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Dominic Raab bullying claims: deputy PM refusing to resign after reading report – as it happened

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Dominic Raab leaving No 10 after a weekly cabinet meeting. He resigned on Friday. Photograph: Leon Neal/Getty Images

[Dominic Raab](#)

[Explainer](#)

Why Dominic Raab faced a bullying inquiry and what happens next

After deputy PM's resignation, report prompted by civil servants' complaints has been published

- [UK politics live – latest updates](#)

[Peter Walker](#) and [Rowena Mason](#)

Fri 21 Apr 2023 06.22 EDTFirst published on Wed 19 Apr 2023 13.36 EDT

Dominic Raab has resigned as the UK's deputy prime minister and as justice secretary after an official report on allegations that he bullied civil

servants. The report was published later on Friday. Here is the background to the case.

What is the report?

In November, Rishi Sunak [appointed Adam Tolley KC](#), a senior employment lawyer, to examine a series of complaints against Raab by multiple civil servants. Tolley, who has experience of handling whistleblower claims, was tasked with looking into the complaints in confidence and then reporting back to the prime minister.

As well as talking to officials who made complaints, [Tolley interviewed](#) the top civil servants in the three government departments headed by Raab: Antonia Romeo, the permanent secretary at the Ministry of Justice; Simon McDonald, a former permanent undersecretary at the Foreign Office; and Philip Rycroft, a former permanent secretary at the now-disbanded Department for Exiting the European Union.

What does it say?

The report was published on Friday, after it was handed to Sunak on Thursday. On Friday morning, [Raab resigned](#), saying he was keeping his word that he would step down if there was a finding of bullying. He indicated that the report found two instances of bullying but said the bar was set too low and disputed the findings.

In the report Tolley said Raab had “acted in a manner which was intimidating” by going further than appropriate in “delivering critical feedback”, and insulting officials by making “unconstructive critical comments” about their work.

Though it was disputed, Tolley said he believed Raab had complained about the “obstructiveness” of staff and branded their work “utterly useless” and “woeful”.

Combined with an interruptive style of cutting people off because he did not like having his time wasted, his behaviour was intimidating and abrasive, said the report.

Though Raab had since regulated his level of abrasiveness, this should have happened sooner following private discussions with the permanent secretary, said the report.

Why was it commissioned?

It follows two formal complaints against Raab, plus widespread reports that many other civil servants were unhappy with his behaviour, which was described as sometimes bullying, humiliating and too demanding.

The scope of the report was expanded as other formal complaints were made, taking in all three departments he has headed. In January, the [Guardian discovered](#) that at least 24 civil servants were involved in formal complaints against Raab.

What was the response of Raab and his allies?

Raab has throughout vehemently denied any bullying or intimidating behaviour, [saying he](#) has “behaved professionally at all times”. In February, Raab [said he would](#) quit as a minister if Tolley’s inquiry went against him: “If an allegation of bullying is upheld, I would resign.”

Allies of Raab have portrayed him as a demanding minister who expects a lot from his officials and knows exactly what he wants, but is always professional. In March, one former [Foreign Office official told ITV](#) he felt Raab was “100% a bully”, while other unnamed officials defended him, one recounting how he organised staff events at Christmas.

In his resignation letter, Raab said the finding of bullying would set a “dangerous precedent” and stop ministers from driving change. He argued his behaviour simply amounted to “pace, standards and challenge”, while apologising for any “unintended stress”.

Have Tory MPs backed Raab?

The predominant view was that people should await Tolley's verdict. However, Jake Berry, who was party chair and minister without portfolio in Liz Truss's cabinet, said Raab should step aside while the inquiry was being held. Berry said it would be "very bizarre" if someone in a similar position to Raab in any other workplace remained in their role. Other Conservative MPs share Raab's view that the prime minister should not be seen as "giving in" to civil service complaints.

Are there any political repercussions for Sunak?

Yes. While commissioning Tolley both bought time and provided distance from the allegations, if the report is damning, the prime minister is likely to face pressure over why he reappointed Raab to the cabinet given the concerns about his behaviour.

Downing Street has said only that Sunak did not know about any formal complaints before forming his first cabinet in October. However, it was not clear whether he had been told about other worries.

One [report last month](#) said Boris Johnson, who was also interviewed by Tolley, previously warned Raab about his conduct.

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University students and staff demonstrating in London in November.
Photograph: Wiktor Szymanowicz/NurPhoto/Rex/Shutterstock

[Higher education](#)

Student complaints in England and Wales at record levels, watchdog says

Higher education adjudicator expresses concern about ‘increasing levels of distress’ among university students

[Sally Weale](#) *Education correspondent*

Thu 20 Apr 2023 01.01 EDT Last modified on Thu 20 Apr 2023 01.30 EDT

University students made a record number of complaints last year to the higher education watchdog in England and Wales, which expressed concern about “increasing levels of distress among students who are struggling to cope”.

The [Office of the Independent Adjudicator](#) (OIA) received 2,850 complaints in 2022 – its highest ever number and a 3% increase on the

previous year – which resulted in financial compensation of more than £1m in total.

The OIA hears appeals from students only if they have exhausted their institution's internal procedures and are still dissatisfied. According to its annual report for 2022, 25% of complaints were justified, partly justified, or settled in favour of the student.

The watchdog reported a big jump in the proportion of complaints about academic appeals of assessments and grades, up from 29% in 2021 to 38% in 2022, while complaints about teaching, course delivery and supervision fell from 45% to 38%.

“This rebalancing of our caseload is likely to reflect the end of the ‘no detriment’ or safety-net policies that had been in place during the pandemic and had resulted in fewer appeals, as well as the reduction through the year in the number of complaints related to Covid-19 disruption,” the OIA said.

The watchdog did, however, conclude its handling of complaints from a group of more than 400 arts students at a single provider about disruption caused by Covid, which were found to be partly justified. In total, the students received about £640,000 in compensation, but the details do not form part of the overall 2022 data.

Felicity Mitchell, the independent adjudicator, said it had been another difficult year for students and universities, with the cost of living crisis and strikes. “We are seeing increasing levels of distress among students who are struggling to cope, and this is a major concern. At the same time the pressures on providers make it more difficult for them to support students effectively.”

One example was of a student on a healthcare course who had a mental health condition that meant they were unable to start their second placement on time. The student has since dropped out and was awarded a partial refund of tuition fees and compensation after the university failed to support them adequately.

The OIA also recommended compensation to a group of students on a distance learning course who complained the course did not live up to their expectations, based on the marketing materials. It also reported an increase in complaints relating to harassment and sexual misconduct, though numbers remained small.

Chloe Field, the vice-president for higher education at the National Union of [Students](#), said: “Students are at breaking point, with the cost of living crisis and spiralling rents pushing many over the edge. It is no surprise the OIA has received a record number of complaints.”

A Department for Education spokesperson said: “Whilst complaints have increased, it is good to see that the OIA is working to resolve these issues, ensuring that more complaints were closed than ever before in the last year.”

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[Ukraine war live](#)Ukraine

Kremlin's foreign minister to meet UN secretary general; US considering ban on exports to Russia – as it happened

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2023.04.20 - Spotlight

- SNP in shock A party that surged to power but forgot about self-governance
- Sudan's outsider How a paramilitary leader fell out with the army and plunged the country into war
- The rape survivor who spoke out Ellie Wilson on the brutal reality of taking an attacker to court
- Miquita Oliver's forever fashion I first wore this on Popworld. It was the early 00s – absolute chaos!



Nicola Sturgeon, Scotland's then first minister and SNP leader with her MPs in Dundee after the 2019 UK general election. Photograph: Neil Hanna/AFP/Getty

[Scotland](#)

[Analysis](#)

SNP in shock: a party that surged to power but forgot about self-governance

[Libby Brooks](#) Scotland correspondent

Scottish National party was outwardly successful but behind the scenes it was chaotic, say insiders

Thu 20 Apr 2023 02.00 EDT

The first day back at Holyrood after Easter recess should have been the moment for Scotland's new leader, Humza Yousaf, to reset the agenda after a bruising leadership contest.

Instead, hours before his first big policy statement on Tuesday, Yousaf found himself besieged by reporters asking questions about the arrest of the SNP treasurer, Colin Beattie, earlier that morning, and having to insist that while Beattie's arrest was a "very serious matter", people were "innocent until proven guilty".

The clamour was further evidence of a Scottish National party in chaos. Just two weeks earlier, its former chief executive Peter Murrell – the husband of Yousaf's predecessor, Nicola Sturgeon – had also been arrested, with police dramatically raiding the couple's home and erecting a tent to gather evidence in the garden.

The arrests are part of a police inquiry into the SNP's handling of more than £600,000 in donations raised to campaign for a second independence referendum, but allegedly used for day-to-day running costs instead. It is no repeat of the Westminster MPs' expenses scandal, but the criminal allegations still raise the prospect of financial wrongdoing.

Now MSPs, activists and officials are asking soul-searching questions, many of which boil down to: how could a national party, leading Scotland's battle for independence from the UK, have been allowed to descend into such turmoil?

"Some people are still in shock, some are in denial, some are saying 'what the fuck?'" says one senior politician representing the north of Scotland.

Speaking to a wide range of elected representatives, activists and officials, almost all refer to the explosion in membership that took place immediately after Scotland's first independence referendum of 2014 as the pivot point for a party where governance – as one ex-minister put it – "became nonexistent".

"The party depended on the old mechanisms for too long and that's why we are in deep shit," says a former national executive committee member bluntly.

Despite being in government at Holyrood since 2007, it was the influx of energised Yes voters that turned the party – which was still led by people who could remember being spat at in the street while leafletting – into a popular, mass-membership organisation that other Scottish parties feared and admired.

As one senior official who worked closely with Sturgeon accepted: “We should have modernised, and we never really changed the governance to accommodate the membership post 2014. Yes there was a lack of transparency and accountability, but it’s unfair to pin everything on one person. Everyone needs to take a long hard look at themselves.”

A number of sources describe a kind of institutional stasis, as the party bounced from election campaign to massive conference venue: glossy, controlled and hugely successful in public, but behind the scenes never having time to do more than triage or, increasingly, ignore longer-term issues. Repeatedly, SNP insiders point out that much of the work was done by volunteers with other responsibilities.

“Restructuring takes a lot of energy, as does arranging two conferences a year and running eight election campaigns, with a small HQ team. People still don’t appreciate how difficult it was running a party during Covid. People were exhausted.”

Many describe an almost passive acceptance of the highly unusual situation of having a married couple at the very top of the party. Murrell had established his reputation in transforming the party’s electoral prospects while his wife was still deputy leader, and “it didn’t seem to be a problem” when she then took over from Alex Salmond as leader and first minister. “Scottish politics is a small world,” says one veteran activist who has worked with both.

But what it amounted to was a blurring of the lines between party and government. As one former MP with experience of both Salmond and Sturgeon’s leadership explains: “When we went into government in 2007, nobody had ever run anything. The lines between party and government got blurred and increasingly party machinery was co-opted into running the FM [first minister].

“After 2014 we lacked the experience and ability to run a large national party,” they add. “The leadership team were very inexperienced in handling internal democracy on that scale and increasingly steamrolled over reasonable challenge. Nobody seemed to realise there would be a mighty explosion at some point.”

While the willingness to speak about it in public is certainly new, frustrations among the rank and file membership about the behaviour of the SNP leadership go back years, as do attempts to change it.

That’s one of the reasons why such a substantial portion of members voted for Kate Forbes, who was narrowly beaten by Yousaf in the leadership contest, suggests another senior party figure. “They were pissed off with HQ, with emails not answered, complaints not dealt with, and above all the complacency.”

Another senior official suggests that MSPs and MPs who largely endorsed Yousaf for leadership ignore this at their peril: “The split between the parliamentarians and the membership could end up being a more fundamental issue to the party’s future than the finances.”

The clamour for party reform that started during the leadership contest is now deafening, but recent revelations have also galvanised some members.

One central belt MSP explains: “Party members have been upset, baffled, shocked, hurt, but there’s also a new confidence in asking questions and demanding transparency from the party. They’re thinking about how to move forward, how to re-engage the people we need to, and at branch level, members are saying ‘let’s get out there, get the new leaflets ready’. There’s nothing they can do about the ongoing revelations, but they can affect what’s happening in their own constituency.”

As one former minister who served with Sturgeon puts it: “The trump card was always: ‘Do you really want to do that to the boss?’ It was based on respect and trust, and a discipline based on loyalty.”

So what does it mean for Yousaf, leading a party in which the internal critics are unleashed? Forbes and her campaign team have already formed a

backbench group focusing on the economy, and other MSPs point to the “energy and experience” on the backbenches. “It depends if Humza is true to his word about being open to new ideas and input from beyond the inner circle,” says one.

Many members note a change in tone from Yousaf. Over the Easter recess, and even with the physical demands of Ramadan fasting (Yousaf is a practising Muslim), they admire his visibility, inviting the media to Bute House for a “fireside” briefing, campaigning at weekends with activists, and emailing party members to reassure them soon after Murrell’s arrest. As one senior MSP put it: “What a difference – actually acknowledging there’s a problem.”

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Sudan's outsider: how a paramilitary leader fell out with the army and plunged the country into war

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‘I wanted to walk into court and show I hadn’t been defeated’ ... Ellie Wilson. Photograph: Katherine Anne Rose/The Guardian

[Rape and sexual assault](#)

The rape survivor who spoke out: Ellie Wilson on the brutal reality of taking

an attacker to court

Less than 1% of reported rapes lead to a conviction. But this was the case for Wilson – who then waived her anonymity to expose the problems in the criminal justice system

[Anna Moore](#)

Thu 20 Apr 2023 05.00 EDT

On 26 May last year, Ellie Wilson sat in the witness room of the high court in Glasgow, waiting to be called. As chief witness, the rape victim in the trial of her ex-boyfriend Daniel McFarlane, her anxiety was off the scale.

“Any time the door would knock, I’d have this flash of black across my vision and the room would kind of spin,” she says. “It was the weirdest physiological experience. I was terrified in a way I had never been before. Then the clerk comes in dressed in robes and brings you into the court ... I feel scared just thinking about it.”

Wilson, now 25, has experienced a rare thing: her rapist was not only prosecuted but found guilty. Though research shows that [one in four](#) women have been raped or sexually assaulted as adults, it is estimated that only one in six will report it and less than 1% of reported cases end in a conviction. The few who do see their rapist jailed rarely wish to share the experience but Wilson does – her friends call her “Ellie Telly”. Through Twitter, TikTok, the press, Panorama and BBC Scotland she is sharing what she has been through and how so much needs to change. She has crowdfunded to make a complaint against the defence advocate (defending barrister) in her trial. She is lobbying Scottish parliament for policy change and better safeguarding in universities. Most important for Wilson though is to just keep on talking so that other rape victims have some idea of what to expect when navigating the system. “Because I had absolutely no idea at all,” she says. “I went in knowing it would be difficult but it was harder than I thought. I didn’t expect it to be so personal.”

Conviction rates are far lower for date rapes than stranger rapes and Wilson had been in a relationship with McFarlane for more than two years. Both were students at Glasgow University – Wilson studying politics, McFarlane medicine – they had met in September 2017 through the athletics club. “I’d been going through a difficult time at the club and Daniel offered to coach me,” she says. “He was a really good athlete, better than me and very quickly he was my best friend.”

Three months later, while still just friends, he raped her. It was New Year’s Eve, they had been out partying and Wilson was drunk and had passed out in her bed when it happened. “I had a bad feeling the next day,” she says. “I woke up feeling something bad had happened but almost didn’t want to speak it into existence. I pushed it to the back of my mind because if I thought about it in any detail, everything would change and I couldn’t deal with the consequences of that.” Soon after, they became a couple.

The relationship was studded with jealous rows, temporary breakups and more abuse. On one occasion, Wilson refused sex because she had a UTI. McFarlane raped her anyway. She didn’t recognise this as domestic violence. “That’s something you maybe associate with older married couples,” she says. “When you’re young, it’s very easy to romanticise the kind of relationship we had. Your boyfriend should be crazy about you to the extent that they’re actually crazy!”

“It was a rollercoaster. When it was good, it was really good, but when it was bad, it was really, really, really bad. You’re like a drug addict. You want your fix. You just want it to be good again. I still maintain that I’ll probably never love anyone as much as I loved him – but that’s a good thing.”

She later learned that McFarlane had raped her on that first New Year’s Eve. He had told her in a text message the following summer: “PS The reason I told you you have probably been raped while drunk sleeping is because I did it.” Another time, with her phone recording their conversation while hidden in her bag, she’d asked how he felt about raping her. McFarlane replied: “I feel good knowing I’m not in prison.”

Abuse doesn’t make you love someone less. Often, it makes you love them more because it isolates you and makes you more dependent

“I made that recording partly for my own sanity,” says Wilson. “I wanted the truth for when I doubted myself.” She also knew this was hard evidence should she ever need it – though it was another year before the relationship ended.

Wilson is very clear on why she stayed with McFarlane for so long. “Abuse doesn’t make you love someone less,” she says. “Often, it makes you love them more because it isolates you and makes you more dependent. He is the only person in the world who knows what you’re going through – and often he is the person that comforts you afterwards.”

During her time with McFarlane, Wilson became, she says, “a ghost” and “unrecognisable”. She had spent a week in hospital after an attempted suicide, had stopped going to classes and was retaking her final year by the time she ended all contact with him. This was March 2020, going into lockdown, and in that quiet space, she began healing and started to think about pursuing justice. “I wrote everything down and seeing it in words made it clear. He was doing a medical degree so it was partly for the safety of other people, but it’s also fair and right to want justice for myself.”

Within a week of Wilson’s police interview, McFarlane was arrested and charged. Next came a two-year wait for the case to reach trial.

“I knew that cases such as these were supposed to be heard in a year, but I was told that the Covid backlog meant it would be a lot longer,” says Wilson. “It’s like a cloud hanging over you, it’s never out of your mind.” Still, for the first year, Wilson felt she was doing well – she focused on her master’s and got a distinction and began working in the Scottish parliament in Edinburgh. McFarlane had been suspended from Glasgow University so she assumed he would be back home in the Highlands on bail. Then she saw on social media that he was in Edinburgh, too. He’d been offered a place at Edinburgh University despite their awareness of his impending trial.

When you are living close to the man who has been charged with your rape – as many victims do during the long wait for trial – every day is traumatising. “Walking in public was terrifying for me,” says Wilson. “I would see his face on men’s faces in the streets. I’d freeze regularly, burst

into tears at random moments. I started crying in front of the MSP I worked for. I had a really big scar on my arm as I chose to hurt myself instead of killing myself. I'd done all this healing, taken these steps forward and now I was going backwards."

She was shocked by the absence of support available. "I knew that accessing mental health services is really difficult but I thought in these circumstances, when you're going to court, there must be something, some sort of funding. There's nothing."

As the trial approached, Wilson struggled with suicidal thoughts. "I was terrified about how I would cope if he was found not guilty," she says. "That was the big thing – to not be believed. If he was acquitted, it would be as if I'm being told it didn't happen and that was the most painful thing in the world for me. I couldn't live in a world that would let someone do that."

When Wilson finally gave evidence, separated from McFarlane by a screen, she had no idea what lines of questioning to expect. "It's not you v him – it's the crown v him, so there's no one talking to you about the case beforehand. You're not allowed to be given any information." The prosecutor's questions took two hours. Then came the defence advocate – his questions to Wilson took two days.

The defence was charismatic, theatrical, he kept calling me 'this girl'

Though Wilson had fully expected her accounts of the rapes to be challenged, it was still excruciating to hear. "He was massaging your buttocks and touching you in that area, you became very wet and that ... led on to intercourse ... maybe it was sore because you had this UTI, and so you were crying but you didn't stop him ..."

What she hadn't expected was what felt like a character assassination. "The prosecution focused on facts," says Wilson. "The defence was very different. He was charismatic, theatrical – he was more concerned with painting a picture." That picture showed, in the defence's words, "a

straight-A student from a nice Christian background” who’d “fallen in love” with an arch-manipulator.

“He made a big thing that Daniel was a virgin when we met and I wasn’t,” says Wilson. “Respect in court is so important. We call the judge ‘My Lord’ and stand when he enters the room. But the defence kept calling me ‘this girl’.” “This girl, what do you know about her?” he asked the jury. “This is a girl without empathy all right!”

He asked Wilson if she liked to make McFarlane jealous. He asked about her drinking and what she wore to bed. He asked if she had narcissistic personality disorder – not based on medical evidence, just his own analysis. Then he asked if she’d heard of cluster B personality disorders – the judge instructed Wilson not to answer.

The case lasted six days. Wilson held her nerve and answered well – although that seemed to count against her in the defence’s closing speech. “She’s the strong one!” he said at one point. “I suggest to you that she can manipulate ... You saw how she was with me! Daniel had to put up with that for two and a half years!”



‘If I can help one person who is going through this feel less alone, then that means so much.’ Photograph: Katherine Anne Rose/The Guardian

McFarlane was found guilty – although the verdict wasn't unanimous, even with a recorded confession included as evidence. "It was an immense relief," says Wilson. She chose to attend the sentencing. "I wanted to walk into court and show I hadn't been defeated." McFarlane was now a convicted rapist but you wouldn't know it when his defence advocate set out the mitigation plea. "Tragically, he went to university ... he hadn't even kissed a girl before then and he fell in love with the wrong person ... They were like chalk and cheese, my lord ... Their life experiences were very, very different ... All this was a relationship that wasn't going well." "The word 'rape' was used once in that whole speech, the word 'love' was used six times," says Wilson. "There had already been a guilty verdict but I had to listen in silence to what was essentially a tirade against me." McFarlane was sentenced to five years. McFarlane's defence advocate did not respond to the Guardian's approach for comment.

Unlike with Wilson, more than six rape and sexual assault cases are discontinued every week as complainants withdraw their support – in many cases due to waiting for a court date that can stretch up to three years – which is about a third higher than nine years ago. Partly to address this, England and Wales is rolling out prerecorded evidence, where rape victims can give evidence and have their cross-examination as close to the time of reporting as possible, when memories are fresh and to avoid the long wait and trauma of open court. Scotland is considering a range of measures including specialist sexual violence courts with judge-only trials. Advocacy and support groups such as the Centre for Women's Justice and Rape Crisis have pointed out that the current system incentivises defence advocates to destroy a complainant's credibility and undermine them in any way possible. Plenty of research has shown that rape myths are alive and well in the average jury – ideas about how "genuine" victims would behave, what they would wear, how much they would drink – so the defence's best chance is to play to them.

"I can see the argument for a panel of judges," says Wilson, "but there are simple, less controversial things we can do, like ensuring defence questioning doesn't cross the line and that complainants are treated with dignity and respect. We could ensure they have access to psychological support." In order to make a complaint against McFarlane's defence

advocate, Wilson needed a copy of the court transcript, which was only available at a cost of £3,000 plus VAT. She raised this through crowdfunding and is now campaigning to abolish this prohibitive expense for victims of crime. “All it does is perpetuate the secrecy around the court.” She is also in discussion with Ucas and the Scottish government over the admission of students to university when they have serious criminal records or are awaiting trial.

In truth all this action is a kind of therapy. “The trauma will never go away,” says Wilson. “I need to pour all this energy and hurt somewhere. Of course I want change, but if I can help one person who is going through this feel less alone, then that means so much.” It also helps drown out the thoughts that sometimes surface in the quieter moments. She is still trying to make sense of it all. “I worry about him in prison, I feel guilty about the bright future he had, scared about him hurting himself,” she says. “But then I think about the person I was and what he took from me and all I’ve had to go through since. I need to remind myself that justice is something worth celebrating.”

In the UK, [Rape Crisis](#) offers support for rape and sexual abuse on 0808 802 9999 in England and Wales, 0808 801 0302 in [Scotland](#), or 0800 0246 991 in [Northern Ireland](#). In the US, [Rainn](#) offers support on 800-656-4673. In Australia, support is available at [1800Respect](#) (1800 737 732). Other international helplines can be found at ibiblio.org/rcip/internl.html

In the UK and Ireland, [Samaritans](#) can be contacted on freephone 116 123, or by emailing jo@samaritans.org or jo@samaritans.ie. In the US, the [National Suicide Prevention Lifeline](#) is at 800-273-8255 or chat for support. You can also text HOME to 741741 to connect with a crisis text line counselor. In Australia, the crisis support service [Lifeline](#) is 13 11 14. Other international helplines can be found at befrienders.org

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‘Clothes are our own personal history’ ... Miquita Oliver. Photograph: Linda Nyland/The Guardian

[Forever fashion](#)[Women's tops](#)

Miquita Oliver’s forever fashion: ‘I first wore this on Popworld. It was the

early 00s – absolute chaos!’

The broadcaster borrowed this flea market top from her cousin. It has since survived 10 house moves and had two TV outings, a decade apart



As told to [Chloe Mac Donnell](#)

[@tweetchloe](#)

Thu 20 Apr 2023 02.00 EDTLast modified on Thu 20 Apr 2023 06.30 EDT

I nicked this top off my cousin, Naima, when I was 18. She bought it at a flea market in New York, but it’s originally from Victoria’s Secret. I love the straps that cross at the back; it’s simple, but very chic.

I first wore it on Popworld [the Channel 4 music show Oliver co-presented from 2001 to 2006] with a very short skirt. We didn’t have any dressing guidelines – it was the early 00s, it was absolute chaos! We did have a stylist, but I didn’t enjoy working with them because I wanted to wear secondhand clothes.



Top of the pops ... Oliver at V festival in 2012. Photograph: David M Benett/Getty Images

When we were young, my mum [[the chef Andi Oliver](#)] and my Auntie [Neneh Cherry](#), who is Naima's mum, didn't have a lot of money. Shopping for clothes in charity shops or from Portobello market is how we were brought up. It's the way my Scottish and Caribbean grandmas used to shop, too. It runs deep in our family. I never thought of my clothes as being "vintage".

Ten years ago, when I was 28, I got a job co-hosting Channel 4's coverage of V festival with Nick Grimshaw. It was a bit of a comeback for me. I wore the top again, as the colour looks great on telly, this time with Levi's shorts I had cut myself and a pair of hideous Nike Dunks. Those trainers were the last time I tried to dress in a "current" way. Today, the shorts fit me differently because, during lockdown, I started doing a lot of skipping.

I'm hugely sentimental about clothes. They are our own personal history. I love to rewear things I've had a brilliant time in – putting them back on evokes those feelings in a really visceral way all over again. It's like time travel.

I like to think about the person who first wore this top in New York. How did it make them feel? It came to me with stories and, over the years, I've added my own. It's survived about 10 house moves and reminds me of a time when I was so enamoured of the way Naima shopped and the clothes she would find. Subconsciously, it's probably made me look after it really, really well.

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‘Keir Starmer is keen to say he will be ‘ruthless’ in pursuit of power. Fine. But there is little point in power if it is not used for transformative change.’
Photograph: Owen Humphreys/PA

[OpinionLabour](#)

Labour is on the warpath at last. But why is it targeting benefit claimants and disabled people?

[Frances Ryan](#)



By reviving scrounger myths and rubbishing free social care, Starmer's begun a race to the bottom – one the Tories will win

Thu 20 Apr 2023 03.00 EDTLast modified on Thu 20 Apr 2023 06.05 EDT

With the [local elections](#) round the corner and the general election rumoured for next autumn, Keir Starmer, the measured lawyer, is rebranding. Faced with criticism over [attack ads on Rishi Sunak](#), the newly bullish Labour leader has doubled down, insisting he will continue “no matter how squeamish it might make some feel”. Those who object to the new tactics are not expressing legitimate critiques, the argument goes – they're just too soft for the fight. As [one frontbencher put it](#): “We have come back from Easter ready for a scrap. Yes, this is a reset and we are ready to take a few swings.”

The attack ads levelled at Sunak are grim, but he is not the only – or most worrying – target of Labour's blows. Last week, Labour [blasted benefit fraud](#) and error, claiming the cash lost could fund extra cost of living payments. Inadvertently or not, in doing so the party played into old stereotypes of “scrounging” benefit claimants. The tactic falsely suggests the benefits system is rife with fraud, while framing benefit claimants as the

reason other “deserving” people aren’t getting the support they need. It conflates fraud with innocent error, reinforcing the long-term Tory attempt to bloat the figures of benefit fraud.

Politics, much like life, is ultimately a series of choices. And Labour has chosen to target families on universal credit rather than say, the £35bn lost to [tax fraud and evasion](#).

This is a calculation of a wounded party long out of power. If you are serious about winning, the thinking goes, you cannot deviate too far from the toxic line on benefit claimants touted by many in the media. That the message for people struggling to feed themselves is “this party is not for you” is lost amid the blood sport. There will always be casualties on the long road to power – and we are expected to make our peace with that.



Wes Streeting after appearing on Sunday with Laura Kuenssberg, 16 April. ‘The shadow health secretary ruled out social care free at the point of need as ‘hugely expensive’, and too much of a ‘big overnight change’.’ Photograph: Thomas Krych/Zuma Press Wire/Shutterstock

Look, too, at the strategies being used against social care users or NHS strikers. On Sunday with Laura Kuenssberg, the shadow health secretary,

Wes Streeting, ruled out social care free at the point of need as “[hugely expensive](#)” and too much of a “big overnight change”. Given the wreckage of the last 13 years of Tory rule, it is almost impressive that the opposition can frame “too much change” as a negative to squirm away from. Labour’s commitment to “fiscal responsibility”, in the form of limited spending, is in many ways a self-inflicted wound, pushing them away from any real form of investment that would actually make people’s lives better. Last week, Starmer said that the pay demand of junior doctors [was unaffordable](#). There is no desire from Labour to challenge the economic and political status quo over what exactly we choose to afford or how we choose to afford it. Low expectations are regarded as a sign of maturity. The grownups know better, even as disabled people sit in their own faeces waiting for a care worker.

It is not simply that this is deeply disappointing coming from the party of labour – it is also unnecessary. With NHS waiting lists the [key concern](#) on the doorstep for next month’s elections and [satisfaction with social care plummeting](#), now is an ideal time to argue for a radical increase in funding for health and social care.

Labour’s strategy is clearly designed to show it is unafraid to focus on areas – crime, benefits, fiscal responsibility – that are traditional Conservative territory. Generous minds would describe this as “beating the Tories at their own game”. But it could also be described as trying to out-Tory the Tories. Such capitulation only serves to push the dial ever further right, keeping the national conversation conservative and giving the government tacit permission to be increasingly reactionary and callous. Voters are likely to be unimpressed. Progressives will be turned off, while no one who genuinely believes that benefit claimants are milking the system will ever be satisfied with whatever Labour is willing to offer. A Tory party which is currently fighting for the [right to display golly dolls](#) will never lose a race to the bottom.

Starmer is keen to say [he will be “ruthless”](#) in pursuit of power. Fine. But there is little point in power if it is not used for transformative change. None of the crises facing Britain at present – from a broken NHS and social care, soaring child poverty, mass strikes and a meagre benefits system to the lack of affordable housing – will be solved by business as usual. Or, to put it

another way: it is not wrong for Labour to be ruthless – it just has to be ruthless about the right things.

As it stands, its tactics are doing more harm than good. When it rails against benefit overspending or cautions against social care overhaul, it is not just the Tories it is attacking. It is the very people who need Labour most. Children are eating rubbers at school because their parents [can't afford lunch](#). Disabled people are [turning off medical equipment](#) when they can't pay their energy bills. Come out fighting, Labour. But first, pick the right target.

- Frances Ryan is a Guardian columnist

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‘In the first half of the play, Comer is all swagger, an absolute player who sees the law as a game.’ Jodie Comer in the London production of *Prima Facie*. Photograph: Helen Murray

[OpinionTheatre](#)

#MeToo hasn't always made for great art – but now there's Jodie Comer's *Prima Facie*

[Emma Brockes](#)



On Broadway, there wasn't an empty seat in the house – and we finally saw how compelling stories of victimhood can be

Thu 20 Apr 2023 01.00 EDTLast modified on Thu 20 Apr 2023 23.19 EDT

It comes around intermittently every few years; a show on Broadway that reminds us why theatre beats every other medium hands down and almost justifies the cost of the tickets. So it was last night, walking down 45th Street in New York past foyers sparse with patrons, to something as close to a mob scene as a person with one eye on their phone for the babysitter can get.

Beneath the marquee, which featured a blown-up image of the actor [Jodie Comer](#), women posed with each other for photos. It was like a revival tent meeting for affluent middle-age lesbians, young women attending alone, a handful of gay men and, I would hazard, approximately 27 enlightened straight ones. “Our people have gone mad for this,” said the friend I was with, and we repaired to our seats feeling vaguely hysterical.

Prima Facie, which has just transferred [from London](#) to New York after its opening run in Sydney, isn't an obvious theatrical blockbuster. There are no

songs. There is only one person in it – Comer, who holds the stage for more than 90 minutes with no intermission. It is also about the very unblockbustery subject of sexual assault and the failure of the legal system adequately to reckon with it.

Comer, who plays a barrister whose assumptions about the law are upended when she is sexually assaulted, has a big following after her role in *Killing Eve*. And the play, by Suzie Miller, is brilliant. But none of that fully explains it. There wasn't an empty seat in the house on Tuesday night and the audience was as keyed up as any I've seen since *Hamilton* in 2015, or going back much further to [Rent in 1996](#). The young woman sitting to my right, who told me this was the second time she had seen the play in a week, started weeping, loudly, 30 minutes in and didn't stop until the standing ovation.

Artworks triggered by or related to the #MeToo movement have appeared in numbers in recent months, and it's curious to note which of them work and which don't. I happened to see the film [She Said](#) last week, an energy-free adaptation of the book of the same name by the two New York Times reporters who broke the Harvey Weinstein story.



‘On screen, *She Said* was as flat as a pancake, the two leads desperately trying to resuscitate a script of aching dullness and piety.’ Carey Mulligan,

left, and Zoe Kazan in *She Said*. Photograph: Everett Collection Inc/Alamy

What I loved about the book – a sober, studious account of that groundbreaking reporting that was far superior to [Ronan Farrow's](#) showboating rival effort – killed the movie. On screen, *She Said* was as flat as a pancake, the two leads, Carey Mulligan and Zoe Kazan, desperately trying to resuscitate a script of aching dullness and piety. (The only bright spot was Jennifer Ehle, who should, obviously, be in everything.)

The real #MeToo movie – the one that animated the themes of that movement in a way that didn't feel like homework or feature women making endless, drippy faces at each other – was Sarah Polley's Oscar-nominated [Women Talking](#). We talk about the flattening effect of the term “victim”, and here was an example of how to energise and enliven stories around victimhood without losing all the other markers of what makes us human. In *Women Talking*, the women are savage, hilarious, absurd – fully real, in other words.

It's possible to portray reporters and serious subjects this way. I went scuttling back to [All the President's Men](#), the 1976 Watergate movie, after watching *She Said* to try to figure out how the film got it so wrong. It is unfair to compare any performer with Dustin Hoffman and Robert Redford at their height, but still; [William Goldman's script](#) permitted those actors, per the men they were based on, to be diligent reporters but also to be peevish, vain, bombastic and, above all, monstrously ambitious. By contrast the female leads in *She Said* were presented as virtuous altruists without a competitive bone in their bodies. (Ha – have you met reporters?)

Which brings us back to the character of Tessa Ensler in *Prima Facie*. In the first half of the play, Comer, whose performance exhausts every superlative, is all swagger, an absolute player who, in the male style, sees the law as a game and whose job it is to take apart victims in the witness box. She is funny and brassy and sure of the space she takes up. The reversal, when it comes, does a very rare thing even in the context of other plausible #MeToo-themed shows: it fully delineates all that has been lost.

In the final third of the show, Comer is almost unrecognisable from the actor she was in earlier parts of the play, her voice, movements, even – and I don't know how she pulls this off – her face itself seemingly estranged from what they were pre-assault, her energy curdled but still seeking outward expression.

It is this treatment of an entirely commonplace experience with the symbolic weight of dramatic art at its best that, for all the darkness of the play, makes watching it feel like a punch in the air.

- Emma Brockes is a Guardian columnist
- ***Do you have an opinion on the issues raised in this article? If you would like to submit a response of up to 300 words by email to be considered for publication in our [letters](#) section, please [click here](#).***

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‘James Cleverly seems to be quietly cajoling Tory foreign policy down off the post-Brexit battlements and towards a more stable place.’ Photograph: Thomas Krych/Zuma/Rex/Shutterstock

[OpinionTrade policy.](#)

Brexitters have a new threat to focus their nationalism on: China. But their influence is waning

[Martin Kettle](#)



In this pragmatic Rishi Sunak era, a fresh start with China – and an end to bullish Tory sabre-rattlers – is on the cards

Thu 20 Apr 2023 05.00 EDTLast modified on Thu 20 Apr 2023 13.56 EDT

Cleverly by name. And perhaps even Cleverly by nature, too? Judging by his [Guardian interview](#) this week, and by his step-by-step rebuilding of Britain's relations with Europe, James Cleverly seems to be quietly cajoling Conservative foreign policy down off the post-Brexit battlements and towards a more recognisably practical and stable place in world affairs. If so, two important questions follow. Where exactly is that new place for Britain? And will the Tory party let him do it?

The foreign secretary's interview in Tokyo exemplifies Rishi Sunak-era pragmatism. The interview's tone is less brazen towards China than anything that any of Cleverly's recent predecessors would have either wanted or felt able to say. But it is also stronger on mood music than on measurable stuff. It reads in part like an attempt to soothe the ill-feeling provoked by [Emmanuel Macron's comment](#) that America's allies should not become its "vassals" in any confrontation with China.

Nevertheless, just look at some of the things Cleverly said after the G7 foreign ministers meeting this week. It was not in anyone's interest "to just pull the shutters down" on relations with Beijing. China's size and importance mean "we have got to – and therefore we will – engage closely and regularly". Not to engage means "throwing away" influence. Engaging means focusing on "what is in our national interest, and what is in the interest of the world more generally".

This is not the usual language of post-Brexit Britain. The words have, of course, to be judged against Cleverly's actions. Yet they are a long way from the sabre-rattling and flag-waving of the Boris Johnson and Liz Truss eras. If she had lasted as prime minister, Truss intended to [formally designate China](#) as "the most serious long-term threat to our values and way of life", in an intended update last autumn to Britain's integrated review of foreign and defence policy. In the event, the review was rewritten under Sunak to dub China "an [epoch-defining challenge](#) to the type of international order we want to see".



Xi Jinping with the late queen at a state banquet at Buckingham Palace during his state visit to the UK in 2015. Photograph: Dominic Lipinski/PA

But the Cleverly approach has little in common with the language of the pre-Brexit era, either. Those were the years in which David Cameron

promised a “[golden era](#)” in UK-China relations, and the former chancellor, George Osborne, proclaimed Britain as “[China’s best partner in the west](#)”. On his [state visit](#) to Britain in 2015, President Xi Jinping struck a similarly starry-eyed note, speaking of lifting relations “to a new height”, and describing China and Britain as “a community of shared interests”.

Rarely has hot air emptied more definitively from a diplomatic balloon than it has since then. Most of the reasons for the shift are China’s doing: among them, the repression in Hong Kong, threats against Taiwan, human rights issues, cyber and technology security fears, Covid and Chinese support for Russia in Ukraine. But a key driver has also been the refreshed British nationalism that coursed through the Tory party after Brexit, driving a general bullishness towards other nations.

Most of that nationalism, self-evidently, was targeted at the European Union. For some years, the European Research Group became the most important faction in the Tory party. Ministers could not govern without its support. But, as Brexit’s salience and popularity have waned, so has the importance of the ERG. The [March parliamentary vote](#) on the Northern Ireland protocol revisions (in which Cleverly was deeply involved) showed their numbers reduced to a small rump.

For many erstwhile Brexiter, China is now the great new threat on which their nationalism feeds. There have been periods in the past two years when the Sinophobe Tories seemed on the verge of turning the [Conservatives](#) into the anti-China party as well as the anti-Europe party, particularly while Truss was in a senior position. But the confidence that is so evident in Cleverly’s interview suggests that these attempts are running out of steam, too. Much will depend on the reception that his planned China speech next week receives.

It is no surprise to see the nationalist “ourselves alone” tendency on foreign policy withering. Britain won’t get anywhere by seeing everyone except Australia as a threat. The part of Brexitism that genuinely imagined Britain could reclaim great power status outside the EU looks more delusional than ever today. Economic stagnation and the Ukraine war have underscored the fact that Britain’s interests are dependent on restored trade and effective

alliances, above all with North America and Europe. For the rest, Britain is not a Pacific power, Russia is a hostile state, the future of the US remains uncertain and liberal democracies need to stick together. There is no role in such a world for a maverick Britain.

So it makes complete sense for Britain to be more appropriate in its foreign policy ambitions and to prioritise the practicable. This explains why Sunak and Cleverly, both former Brexiters, are trying to regain some of the trust – and trade – in Europe that Britain lost in the Johnson and Truss years. This is the process of which [restoring devolved government](#) in Northern Ireland is the necessary foundation. It's exactly what Labour would do too.

It also makes sense to seek a conditional, varied and more nuanced relationship with China – and one day, when conditions again allow, with Russia. The image Cleverly used in his interview to depict such a relationship had a period charm. “It's not an on-off switch. It's not even a volume knob. It's not about dialling up or dialling down. It's more like a graphic equaliser.” At least the megaphone has at last been quietly junked. Now Britain needs to find the right tune.

- Martin Kettle is a Guardian columnist

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German photographer Boris Eldagsen next to his work Pseudomnesia: The Electrician, created with artificial intelligence. Photograph: Alex Schwander/Reuters

[Opinion](#)[Adrian Chiles](#)

In this era of AI photography, I no longer believe my eyes

[Adrian Chiles](#)



If the judges of the Sony world photography awards can't tell a fake picture from a real one, what chance do the rest of us have?

Thu 20 Apr 2023 02.00 EDTLast modified on Thu 20 Apr 2023 12.33 EDT

Lying in bed the other morning listening to the radio, I experienced a dark epiphany; I've never been much fun in the mornings. There had been problems in Jerusalem, and one side in the conflict had provided video footage supporting its claim that it had been wronged. For my whole life up to this point, I would have been minded to take a look at that video. But now I found myself thinking, why bother? How would I know it showed what it said it showed? How would I know it wasn't a complete fake? Videos and photos used to mean something concrete, but now you can't be sure.

I haven't enough confidence in my human intelligence to formulate a firm view on the dangers or otherwise of artificial intelligence. What I do know is that before long, we won't know anything for sure. As it stands, however good a fake might be, you can still just about tell it's a fake. But only just. Sooner rather than later, the joins will disappear. We might even have already passed that point without knowing it. If the judges of the [Sony](#)

[world photography awards](#) couldn't spot the fake, what chance have the rest of us got?

Television drama is ahead of the curve on this. The Capture and The Undeclared War were both great and did the subject justice – both gave off an unsettling sense of the end of days. If the twist in every crime drama is some kind of deep fakery, it's all going to get terribly boring. So, in the outside world, to paraphrase GK Chesterton, everything will go to pot as we'll believe in nothing or, indeed, anything. And, back home, there won't even be a decent box set to watch. What a time to be alive.

[Adrian Chiles](#) is a writer, broadcaster and Guardian columnist

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Smoke rises during clashes between the Sudanese Armed Forces and the paramilitary Rapid Support Forces in Khartoum on Wednesday. Photograph: Anadolu Agency/Getty Images

[Sudan](#)

British Council staff stranded in Khartoum offices amid gunfire and explosions

Nine employees stuck for five days say they are ‘terrified’ as they wait to be evacuated while fighting continues in Sudan

[*Zeinab Mohammed Salih*](#) in Khartoum

Wed 19 Apr 2023 15.54 EDTLast modified on Thu 20 Apr 2023 03.59 EDT

Nine employees of the British Council in Khartoum have been stranded in their offices for five days amid heavy gunfire and explosions, as [fighting in the streets of the Sudanese capital continues](#) between the army and paramilitary forces.

One of the British Council staff is a British-Ugandan dual citizen; the rest are Sudanese. They include a security guard, an English language teacher, a driver and administrators.

“We are terrified – the fighting is all around us. We have been patient, but now honestly we are starting to [be] feeling anxious,” said Mohamad Berer, speaking by phone from the centre.

At least 270 people have been killed in the fighting which has raged since Saturday between the Sudan Armed Forces headed by Gen Abdulfatah al-Burhan and the paramilitary Rapid Support Forces headed by [Mohamed Hamadan Daglo](#).

Thousands trapped in Sudan as fighting continues despite ceasefire – video report

Another group of foreigners, including Egyptian, Japanese, Irish, Syrian and US citizens, are also understood to be trapped in central Khartoum amid the fighting.

The British Council sits just a few miles from the military headquarters and the presidential palace, the focus of the most intense clashes.

“We have been given promises by our manager since the beginning that they will evacuate us but nothing has happened, so now we are calling for people on the outside to help get us out,” Berer said.

After five days eating food from the canteen, the trapped employees are running low on supplies. As is the case for the entire Khartoum East district, power at the centre has been cut since the fighting started, but water is still available from taps.

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One female employee, who did not want to be named, said she lived in Khartoum's sister city Omdurman, but the bridges across the Blue Nile are all closed. She said she was disappointed that the group had not been evacuated. "I am very angry and scared of what's been going on, there are some false promises to get us out but nothing's happening, we are waiting and the situation is increasingly hard for us," she said.

A British Council spokesperson said: "The safety and security of our colleagues is our highest priority. We are doing everything in our power to help our colleagues find safe passage to an alternative location."

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Rahul Gandhi addressing an election rally. Photograph: Abhishek Chinnappa/Getty Images

[India](#)

Rahul Gandhi could face jail and loss of seat after Indian court rejects plea

Lawyers pledge to challenge ruling in higher court, saying they believe judiciary will ‘uphold justice’

[Hannah Ellis-Petersen](#) in Delhi

Thu 20 Apr 2023 01.51 EDTLast modified on Thu 20 Apr 2023 15.57 EDT

The Indian opposition leader [Rahul Gandhi](#) has been dealt a blow after a court rejected his plea for a stay on his recent defamation conviction, meaning he could face jail and will lose his parliamentary seat as he appeals against the guilty verdict.

On Thursday, a judge in Surat district court, in India’s western state of Gujarat, rejected his petition seeking a stay of conviction.

The rejection of the plea means Gandhi, former leader of the Congress party and the most recognisable face of India's political opposition, is disqualified from office and there will now be a byelection in his Kerala constituency.

Gandhi's lawyers said they would challenge the ruling in a higher court. "We are going to challenge the decision in Gujarat high court tomorrow. We have full faith that the judiciary will uphold justice and save the democracy," said Naishadh Desai.

In March, Gandhi was convicted of defamation by a court in Gujarat over a 2019 speech made on the campaign trail in which he linked the prime minister, [Narendra Modi](#), with two high-profile criminals, commenting: "Why is it that all thieves have Modi as a common name?"

Purnesh Modi, a legislator in Modi's home state of Gujarat, subsequently filed a case in the courts alleging that all those named Modi in the country had been offended and defamed by Gandhi's comment.

The case had stagnated in the courts for almost two years, but earlier this year it was resumed and [Gandhi was convicted of defamation in March](#). He was given the maximum possible sentence, a two-year jail term, which the judge said was due to Gandhi's "status as a parliamentarian" which made his comments more public and therefore more serious.

It was also the minimum jail sentence needed in order to expel Gandhi from parliament, which happened [less than 24 hours after his conviction](#). If his sentence is upheld, it could see him banned from holding political office for six years.

Gandhi was granted 30 days bail after the ruling. He immediately filed an appeal, calling the sentence "harsh and excessive", arguing that the case was "politically motivated" and that a "cloak of defamation" had been used as a means to get him expelled from parliament.

Gandhi's lawyers have also argued that the 130 million people called Modi in India are not one collective group that can be defamed and that the sentence was based on "conjecture not evidence".

Speaking on Thursday as he rejected Gandhi's plea, the judge declared that Gandhi's "derogatory" remarks had evidently caused "pain and agony" to Purnesh Modi and that Gandhi "should have been more careful with his words which would have large impact on the mind of people".

The refusal by the courts to give Gandhi relief in the case could signal that he faces an uphill battle to get the verdict overturned through an appeal. Many in the Congress party expect the fight to go all the way up to the supreme court.

Opposition figures and critics have said the defamation case against Gandhi is being used as part of an attack on opposition parties by the ruling Bharatiya Janata party (BJP) and symptomatic of an increasingly politicised judiciary.

Many pointed out that the defamation case against Gandhi only began to gather pace this year, just as he was drawing public attention to Prime Minister Modi's links to the [Indian billionaire industrialist Gautam Adani](#), whose company was recently accused of committing the "largest corporate con in history". The company has issued a [lengthy rebuttal](#) of the allegations.

While out on bail, Gandhi has continued to be politically vocal and this week has been out on the campaign trail in Karnataka, where Congress is fighting to topple the BJP in the state elections next month. "The BJP think I can be intimidated with disqualification but I am not scared," Gandhi told a rally this week.

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The study suggests stem cells may get stuck as hair ages and lose their ability to mature and maintain hair colour. Photograph: Image Source/Getty Images

[Science](#)

Scientists may have discovered why hair turns grey

Results of stem cell research could lead to treatment that halts or reverses the process

[Nadeem Badshah](#)

Wed 19 Apr 2023 17.21 EDTLast modified on Thu 20 Apr 2023 08.04 EDT

Scientists believe they have discovered the mechanism for hair turning grey, which could help develop treatment to alter cells in order to reverse or halt the process.

A new study suggests stem cells may get stuck as hair ages and lose their ability to mature and maintain hair colour.

Certain stem cells – which are able to develop into many different cell types – have a unique ability to transition between growth compartments in follicles. These cells lose the ability to move with age, resulting in greyness.

The research focused on cells in the skin of mice and also found in humans called melanocyte stem cells, or McSCs.

The scientists, led by researchers from New York University Grossman school of medicine, suggested that if their findings hold true for humans they could open up a potential way to reverse or prevent grey hair.

The study's lead investigator, Qi Sun, a postdoctoral fellow at NYU Langone Health, said: "The newfound mechanisms raise the possibility that the same fixed-positioning of melanocyte stem cells may exist in humans.

"If so, it presents a potential pathway for reversing or preventing the greying of human hair by helping jammed cells to move again between developing hair follicle compartments."

Hair colour is controlled by whether continually multiplying pools of McSCs within hair follicles get the signal to become mature cells that make the protein pigments responsible for colour.

Researchers found that during normal hair growth the cells continually pivot between compartments of the developing hair follicle. It is inside these compartments where McSCs are exposed to signals that influence maturity.

Researchers found that McSCs transform between their most primitive stem cell state and the next stage of their maturation depending on their location.

According to the findings, as hair ages, sheds, and then repeatedly grows back, increasing numbers of McSCs get stuck in the stem cell compartment called the hair follicle bulge, where they remain.

A senior investigator on the study, Mayumi Ito, said: "It is the loss of chameleon-like function in melanocyte stem cells that may be responsible

for greying and loss of hair colour.”

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/science/2023/apr/19/scientists-may-have-discovered-why-hair-turns-grey>.

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Gonçalves Dias with Lula at the president's inauguration in January. There is no suggestion Dias was involved in planning or facilitating the riot. Photograph: Sérgio Lima/AFP/Getty Images

[Brazil](#)

Brazil: Lula security chief resigns after leaked footage of far-right palace riot

Video shows Gonçalves Dias inside presidential palace as supporters of Bolsonaro went on the rampage in January

[Tom Phillips](#) in Rio de Janeiro

Wed 19 Apr 2023 18.32 EDTLast modified on Thu 20 Apr 2023 08.40 EDT

A key member of [Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva](#)'s new administration has been forced to resign after the emergence of security footage showing him inside the presidential palace during the [8 January far-right assault](#) on Brazil's democratic institutions.

After his election last year, President Lula made the retired army general Gonçalves Dias head of Brazil's Institutional Security Bureau (GSI), which advises the president on defense and security matters and handles presidential security.

However, on Wednesday afternoon, less than four months after the leftist veteran took power, Dias was forced from his job after a television network broadcast leaked CCTV images in which he could be seen roaming the corridors of Brasília's Planalto Palace as radical supporters of the former president Jair Bolsonaro rampaged through that building, the supreme court and congress.

The 73-year-old minister, who provided security to Lula both during both his 2003-10 presidency and last year's tempestuous election campaign, sought to explain the footage in an interview with the GloboNews network.

"I entered the palace after the palace had [already] been stormed, and I was removing people from the third and fourth floors so they could be arrested on the second," claimed the general, a Harley-Davidson enthusiast best known by the nickname "G Dias".

Lula and Dias are reported to have a longstanding and trusting relationship, and there was no suggestion that Dias was involved in planning or even facilitating the chaos in Brasília.

Even so, his explanations appeared to cut little ice with senior members of Lula's administration, who have called the 8 January uprising a botched coup attempt designed to reinstall Bolsonaro as president.

As well as images of Gen Dias, the leaked footage included scenes that showed GSI agents greeting the pro-Bolsonaro extremists and serving them water as they carried out their attack.

Hours after the leaked footage was aired by CNN Brasil, Lula reportedly summoned several top ministers, including Dias, to a meeting at which his fate was sealed.

In a statement, Brazil's presidential communication secretariat, Secom, said there would be "no impunity for those involved in 8 January's criminal acts".

Secom claimed that at the time of the "terrorist" attacks, government agencies, including the GSI, had contained remnants of the previous government who were subsequently removed from their posts. Investigators examining the events of 8 January had already questioned more than 80 military officials, including GSI agents, it added.

The president of Lula's Workers' party (PT), Gleisi Hoffman, claimed on Twitter that the GSI agents filmed "collaborating" with the mob invading the presidential palace were the residue from the Bolsonaro era, when they had worked under its chief, Gen Augusto Heleno.

Heleno, the hawkish 75-year-old former head of Brazil's army in the Amazon, was one of the most radical and sharp-tongued members of Bolsonaro's 2019-22 administration.

During Brazil's two-decade dictatorship, Heleno was an aide to Sylvio Frota, a ferociously anti-communist army general who played a key role in the 1964 military coup that toppled the leftist president João Goulart.

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Alec Baldwin on the set of Rust. Filming is set to resume in Montana 18 months after the shooting of cinematographer Halyna Hutchins Photograph: Santa Fe County Sheriff's Office/AFP/Getty Images

[Rust film set shooting](#)

Alec Baldwin's 'Rust' movie to resume filming 18 months after shooting

A representative said filming likely to restart in Montana on Thursday while a number of legal issues remain unresolved

Associated Press

Thu 20 Apr 2023 01.07 EDTLast modified on Thu 20 Apr 2023 21.12 EDT

Filming on the western movie Rust could resume this week in Montana, the production company said, 18 months after the fatal shooting of a cinematographer during a rehearsal with actor [Alec Baldwin](#) on the original production in New Mexico.

Baldwin is set to continue his involvement with the project as both actor and co-producer. Rust Move Productions attorney Melina Spadone said via a representative that filming will restart on Thursday at the Yellowstone Film Ranch.

Last month, the production company finalised a settlement with New Mexico workplace safety regulators over “serious” violations. The company agreed to a \$100,000 fine to resolve a [scathing safety review](#) that found unheeded complaints and misfires on set before cinematographer Halyna Hutchins was shot and killed in October 2021.

Plans to resume filming were outlined last year by widower Matthew Hutchins in a proposed settlement to a wrongful death lawsuit that would make him an executive producer on a rebooted Rust.

Prosecutors in Santa Fe are pressing forward with involuntary manslaughter charges against Baldwin and weapons supervisor Hannah Gutierrez-Reed. Baldwin and Gutierrez-Reed have [pleaded not guilty](#).

Baldwin was pointing a pistol at Hutchins during a rehearsal when the gun went off, killing Hutchins and wounding director Joel Souza.

Baldwin has said the gun went off accidentally and that he did not pull the trigger. An FBI forensic report found the weapon could not have fired unless the trigger was pulled.

New Mexico governor Michelle Lujan Grisham this month signed a new \$360,000 allowance for prosecution of the case. Evidentiary hearings are scheduled in early May in state district court to decide whether to proceed toward trial. Baldwin has indicated that he won’t attend those hearings.

Santa Fe district attorney Mary Carmack-Altwies says her office is pursuing justice in the death of Hutchins and wants to show that no one is above the law when it comes to firearms and public safety. She says the Ukrainian-born cinematographer’s death was tragic and preventable.

Rust's safety coordinator and assistant director David Halls pleaded no contest in March to a conviction for unsafe handling of a firearm and a suspended sentence of six months of probation.

Souza, the director, has said he'll return to the Rust production to honor the legacy of Halyna Hutchins.

Parts of a documentary about Hutchins' life will be filmed simultaneously with Rust.

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2023/apr/20/alec-baldwins-rust-movie-to-resume-filming-18-months-after-shooting>.

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- [Live Dominic Raab dismissed warnings about his behaviour, says ex-Foreign Office colleague](#)
- [Dominic Raab Ex-mandarin warned former deputy PM about conduct 'more than once'](#)
- [Rishi Sunak Dominic Raab's resignation raises questions about PM's judgment](#)
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Dominic Raab dismissed warnings about his behaviour, says ex-Foreign Office colleague – as it happened

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There was no 'small group of activists', says former top mandarin – video

[Dominic Raab](#)

Ex-mandarin warned Dominic Raab about conduct ‘more than once’

Former Foreign Office civil servant Simon McDonald also rejects former deputy PM’s claims of ‘activist civil servants’

- [UK politics live – latest updates](#)

[Miranda Bryant](#)

Sat 22 Apr 2023 05.46 EDTLast modified on Sat 22 Apr 2023 12.08 EDT

A former civil service mandarin has revealed he had to warn [Dominic Raab](#) “more than once” about his conduct as foreign secretary while they were working together.

Simon McDonald said Raab, who was forced to [quit as deputy prime minister](#) on Friday after an inquiry found he had bullied civil servants, was a “tough taskmaster” whose “methods did not help him to achieve what he wanted to do”.

Raab did not listen to the issues raised with him, Lord McDonald claimed, adding: “He disputed it. He disputed the characterisation.”

McDonald, who was permanent undersecretary at the Foreign Office between 2015 and 2020, told BBC Radio 4’s Today programme: “Frankly, I witnessed somebody whose methods did not help him to achieve what he wanted to do, and that I raised with him more than once.”

The high threshold for filing a formal complaint against ministers meant that civil servants were hesitant about reporting specific grievances, he said, which, without evidence, Raab “was able to deflect”.

“He said, and in a way reasonably: ‘What is the evidence?’ And without being able to present names and particular detailed instances, he resisted my representations,” McDonald said.

Rejecting Raab’s claims of “activist civil servants”, who the former prime minister claimed on Friday were trying to block the government’s work, McDonald said all civil servants he witnessed “worked very hard for him”.

“There is no civil service activism, there is no civil service passive aggression, there is no separate civil service agenda,” he added.

But allies rallied around the former foreign secretary. Hugo Swire claimed Westminster had not seen the end of Raab, predicting that he would be “back in some capacity”.

“This is a career which has been brought prematurely to a temporary halt, because I fundamentally believe that a talent such as Dominic will reappear in some place at some time. It is the government’s loss,” Swire said.

Overnight reports claim a Brexit-era row over British troops in Gibraltar was behind one of the bullying claims.

Raab resigns: how the bullying claims against him piled up – video timeline

According to the Daily Telegraph, the civil servant at the centre of the incident was the British ambassador to Spain, Hugh Elliott, who Raab allies claimed went beyond the cabinet position on not having Spanish officers permanently stationed in the British overseas territory.

In an article for the newspaper, Raab claimed the inquiry into his behaviour was “Kafkaesque”. In a BBC interview, he accused “very activist civil servants” of working against him and claimed ministers would be fearful of officials as a result.

Bob Kerslake, a former head of the civil service, on Saturday described Raab's activism claims as "absurd". He told Today: "It's completely inaccurate, and I think it's just one more line of attack to avoid taking responsibility for his actions."

Attacking Raab's "graceless" resignation letter, he added: "He seems to lash out at everybody but doesn't accept personal responsibility for any of his own behaviour, and I think the issue here he's trying to turn it into – some kind of constitutional question of good government – simply doesn't stand up."

The general secretary of the FDA, the trade union for civil servants, accused Raab of setting a "dangerous" precedent by accusing civil servants of acting on political grounds, and he called on Rishi Sunak to intervene.

How Westminster reacted to Dominic Raab's resignation – video

"This is where we start to get into quite dangerous territory and really the prime minister should be starting to intervene, because what Raab's now doing is he's saying: 'This wasn't just about me, this was a politically motivated group of civil servants trying to block government policy,'" Dave Penman told Times Radio.

"Of course he provides no evidence to support that whatsoever in his desperate attempt to defend himself."

Penman accused ministers of trying, without evidence, to stoke a culture war of a "woke left civil service", who were not able to respond due to impartiality rules.

He called on Sunak to "conduct a review of the entire process" of how civil servants report concerns about ministers.

Raab resigns: how the bullying claims against him piled up – video timeline

[Dominic Raab](#)

Dominic Raab resignation raises questions about Rishi Sunak's judgment

Sources say PM did not ask deputy to go despite bullying inquiry finding he engaged in ‘abuse or misuse of power’

- [UK politics: live updates](#)

[Pippa Crerar](#) *Political editor*

[@PippaCrerar](#)

Fri 21 Apr 2023 14.18 EDTLast modified on Sat 22 Apr 2023 02.50 EDT

Dominic Raab has been forced to quit as deputy prime minister after Rishi Sunak begrudgingly accepted an official inquiry that found his close ally bullied civil servants by acting in an intimidating and [aggressive manner](#).

A five-month investigation by a leading employment barrister found that Raab, as foreign secretary, had engaged in “abuse or misuse of power” to undermine or humiliate staff. He was “intimidating and insulting” in meetings at the Ministry of Justice.

After his departure on Friday, Raab launched [an attack](#) on “activist civil servants” who he said were trying to block the work of government. He had told the inquiry that the civil service had “culture resistance” to policies, including on Brexit, and [on Friday claimed the threshold for bullying was “too low”](#).

Threshold for bullying in danger of being too low, says Dominic Raab – video

Downing Street sources said Sunak had not asked Raab to go, but that his former deputy had offered to resign and the prime minister had accepted. In his [reply to Raab's resignation letter](#), Sunak lavished praise on Raab and questioned historical processes; while No 10 offered only lukewarm endorsement of the report's findings. It resulted in the prime minister being accused of failing to stand up for civil servants.

Raab, who was justice secretary as well as deputy prime minister, had faced multiple formal complaints over his dealings with civil servants across three departments including claims, [first revealed by the Guardian](#), that he bullied and belittled staff, driving some to tears or causing them to throw up before meetings.

The investigation by Adam Tolley KC found that Raab branded civil servants' work "utterly useless" and "woeful". Some staff said they suffered stress and anxiety after dealing with him, and felt forced to take unpaid leave or, in one case, stress-related sick leave.

Tolley rejected claims by some Conservative MPs that civil servants had been "snowflakes", stressing he did not find "any material lack of resilience" among officials who had "many years of experience" working with ministers.

The report, however, found "no persuasive evidence" that Raab shouted or swore, and dismissed allegations about his behaviour when he headed the Brexit department.

But in an indignant opinion piece [in the Telegraph](#), Raab dismissed a "Kafkaesque saga" and suggested it would encourage some officials to target ministers who "pursue bold reforms" and "persevere in holding civil servants to account".

His resignation probably represents the end of his frontline political career, with allies admitting he is expected to lose his marginal Surrey seat to the Liberal Democrats at the general election next year. Raab told the BBC he

wanted to “let the dust settle a little bit” before making a decision about his future.

The departure of such a close political ally is a major blow to Sunak, who is facing questions over his judgment after civil servants flagged “issues” with Raab in his previous departments before the prime minister brought him back into government.

Sunak glossed over the substance of the complaints, while Downing Street only condemned the bullying of civil servants “in general terms” and refused to explicitly acknowledge that Raab had broken the ministerial code.

In his [letter to Raab](#), Sunak said his deputy prime minister had “rightly” undertaken to resign if the report made any finding of bullying whatsoever. “You have kept your word,” he said.

“But it is clear that there have been shortcomings in the historic process that have negatively affected everyone involved. We should learn from this how to better handle such matters in future.”

He went on to praise Raab’s record and his support during the Tory leadership campaign. Downing Street rejected calls for a wider inquiry into ministerial bullying but indicated that lessons could be learned about the handling of complaints.

Oliver Dowden, a senior Tory “warrior against woke”, will take on the role of deputy prime minister in addition to his responsibilities at the Cabinet Office, while Alex Chalk, a barrister and former solicitor general, has been appointed as the new justice secretary.

Tolley confirmed that top officials at the Foreign Office and Ministry of Justice had warned Raab about his behaviour. He said Raab’s manner – which the MP himself described as “inquisitorial, direct, impatient and fastidious” – was not in every case intentional, but he was a “highly intelligent man” who ought to have realised the impact on officials, and made changes.

[Download original document](#)

Raab's [resignation letter](#) said the conclusions of the report created a "dangerous precedent" by setting the threshold for bullying "so low" that it could have a "chilling" effect on ministers trying to make changes.

The MP said he felt "duty bound" to resign, having undertaken to do so if the report found against him. He claimed that all but two of the eight complaints against him had been "dismissed", but Tolley found evidence of poor behaviour in six of them.

Raab refused to apologise. Tolley said: "The DPM has expressed regret in relation to the impact on individuals, which has been communicated to him for the first time in the course of the investigation. He has not offered any apology, given that he does not accept that he has done anything wrong."

But Raab said he was "genuinely sorry for any unintended stress or offence that any officials felt, as a result of the pace, standards and challenge that I brought to the Ministry of Justice".

My resignation statement. pic.twitter.com/DLjBfChlFq

— Dominic Raab (@DominicRaab) [April 21, 2023](#)

A Ministry of Justice source said they were relieved. "There is a noted sense of deep relief in the MoJ today. The lack of remorse from Raab is upsetting but entirely predictable. The behaviour evidenced in the report falls so far below any standard that would be acceptable in any workplace.

"Dominic Raab's behaviour was the worst-kept secret in Westminster. Through the weight of evidence from three departments and his subsequent response, the public now has a sense of his true colours."

Sunak had faced criticism for allowing Raab – the second member of his cabinet forced to resign amid bullying allegations after Gavin Williamson last year – to stay in post while the investigation by Tolley was carried out.

The prime minister received the report on Thursday morning before consulting with Tolley and his ministerial ethical adviser, Sir Laurie Magnus. He spoke with Raab by phone on Friday morning.

A government source said Downing Street had been planning to publish the report on Friday afternoon, suggesting Raab had “jumped before he was pushed”.

A small number of Tory MPs defenced Raab. Jacob Rees-Mogg told Channel 4 News: “I think his resignation was unnecessary and the PM should not have accepted it. It seems to me there is one way accountability. Civil servants can be as incompetent and useless and fail to do deliver on government policy and there is no consequence for them. This is undemocratic.”

However, some Tory MPs are privately concerned that Sunak’s handling of the row, in the wake of the [Nadhim Zahawi tax affair](#), would further undermine his pledge to instil “integrity, professionalism and accountability at every level” of his government as he tries to move on from the Boris Johnson era.

Tolley conducted 66 interviews over several months, including four interviews with Raab, which took two and a half days. He said he could not make a finding on a complaint from Raab’s time as Brexit secretary because of a lack of evidence and the passage of time.

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2023/apr/21/dominic-raab-investigation-raises-questions-about-rishi-sunaks-judgment>



Dominic Raab said the inquiry into his conduct had set the threshold for bullying low. Photograph: Neil Hall/EPA

[Bullying](#)

‘Robustness’ or bullying: when does firm management cross the line?

As the Dominic Raab case has shown, allegations of bullying can be highly subjective

[*Esther Addley*](#)

Sat 22 Apr 2023 02.00 EDT

Dominic Raab, in his [resignation statement](#), preferred to call it “direct critical feedback” and the “pace, standards and challenge” that he brought to his departments. His allies had previously defended him as someone who simply “[expects people to be on their brief](#) and puts them on the spot”.

But in his report, Adam Tolley KC found that at times the politician had gone beyond merely demanding high standards of his staff, including instances in which he was “intimidating” or acted in a way that was “unreasonably and persistently aggressive”.

So where does the line between [“robustness”](#) and bullying lie? While some conduct is very obviously unacceptable, experts acknowledge it is not always easy to judge when firm management crosses that line.

The ministerial code, which governs how senior politicians must behave, says they must “treat all those with whom they come into contact with consideration and respect ... Harassing, bullying or other inappropriate or discriminatory behaviour ... will not be tolerated.”

For the purposes of his investigation, Tolley said he relied on a previous case that found bullying could be defined as “offensive, intimidating, malicious or insulting behaviour” or an abuse of power “in ways that undermine, humiliate, denigrate or injure the recipient”.

Notably, Tolley reiterated a finding that behaviour could be classed as bullying even if the person at fault did not mean to bully.

Normal workplaces outside the political arena may not have a ministerial code, but similar principles on behaviour apply, say experts.

“As a manager, you can be robust about challenging poor work and set down reasonable expectations,” says [John Bowers KC](#), an experienced employment law barrister and the principal of Brasenose College, Oxford. “But what you cannot do is be malicious, humiliating, over the top or too personal.”

Who’s to say what is “over the top”, though? Allegations of bullying can be highly subjective, Bowers agrees, “and more importantly everyone’s susceptibility is different, which partly depends on how senior the person is.”

Part of the problem is that there is no specific legal definition of bullying. While the [government says](#) examples of bullying can include spreading malicious rumours, unfair treatment, regularly undermining someone or denying them training or promotion opportunities, these are not in themselves against the law.

It doesn't need to be in person: communications by email, phone or letter can constitute bullying behaviour as well as face-to-face interactions.

It is only when this behaviour is related to protected characteristics such as a person's age, race, sex, religion, disability or sexual orientation that it is legally classed as harassment, and falls under the Equality Act 2010.

“Bullying is generally described as unwanted behaviour, but that's a pretty loose definition,” says [Andrea London](#), a partner in the employment department at the law firm Winckworth Sherwood. To qualify, “it has to be more than unwanted – along the lines of being offensive, insulting or humiliating”.

Perhaps someone has spread a malicious rumour about you, or keeps putting you down in meetings. Your boss may continually give you a heavier workload than others in your team. A colleague may have made humiliating or threatening comments or photos on your social media posts. All are [cited by Acas](#), the workplace conciliation service, as potential examples of bullying.

It doesn't have to be your manager or someone more senior to you, Acas points out – a more junior employee can be guilty of bullying their superior if they show ongoing disrespect, refuse to carry out tasks or attempt to undermine their more senior colleague.

Most employers should have a bullying at work policy, notes London, which should include clear guidance and lead to an established grievance procedure that either seeks to resolve the situation informally or allows someone to make a more formal complaint.

If that doesn't reach a resolution, a person who feels they have been bullied may have no legal redress other than to resign and claim for unfair

dismissal.

To establish unfair dismissal, however, three tests have to be met, says London. “There has to be a repudiatory breach of your contract” – one that goes to the very heart of your employment terms – “you have to resign in response to that breach, and you have to do that without undue delay”. That is “a very high bar to have met”, she says.

In such a case, employment tribunals will look at the conduct of the employer and how seriously they have taken complaints about a staff member’s behaviour. “If the employers have just batted it away and [said] there’s nothing here, this person is a complainer and just doesn’t like being told what to do – tribunals don’t like to hear that kind of behaviour from employers.”

If you feel you are being bullied, keep a diary, London advises. “Bullying can be quite insidious and you might not have any witnesses to the behaviour. If a bully is being malicious, rather than it just being part of their personality, the chances are that they will try to cover up what they’re doing.”

But if you’re a straight-talking manager who just wants to push your team, how do you avoid tipping over into accusations of bullying? “Communication is really key,” she says. “As a manager, you might say: ‘Look, we’ve got to get to this particular target, and I really need everybody to pull together. If you think that I’m being short because my emails are just one-liners, don’t take that personally – and if you have any concerns about anything, come and speak to me about it.’

“A manager who is aware of their potential foibles is probably in a much better position than somebody who just thinks that they’re able to bulldoze people.”

2023.04.22 - Spotlight

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- ['Men my age aren't good on their own. They're needy' Lesley Manville on being happily single and her big problem with Hollywood](#)
- [How to have better sex Share a bath, play the three-minute game and don't catastrophise!](#)
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Helen Pidd, photographed in Berlin last month. Photograph: Gene Glover/The Guardian

[Life and style](#)

**Not being able to have a baby was
devastating – then I found people who**

embraced a childfree life

I had always wanted to be a mother, but after three unsuccessful rounds of IVF, I decided to stop trying. What could I learn from the people who have chosen not to be parents?



[Helen Pidd](#)

Sat 22 Apr 2023 05.00 EDT

It was my hen do in the Lake District and my friends had organised a game of Mr and Mrs. The idea, for the uninitiated, is to test how well you know your future spouse. Beforehand, they quizzed Ian, my intended, and then repeated the exercise with me, with extra fizzy wine. It began with the usual stuff (Where was your first kiss? Who is the better dresser?) but then they asked a question that suddenly sobered me up: “What is your greatest fear?”

I wondered whether to answer honestly. I instinctively knew the truth but was aware it might kill the vibe. I went for it anyway. “Not being able to have children,” I said. There was a momentary hush before one of the hens played a video of Ian guessing the rather more sweeping “Failure”, and someone filled my glass to the brim. I was 36.

Several years in to trying and failing to have children, that game of Mr and Mrs sometimes haunted me. There are all sorts of complicated and sometimes illogical feelings that come with infertility. For me, shame was one. I felt ashamed that I had never hidden my desire to have children – I used to claim I would have four – and was embarrassed that it wasn't working out.

I was a person who got what she wanted by putting in the hours. I had been ludicrously motivated from a young age, certain early on that I wanted to be a journalist. I wrote to my local radio station at 14 and explained why no one my age listened to their programmes, my cheek rewarded with a weekly slot on Radio Lancashire beamed live from my bedroom. Later, I deliberately chose a degree I knew wouldn't take much time (German) so I could devote myself to student journalism.

I remember sobbing on a rock as I watched a seal plop into a loch followed by her many glistening babies

My focus paid off. I got offered a job at the Guardian when I graduated, and by 30 was working as a foreign correspondent in Berlin. I remember holding a friend's newborn baby in the pub before flying to Germany. I always loved babies – I still do – but having my own seemed so far away. There was so much I wanted to do first.

By the time I had found the right man and it became clear that baby-making the classic way was not going to work, many of my friends were on to their second child. I started [IVF](#) at 38 when a colleague was just about to go on maternity leave, her basketball belly an everyday reminder of the fertility I lacked. Social media seemed awash with 12-week scans and delivery suite snaps, with captions extolling “the greatest love of all”. I pretended to be happy for everyone else.

I developed an intense hatred for male celebrities who became fathers in their dotage after finding much younger second wives. I began boycotting the work of an actor I previously admired when he gave an interview saying that he only had to look at his wife and she seemed to get pregnant. I resented more than ever having to be the one doing all the running in my

friendships, fitting in visits around school pick-ups and nap times. In my day job as a reporter, court cases involving child neglect hit me harder than ever. How were these monsters having babies when I couldn't?

The red mist descended if people tried to tell me that having kids was only borderline worth it, that they envied my lie-ins

I developed irrational habits, like watching 22 Kids and Counting, a Channel 5 series about Britain's biggest family. The Radfords live in Morecambe, where I grew up, and Sue, the matriarch, gave birth to her 22nd child at age 45, in April 2020, when my IVF was on hold because of Covid. We had to stop watching some of our favourite programmes as they seemed to be tormenting us. I remember crying on the sofa when Jake and Amy in [Brooklyn Nine-Nine](#) started trying for a baby. Naturally, they had a happy ending. I'd gobble up magazine features about a woman's struggles, only to find out in the penultimate paragraph that she had given birth to twins.

When I started being more open about having IVF, everything fertile people said annoyed me. The red mist would descend if they tried to tell me that having kids was only borderline worth it, that they envied my – admittedly superior – holidays and Sunday morning lie-ins with the papers. They couldn't win because I hated their pity, too. If they tried to cheer me up by saying they had a “really good feeling” about this embryo transfer, I wanted to punch them. It is an inconvenient truth that most IVF fails. My three rounds produced 24 eggs and six decent embryos, none of which resulted in a baby.

We decided to stop in the summer of 2021. Not everyone seemed to respect our decision, imagining they were being helpful when they told us about their friends who had succeeded on the seventh try or had gone down the egg-donation route. We went on holiday to Skye the day I got the final negative pregnancy result, and I remember sobbing on a rock as I watched a seal plop into the loch followed by her many glistening babies.

Solace came in the form of Mia and Laura, two glorious hedonists 10 years our junior. They had moved to Manchester from London just before the first

lockdown, and Ian had joined [their band](#) on bass. The girls, as we always call them, are married but had decided early on not to have children – they just didn't feel that children were the key to a meaningful and worthwhile existence and didn't fancy the day-to-day drudgery of parenting. There's a freedom that comes from opting out of motherhood before you hit your 30s. I envied it, having wasted so much of that decade wondering if I would meet the right man in time, only to find him and then discover my ovaries were not up to the mark.

Mia and Laura were sympathetic to my pain but offered an entirely different perspective on how the second half of my life might now look. Twenty free years suddenly opened up in my calendar. Having children is a good way of not having to think about what you really want from your life. Without children, you are responsible for your own destiny. You can't blame your thwarted dreams on the pram in the hallway.

Still, childlessness can feel very lonely. It shouldn't, given half of all women in England and Wales [are now childless](#) by their 30th birthday. Just over 18% are still without kids at 45, the point at which statisticians judge the natural "childbearing years" to finish, a statistic that has remained more or less constant since the late 1950s.

I started to seek out others without children, preferring the optimism of the childfree-by-choice community over the grief of those like me. It has become fashionable to draw a distinction between the childfree and people in my predicament, referred to as "childless". Adding "less" to most words makes them negative: hopeless, meaningless, useless. I personally prefer "childfree", not wanting to be defined by what I do not have.



Zoë Noble and James Glazebrook of the We Are Childfree network.
Photograph: Gene Glover/The Guardian

It is in search of these childfree connections that I find myself again on a plane to Berlin. This time, my destination is a natural wine shop in Neukölln, a tatty but fashionable southern suburb where I used to live, to meet a group of other women with no children. I say women, but I'm surprised to see a few men when I arrive at the meet-up organised by We Are Childfree.

Everyone is well dressed: there are directional trouser suits, architectural glasses and a lot of good hair. Everyone looks delighted to be there. Jacky, a sinologist in wire-rimmed specs, says it is “paradise – when you go outside, you're confronted with a lot of people who think you must be a cold person, or you just don't know what you want and you will regret it. But it's really medicine for the soul to know it's OK. Like, my life is supposed to go this different way.”

The brainchild of Zoë Noble, a photographer from Newcastle who has been living in Berlin since 2010, We Are Childfree began in 2017 as a photographic project to celebrate women who had chosen not to be mothers. Having never felt the urge to procreate, Noble put a callout [on her blog](#) saying she wanted to “shine a spotlight on childfree women, who are

elsewhere overlooked or judged for their choices”. The idea was to take beautiful portraits and interview the women about their decision to “help to remove the stigma often attached to women who don’t plan to have kids”.

Forty strangers offered to tell their stories, and the project took off. During the pandemic, Noble and her husband, James Glazebrook, decided to devote more time and resources to building what is now Europe’s fastest-growing childfree network. [Their website](#) hosts 200 diverse stories of people living their best lives without children, usually but not always by choice, and their podcast features interviews with childfree pioneers.

It is one of an increasing number of online communities – bolstered by Reddit threads and TikTok influencers – dedicated to celebrating and supporting those without kids. They aim to reclaim the childfree identity from the stereotypes of the selfish and the pitiful, and to challenge pronatal policies and assumptions. They sell merchandise, too: baseball caps saying “Tubes tied and ready to ride”, T-shirts emblazoned with “No bun in this oven” and tote bags listing the first names of four childfree legends: “Jen & Betty & Dolly & Oprah”.

It was the inclusion of Jen – Jennifer Aniston – that piqued my interest more than the others (Betty White from *The Golden Girls*, plus Dolly Parton and Oprah Winfrey). In the late 1990s and early noughties, when I came of age, no one’s fertility was more debated than that of the *Friends* star. When Brad Pitt left her for Angelina Jolie and quickly fathered a daughter and twins, as well as adopting three other children, Aniston took on a new sobriquet in the global media: Poor Jen.

Was it via her treatment at the hands of the tabloid media that I internalised the idea that not having kids was a source of shame? It showed that you could be one of the richest, most successful actors on the planet, with the world’s best hair, but if you do not have children ... Poor Jen!

Growing up, I didn’t have any childfree models. All the adults I knew well were someone’s parents

It was only last year that Aniston opened up about her failed IVF treatments and how hard the years of speculation made what she called the “baby-making road”. It is so weird when people start asking about babies. It was David Miliband who first asked me if I had kids. I was interviewing him in his then constituency in South Shields. I was only about 26 and remember turning around to check that the question was directed at me. Me? Have kids? It seemed a ludicrous proposition at the time, though he was just the first of many strangers to make unsolicited inquiries about my family planning.

It now seems particularly surprising that the question came from him, given that he [subsequently talked about adopting his two sons](#) after IVF didn’t work out. Only those who have tried and failed to have children truly understand how I feel, I often think. That’s why I have a crisis of confidence on the way to the Berlin wine shop, where I rightly anticipate that everyone else will be childfree by choice.

Growing up, I didn’t have any childfree models. All the adults I knew well were someone’s parents. At the meet-up, Dorien, from the Netherlands, talks about her seven-year-old niece coming to stay: “After the weekend, she kept telling everyone, ‘I want to be like my aunt. When I have babies, I’m just going to throw them in the trash can so I don’t have to deal with them.’”

Hannah, from Portland, Oregon, talks about the influence of her childfree aunt: “She was a costume designer, she was doing these meditation retreats, she had all these amazing hobbies and was having these amazing experiences that were only possible because she didn’t have kids.”

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Though Hannah is now an example for her own young nieces, the pull of pronatalism is strong. One niece has a gay teacher and was preoccupied with how he would have a baby with his boyfriend. “I guess they could get a woman and keep her to make the babies,” said the young girl, to Hannah’s horror. “They were imposing Gilead at four!”

All the evidence suggests that as women become better educated and financially independent, they choose to have fewer children. What feels new is that women are now talking about this decision and refusing to apologise or be pitied for it. The US comedian Chelsea Handler uses her Instagram account to troll parents and rightwing commentators by detailing her fabulous childfree life, which mostly seems to involve skiing and getting stoned.

Handler rejects the idea that if you don’t have children you have to use all of your extra free time productively. I remember in the aftermath of my final failed IVF round announcing plans to take a bricklaying course, write a novel, learn how to sew my own clothes. I even contemplated running for public office.

I did none of these things, and that’s OK. But the increasing number of childfree women in the world could present a huge opportunity. Ruby Warrington, author of a new book, [Women Without Kids](#), suggests that the increasing number of childfree/childless women – what she calls the “unsung sisterhood” – could herald “the start of a new chapter in our human story”. She asks: “What if more women having more time, energy and other resources at our disposal means more women leaders in business, politics, and the arts?” It could potentially lead to a more restorative, collaborative way of running the world.

Warrington, childfree by choice, confesses to playing what she calls the “Does she have kids?” game. I am a veteran of this masochistic sport, compulsively looking up women who have caught my eye and going straight to the personal section of their Wikipedia page to see if they have kids, and then feeling bad about myself when I realise they are super-successful and a mother of four.

I spent so long feeling sorry for myself that I never considered the difficulties of those determined to avoid parenthood

Some of the women at the Berlin meet-up talk about difficult childhoods. Mine was very happy. My mum was not willing to sacrifice her career as a psychiatrist to have my sister and me, but once said – long before my IVF – that her great regret was not having more children. That stuck with me and no doubt reinforced the idea that while having an interesting and well-paid job is all well and good, it is children who provide the true path to fulfilment. When I got married, I became a stepmum. Though I have worked hard to build a good relationship with my stepdaughter, I see myself not as a third parent, but an extra adult invested in her hopes and dreams.



Lise Scott, a nanny: ‘I love children, but have no desire to be a mother.’
Photograph: Gene Glover/The Guardian

I spent so long feeling sorry for myself over not being able to have kids that I never considered the difficulties of those determined to avoid parenthood. In Berlin, one woman recalls asking for tubal ligation when she was 18, only to be refused by a succession of physicians “because you’ll change your mind”. She was almost 30 when she finally found a doctor to perform the procedure. Don’t you think you might be missing out on a life-enhancing experience, I ask her. After all, parents are always going on about a “love like no other”. She looks at me as if I’m mad. “I think they just want us to share their misery,” she says.

Noble and Glazebrook also experienced the patriarchal arrogance of the medical establishment when Noble had to beg for a hysterectomy after suffering years of agonising fibroids. It was a different story when Glazebrook, then aged 35, asked for a vasectomy. “I just went in for a consultation, which involves the doctor asking, ‘Do you have kids?’ No. ‘Do you want kids?’ No. That was it. Not even, ‘Are you sure?’”

Lise Scott, a 41-year-old nanny to Berlin’s elite, struggled since her 20s with endometriosis, having periods so painful she would pass out. But it was only last year that she finally found a doctor to remove her uterus, with successive medics refusing to believe that she was serious about not wanting children. The fact she works with children created extra confusion. “I just know 10,000,000% that I have absolutely no desire to be a mother,” she says. “I love children. I love being around them. But it has a cap for me.”

Noble and Glazebrook say there are two main fears their members share. The first is how to cope when all their friends start having kids. Scott, like many women I speak to, says friendships have fallen by the wayside once babies arrived. Her attitude is sanguine: “That’s your loss, because I’d have been an amazing proxy auntie. Plus: free babysitting.”



Helen Pidd: 'It feels good to be part of a pioneering generation rather than a subject of pity.' Photograph: Gene Glover/The Guardian

The big one is what happens in later life. I worry about this, but talking to women at the meet-up gives me optimism. Amy Daroukakis, 42, a trends forecaster, sees the burgeoning community as an opportunity to develop new models of living as we age. "It's this idea of a kinship. And that's going to be the next definition of what family looks like, where it's based on like-minded interests, sharing of resources."

It feels good to be part of a pioneering generation rather than a subject of pity, but I am keen to talk to someone already in the later stages of life. I call Marcia Drut-Davis, an 80-year-old author from Long Island, New York, who in 1974 was sacked from her job as a teacher in the US after giving an interview to the news show 60 Minutes about why she did not want to have children. "It was the first time I faced what pronatalism is. I had death threats and I had to have police escort me when I spoke," she says now.

She has written [two books](#) – Confessions of a Childfree Woman and What?! You Don't Want Children? Understanding Rejection in the Childfree Lifestyle – and now organises regular childfree cruises. She has found a new lease of life on Instagram as @childfree_guru, where she posts things like "Fabulous dinner ... And we could afford it, not having raised kids or

helping grandkids.” With short white hair and immaculate makeup, she looks 15 years younger than her age, and I say so. “That’s because I have a little extra money to have injections in my face!” she says.

Her books have recently started selling again and she is in demand as a speaker and mentor. Childbearing is still praised above all else, she says. “Look at an obituary. No ‘what a wonderful human being she was, dedicated to saving the planet’. But how many children did they have? How many grandchildren? If they have great-grandchildren, nirvana!”

When we chat she is cock-a-hoop that the American actor [Seth Rogen has just given an interview](#) about why he and his wife don’t have children. He said they decided it wasn’t for them and now thinks: “Honestly, thank God we don’t have children. We get to do whatever we want.” Drut-Davis thinks he has done an immeasurable service to the childfree community.

I ask her if the prospect of dying alone worried her when she first came out as childfree. “Of course it did!” she cries. “It helped when I became aware that so many parents don’t have their children there as they age. It happened to my own husband [her third]. He and his children are estranged. Some have children of their own and can’t visit. Sometimes children predecease Mom and Dad. There’s no guarantee at all.”

What she is really passionate about is “making heart connections to younger people”. By this she means “meaningful, authentic, loving friendships” with people across the generations. “Because they’re the ones who will visit you and they’re the ones who will care.”

As we say goodbye she makes me promise that if I am ever feeling sad about not having children I’m to call her. “I’m not gonna say you are not going to struggle. You will. Pronatalism makes everything all gooey and wonderful. But, you know, little babies become teenagers. Teenagers are snarky pains in the ass. Life with a child is a 24-hour, seven-day-a-week career.” She blows me a kiss and hangs up.

I wasn’t sure joining the world of the childfree by choice was going to provide me comfort. Would these women, so certain that parenting was not for them, understand why it was what I had always wanted? Perhaps I, too,

had internalised the idea that women without kids were cold and lacking in compassion, which could not be further from the truth. The “unsung sisterhood” has got my back.

As I was writing this article, a friend texts to say she is pregnant again. I tell her I am happy to hear her news, and I am. I feel a little bit sad for me, too. That both things can be true feels like progress. I think I am going to be all right.

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‘Men my age aren’t good on their own. They’re needy’: Lesley Manville on being happily single and her big problem with Hollywood

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[How to have a healthy sex life](#)[Sex](#)

Share a bath, play the three-minute game and don't catastrophise! How to

have better sex

From the first to time through to the menopause, expert advice on how to improve your sex life – no matter your age, experience or desire



[Joanna Moorhead](#)

Sat 22 Apr 2023 02.00 EDT

There's an irony – or maybe not – in the fact that since we've become more “open” about sex as a society, we've been having less of it. So sex is everywhere, but not so much in the nation's bedrooms (or sitting room floors, or on the kitchen worktops or wherever else you might care to get down to it). The generation that had most sex was born in the [1930s](#) – the so-called silent generation; the generations that have it least are millennials, born between 1981 and 1996 and Gen Z who are born between 1997 and 2012.

In Britain, across all age groups, around [one in four](#) of us has sex at least once in an average week with almost one in 10 of us managing three times – but the older we are, the less common sex is. The average age someone [loses their virginity is 17](#), with late twentysomethings having the most sex.

But by our late 30s, four in 10 report having not had sex in the past week, and around a fifth of 40 to 44-year-olds aren't having sex at all.

What, though, is a sex life? You might not currently have a partner, but you're experimenting, solo or not. And sex certainly isn't just about penetration: sex is intimacy that involves touch, stimulation, oral sex, masturbation. Yourself and, if you have one, your partner.

But whatever kind of sexual activity you're engaged in – solo, straight, queer or bi – stress is a barrier. Research published [last month](#) found the lifestyle demands on women aged 40-59 were more significant than the menopause in the decline and frequency of sexual activity.

So how do we do it better? Here's advice for some of the trickiest moments in our sex lives.

... if it's the first time

Penetrative sex – the insertion of part of your body into part of someone else's, or vice versa – isn't something to “get over with”. You're much more likely to have a good time if you take the opposite approach. Remember, it's the first time – it doesn't have to be the best time. You're on the nursery slopes. Relationship and psychosexual therapist [Cate Campbell](#) suggests concentrating on non-penetrative sex for a while first. “Seeing an aroused penis for the first time can be a shock,” she says. If you're a heterosexual woman, “use his penis to stimulate your clitoris – get used to having it around your vulva”. If you're a homosexual man, be aware that getting a hard-on doesn't mean your partner necessarily wants penetrative sex. Make sure you talk; and it goes for all sexual situations, that both partners must totally consent to whatever is happening or about to happen.

If you're going to be penetrated by another person's penis, it's definitely a good idea to start by spending time with it before you have it inside you: hold it, play with it, perhaps start with just a bit of penetration, so you can feel how it's going to be. Talk with your partner beforehand: in a heterosexual relationship, having the girl on top will also help to ensure she stays in control. “What you want is that the first time you have penetrative

sex, you already have a lot of arousal,” says Campbell. And if you’re the girl, don’t expect to climax; most women don’t orgasm during penetration. And if you’re the boy, don’t fret about whether you’ll come too quickly. The ambition is to enjoy yourselves, without pressures.



Photograph: Inti St Clair/Getty Images/Tetra images RF

... at the start of a big relationship

Sex tends to be great at the start of a big relationship – but what matters here is being authentic and honest right from the get-go. “If you do what you think your partner wants, rather than what you want, you could be setting yourself up for resentment down the line,” cautions Relate psychosexual therapist [Tamara Hoyton](#). So listen to your partner: ask what he/she wants, and share what you truly want. “Using terms like ‘I like it when you ...’ or ‘I love it when ...’ is important,” she says. “No one is a mind reader.” What’s really sexy for anyone, in any kind of relationship, is being with a partner who’s confident in their own mind, who’s prepared to be upfront about what they want. So don’t be shy: and enjoy it.

... if it’s a one-night stand

Perhaps fuelled by internet dating, one night stands are [on the up](#), especially among older people. A study from King's College London this month found Britons are more likely than people elsewhere to have casual sex, with four in 10 saying it's justifiable. That rises to 67% of Gen Z respondents, and 30% of baby boomers (up from 8% in 2009).

Context and self-knowledge are all when it comes to casual sex. Don't do it if you've had way too much to drink. "And also, you need to know yourself well enough to know you're not going to hate yourself in the morning," says Hoyton. If you're embarking on this, with a positive frame of mind, the trick is to be creative. "Think about doing something different," says Hoyton. "And if you're going to do it, make sure you enjoy it."

To enjoy it, you'll need to be clear about what you like and dislike: think about how adventurous you want to be, and dare to try something new. This kind of sex will all be about what happens in the moment: your partner doesn't know you. Be bold! Have fun! Experiment, and find out new things about yourself.



Photograph: VladOrlov/Getty Images/iStockphoto

... when you've been with the same person for 23 years

Desire and arousal are different things, says Campbell, and understanding this helps in understanding sex in a long-term relationship. "Most women in these relationships, and about a third of men, don't feel desire until after they feel aroused," she says. So concentrate on giving yourselves the opportunity for desire to develop.

"You might want to have a bath together, or just go to bed naked together," she says. Or try the [three-minute game](#), which focuses on touch and telling one another how you'd like to both give and receive touch. Take the pressure off by agreeing beforehand that it's not going to be a failure if penetrative sex doesn't happen; this is about connecting, or reconnecting. It's not about all or nothing, and if you've not been having sex much for a while, you need to invest time if you want to be intimate again. Talking about your fantasies is another great way to get sex going again, says Campbell.

In long-term relationships (but in less long term ones as well), it's often the case that one partner is more keen on sex than the other. In fact, says Hoyton, this is always the case, because who has identical desires? It's always about accommodating the other person; but if your partner doesn't want sex at all or hardly ever (and don't assume it's going to be the woman who feels like this in a heterosexual relationship; men in midlife are every bit as likely to be under stress and feeling sex is something they can take off their long to-do list), working things out can be tough. Empathy is all. Try to understand why your partner isn't into sex. Try to keep the avenues of physical connection open: offer cuddles without the implication that sex will necessarily follow. Think about the ways in which you and your partner are intimate: if you've been together a long time, intimacy can come in different forms. Remember, too, says Hoyton, that sex in a long-term relationship is rarely spontaneous: you need to diarise it, you need to plan for it.

... after you have given birth

This is another time when the big message is to go slow, and make sure your partner knows why you need him to go slow. “Your vagina is possibly going to feel different after you’ve had a baby,” says Hoyton. “It might be dryer, or you might experience some pain. Only have penetrative sex when you feel really ready to do that.”

Hormonal changes affect lubrication, so have a lubricant on standby. And as always, don’t worry about it all going perfectly. “Sometimes you have good sex, sometimes you have bad sex,” says Hoyton. “The quality of the sex you have today doesn’t dictate the quality of the sex you might have tomorrow.” Try not to catastrophise around sex: sometimes it works well, sometimes it doesn’t work so well. When you’ve just had a baby, there are all sorts of other things going on, so don’t stress about sex and ease yourself back into it as slowly as you want.



Photograph: B-D-S Piotr Marcinski/Rex/Shutterstock

... if you’ve never had an orgasm

Anorgasmia, which is a persistent difficulty in achieving orgasm, more common in women but sometimes a problem for men – is a medical condition that can be treated very successfully, so talk to your GP. But for most people, not having an orgasm is more about the psychological

pressure. “Sex tends to be very goal-oriented,” says Hoyton. “If people don’t have an orgasm, they feel cheated. And men often judge their performance on whether they get a woman to climax – it’s a standard of his prowess.”

Tantra teacher and sex and intimacy coach [Jan Day](#) recommends spending time in self-pleasuring. “Take time. Discover what feels good. Let yourself know it’s OK to feel pleasure,” she says. “Learn to pleasure yourself on your clitoris and around your labia, and gradually pleasure and stroke the inside of your vagina – there’s usually a spot there that feels different.” Remember too, she says, that having an orgasm is about everything in your life: learn to enjoy your body, and then tell your partner what you like. And don’t feel it has to be him who brings you to orgasm; masturbating during sex with a partner can help you to come more easily, and will help him to see what you like.

... when you hit the menopause

Here’s one thing to get straight: hitting the menopause doesn’t mean you don’t feel like sex any more. “In fact it’s not until 12 years after the menopause that there’s any significant loss of libido,” says Campbell. Given that the average age of menopause in the UK is 51, that means women can expect to get into their early 60s without any change to their sex drive. You will, however, notice differences: for example, you don’t feel horny mid-month any more, because you’re no longer ovulating. But that doesn’t mean you’re not going to feel like sex at all.

The menopause militates against sex more in terms of how it makes a woman feel: too hot, too sweaty, unsure when you’re suddenly going to have a heavy period. What women tend to do, says Campbell, is tell their man not to come near them – they’re not feeling good. What she suggests is go with it: have a break from sex, but talk with your partner about what is possible. “It might be sitting on the sofa holding hands; it might be mutual masturbation.” The important thing is to be honest about how you’re feeling, and look for what is acceptable and possible and will make you feel good.



Hilary Mantel in 1995. Photograph: Jane Bown/The Observer

[Hilary Mantel](#)

Hilary Mantel's last novel was to have been an Austen mash-up: read an exclusive extract starring Mr Darcy

In the week of the Wolf Hall author's memorial, her husband and agent talk about the Jane Austen satire she was working on when she died in 2022. Read an exclusive extract from it here, along with her earliest published work



[Lisa Allardice](#)

Sat 22 Apr 2023 03.00 EDTLast modified on Sat 22 Apr 2023 05.22 EDT

“What might she have written next?” asked Margaret Atwood in her [tribute to Hilary Mantel](#), after the Booker prize-winning novelist’s sudden death in September last year. “I don’t know, but I will miss it.” In this, she spoke for readers around the world, eagerly awaiting a new book from the author of the Wolf Hall trilogy. Aside from her Cromwell novels, Mantel had a habit of confounding expectations, with each new work so different from its predecessor.

We now know the answer to Atwood’s question: Mantel was working on a rewriting of *Pride and Prejudice*, told from the perspective of the overlooked middle sister Mary Bennet, to be titled *Provocation*. Even more intriguingly, it was planned as a mischievous [Austen](#) mashup, with characters from all her novels making an appearance in unfamiliar guises. From 2,000 pages of bloody Tudor pageantry to Austen’s [two-inches of ivory](#), it is a dizzying shift in scale. “I think she thought, ‘I can just have a whole load of fun,’” says her long-term agent, Bill Hamilton. “She felt that it was time to get away from the really serious research and the big historical novels, to do something lighter.”

Mantel had written 20,000 words of *Provocation*, but the two brief paragraphs published here, read at her memorial in Southwark Cathedral this week, are the only ones Gerald McEwen, Mantel's husband, felt were finished enough to share with the world. The rest, along with around 150 A5 notebooks, have been sent to the Huntington Library in California, where her archive is kept. (Mantel was close friends with the Huntington's now retired curator of British historical manuscripts [Mary Robertson](#), with whom she was in constant contact.) No one will be able to read the notebooks – divided into manuscript notes and personal diaries – until after McEwen's death.

Mantel would leave notebooks and diaries all over the flat in Budleigh Salterton, Devon, where the couple lived for 12 years, but they had an honourable agreement that McEwen would never read them. It was only after she died that he opened the last one. It was written around the time of the Queen's death, after which Mantel was inundated with requests from newspapers. She was planning a long piece, a follow-up to *Royal Bodies*, her [controversial 2013 essay](#) for the London Review of Books (in it, she described Kate Middleton as a [“jointed doll on which certain rags are hung”](#)). McEwen was always her first reader. She would turn to him not for literary criticism, she said, but for his “reaction as a human being” to her work in progress. He is keeping that final notebook, he says, “because it contains all kinds of stuff, which I wouldn't want to be out there, even after I'm dead. It's just too private.”

Mantel died at 6 o'clock on the 22nd of September, McEwen says carefully, when we speak on the phone ahead of the memorial. They had been cleaning the flat because they were moving to Ireland. He went to take some bags to the recycling centre, and when he came back she had collapsed after a massive stroke from which she never recovered. “My last words to her were, ‘I won't be long.’” Had she survived until midnight, he says, they would have been celebrating their 50th wedding anniversary. Four days later, they would have left for their new home in Kinsale, Ireland. “We were ready to move, all the removals and things were sorted. We were just tidying up.”

She was an outsider within her family, within her religion, within England, and that gave her this extraordinary fresh perspective on everything

Both Mantel and McEwen were of Irish-Catholic descent, although they met as teenagers in Cheshire, where they grew up. (McEwen tells a good story about their first date in a pub in Manchester. It was raided by the police looking for underage drinkers – Mantel was six months shy of 18. This led to a second date at the local police station. His relationship with her parents got off to a bad start, “and deteriorated from there,” he jokes.) The proposed move to Ireland was in part an attempt to reclaim their European citizenship post-Brexit; they had spent many holidays in Cork and “had just fallen in love with the place”. Shortly after the funeral, McEwen packed up the car with a few essentials and headed to the house in Kinsale. He camped on the floor on a yoga mat for one night, but it was so uncomfortable that he spent the next four nights in a hotel. “After the four days, I decided that although it was a lovely house, I didn’t want to live there by myself.”

The planned move to Ireland “gave her permission to look sardonically back across the Irish sea,” Hamilton says of her decision to turn to Austen for her next novel. “To take another English icon and do with it what she pleased.”

While her writing on the nation led her to become a national treasure, Dame [Hilary Mantel](#) was also something of an iconoclast. Just as she decided “to march on to the middle ground of English history and plant a flag”, as she put it, in daring a fictional account of the reign of Henry VIII, so she was planning on marching into the middle ground of English literature and planting another less blood-stained one. In some ways our cultural map is dotted with Mantel flags: “She’s done it with royalty in her journalism, she’s done it with Catholicism in Fludd and she’s done it with the nightmares of suburban life in Beyond Black,” Hamilton says. “I think this was an open door.”



Gerald McEwen and Hilary Mantel in 2014. Photograph: Richard Young/Shutterstock

At first glance the “light, bright and sparkling” romance of *Pride and Prejudice* seems a world away from the dark, brutal and labyrinthine Tudor politics of *Wolf Hall*; and po-faced Mary, whose one big moment in the novel is a humiliating performance at the piano, seems an unlikely successor to Henry VIII’s right-hand man. And yet Mary Bennet, “the only plain one in the family”, and Thomas Cromwell, the blacksmith’s son from Putney, were both outsiders, like Mantel herself. As Hamilton says, “She was an outsider within her family, within her home town, within her religion, within England, and that gave her this extraordinary fresh perspective on absolutely everything.”

From her early 20s, Mantel shared Cromwell’s “seething ambition” and desire to impose himself on the world, opting, given her ill health (Mantel suffered with severe endometriosis throughout her life), for the rather less ruthless means of writing: “I needed to be somebody,” she said in an [interview in 2003](#). And like Mary she had spent many years being overshadowed by noisier peers (Martin Amis, Ian McEwan et al, “the lads” as she called them), “a niche product” on the literary scene, critically acclaimed but without the big sales and profiles, “[very much a minority interest](#)”.

Her husband is keeping her final notebook. ‘It’s just too private’

She had always been a devoted Austenite, and *Pride and Prejudice* was her favourite of all the novels (McEwen prefers *Emma*). Of course, she isn’t the first to assay an Austen revision or sequel – in fact, Mary has had [at least six spin-offs](#) to her name in recent years. But Mantel never came across one that satisfied her. “She thought, ‘Well, you know what, I think I can do a better job,’” McEwen laughs. As with *A Place of Greater Safety*, about the French Revolution, she had run out of books to read on the subject, so she decided to write one herself.

She had been working on the new novel for about six months, which, Hamilton says, “probably means she had been thinking about it for five years”. She was infuriated by the cosiness of the Austen industry, he explains, the glossing over of the underlying social awkwardness and Austen’s spiky wit in the endless TV and film remakes. “I just think she thought, ‘I can make this really funny and I can fill in gaps.’”

Austen’s admirers “snuggle up and pat her on the head”, she wrote in a piece in the *New York Review of Books* as far back as 1998, entitled [Not Everybody’s Dear Jane](#). “Her work was appropriated for social conservatism. It indulged a long sentimentality about a more orderly world, a world of decorum, grace.” Twenty years later, Mantel set out to topple the accepted wisdom of her fiction, that “men set the standards to which women must rise”.

The universally acknowledged truth she boots out the door from the off is that Mr Darcy, literature’s favourite strong, silent type, is such a catch. “This led me to question, in due course, whether Darcy himself were in command of any significant intellectual power,” she sallies in the third line. The Darcy who emerges from this wickedly acidic opening paragraph is not so much Colin Firth in a wet shirt, as a damp squib with nothing to say. “His silence in company proceeded, not from a conviction of natural superiority, but from a solid, sterling stupidity, such as an English gentleman alone dares display.” A “sort of Jacob Rees-Mogg figure”, McEwen suggests, although more benign. Clearly, the novel wasn’t to be called *Provocation* for nothing.

John Mullan, the author of [What Matters in Jane Austen](#) and one of the Booker judging panel in 2009 when [Wolf Hall won](#), observes that, along with Austen's "sheer precision in her use of words", Mantel also shared her "trust in the ingenuity of her readers. Her work in progress imagines a reader who already understands *Pride and Prejudice* very well."

Immersing herself in Austen also meant returning to the 18th century, with which she had been obsessed as a teenager. "I only became a novelist because I thought I had missed my chance to become a historian," she told [the Paris Review in 2015](#).

While she might claim that she never set out to be a writer, she began an apprenticeship from a very early age. Feeling alienated from her family (her mother removed Hilary and her brothers from their home in the mill town of Glossop in Derbyshire, to live with her lover, Jack Mantel, in Cheshire: she never saw her father again); the Roman Catholic faith in which she had been brought up; and even her body, which was already turning against her, Mantel retreated into books. A "hyperconscious" and analytical reader, she "was never simply absorbing stories but always asking myself, how is this done?" When other girls might be daydreaming or worrying about homework, she would "do" the weather on her walk to school every morning, not stopping until she had "one perfect paragraph", an exercise which left her with "a huge mental file of weather" that she could draw on when she started writing in earnest.

A few months after Mantel died, McEwen received an email from an old school friend of hers, Veronica Snowball, from Harrytown Convent school in the village of Romiley. She had been clearing out old boxes and came across a school yearbook that contained a piece of writing by Hilary. Entitled "A death in the morning" and written when she was 11, it has all the nascent Mantel hallmarks: clear, precise sentences; her delight in storytelling; and a sympathy for the hunted, the unlikely hero in this case a wily fox. "You can absolutely feel it was Hilary gearing up," Hamilton says of the piece.

Although Mantel's pen was at its sharpest on the subject of royalty, McEwen was also touched to receive a handwritten letter from Camilla, the Queen Consort. They had met through The Queen's Reading Room,

Camilla's charity, set up during the pandemic to encourage children to read: Mantel had even joined her book club, spending a couple of evenings at Clarence House chatting about books (not necessarily her own).

“Saint Augustine says, the dead are invisible, they are not absent. You needn't believe in ghosts to see that's true,” Mantel opened the [first of her Reith lectures in 2017](#). All her novels, not just the historical ones, are in some way conversations with the dead. Sometimes the barrier between the living and the dead seems “like an enormous stone wall and sometimes it's just whisper thin”, she said in one of her last interviews.

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“She certainly believed that what we normally see is not all that there is,” Hamilton says. “And she made it pretty clear that she felt that ancestors remained with us in all sorts of meaningful ways.” One of the things he most misses about working with Mantel is receiving an email from her. “Because it was so sharp. It was so funny. She just raised your game.”

While we will sadly never know quite how much fun Mantel might have had with misunderstood Mary and dim Darcy, one thing is sure – it would have been a giant hit. These tiny extracts are tantalising glimpses of what might have been, and a reminder of what we have lost. But Mantel's spirit

is already at work. Work has begun on the TV production of [The Mirror and the Light](#), the final instalment of the Wolf Hall trilogy, starring many of the original cast. Hamilton hopes that her earlier novels, in particular *A Place of Greater Safety*, may be adapted as well. She will continue to talk to us. A few lines in to the playful first paragraph of *Provocation*, the narrator pulls us up sharply. “Reader, to think it is to know it.”

Provocation

An extract from Mantel’s unfinished Austen satire

Elizabeth took her new sister’s silence as a token of profundity. But I myself saw that, compared to Georgiana, my sister was Socrates. And this led me to question, in due course, whether Darcy himself were in command of any significant intellectual power. How often, I believe, we women must suppress the question? A solemn countenance, a grave manner, a pre-occupied frown; these suggest to us a mastering of life’s perplexities born of a habit of deep reflection, and vigorous examination of every fact and circumstance. Yet, but what if the frown means nothing but ill humour? If the grave and pre-occupied air means nothing but insufficiency in the face of whatever circumstances present? What if the long silences, so intimidating to my sex, are merely the consequence of having nothing to say? What if that prevailing solemnity results from a simple failure to see the joke? Reader, to think it is to know it: Darcy was a more harmless soul than we had imagined, and replete with good intentions; his silence in company proceeded, not from a conviction of natural superiority, but from a solid, sterling stupidity, such as an English gentleman alone dares display. When was Darcy ever contradicted? His every assertion was treated as scripture. When were his wishes not performed, as if they were law? Such infallible consideration must divide a man from himself: he is dull but never knows it, for he receives witty answers to witless questions. I saw that it would be Elizabeth’s lifetime work to collaborate with his innocent self-conceit. It is what she will give, in return for being mistress of Pemberley.

“Darcy believes it is going to rain!”— and the whole county must seek cover. “Darcy believes there will be a vote in the house!” and all interested parties are agog. Never mind that the sky is clear. Never mind that Parliament is

prorogued. We simple souls will all agree that Darcy has power to perceive what is hidden from us, because he is a man, and a gentleman and has a park that is ten miles round.

A death in the morning

Mantel's first published work, from her school yearbook

The sun rose slowly above the horizon. A brown leaf floated slowly to the ground. A gentle breeze played with the leaves of a tall tree close by. Nothing broke the stillness of the October morning.

The fox was very, very still, his tawny body half covered by the long grass. His eyes were focused on one point – the rabbits' hole. Soon they would be out. Suddenly he stiffened. He had heard something that was not the wind in the trees, not the rustling of a dead leaf, not a bird flying above him. He crouched there, the rabbits forgotten, his ears straining to hear the slightest sound.

Over the clear morning air came the shattering sound of a loud whinny. The fox needed nothing more. Instantly he was up and fleeing for his life. It was not the first time he had been hunted. He could hear the baying of the hounds now as they caught his scent. He ran on and on. But the hounds were gaining on him. He could hear the thundering hooves of horses and the crack of the huntsman's whip as he urged the dogs on faster.

Suddenly the fox swerved and jumped a low wall into a field where a flock of sheep were grazing. As he dashed in the midst of them they scattered in all directions, bleating loudly. He ran in and out of the sheep, mixing his scent with theirs. Then he ran on. The pack rushed into the field in full cry, only to stop bewildered when they picked up the many different scents. For a short time they padded round, noses to the ground, but they had lost the scent and the hunt retired to look for a fresh quarry.

After a quarter of a mile further on he stopped, panting and exhausted. He sank into a pile of long grass and crouched there, every muscle tense. He waited. No sound came to his straining ears. So he set off quietly for home. He was one fox who did not intend to be a part of "A death in the morning."

Hilary Mantel, 1L

Provocation and A death in the morning © Tertius Enterprises

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2023.04.22 - Opinion

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- Psycho goes down raging: the liberal wokerati finally get to Raab
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- For all his hardman mantras, Raab forgot rule one: don't be a massive arse



‘Stephen would be 48 years old now and I often imagine what he would be doing today.’ Photograph: Metropolitan police

[Opinion](#)[Stephen Lawrence](#)

**After his murder, Stephen Lawrence
came to symbolise so much. But he was
also my little boy**

[Neville Lawrence](#)



Thirty years on, my child's killers still walk free and the Met is resisting reform – that is why I'm still fighting for justice

Sat 22 Apr 2023 02.00 EDTLast modified on Sat 22 Apr 2023 05.06 EDT

I try not to remember the day Stephen died. Even 30 years on, the pain of losing your firstborn never goes away. I remember watching him leave the house that morning for the last time and turn down the alleyway up to the main road where he used to catch the bus. I remember the neighbour banging on the door telling us Stephen had been attacked by a group of boys.

Later in the hospital, when the doctors told me Stephen had died, I asked to go and see him, but they said he needed cleaning up first. I remember going into the room and looking at him but I don't know what I did, how I felt, or even if I touched him. The next morning, I woke up at home thinking it was all a bad dream. I went into his bedroom and saw his bed hadn't been slept in – that's when I realised it was real.

Stephen would be 48 years old now and I often imagine what he would be doing today. He had ambitions to be an architect, something I myself

wanted to be as a young man. He had been doing work experience shortly before he died. One of the projects he was involved in was later built in Deptford. Every time I drive past that building, I remember him and what could have been.

Your children are the people who carry on your name when you're not here. I'm now retired, a pensioner – I imagine him supporting me, living a life full of achievements that I was never able to achieve. But Stephen won't be around in my old age.

Even though [Stephen's case was closed](#) by the Met in 2020, I am still hoping that everyone involved in his death will serve time. I keep in close contact with Clive Driscoll, the detective who brought two of Stephen's killers to justice, and he has some new information that I hope could lead us somewhere. But what we do with any new leads is complicated. I can't see us becoming involved with the Met again. If we found something really consequential, how could we trust that they would do the right thing? I will leave it to my lawyers to decide where best to go from here.

The people who killed my son still walk freely. Perhaps they are married now, with children of their own – whole lives lived that my son was never able to achieve because of what they did to him. But I have forgiven them. Even those who haven't been brought to justice. After the murder, I used to fantasise about what I would do to them if I came across them in the street. At times, I was so angry I couldn't sleep at night.

I went to my pastor and I asked him how I could forgive. He told me I didn't need to become friends with these people, but that I could offer them forgiveness inside my heart. So I did, and I got baptised. That brought me a hell of a lot of peace.



Flowers at the Stephen Lawrence memorial at the scene of his murder in Eltham, south-east London. Photograph: REX/Shutterstock

On the anniversary of Stephen's death on Saturday, I will go to lay flowers at the bus stop where he died. Clive will probably join me. When he retired, it dealt a crushing blow to my family. He was the first and only officer to ever explain to us what was happening in the investigation. To treat us with respect. Even when I was in Jamaica, he would call me weekly. Since he retired, I have no relationship with the Met. It was undoubtedly premature to close Stephen's case. Even the judge who prosecuted two of his killers spoke of his [hopes to bring the others to justice](#).

I have no interest in meeting the Met commissioner, Sir Mark Rowley. What is there to say? He has [refused to utter](#) the words institutional racism. But if it's not that, then what is it? Reform is not impossible, but if the person in charge of the organisation refuses to accept changes, then how is the force going to change? If I was in trouble today, I wouldn't call the police for help. Absolutely not. I have no confidence that I would be treated with fairness or respect.

It has been 13 years since the Conservatives came to power. The home secretary is the person who guides the Met. When you have a home secretary who is saying they are going to send people to Rwanda who don't

even come from there, what can you possibly say about a person like that? In 13 years, Theresa May is the only home secretary who has done anything decent by giving us [Stephen Lawrence](#) day.

Stephen's death turned my own life upside down. I don't want to be in this country any more, so I spend most of my time in Jamaica now. That's where most of my relatives are. I didn't feel good about living in the UK after what happened to Stephen here. Stephen is buried in Jamaica, too, because we didn't want people to vandalise his grave. When I want to feel close to him, I go down to his grave and tend to it and think of him.

Stephen's image has come to symbolise so much. For me, too, he is the face for change. But he was also my little boy. I will always remember him as both. The promise of modern-day anti-racism movements has faltered somewhat. After George Floyd's death, they managed to galvanise people [all over the world](#), and unite them behind this cause, but all of a sudden they seem to have disappeared. I don't know what has happened.

My family has spent 30 years campaigning for the same cause, so that other families don't have to suffer what we have. What has become abundantly clear in the years since his death is that systemic racism is still deeply rooted in the places that are meant to protect us. But what has changed is young people's attitudes, and that gives me hope. I have spent a lot of time in schools, and I feel that younger generations today are more accepting of multiculturalism and integration than they were 30 years ago.

On the anniversary of Stephen's death, 30 years since he was killed, if there is any possibility for justice, however remote, I will keep fighting for answers. I will never stop fighting. I will keep hoping and praying that one day there will be a breakthrough.

- Neville Lawrence OBE is an anti-racism campaigner and the father of Stephen Lawrence. As told to Lucy Pasha-Robinson

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What was the world coming to? Next, someone would say that using junior members of staff as a punch bag was out of order. Photograph: Toby Melville/Reuters

[The politics sketch](#)[Dominic Raab](#)

Psycho goes down raging: the liberal wokerati finally get to Raab

[John Crace](#)



The deputy PM was oiled and ready to take the initiative. He'd make sure to depart as gracelessly as possible

Fri 21 Apr 2023 11.15 EDTLast modified on Fri 21 Apr 2023 14.51 EDT

Dominic Raab hadn't had the best of nights. His sleep had been broken by repeated nightmares. Him being nice to people. In one he had even dreamed he had befriended an asylum seeker. It was disturbing to find the liberal wokerati had forced their way into his subconscious. This just wouldn't do. Much more of this and he'd become a paid-up member of the Blob.

Time to start acting like a real man again. He tossed the duvet to one side and got out of bed. He stared in the mirror lovingly as he oiled his biceps. Hard. So hard. They could take a man down with a single blow. Or a woman. Psycho wasn't misogynistic. He'd hit anyone. His fists were equal opportunities employers.

Next, on with his favourite budgie smugglers. His sequined posing pouch. No winky shrinkage for him. God, he really was a great catch. His family and friends didn't know how lucky they were. Finally, the morning fix of steroids. His life. His wife. He reached for the syringe and tenderly pushed

the needle into his thigh. He pressed down the plunger and was overwhelmed by that familiar, comforting sensation. That feeling of power that came with infinite rage. No one could reach him here. Dom's safe space.

Just then Psycho's phone rang. It was the prime minister.

"Um, yo, Dom," stammered Rish! Sunak. "How are you doing, man?"

"Never better," the Raabster spat back. "Just get on with it. What's the score?"

"Er, well ... you see ... It's like this. I've been re-reading Adam Tolley's report again overnight ... and it would be really helpful if you could, er ... resign?"

"You're fucking kidding me, you fucking fuck. You're really taking that piece of shit report at face value? You and I both know it's a total fucking establishment stitch-up."

"Er ... I thought we were the establishment ..." Rish! observed.

"Don't be so blind," screamed Psycho. "Our whole English way of life is under threat if someone in a senior position isn't allowed to bully someone junior. And if you can't see that then I'll have to come round to Downing Street to flush your head down the toilet again."

"But the thing is, Dom, I sort of did promise to govern with integrity. And though I obviously never meant that to apply to you, it would be more embarrassing not to sack you than to sack you. I've done my best for me. I mean you. I phoned Tolley to see if he would consider changing 'The minister was intimidating and persistently aggressive' to 'The minister was not intimidating or persistently aggressive' but he was adamant he wouldn't change a word. So I'm a bit stuck. The thing is, no one really likes you. They think you're a twat."

"So that's it?"

“I’m afraid so.”

“You’re going to regret this big time. Your dog won’t last the day.”

Psycho hung up. Time to take the initiative by writing his own letter of resignation. He’d make sure to go down as gracelessly as possible. Fighting all the way to the bottom. Staying on brand at least.

“Dear prime minister.” He could barely write that “Dear”. On to the substance. Yes, he knew that he’d once said he would resign if the bullying allegations were upheld, but he’d never imagined that a KC from the liberal elite would conclude that publicly humiliating civil servants would count as bullying.

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What was the world coming to? Next, someone would say that using junior members of staff as a punch bag was out of order. Or killing someone, for instance. Would no one allow for accidents in the workplace any more? Health and safety gone mad. God knows, Psycho had killed a few people in his time. And there might well be a few more before the day was out.

Then there was the fact that only two of the bullying complaints had been upheld. That meant he had got away with at least six. And shouldn’t a

minister be allowed a free pass on his first two charges? Especially as civil servants these days couldn't take any criticism that involved bodily harm. Woketards the lot of them. And weren't all complaints meant to be registered within three months? That would have been ideal. Because when the Raabster bullied someone they stayed bullied. Most ended up in a psychiatric hospital unable to speak with PTSD for at least a year.

Yeah, that was sticking it to the prime minister. To think he'd once been Rish!'s cheerleader-in-chief during his leadership campaign. His deputy prime minister. Sunak had turned out to be a softy like all the others. Cuthbert Cringeworthy. A sack of shit. Just another feeble apologist. Would no one stick up for GBH? God stand up for bastards.

Psycho was on a roll. The Daily Telegraph wanted more of his resignation nonsense and he was thrilled to oblige. No, he wasn't sorry for anything. He had done nothing wrong. It had all been a leftwing media plot to remove the most talented politician of his generation. The only man standing who still believed in Ultra Violence. Just a normal guy who believed in the right to bully anyone. It was the thin end of the wedge. First they had come for him. Next they would come for Michael Gove's crack den on his department roof.

Back in No 10, Sunak had had the security detail doubled. Just in case Psycho reappeared. When he felt the coast was clear, he put out a statement of his own. He had done the right thing. The brave thing. By sacking the Raabster. Who was a moral man. Of course he was. But had just narrowly crossed the line by bullying everyone he had ever worked with.

Rish! then announced Alex Chalk as the new justice minister and Oliver Dowden as deputy prime minister. Ideal fits. Chalk was hopeless and wet as they come, so he'd do no damage. And couldn't do any worse than Dom who'd driven the department into the ground. As for Dowden, the thinking man's Chris Philp, he had his head so far up everyone's arse, he hadn't seen daylight for weeks.

Psycho reached again for the comfort of the syringe, before applying camo paint to his face and donning a balaclava. He was off to Dover to see if he

could stop a few asylum seekers arriving in small boats. Permanently. He would have to take his pleasures where he could find them from now on.

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‘We have been led to believe that people from Black, Black heritage and Asian communities do not want to join policing. That has not been my experience.’ Photograph: Hollie Adams/Getty Images

[OpinionPolice](#)

30 years after Stephen Lawrence’s murder, my job as a Black police officer has never been so difficult

[Ruth Honegan](#)



Successive promises of change on institutional racism have had few results – but I still believe we can create a diverse workplace

- Ruth Honegan is general secretary of the National Black Police Association

Sat 22 Apr 2023 03.00 EDTLast modified on Sat 22 Apr 2023 05.04 EDT

This year, it will be 20 years since I joined policing, spurred on by two very different encounters. One was with a detective inspector in the [Metropolitan police](#), who treated me with respect and courtesy, and suggested I sign up. The other was with some officers who behaved terribly, while I watched the people who challenged them being ignored. I realised that if you want to effect change, you can't stay on the outside looking in. I've dedicated most of my service to speaking up and supporting my colleagues in the police.

As I approach my 20th anniversary, I can honestly say that working in the police service is more difficult than it has ever been. This is down to many different factors – including austerity, the pandemic, government policy and other world events – but being a Black serving police officer doesn't seem to be getting any easier.

That's despite a lot of promises of change. In 1981, the [Scarman report](#) on the Brixton riots criticised the heavy-handed use of stop and search. After Stephen Lawrence's murder 30 years ago, the [Macpherson report](#) made 70 recommendations to tackle "institutional racism". Now, the [Casey review](#) has found institutional racism, misogyny and homophobia in the Met, and action is promised yet again.

Change has happened, but clearly it has not been significant enough when, 30 years after Stephen's death, the Met commissioner, [Mark Rowley](#), is still debating the use of the word "institutional", and Black families are still losing sons and daughters. It feels as though nobody is listening and our experiences are still being dismissed.

More recently, change has been promised with the recruitment of 20,000 new police officers through the government's [police uplift programme](#). Announced in 2019, the then policing minister presented this as a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to change the face of policing and increase diverse representation. Unfortunately, due to the timeframe set by the government, the push to meet the overall numbers target superseded any other objective.



A vigil for Sarah Everard on Clapham Common, London, February 2022.
Photograph: Victoria Jones/PA

There is still an intention to increase representation through positive action. But “positive action” has become one of the most hated phrases in policing – nobody wants to be told that they need extra help and support to be good at their job.

We have been led to believe that people from Black, Black heritage and Asian communities do not want to join policing. That has not been my experience. In 2015, I was part of a team tasked with increasing representation within my force in Bedfordshire. The starkest observation I had was how many people from Black, Black heritage and Asian backgrounds had enquired and started an application but never finished it, or were sifted out at the very early stages. They were not given the impression that policing was for them.

The [Our Black Workforce](#) survey, published in December 2022, found that new recruits’ reasons for joining and staying in the force are positive, with “having the opportunity to help people” and “making change from within” the most popular. But it also found that Black, African and Caribbean employees felt more excluded at work and were more likely to hide elements of their culture from colleagues than those from mixed backgrounds. Respondents said that incidents of racial discrimination and harassment were common.

Despite all this, I do believe that change is possible. The police demonstrated their ability to change when Sarah Everard was murdered. As a call for action against violence against women and girls, they galvanised resources and implemented plans to get rid of the rotten apples. Rowley may not have accepted that his force is “institutionally” racist and misogynist, but he has promised to be “[ruthless](#)” in rooting out wrongdoing in the ranks.

Other recent appointments also suggest a move towards communicating better with communities who don’t feel supported or represented by the police. [Gavin Stephens](#), stepping into his new role as the chair of the National Police Chiefs’ Council this month, announced his intention to support the [Police Race Action Plan](#): “It’s my firm belief that those who trust policing the least should have the most opportunity to influence how we work,” he said. In March, [Steve Hartshorn](#), the new chair of the Police

Federation of England and Wales, made a similar commitment by acknowledging that the Met is institutionally racist.

The College of Policing, which represents everybody who works for the police in England and Wales, now needs to step up, be bold and create plans to develop the existing underrepresented workforce – to create a pipeline to leadership for those who have already shown their commitment and capability within policing. They need to stop creating more and more layers of assessment, which, to my mind, adversely impacts underrepresented groups and further cements the myth they are just not interested or not good enough.

We all want a workplace where we feel confident and safe. If that can be created, Black police officers will be the number one advocates, encouraging our friends and families to join us. Policing is still one of the best careers you can have. There are far more amazing, hard-working people than there are bad ones, and we are desperate for change.

Thirty years on from Stephen Lawrence's murder and all the promises of change that followed, one thing is often forgotten: police officers are the public and the public are police, and we are all part of the same community. For Black officers like me, there is a twofold reason to make things better. And if we can believe in change, then everyone can.

- Ruth Honegan is an acting police sergeant and general secretary of the National Black [Police](#) Association
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‘Train hard, fight easy.’ Dominic Raab leaves BBC Studios in London, 26 May 2019. Photograph: Mark Thomas/Rex/Shutterstock

[Opinion Dominic Raab](#)

**For all his hardman mantras, Raab
forgot rule one: don't be a massive arse**

[Marina Hyde](#)



Where does Raab's resignation leave Rishi Sunak? The PM's pledge to leave scandal behind is wearing thin

Fri 21 Apr 2023 07.40 EDTLast modified on Fri 21 Apr 2023 14.01 EDT

It's unfortunate that the epithets "[boxing fanatic](#)" and "[karate black belt](#)" are so frequently attached to Dominic Raab. When they appear in a news report, these have much the same effect as the words "former nightclub bouncer". You know the final sentence of said report will simply read: "The trial continues."

Anyway: the trial continued, until it finally ended this morning with Raab's [eye-bulgingly aggressive resignation letter](#). How did you enjoy episode 97 of He-Hulk: Attorney at Ministry of Justice? Having been handed the report into Raab's alleged bullying of staff at three government departments over a number of years, prime minister Rishi Sunak spent a full 24 hours reading it and considering what to do about its findings.

Ironically, if Sunak had worked for Raab, this slow pace of work would have resulted in him getting belittled for being a useless waste of space. The saga ended up dragging on so long that by yesterday evening people had

begun to think Raab might actually end up butchering it out. [Recent changes to the ministerial code](#) meant Sunak now had a wider range of options than merely sacking him or not sacking him. These reportedly included instructing Raab to make a public apology, docking his salary, making him attend an anger management course, or having Black Widow sing him lullabies.

In some ways, then, the resignation is a missed opportunity. What's not to love about the image of Raab submitting to a mandated anti-bullying training module, his forehead vein going at it like a jackhammer as he punches his way through a series of multiple-choice answers to which the correct one can never be "Shout formatting requests off a Greek paddleboard while the UK literally evacuates an embassy".

Allies of Raab tended to go in hard on the line that civil servants just need to toughen up – a point typically made by people who wet their pants about a [Gary Lineker reply tweet](#). The general tenor of their defence of Raab's alleged behaviour is: come on, nobody died.

Actually, hang on. During a discussion of Raab's conduct, Ministry of Justice officials were told by Foreign Office counterparts that "people had died" in the Afghanistan evacuation because of [Dom's refusal to review documents in formats he didn't like](#). Maybe we can split the difference and go with "people died, but not these people"?

Back in that fateful August, the holidaying Raab somehow managed to style out the unforgivable spectacle of having been an out-of-office foreign secretary for an emergency withdrawal that [Rory Stewart described](#) as a "total betrayal". Of the decision to give airport facilities for Pen Farthing's pet rescue, Raab's colleague [Tom Tugendhat observed](#): "We've just used a lot of troops to get in 200 dogs; meanwhile my interpreter's family are likely to be killed." [Boris Johnson called](#) the botched Afghanistan withdrawal "one of the most spectacular operations in our country's postwar military history", meaning that, as usual, the diametric opposite may be regarded as the truth.

As for Sunak's personnel dilemma this week, it's possible he couldn't risk merely giving his valued political ally the proverbial slap on the wrist, lest

it trigger a Raab countermove that would see Rishi promptly laid out on the rug, with a snarling justice secretary leaning three inches above his face, hissing: “train hard, fight easy.” “Train hard, fight easy” was Raab’s mantra for his 2019 Conservative leadership bid. I don’t need to remind you how that one turned out.

I guess it’s like Mike Tyson said: everyone has a plan until they get over-readied by [Boris Johnson](#). Even so, I love these little hardman political incantations the guys think will be key to their political success, when 99 times out of 100 they’d do so much better just sticking with that old faithful: “Remember not to be a massive arse.”

Still, it’s been good to hear about workplace snowflakes again from a bunch of people convinced they got their four-bedroom properties, defined pension benefits and free university education by “being tough” and “not buying coffee”. Did you manage to catch stalwart Raab defender David Davis tipping all over the civil service, specifically in terms of millennials’ “[lower expectation of work](#)”?

You may remember David from Brexit, where the sometime [Department for Exiting the European Union](#) (DExEU) secretary was frequently photographed grinning above a notes-free section of boardroom table , while the EU representatives opposite – who would go on to best him in the negotiations – peered wryly over their binders. Dominic Cummings once described Davis as “[lazy as a toad](#)” , while the former permanent undersecretary at the Foreign Office observed that David “[could hardly be bothered to go to Brussels](#)”. I don’t know about you but I definitely want to hear much, much more from this guy about how you just can’t get the junior staff to put in the hours.

Speaking of the bizarre double standards of expectation that have been at play throughout this unedifying case, it was Raab who – after he succeeded Davis at DExEU – [announced in public](#): “We are, and I hadn’t quite understood the full extent of this ... but if you look at the UK and if you look at how we trade in goods, we are particularly reliant on the Dover-Calais crossing.” Imagine saying that out loud as a secretary of state, then beetling off to insult some underling for failing to pander to one of your

Microsoft Word idiosyncrasies. Ditto [Raab's failure to read the 32-page Good Friday agreement](#). Raab eventually resigned as Brexit secretary because he couldn't support a deal he himself had negotiated. But honestly, mate, tell me again how all you demand from people are the same high professional standards to which you hold yourself.

So what now of Sunak, the hardest man in the luxury knitwear aisle? We began the week with the prime minister's much-vaunted reannouncement about trying to [raise standards in maths](#). We end it with him having reluctantly subtracted one cabinet minister from his table, and [under personal investigation](#) for an alleged failure to declare his wife's shares in a private childcare company that stands to benefit from his government's plans to get more people to become childminders.

As chancellor, of course, Sunak previously had to eat humble pie after it was revealed he had somehow [neglected to get his own wife to pay him tax](#). We have yet to learn definitively whether, as reported, Sunak was aware of the multiple bullying allegations against Raab when he reappointed him as justice secretary and made him his deputy prime minister. Yet we do know he pledged his government would leave scandal behind – and it's tough to see how that one is running on anything more than fumes.

- Marina Hyde is a Guardian columnist

2023.04.22 - Around the world

- ['Champagne of beers' Belgium crushes 2,000 cans of Miller High Life over slogan](#)
- [Japan 'Crying baby sumo' festival returns for first time since pandemic](#)
- [Hunter Biden and 'dirty' New York Fox News back to basics after lawsuit](#)
- [Florida Suspect in shooting of six-year-old over stray basketball arrested](#)
- [Denmark Hoard of 1,000-year-old Viking coins unearthed](#)



A worker dumps empty cans of Miller High Life beer into a machine to be crushed at the Westlandia plant in Ypres, Belgium. Photograph: AP

[Beer](#)

Belgium crushes 2,000 cans of Miller High Life over ‘champagne of beers’ slogan

Comité Champagne asks for destruction of shipment on grounds Miller High Life’s motto infringes champagne’s protected origin

Associated Press in Brussels

Fri 21 Apr 2023 16.27 EDTLast modified on Fri 21 Apr 2023 16.46 EDT

The guardians of champagne will let no one take the name of the bubbly beverage in vain, not even a US beer behemoth.

For years, Miller High Life has used the “Champagne of Beers” slogan. This week, it became clear that for some the name has become impossible

to swallow.

At the request of the trade body defending the interests of houses and growers of the north-eastern French sparkling wine, Belgian customs crushed more than 2,000 cans of Miller High Life advertised as such.

The Comité Champagne asked for the destruction of a shipment of 2,352 cans on the grounds that the century-old motto used by the American brewery infringes the protected designation of origin “Champagne”.

The consignment was intercepted in the Belgian port of Antwerp in early February, a spokesperson at the Belgian Customs Administration said on Friday, and was destined for Germany.

Molson Coors Beverage Co, which owns the Miller High Life brand, does not currently export it to the EU, and Belgian customs declined to say who had ordered the beers.

The buyer in Germany “was informed and did not contest the decision”, the trade organization said in a statement.

Frederick Miller, a German immigrant to the US, founded the Miller Brewing Company in the 1850s. Miller High Life, its oldest brand, was launched as its flagship in 1903.

According to the Milwaukee-based brand’s website, the company started to use the “Champagne of Bottle Beers” nickname three years later. It was shortened to “The Champagne of Beers” in 1969. The beer has also been available in champagne-style 750ml bottles during festive seasons.

“With its elegant, clear-glass bottle and crisp taste, Miller High Life has proudly worn the nickname ‘The Champagne of Beers’ for almost 120 years,” Molson Coors Beverage Co said in a statement to the Associated Press.

No matter how popular the slogan is in the United States, it is incompatible with European Union rules which make clear that goods infringing a

protected designation of origin can be treated as counterfeit.

The 27-country bloc has a system of protected geographical designations created to guarantee the true origin and quality of artisanal food, wine and spirits, and protect them from imitation. That market is worth nearly €75bn (\$87bn) annually – half of it in wines, according to a 2020 study by the EU’s executive arm.

Charles Goemaere, the managing director of the Comité Champagne, said the destruction of the beers “confirms the importance that the European Union attaches to designations of origin and rewards the determination of the champagne producers to protect their designation”.

Molson Coors Beverage Co said it “respects local restrictions” around the word champagne.

“But we remain proud of Miller High Life, its nickname and its Milwaukee, Wisconsin, provenance,” the company said. “We invite our friends in Europe to the US any time to toast the High Life together.”

Belgian customs said the destruction of the cans was paid for by the Comité Champagne. According to their joint statement, it was carried out “with the utmost respect for environmental concerns by ensuring that the entire batch, both contents and container, was recycled in an environmentally responsible manner”.

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/food/2023/apr/21/miller-high-life-champagne-problems>



A baby in a ceremonial sumo apron faces another baby in the sumo ring at Sensoji Temple in Tokyo. Photograph: Philip Fong/AFP/Getty Images

[The ObserverJapan](#)

Japan's 'crying baby sumo' festival returns for first time since pandemic

Staff wearing demon masks try to make competing babies cry, with the first to bawl declared the winner in a centuries-old tradition

Agence France-Presse

Sat 22 Apr 2023 04.28 EDTLast modified on Sat 22 Apr 2023 14.13 EDT

Dozens of bawling Japanese babies faced off in a traditional “crying sumo” ritual believed to bring the infants good health, which returned for the first time in four years after the pandemic.

Pairs of toddlers wearing ceremonial sumo aprons were held up by their parents and faced each other in the sumo ring at Sensoji Temple in Tokyo on Saturday.



The children face each other in a sumo ring, with the first to cry declared the winner. Photograph: Philip Fong/AFP/Getty Images

Staff wearing “oni” demon masks tried to make the babies cry, with the first to bawl declared the winner by a sumo referee in an elaborate traditional uniform holding a wooden fan used to signal victory.

“We can tell a baby’s health condition by listening to the way they cry. Today she may get nervous and not cry so much, but I want to hear her healthy crying,” Hisae Watanabe, mother of an eight-month-old, told AFP.

The “crying sumo” is held at shrines and temples nationwide, to the delight of parents and onlookers.

Shigemi Fuji, chairman of Asakusa Tourism Federation which organised the event, said some people might think it’s terrible they make babies cry.

“But in Japan, we believe babies who cry powerfully also grow up healthily. This kind of event takes place in many places in Japan,” he said.



Staff wearing 'oni' demon masks try to make the babies cry. Photograph: Philip Fong/AFP/Getty Images

A total of 64 babies participated in the ritual, according to the organiser.

The rules vary from region to region – in some places parents want their offspring to be the first to cry, in others the first to weep is the loser.

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Tucker Carlson churned out the usual hits on his 8pm show. Photograph: ZUMA Press, Inc./Alamy

[Fox News-Dominion case](#)

Hunter Biden and ‘dirty’ New York: Fox News back to basics after lawsuit

Network's \$787.5m settlement with Dominion over election lies is barely mentioned as hosts pick up where they left off



[Adam Gabbatt](#) in New York

[@adamgabbatt](#)

Sat 22 Apr 2023 02.00 EDT

With [Fox News](#) humbled into a \$787.5m settlement with Dominion Voting Systems over election lies this week, it might be expected that the conservative TV channel's outspoken hosts would tone down the misinformation a bit, soften their rhetoric – basically, just chill out.

None of that has happened.

Instead Fox News has continued just where it left off, serving viewers a largely imagined, and utterly terrifying, version of the US: one where trans people are on the warpath, where people in New York City are never more than 6ft from either a rat or being murdered, and where the government is attempting to “send away” Fox News viewers to an undefined but ominous sounding “camp”.

Just a normal week, in other words, as America's most-watched news channel mainly ignored the Dominion lawsuit – brought after Fox News repeatedly aired untrue accusations that the company's voting machines had been manipulated to flip votes from Donald Trump to Joe Biden – and got back to basics.

On Thursday night Tucker Carlson, Fox News's most performatively upset host, was churning out the usual hits on his 8pm show, with Hunter Biden, "racial violence", and "transgenderists" to the fore.

"Say what you will about elected Democrats but they know where the power is. They're like truffle pigs for power," was how Carlson [began his show](#). He then made a pig noise, before accusing Joe Biden of attempting to subvert the course of justice regarding an investigation into his son.

"This is not a small story," Carlson told his audience, seemingly implying that the mainstream media had ignored it: except the story – that a whistleblower had come forward accusing the Department of Justice of going easy on an investigation into Hunter Biden's finances – had been [broken by CBS News](#), and covered by ABC News, [NBC News](#), the [BBC](#), the [Los Angeles Times](#) and [Associated Press](#).

"What we've learned here is exactly [what] you suspected all along: the Biden people are criminals," Carlson said.

Given none of the "Biden people" have been convicted of any crimes, it was the kind of statement a network just sued for defamation might have wanted to avoid, but never mind, because soon Carlson was on to New York City, a favorite bugbear.

"New York City has got a lot dirtier," Carlson announced to the audience after an ad break.

Dirtier than what? Than where? Than who? We'll never know, but it's something to do with Democrats, liberals and possibly Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez.

We learned that there are rats in New York City – the place where Fox News is headquartered – and that the city’s mayor, Eric Adams, is a chump.

On Fox News the viewer is never more than two minutes away from being warned about trans people, and Thursday night was no different.

After inviting on Tulsi Gabbard – a former Democratic congresswoman turned paid rightwing media personality who has been such an ardent defender of Russia and Vladimir Putin that Russian state TV has literally [used her appearances as pro-war propaganda](#) – to have a go at trans people in the military, Carlson later declared that trans people are “blowing stuff up”.

“They detonated explosives at the University of Pittsburgh the other night, because somebody said something they didn’t like. That’s what the transgender movement’s up to this week,” Carlson said.

“There is an enormous amount of transgender violence going on,” Carlson continued – news which will come as a surprise to those who have seen crime *against* trans people [rise in recent years](#).

The story, about activists in Pennsylvania protesting against an anti-trans speaker, was wildly overblown – the “explosives” the students “detonated” consisted of a firework and a smoke bomb, according to police – but you wouldn’t know it from watching Carlson.

“These people are low-IQ thug savages,” he announced.

In the days following the Dominion settlement, Fox News has remained largely silent on its own legal struggles. It [reported](#) the end of the lawsuit on its 6pm show on Tuesday, but the channel’s media correspondent, Howard Kurtz, had been rather coy about the details.

“The amount of the settlement has not been disclosed,” Kurtz told viewers – a strange thing to say, given the \$787.5m settlement had been reported by almost every news outlet in the US.

“For Dominion, if it lost the case, it ends up with zero, and because of the first amendment concerns [...] that would’ve been a roll of the dice for the company that argued that they had been defamed by Fox,” Kurtz added.

It raised the question as to why Fox News paid Dominion the better part of a billion dollars. The question was not answered.

Sean Hannity, the silver-haired, box-faced, Carlson follow-up act, hasn’t mentioned the massive settlement this week. His focus has been elsewhere.

“Coming up, Kamala Harris giggles her way through another public appearance,” read a chyron on his show on Thursday. The vice-president’s laugh has [proved an enduring fascination](#) for Hannity, who has repeatedly devoted air time to Harris’s chortling.

The Fox News host had kicked things off with the customary 15 minutes on Hunter Biden’s laptop, before bringing on Laura Ingraham, who hosts her Fox News show at 10pm.

Hannity has been experimenting with hosting a live studio audience recently, and they gave Ingraham a rapturous welcome – the cheers only dying down when she attempted to toss an American football into the crowd and instead hit a spotlight.

Amid a rambling speech which touched on Hillary Clinton, Michelle Obama and unnamed “destroyers of democracy”, Ingraham turned to Hannity’s audience – predominantly made up of white men with red faces – and gave a stark warning about Democrats’ aims.

“Every one of you sitting here tonight, if they could, I really believe they would shut you down: whether put you in a camp or send you away somewhere so you’re never heard from again,” Ingraham said.

Hannity nodded in agreement.

“These are the only normal people in the country,” he said, referring to the audience. There was a chorus of lusty cheers.

For the crowd, and the viewers at home, it was like a greatest hits show: because that's what Fox News does.

Every night people are told that a revolving cast of Biden, Democrats, liberals, trans people, Black Lives Matter activists, criminals, China and Hunter Biden are out to get them.

Fox News, and its executives, know what its audience want. They don't want apologies about allegedly defaming innocent companies. They want fire, and brimstone, and Kamala Harris's laugh.

On the evidence so far, the Dominion lawsuit isn't going to stop them getting it.

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Kinsley White, six, shows reporters a wound left on her face, in Gastonia, North Carolina, on Thursday. Photograph: Kara Fohner/AP

[US news](#)

Suspect in shooting of six-year-old over stray basketball arrested in Florida

Robert Singletary will not resist being transferred back to home state of North Carolina to face four attempted murder charges

[Maya Yang](#)

Fri 21 Apr 2023 18.37 EDTLast modified on Sat 22 Apr 2023 14.49 EDT

The [North Carolina](#) man who is accused of shooting a six-year-old girl along with her parents after a basketball with which the child was playing rolled into his yard is not resisting being transferred to his home state after being arrested in Florida.

After his arrest on Thursday in Tampa, [Florida](#), 24-year-old Robert Louis Singletary made a court appearance on Friday during which he was asked

whether he would sign the extradition waiver that would allow officials to transport him back to North Carolina, where the shooting occurred two days earlier.

“Indeed,” Singletary said to the Hillsborough county judge Catherine Catlin, according to the local news station [Fox 13](#).

The court hearing came just two days after Singletary allegedly fired shots at children and their parents after the youths attempted to retrieve a basketball that rolled into his yard in a neighborhood in Gastonia, North Carolina.

“As soon as I saw him coming out shooting, I was hollering at everybody to get down and get inside,” neighbor Jonathan Robertson [told](#) the Associated Press, adding that since Singletary moved to the neighborhood, he had yelled at the children on several occasions.

Kinsley White, six, was wounded on her left cheek while her father, William White, was shot in the back after he rushed to her aid, her grandfather Carl Hildebrand [told](#) the Associated Press. Kinsley’s mother, Ashley Hildebrand, was wounded in the elbow.



Robert Louis Singletary. Photograph: AP

[According to](#) reports, Kinsley had to have stitches as a result of bullet fragments lodged in her cheeks. She and her mother have both been released. Gaston county police [said](#) that White remained in serious condition at a hospital in Charlotte, North Carolina.

Singletary had allegedly also fired shots at another man but missed, authorities [said](#). He fled the state and surrendered to authorities in Tampa on Thursday afternoon.

Investigators are charging him with four counts of attempted first-degree murder, two counts of assault with a deadly weapon with the intent to kill inflicting serious injury, and one count of being a felon in possession of a firearm.

Catlin said that she plans to hold another hearing about Singletary's arrest if North Carolina officials do not retrieve him by Monday.

Before allegedly shooting the Whites and Hildebrand, Singletary had been out on bond after he was charged with attacking a woman with a sledgehammer last December.

The victim told Gastonia police that Singletary had kept her inside his apartment for more than two hours after the alleged attack during which he struck her in the back of the head with the weapon.

Police [said](#) that Singletary did not allow her to leave his apartment until she had cleaned up all evidence of the attack, WSOC-TV reported last December.

The shootings with which Singletary has been charged came six days after [Ralph Yarl](#), 16, was shot in a separate and unrelated case by a man after ringing the man's doorbell in Kansas City, Missouri.

On 18 April, in another separate and unrelated case, 20-year-old Kaylin Gillis [was shot and killed](#) by an upstate New York resident after the car she was riding in accidentally pulled into the wrong driveway.

And days after Gillis was killed, a man in Texas is alleged to have [shot and injured two cheerleaders](#), Payton Washington and Heather Roth, after one almost got into his parked car by mistake, according to reports.

The various cases other than the one involving Singletary have also led to arrests and have trained a global spotlight on [US gun culture](#).

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The silver coins were found about 5 miles from the Fyrkat Viking ringfort, near the town of Hobro. Photograph: North Jutland Museum

[Archaeology](#).

Hoard of 1,000-year-old Viking coins unearthed in Denmark

Artefacts believed to date back to 980s found by girl metal-detecting in cornfield last autumn

Agence France-Presse

Fri 21 Apr 2023 09.06 EDTLast modified on Fri 21 Apr 2023 14.39 EDT

Nearly 300 silver coins believed to be more than 1,000 years old have been discovered near a Viking fortress site in north-west [Denmark](#), a museum has said.

The trove – lying in two spots not far apart – was unearthed by a girl who was metal-detecting in a cornfield last autumn.

“A hoard like this is very rare,” Lars Christian Norbach, the director of the North Jutland Museum, where the artefacts will go on display, told Agence France-Presse.



The trove includes Danish, Arab and Germanic coins as well as jewellery from Scotland or Ireland. Photograph: North Jutland Museum

The silver coins were found about 5 miles (8km) from the Fyrkat Viking ringfort, near the town of Hobro. From their inscriptions, they are believed to date back to the 980s.

The trove includes Danish, Arab and Germanic coins as well as pieces of jewellery originating from Scotland or Ireland, according to archaeologists. Norbach said the finds were from the same period as the fort, built by King Harald Bluetooth, and would offer a greater insight into the history of the Vikings.

There could be a link between the treasure – which the Vikings would bury during wars – and the fort, which burned down during the same period, he said.

Archaeologists have said they will continue digging next autumn after the harvest. They hope to find the burial sites and homes of the troves' one-

time owners.

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People working at the site. Photograph: North Jutland Museum

The Vikings believed that burying their treasure allowed them to find it again after death.

The artefacts will go on public display from July at the Aalborg Historical Museum. The girl who made the discovery will receive financial compensation, the amount of which has not been made public.

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/science/2023/apr/21/hoard-of-1000-year-old-viking-coins-unearthed-in-denmark>

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The number and range of the claims have plunged the CBI into turmoil.
Photograph: Leon Neal/Getty Images

[Confederation of British Industry \(CBI\)](#)

Second woman claims she was raped by colleagues while working at CBI

Exclusive: Another female employee complained she was stalked by a male colleague in 2018 at the business lobbying group

[Anna Isaac](#)

[@Annaisaac](#)

Fri 21 Apr 2023 02.20 EDTLast modified on Fri 21 Apr 2023 13.27 EDT

A woman has alleged that she was raped by two male colleagues when she worked at the Confederation of British Industry.

The woman told the Guardian the incident took place when she was employed at an overseas office of Britain's most prominent business lobby group.

She said she blamed the culture at the CBI for having no support after what she claims happened to her.

This is the second woman to claim she was the victim of rape at the CBI – it follows another member of staff who alleged she was raped by a manager on a 2019 summer boat party on the River Thames.

Separately, the Guardian has been told that a woman based at the organisation's London office was stalked by a male colleague in 2018. Sources said he followed her in person and tracked her online, and that when she complained the CBI launched an investigation.

It is understood the CBI upheld a finding of harassment.

However, sources claim the woman was actively discouraged from reporting the stalking to the police and the alleged perpetrator retained his job.

The CBI says it has reported further allegations to the police.

Profile

What is the CBI and who funds it?

Show

The Confederation of British Industry (CBI) is the UK's most prominent business lobbying organisation. It is a not-for-profit organisation founded by royal charter in 1965, after a merger of older employer bodies.

It claims “unrivalled” access to government. It also claims to have the biggest number of policy specialists outside of Whitehall, the seat of the British government, in order to support its 190,000 business members, which are the chief source of its income. Its total income was £25m in 2021, of which £22m was from membership fees.

Its membership is composed of direct members and members of other trade bodies.

Its 1,500 direct members are businesses that actively hold membership. Fees vary significantly: top-tier businesses can pay £90,000 annually, some mid-sized companies pay half this price and smaller companies pay far less.

The bulk of its membership comes via trade bodies, and it counts these memberships within its own 190,000 total.

The lobby group has access to the prime minister and cabinet, and campaigns on issues ranging from funding for childcare to tax and skills. Its relationship with the UK government was stretched severely by Brexit, with its access to No 10 much curtailed. A remark attributed to the former prime minister Boris Johnson – [“fuck business”](#) – was considered to be aimed at efforts by the CBI and others to try to influence the post-Brexit UK-EU trade agreement.

The organisation sought to rebuild ties with the government during the early stages of the coronavirus pandemic, including working alongside trade unions and No 10 on developing the furlough scheme.

The CBI is governed by a president and an executive committee, which, in normal times, is chaired by the director general. It also has a board of non-executive directors, which the director general sits on.

Anna Isaac

Was this helpful?

Thank you for your feedback.

Last week the City of London police launched an investigation into a series of allegations made by more than a dozen women about misconduct by managers at the CBI.

The alleged rape victim approached the Guardian after reading claims made by other women who worked at the CBI.

She said she had “nowhere to turn” with her allegations at the time because of what she felt was a lack of human resources support for workers outside the CBI’s London headquarters.

After a night of drinking with colleagues, the woman claims she woke up with the two men in the same room as her.

She has no recollection of consenting to sexual activity with either man and described in detail how physical signs led her to believe she was raped. She claims the men later made remarks that suggested they had engaged in sexual activity with her that she could not remember.

The alleged victim has also claimed that she was presented – in the office – with an image of herself where she appeared to be unconscious.

It showed a penis in her mouth, which she understood to have been that of one of her male colleagues who she claims raped her. She said she believed this photograph, which the Guardian has seen, was taken at the same time as the alleged rape.

A second source claimed they recalled her being given the photograph, which they also saw and independently confirmed the contents of.

“Lots of people get raped. I don’t blame the CBI for being raped. I was really young and people took advantage of me after a night of drinking,” the alleged rape victim said.

“I blame the CBI for an atmosphere that was allowed to feed into people’s sense of confidence. That they could act in this way and afterwards feel no worries, no fears of consequences. That they could feel somehow proud, in an office.

“That there wasn’t a person for me to speak to in HR who I knew of and could trust.

“I want to say to other women or men at the CBI that they do great work. I hope they understand why I wanted to speak about it; what happened to me.”

To protect the woman’s identity the Guardian is choosing not to report the date of the alleged incident or the precise international office that it relates to.

The CBI, which claims to represent 190,000 businesses, including Lloyds Bank and HSBC, and has regular interactions with the government, has been plunged into turmoil by the volume and gravity of the allegations.

The government has suspended engagement with the group while the law firm Fox Williams conducts an investigation into them.

The business lobby group issued a public statement on Thursday and passed information to the police about the Guardian's inquiry ahead of publication.

The statement said: "Late yesterday afternoon the CBI was made aware of additional information relating to a report of a serious criminal offence." It added that the CBI was "liaising closely" with the police.

Sources familiar with the same international office claim that there was a broader problem with harassment of junior female staff that fed into a toxic culture and hiring processes. HR matters were handled at that office informally, often with little contact with the lobby group's London headquarters, they allege.

The separate stalking allegation has been confirmed by the CBI.

The female employee complained in 2018 that she was being stalked by a male colleague online and in person. The CBI said it undertook an internal investigation and a finding of harassment was upheld. However, sources familiar with the complaint claim that the woman was actively discouraged from reporting the harassment to the police.

Sources said the woman was asked to move desks and to avoid the alleged stalker at work. She was told by HR to leave the office at a different time to the alleged stalker, the Guardian understands.

The CBI said that a sanction was imposed and the matter concluded and that there was no record of a desire on the part of the complainant to report the matter to the police.

The alleged stalker retained his role and left at a later date for unrelated reasons, the Guardian understands.

It is claimed that he admitted to the HR investigation to having sexual and violent feelings towards her and had followed her home. It is understood that the woman was not informed.

The CBI said it had no information on these specific allegations about the alleged perpetrator's sexual and violent feelings, and no evidence that people were discouraged from making police complaints.

The then CBI director general Dame Carolyn Fairbairn said she was not made aware of the complaint made in early 2018.

Fairbairn told the Guardian: "I am deeply shocked by this repulsive allegation. I have absolutely no awareness of a complaint of this nature being made. I have spent my career fighting for the safety and wellbeing of women in the workplace and tackling discrimination and unfairness."

She added: "It is appalling that this potential allegation was not escalated. Any woman facing shocking abuse of this kind deserves immediate care, protection and the full support of her employer and the law."

CBI president, Brian McBride, said in a statement: "These latest allegations put to us by the Guardian are abhorrent and our heart goes out to any women who have been victims of the behaviour that is described. While the CBI was not previously aware of the most serious allegations, it is vital that they are thoroughly investigated now and we are liaising closely with the police to help ensure any perpetrators are brought to justice."

He added that the lobby group is expecting findings from the Fox Williams investigation "imminently".

"The board will be communicating its response to this and other steps we are taking to bring about the wider change that is needed early next week," McBride said.

Speaking earlier this week McBride said the fact staff members shared their complaints about sexual misconduct with the Guardian rather than with the CBI itself was a sign of the problems within the organisation.

“People decided to go to the newspapers and not speak to us directly, which in itself points to something wrong with our culture,” he said. “Why is it that people felt that they couldn’t stand up and come forward?”

The CBI was embroiled in a public spat earlier this week between McBride and its former director general Tony Danker [after he was dismissed from his role last week](#). Danker’s conduct was part of a different investigation by Fox Williams that related to entirely separate allegations about his behaviour.

“The board lost its trust and confidence in his ability to lead the organisation and represent the CBI in public,” McBride said of Danker’s dismissal.

Danker said in an interview with the BBC on Tuesday that he felt he had been “the fall guy” for allegations unrelated to his own conduct and that his reputation had been “trashed”.

- *Information and support for anyone affected by rape or sexual abuse issues is available from the following organisations. In the UK, [Rape Crisis](#) offers support on 0808 500 2222 in England and Wales, 0808 801 0302 in [Scotland](#), or 0800 0246 991 in [Northern Ireland](#). In the US, [Rainn](#) offers support on 800-656-4673. In Australia, support is available at [1800Respect](#) (1800 737 732). Other international helplines can be found at ibiblio.org/rcip/internl.html*

[Business live](#)Business

‘Deeply sorry’ CBI suspends policy and membership activity until June after firms quit following second rape allegation – as it happened

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Councillor Lisa Smart examines the council-owned toxic land in Romiley.

[Pollution](#)

Sewage-soaked field stops creation of new woodland in Greater Manchester

Plans to create green space cancelled because soil contamination levels pose risk to human health

[Helena Horton](#) *Environment reporter*

Fri 21 Apr 2023 01.00 EDT

Plans to plant a new woodland have been cancelled after local councillors discovered a field was so saturated with sewage the soil could be too toxic for the trees.

The woodland was to have been planted in a council-owned field located by Otterspool Road in Romiley, Greater Manchester. Officials hoped the

woodland would improve the environment, provide green space and encourage wildlife habitats.

However, [Stockport](#) councillors have learned the land is unsuitable for tree planting because of sewage discharges leaching into the ground. They were told the resulting soil contamination would make it hard to plant the trees, so they had decided to cancel the woodland.

Assessments are being done by [United Utilities](#) and council officials to find out the scale of the problem, but the council said it had decided there were too many risks to human health, including workers having to dig into raw sewage to plant trees, and there were worries the contaminants would prevent the trees growing.



The council-owned land by Otterspool Road in Romiley.

This is a fresh blow to attempts by local councils to create green spaces to improve local areas in the face of funding cuts and battles to [keep existing spaces open](#).

Raw sewage contains many problematic elements, including heavy metals that can be toxic to plants, and nutrients that can disturb ecosystems.

According to [Environment Agency data](#), United Utilities discharged sewage at Otterspool Road 135 times last year, which amounted to 40 days of sewage flowing.

The water company was [found](#) to be the most polluting in the country last year. One of United Utilities' pipes spilled sewage into the River Ellen, near the Lake District, for nearly 7,000 hours in 2022. [Environment Agency data](#) also showed that 10 of the country's 20 pipes that spilled the most sewage in 2022 were owned by United Utilities, which provides water to the north-west and the Lake District.

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Sewage leaks have also been reported in a nearby field when local waterways flooded. Pictures show sanitary products and other toilet waste strewn across the field.

Local officials have asked ministers to visit the field to see the devastating impact of the pollution.

Lisa Smart, the Liberal Democrat councillor for Bredbury Green and Romiley, said: "This is a devastating blow for the local community in Stockport. The council was working hard to deliver a new woodland for

local people and wildlife to enjoy, however this environmental scandal has cancelled the project.

“United [Utilities](#) owe local people an apology. Their destruction of our environment cannot go on any longer. We already knew our local rivers were being pumped full of sewage, but now it is our green land.

“I want a minister to visit this field and see first-hand the destruction caused. Rather than a new woodland, we are left with an open sewer.”

The Westmorland and Lonsdale MP Tim Farron, who is also the Lib Dem’s environment spokesperson, added: “This is a scandal. United Utilities are ruining our region’s environment, from the Lake District to Stockport’s green fields.

“Conservative ministers are sitting on their hands whilst these environmental scandals take place. Meanwhile, United Utilities reward their execs with multimillion-pound bonuses. Frankly, the whole thing stinks.”

A United Utilities spokesperson said: “An issue on our network caused flooding from a manhole, affecting a small section of a field in Stockport which we are cleaning and repair work is being programmed.”

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2023/apr/21/sewage-soaked-field-stops-creation-of-new-woodland-in-greater-manchester>



A photo issued by Herefordshire Wildlife Trust from December 2020 showing the damage caused to the River Lugg. Photograph: Herefordshire Wildlife Trust/PA

Rivers

Farmer jailed for 12 months for damaging Herefordshire river

John Price jailed after admitting ‘wanton’ destruction of one of UK’s most unspoiled rivers

[Jamie Grierson](#)

[@JamieGrierson](#)

Fri 21 Apr 2023 03.54 EDTLast modified on Fri 21 Apr 2023 16.37 EDT

A farmer has been jailed for “the worst case of riverside destruction” seen by environmental authorities after ripping up 1.5km of the River Lugg in Herefordshire, wrecking the habitats of otters, kingfishers, trout and salmon.

Following the first prosecution under the farming rules for water legislation, John Price was jailed for 12 months, ordered to pay prosecution costs of £600,000 and disqualified from being a director of a limited company for three years after admitting seven charges related to his “wanton” destruction of one of the country’s most unspoiled rivers.

The Environment Agency and Natural England, which brought the case against Price, said it would take decades to recover from the damage meted out by the farmer, who was also handed a restoration order at Kidderminster magistrates court, requiring him to restore the river.

Price used heavy machinery including bulldozers and excavators to dredge and re-profile a 1.5km stretch of the River Lugg at Kingsland, Herefordshire, destroying the riverbed and banks, the Environment Agency said.

The unconsented works were in breach of several regulations, including the Reduction and Prevention of Agricultural Diffuse Pollution (England) Regulations 2018, also known as the farming rules for water, and operations prohibited in the notification of a site of special scientific interest (SSSI), which persisted despite Price being issued with a stop notice.

Due to the exceptionally high diversity of wildlife, the Lugg is a designated SSSI, with 121 river plant species that provide habitat for invertebrates, fish and birds.

The damage to the river and banks removed the habitats of hundreds of these species, including otters, kingfishers and salmon, as well as destroying trees, aquatic plant life and invertebrates.

The Environment Agency said it was expected to take decades to re-establish mature trees to provide the stability, cover and shade to restore the diversity of the river. Fish, plants, native crayfish and birds may take years to make a gradual return to previous populations.

Speaking after the verdict, Emma Johnson, the area manager for Natural England, said: “The destruction of this section of the River Lugg was

devastating for the abundance and range of species which thrived in this river.

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“The River Lugg is one of the most iconic rivers in the UK and to see this wanton destruction take place was devastating.”

Price, 68, of Day House farm, Kingsland, who owns land either side of the Lugg with assets valued at between £21m and £25m, argued he took action to prevent flooding but experts from the Environment Agency said there was no such benefit from his destruction.

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2023.04.21 - Spotlight

- You be the judge Should my husband let me have the air-con on in the car?
- 'Nobody is left' Brutal fighting lays waste to wealthy central Khartoum
- Ghosted review Dreadful big star action comedy deserves to be ignored
- Experience I proposed while running the London Marathon

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Illustration: Joren Joshua/The Guardian

[You be the judge](#)[Life and style](#)

**You be the judge: should my husband
let me have the air-con on in the car?**

Amaan says it's expensive and a waste of fuel. Bree think she's entitled to travel in comfort. You need to give them a steer

[Find out how to get a disagreement settled or become a You be the judge juror](#)



Interviews by [Georgina Lawton](#)

[@georginalawton](#)

Fri 21 Apr 2023 03.00 EDTLast modified on Fri 21 Apr 2023 21.17 EDT

The prosecution: Bree

Amaan complains it costs too much, but I think being comfortable is important

My husband Amaan is always really stingy about me putting the air-con on in our RV when we are travelling. We recently completed a big trip around Europe in it with our nine-month-old baby Sidney, and I had to really make the case to turn it on.

The RV is quite big, and I'll often head towards the back, where I have more space to feed and look after Sidney while Amaan drives. It's really hot back there. I will be sticky and sweating as we drive through the country,

and will ask to put the air-con on. Amaan will complain and say it's too expensive.

But I don't care. When I'm looking after Sidney I want to be comfortable. After a while Amaan will give in, but he won't want to. Sometimes I'll be sitting in the front next to him at first, then when I retreat to the back with Sidney I'll think: "Hmm, it's suddenly got warm." I'll then go back to the front and see that Amaan's already turned the air-con off.

He says we need to save money because there's a [cost of living crisis](#). Apparently running the air-con burns the petrol more quickly, but I don't know how much of a difference this makes. When Amaan is being tight, I'll point out that we're travelling in my parents' RV. That helps us save a lot on accommodation. My parents also pay the vehicle tax and insurance, so our trips in it are cheap.

When Amaan is being tight, I'll point out we are travelling in my parent's RV. That helps us save a lot on accommodation

We don't need to save any more on top of that, and I reckon the cost of keeping the air-con on during our journeys is negligible. Our longest stint in the car was about five to six hours when it was 24C outside, so I didn't want to compromise on comfort, but Amaan was adamant.

Amaan also thinks that whoever is driving should be in charge, but I don't agree with that. It's not like I'm a passenger-princess. I am the chief baby caretaker for one. I'm also the map reader, DJ, lunch researcher and morale booster, so my voice is also valid. Amaan needs to stop being so tight because I'm not prepared to scrimp on air-con costs when we take my parent's RV out on the road again.

The defence: Amaan

There is a cost of living crisis, so Bree has to be realistic. We need to save money where we can

I'm not totally opposed to air-con in the RV, but I think we need to be sensible about it. I'll suggest starting it on a low setting, but Bree will want to make it a full-on fridge.

Bree doesn't seem to be able to regulate her body temperature like a normal person. She is either boiling hot or freezing – it's strange. I read an article once that said you shouldn't set air-con more than five degrees lower than the natural temperature outside, but sometimes she wants it to be too cool. I also think that blowing air from the fan is more economical than putting on the air-con for hours, so I will suggest that instead as it has the same effect.

She is sometimes OK with that as a compromise, but other times she'll get agitated that she can't have her way. But there is a cost of living crisis, so she has to be realistic. We need to save where we can as we've just had a baby. We're relying on one salary now because Bree is on unpaid maternity leave.

I looked into the maths to see how fuel efficiency is affected by having the air-con on, and it's quite a lot. Studies show that air-con can increase fuel consumption by as much as 20%. I think that's a waste of money. Fuel is so expensive these days.

I'm also concerned for the state of the planet – our baby Sidney will be inheriting it after all

Also, I take the view that whoever is driving should control conditions in the RV. Admittedly that suits me because I do most of the driving, but I can see Bree's point that she also does lots. She'll be busy researching lunch spots and accommodation options as well as looking after Sidney, so I appreciate that.

I'm also a bit of an ecowarrior, I guess. I like to take the train when I can, and I'm also concerned for the state of the planet – Sidney will be inheriting it after all. I would quite like Bree's parents to give us the RV for more trips. That would be amazing – I do love it. We saved a lot with our last trip because they lent us the RV free of charge, and we camped inside it a lot of

the time. But on our next trip, I'll stand by my opinion that we shouldn't really have the air-con on.

The jury of Guardian readers

Should Amaan let Bree have the air-con on more?

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Just because Amaan drives doesn't give him dominion over the conditions in the car. The air conditioning should be adjusted to a temperature that is comfortable for everyone. Yes, it costs extra in fuel, but they're already saving money on accommodation and the cost of the RV, so Amaan should lighten up.

Claire, 49

Both Bree and Sidney deserve to feel comfortable in the RV. Bree is doing a lot of the trip planning while caring also for Sidney and it's unfair to expect her to also be uncomfortable.

Anna, 33

If it is significantly hotter in the back, where Bree is looking after their child, let her have the air-con on. Some back-of-an-envelope figures show that it costs about £10-15 extra to have it on. Is that not worth it, considering the savings on accommodation and more?

Carly-May, 26

With money already being saved elsewhere, Amaan can afford to keep the air-con on. A driver has a responsibility to keep passengers comfortable, and having a nine-month-old in the car should be factored in, too.

David, 35

Amaan should understand that part of the fun of a road trip is comfort – no one wants to be boiled in an RV. Loosen the purse strings or do more staycations/local trips, instead of driving an RV with only three people – what's the maths on that, Mr Ecowarrior?

Ayo, 38

Now you be the judge

In our online poll below, tell us: should Amaan stop scrimping on the air con?

Last week's result

We asked should [Rhea stop washing her dog in the bath?](#)

35% of you said yes – Rhea is **guilty**

65% of you said no – Rhea is **not guilty**

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Smoke rises from Khartoum, where terrified Sudanese people are fleeing their homes as rival forces battle in the capital. Photograph: Marwan Ali/AP

[Sudan](#)

‘Nobody is left’: brutal fighting lays waste to wealthy central Khartoum

The most sought-after addresses in Sudan’s capital city are now so dangerous that residents cannot wait to flee

[Jason Burke](#) and [Zeinab Mohammed Salih](#) in Khartoum

Fri 21 Apr 2023 00.00 EDTLast modified on Fri 21 Apr 2023 06.22 EDT

On one street is a small cafe where diplomats, successful businesspeople and visiting dignitaries enjoyed smoothies and burgers under umbrellas set against the blistering sun. On another is a showroom for custom-designed kitchens imported from Europe, a once well stocked pharmacy and a fast-food joint. Down dusty potholed roads, there are villas behind high walls and apartment blocks where chandeliers hang above shining marble stairways.

These central Khartoum neighbourhoods, once the most sought-after addresses in Sudan's capital city, are now so dangerous that residents cannot wait to flee. For almost a week, they have been the stage for a [brutal power struggle](#), shattered by shelling, grenades and automatic rifle fire that trapped tens of thousands in their homes.

Some have managed to escape. On Thursday, people continued to stream out of central Khartoum and, to a lesser extent, the twin city of Omdurman across the Nile.

Omer Belal, a resident of Khartoum 2, a neighbourhood close to major ministries and the fiercely contested international airport, has sent his family to distant relatives in al-Hajj Yousif, on the eastern outskirts of the city.

"I could be the last person to leave. I am just waiting for the explosions to stop for a bit," Belal said. "There was random artillery strike and my neighbour's house was hit by a huge rocket. Entire neighbourhoods and the areas around us are empty ... Nobody is left here."

More than 400 people have been killed and thousands more injured since the fighting erupted on Saturday, according to numerous estimates. Medics say the true toll is likely to be much higher.

The conflict has pitted soldiers loyal to [Gen Abdel Fattah al-Burhan](#), the head of Sudan's transitional governing sovereign council, and the regular army against the paramilitary Rapid Support Forces (RSF), led by [Gen Mohamed Hamdan Dagalo](#), known as Hemedti. Their power struggle has derailed a shift to civilian rule and raised fears of a long, brutal civil war.

Both came to power in 2019 after the fall of the dictator Omar al-Bashir, who had ruled for nearly 30 years. They then joined forces to marginalise civilians and crush the pro-democracy protest movement that had been crucial in the fall of the former regime. Now they have turned their guns on each other in an attempt to win uncontested control of Sudan's precious resources and its crumbling but still powerful state.

The wealthy neighbourhoods in the centre of Khartoum have suffered most in this brutal fight because they are closest to key strategic locations, such as the defence headquarters where Burhan is believed to have his command bunker, the presidential palace and the airport.

But the damage also has another cause. Hemedti and his fighters see themselves as underdog insurgents from Sudan's margins who are taking on an establishment that has monopolised power and wealth for too long. The young men who fill the ranks of the RSF are recruited in Hemedti's home region – distant Darfur, 530 miles (850km) to the south-west of the capital – and see the streets where they are now fighting as bastions of the political, cultural and economic elite that has paid them little or no attention.

So too does their commander.

“Bashir kept the relatively affluent elite onside and Burhan has been trying to do the same ... Hemedti seems less interested in their support and seems unconcerned about collateral casualties or damage to their neighbourhoods,” said Dr Nick Westcott, the director of the Royal African Society and a professor of diplomacy at SOAS in London.

“The RSF soldiers have little to lose. They are experienced and tough fighters. The Sudanese armed forces are used to living in barracks, regular meals et cetera, so Hemedti feels confident he can prevail.”

Of those fleeing the centre of Khartoum, many have headed for Wad-Madani, a city 80 miles south-east of the capital, where thousands spent their first night in their cars on the streets.

“People just took anything that was going on to the south of Khartoum and fled, whether on a lorry or a minibus ... Many of us do not even have any cash,” said Majid Maalia, a human rights lawyer and former resident of Khartoum 2 whose apartment was hit by an airstrike shortly after he left on Thursday morning.

Sudan human rights lawyer Majid Maali evacuates Khartoum home after heavy shelling – video

Turkey's president, Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, on Thursday became the latest foreign leader to call for an end to the conflict, in separate phone calls with Burhan and Hemedti. But even a temporary truce seems a distant prospect and successive ceasefires have collapsed within minutes.

“There is no other option but the military solution,” Burhan told the television network Al Jazeera.

In 2019, Hemedti made a chilling promise to a crowd of supporters in northern Khartoum. Speaking days after his RSF forces had attacked and dispersed a peaceful pro-democracy sit-in in front of the military headquarters, killing more than 200 people, the warlord said that if the protests had continued for a month rather than just the three days, his men would have reduced Khartoum to a “ghost town” resembling those in Darfur depopulated by decades of conflict. “These expensive buildings ... [would] only be inhabited by cats,” Hemedti said.

For Belal and other residents of what has now become a battleground, this vision has been realised and there is little hope of any return to pre-conflict normality even when the fighting eventually stops.

“If you survive the shooting, you will die with hunger,” he said. “This is an absurd war.”

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Ana de Armas, left, and Chris Evans in a scene from "Ghosted." (Frank Masi/Apple TV+ via AP) Photograph: Frank Masi/AP

[Chris Evans](#)

[Review](#)

Ghosted review – dreadful big star action comedy deserves to be ignored

Chris Evans and Ana de Armas make for a chemistry-free pairing in Apple's catastrophically misfiring mockbuster



[Benjamin Lee](#)

Thu 20 Apr 2023 21.11 EDTLast modified on Thu 20 Apr 2023 22.52 EDT

It's easy to see the commercial allure of Apple's pre-summer mockbuster *Ghosted*, the package: a snappy buzzword title, an idea from the *Deadpool* team later fleshed out by some Marvel writers, a big, sexy star pairing proved on screen twice before, an action-comedy-romance hybrid designed to appeal to the widest possible audience. One can only imagine the enthused high-fives that took place in some cold, pristine LA boardroom when it was given the green light. But it's utterly impossible to see the appeal of *Ghosted*, the movie, a staggeringly, maddeningly atrocious heap of increasingly boneheaded decisions that will act as depressing documentation of just how rotten things got in the current oversaturated streaming landscape.

Ghosted is content dictated by algorithm at its absolute, industry-shaming worst, so carelessly and lifelessly cobbled together that we're inclined to believe it's the first film created entirely by AI. It's almost avant-garde in its all-consuming awfulness, made with sheer contempt for the usual base staples one expects from a movie, head-shakingly shambolic on all fronts. It's smug elevator pitch over plot – a guy gets ghosted by a woman who ends up being a secret agent – and while the early inevitable trailer scenes

that take us to the end of this logline are bad enough they're nowhere near as bad as what follows. Chris Evans plays Cole, a farmer slash history academic slash plant obsessive who meets Ana de Armas's mysterious art curator Sadie one day at the farmers' market. After some truly painful banter about plants, they decide to go on an impromptu date, the kind that cuts to them in an art gallery with her beaming "Oh my God, I love Monet!" or the pair next to the tower of Lincoln books and her noting "Sounds like you love Lincoln!", crushingly bland meet-cute dialogue that removes us from their journey before it truly begins.

After Cole gets, here it comes, *ghosted* by her, he bizarrely decides to track her down and creepily flies to London after accidentally leaving a tracking device on her person or something. She's as alarmed as we are by his behaviour but is forced to protect him when her real profession is revealed and the two find themselves on the run.

With heightened material such as this, no one expects, or really wants, anything that exists in a grounded real world but there's something so uneasily, almost creepily, synthetic about every single frame of *Ghosted*, from the awkwardly robotic dialogue to the uncomfortably asexual central pairing to some shockingly subpar green-screen work, that we still don't want it to exist within the confines of a cheap simulation (it's the rare Apple movie that looks like a Netflix one). It's a strange blip for actor-director Dexter Fletcher, stumbling from the Elton John biopic *Rocketman* into the netherworld of big-budget anonymity, his film more the product of an uninterested committee of tech execs than anyone remotely interested in the world of entertainment. There are embarrassingly dated action sequences with songs like *Are You Gonna Be My Girl?*, *My Sharona* and, groan, *Uptown Funk* loudly blasted over shoddy editing and laboured choreography, interspersed with eye-rollingly unfunny quips, as if a computer was asked to remake *Mr and Mrs Smith* for Tubi.

The death of the movie star has been greatly overstated but the pairing of Evans and Armas (previously seen in *Knives Out* and *The Gray Man*) is so disastrously misjudged, it does make one seriously question what the industry now thinks a star is and what we as an audience are expected to accept from them. Like last year's similarly wretched [Red Notice](#), which

saw Ryan Reynolds, the Rock and Gal Gadot all compete to see who could be the least charismatic actor on screen, it's as actively uncomfortable for us as it appears to be for them (a scene of the pair kissing on a beach is so glumly reticent that it seems as though it was performed at gunpoint). It's not as if the ChatGPT-level script gives them much of anything to work with ("You thought you met a hottie, not a Mata Hari!" is an almost impressively heinous attempt at a zinger) but well-paid stars of this calibre should be able to bring more of an uplift; they're stilted when they should be sleek.

As with everyone else involved in the film (including Adrien Brody as a ridiculously accented French villain and poor Amy Sedaris stuck playing a stock photo mum who becomes sentient), it just feels like pure, cold paycheque work, clocked in and checked out. If they don't seem to care then why on earth should we?

- Ghosted is available on Apple TV+ on 21 April

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Alex Prior: ‘The short speech I’d planned was lost in a wall of noise from the crowds.’ Photograph: Mark Chilvers/The Guardian

[ExperienceLife and style](#)

Experience: I proposed while running the London Marathon

I tried to get down on one knee, but because of cramp it was more of a lunge

Alex Prior

Fri 21 Apr 2023 05.00 EDTLast modified on Fri 21 Apr 2023 10.37 EDT

It was 2014 and I wanted to propose to my girlfriend, Jess – I just hadn’t figured out how. She loved a surprise birthday party I’d organised two years before, so I thought something similar would be fun. A few friends and family were coming to cheer me on in the [London Marathon](#), so I thought I could do it then. We could celebrate – hopefully – with everyone afterwards.

I asked Jess's dad's permission in a restaurant in London in March that year, and moments later Mikel Arteta walked in – as a big Arsenal fan, I took that as a good sign. He'd scored a penalty that day – the football gods approved.

Jess and I met as students at the London College of Communication in 2009. She was smart, great fun, and caring. We just clicked. After a few years, we knew we wanted to spend the rest of our lives together. We'd talked about getting married. So, I was 99.9% certain that she'd say yes.

I told our families about my plan a few weeks before the marathon. They had to get Jess in position at the super-busy area 200m from the finish. It's the last public area before it's ticketed. Our families had brought food and drinks for a celebratory picnic in Green Park afterwards.

A close circle of friends knew as well, but word got around to more people who didn't know about my specific plan, but knew *something* was going to happen. There were about 40 of them by the barrier in the end.

The plan was for Chris, my best friend from school, to hand me a dummy ring that Mum lent me. I knew I'd have clammy hands and didn't want to drop the actual ring or lose it en route. Beforehand, Chris and I practised the ring handover up and down Wimbledon High Street – after a few pints – to some bemused onlookers.



Alex Prior (front) after proposing to Jess at the London Marathon.
Photograph: Alex Prior

On the day, 13 April 2014, it was perfect weather for running – not too hot or cold. After running more than 26 miles I was physically dead, but felt amazing. At this stage, the runners veer towards the inside of the track to get the best time possible. But I had to run across the course, which caught the attention of a photographer who thought I was injured.

The ring handover was seamless. Then I took a few steps back from the barrier and tried to get down on one knee, but because of cramp it was more of a lunge. The speech I'd planned was lost in a wall of noise from the crowds.

As soon as Jess saw the ring, I guess words weren't important. She burst into tears and we kissed. I borrowed Chris's mobile and took a selfie, with Jess looking a bit teary. Then the crowd erupted in cheers for us and Jess encouraged me to continue to get a good time. After running that distance, starting again was like moving an oil tanker. I finished in three hours, 23 minutes. It was actually a personal best for a marathon, but if you take off time for the proposal, I was a bit faster.

Once I got my phone back at the finish line, I texted Jess to ask if she'd definitely agreed. I was almost certain, but I was slightly delirious and with all the commotion I wanted to check.

When the press pictures went online, some newspapers contacted me for the selfie I took on Chris's phone. He's in the photo – he'd been in the sun for hours and had awful sweat patches under his arms. He edited them out.

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I hadn't trusted myself to pick out the actual ring, so we did that afterwards at Hatton Garden. The wedding was the following year. Chris talked about his sweat patches in his best man's speech. I referenced the proposal too, saying something soppy about Jess being my human finish line. Ironically, Jess banned me from running on the morning of the wedding in case I twisted my ankle.

We're very happy and live in Wimbledon. We're both in jobs we love and are enjoying our lives together. I haven't run the London Marathon again, but I volunteered as a marshal in 2017. I've moved on to triathlons and Ironman distances. Jess isn't a runner. I've managed to drag her out for a 5k about five times in our 13 years together. She prefers playing netball.

I'm hoping this article will be another fun surprise. No one else knows about it yet. We'll add it to the collection of photos and clippings we've got framed at home. I think Jess will really like it and read it with a little smile.

As told to Anna Derrig

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2023.04.21 - Opinion

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A tree nursery – part of the work of reforestation – in the Monteverde cloud forest in Costa Rica. Photograph: Christian Sinibaldi/The Guardian

[OpinionDeforestation](#)

Costa Rica restored its ravaged land to health. The rich UK has no excuse for such complete failure

[George Monbiot](#)



Why does a wealthy, powerful nation struggle so badly while a small, much poorer one succeeds?

Fri 21 Apr 2023 01.00 EDTLast modified on Fri 21 Apr 2023 17.57 EDT

One of the world's greatest environmental heroes doesn't even have a Wikipedia page. Though he has done more to protect the living planet than almost anyone alive, his name is scarcely known. It's partly because he's quiet and self-effacing and partly because of a general ignorance about Central America that so few of us have heard of [Alvaro Umaña](#).

This might be about to change. He stars in a fascinating film, now released in the Netherlands and negotiating global sales, called [Paved Paradise](#) (disclosure: I was also interviewed). It's the first feature-length documentary I've watched that engages intelligently with the most critical environmental issue: land use. By contrast with [popular but misguided](#) films such as *Kiss the Ground* or *The Biggest Little Farm*, it recognises that sprawling extractive land uses are a lethal threat to the living world. It makes the case that, unless we count the hectares and decide together how best they should be used, we will lose the struggle to defend the habitable planet.

Paved Paradise tells the story of the most remarkable ecological turnaround on Earth: the transformation of [Costa Rica](#). From 1986 to 1990, Umaña was environment minister in Óscar Arias's government. Arias received the Nobel peace prize for his regional diplomacy. But the equally astonishing environmental shift Umaña catalysed is less well known.



A Ngäbe-Buglé farmer harvests coffee beans in Tarrazú, south of San José, Costa Rica. Photograph: Jeffrey Arguedas/EPA

Until the Arias government took power, Costa Rica suffered one of the world's worst deforestation rates: on one scientific assessment, its forest cover [fell](#) to just 24.4% of the country. Today, forests occupy 57%, which, Umaña tells me, is close to the maximum: some parts were never forested, while others are now occupied by productive farms and cities. While a small amount of illegal timber felling continues, Costa Rica is the only tropical country to have more or less [stopped and then reversed](#) deforestation. It now has one of the world's highest percentages of [protected areas](#). How did it happen?

Umaña persuaded Arias to let him run a new department (energy and environment) with responsibility for protected areas. He saw that the key task was to change financial incentives. Though cattle ranching was

unproductive, as the land could support just one cow per hectare, it was marginally more lucrative than allowing the forest to stand.

His department calculated the opportunity cost of forgoing a cow at \$64 a year, so this was the money it offered for protecting or restoring a hectare of forest. He began by reaching out to small farmers and their representatives, in those regions where people were most sympathetic to the idea. The smallest landholders were offered grants, slightly larger ones were offered soft loans, with the promise that if their forest was still standing after five years, it could serve as the loan's guarantee. The plan was astonishingly successful: 97% of those who received loans protected or restored the trees on their land. As landholders everywhere saw the scheme made financial sense, it became massively oversubscribed.



The former president of Costa Rica, Óscar Arias, who allowed Alvaro Umaña to put together the financial incentives to change land use. Photograph: Jeffrey Arguedas/EPA

Needing more money, in 1988 Umaña agreed a [debt-for-nature swap](#) with the Dutch government. It would cancel part of the foreign debt if the money Costa Rica would otherwise have spent on servicing it were used instead for forest conservation. Following a change of government, Umaña became the

country's climate ambassador. He helped [introduce](#) a special tax of 3.5% on fossil fuels to help pay for forest conservation.

Soon the tree protectors began to supplement their income. Tourists are now the country's second-biggest source of revenue: government figures show that 65% of them [list](#) ecotourism as a principal reason for visiting. They come to see toucans, green macaws, howler monkeys, jaguars, caimans, poison dart frogs and other resurgent natural wonders. Landholders can also apply for a licence selectively to fell a small number of their trees, some of which are very valuable.

One reason for the programme's success is its [sharing](#) of financial benefits, especially through its world-leading [gender action plan](#). Another is cultural change. In building a new identity around "*la pura vida*" (the simple life), the government showed that, in combination with economic incentives, national pride can help bring long-established practices such as forest clearance for cattle ranching to an end.

Costa Rica helped to inspire the [Bonn Challenge](#), a global programme to restore degraded and deforested land. It launched the international [plan](#) to protect 30% of the planet by 2030, and was one of the two founder members, [in 2021](#), of the Beyond Oil and Gas Alliance (though it has since [stood back](#), following a change of government). These are astonishing achievements for a tiny country.

Compare this record with policy in the UK, which, 37 years after Umaña set to work, is still pissing about with half-solutions and non-solutions, held to ransom by rich and powerful property owners and entirely incapable of making strategic environmental decisions, especially on [land use](#). While Costa Rica's wildlife is booming, ours is in [freefall](#). The government seems determined, [against all advice](#), to allow this disastrous trend to [continue](#) for the rest of the decade.

As for the fuel taxes that could have been used, like Costa Rica's, to fund ecological repair, the UK government has now [forgone](#) a cumulative £80bn in revenue by both abandoning Labour's fuel duty escalator and giving

motorists a special rebate. As a result, our carbon emissions are up to 7% higher than they would otherwise have been.

So why does a rich, powerful nation fail, while a small, much poorer one succeeds? Talking to Umaña and researching the history of this transformation suggests a simple answer: quality of government. When governments are committed, decisive and consistent, things happen. When they are beholden to lobby groups, cronyism and corruption, and delegate responsibility to an abstraction called “the market”, they spend decades flapping their hands while chaos reigns.

Our self-hating state, which parades its can’t-do culture as a source of pride, insisting that government cannot and should not solve our problems, is constitutionally destined to founder. Why can’t we follow Costa Rica’s example? Because a small but powerful contingent insists on failure.

- George Monbiot is a Guardian columnist

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‘It’s hard not to view the modern pro-natalist movement, which is largely situated in Silicon Valley, as a rebranding of eugenics.’ Photograph: Vitaliy Smolygin/Alamy

[Life and style](#)

‘Hipster eugenics’: why is the media cosyng up to people who want to build a super race?

[Arwa Mahdawi](#)



Self-proclaimed ‘pro-natalists’ don’t go around saying that they only want white babies, but there’s a thin line between their movement and the ‘great replacement theory’

Fri 21 Apr 2023 01.00 EDTLast modified on Fri 21 Apr 2023 11.03 EDT

Simone and Malcolm Collins are a thirtysomething couple with three kids called Torsten, Octavian and Titan Invictus. (They refuse to give their girls traditionally feminine names because they think that means they’ll get taken less [seriously](#).) The Pennsylvania-based pair plan on having at least eight children and hope each of their children can have eight children so that, in 11 generations, the world will ooze with their bloodline and there will be more Collinses stalking the Earth than there are people alive today.

A bit weird, right? Maybe the sort of fantasy you’d be best off keeping to yourself? The Collinses disagree. They’ve made themselves the poster children of “pro-natalism” and are taking it upon themselves to combat what they describe as “[fertility collapse](#)” – not only by having multiple kids themselves but by trying to push for policies that would increase birth rates in the developed world. The media is paying attention to their crusade: Britain’s [Telegraph](#) profiled the pair this week, with the headline “Meet the

‘[elite](#)’ couples breeding to save mankind”. This followed a long profile on the Collinses last November from Insider and pieces by [Entrepreneur](#) and [Bloomberg](#).

"What were you up to this weekend?"

"You know, the usual. Just superbreeding." <https://t.co/kAxiplO19gpic.twitter.com/UYH39aM2jv>

— Simone & Malcolm Collins (@SimoneHCollins) [April 17, 2023](#)

The Collinses don’t just want to increase the birth rate; they want to optimize the sort of children being born. They used genetic testing for their own embryos and, as Bloomberg reports, “created a spreadsheet with each embryo’s scores, weighting them according to their desired mental health traits”. This sort of thing has led to the pair being called “[hipster eugenicists](#)” online, which they seem to find rather amusing. When an Insider reporter mentioned the moniker to them, Simone called that fact “amazing” but scoffed at the idea that they were eugenicists.

The Collinses might not think of themselves in this way, but it’s hard not to view the modern pro-natalist movement, which is largely situated in Silicon Valley, as a rebranding of eugenics. Pro-natalism may mean pro-birth but the loudest voices in the movement are clearly only pro people like themselves being born. The most famous proponent was one Jeffrey Epstein, who planned to develop a super-race of humans with his DNA, by [impregnating up to 20 women at a time](#). There is a constant refrain in pro-natal circles about how important it is for “[really smart people](#)” to keep reproducing.

Dismissing the movement as quirky people with quirky ideas risks glossing over some very regressive thinking

While pro-natalists don’t exactly go around saying that they only want white people to be born, there is a very thin line between their concern

about birth rates in the developed world and the racist and antisemitic “[great replacement theory](#)”, which posits that white Americans and Europeans are being “replaced” by non-white immigrants. It goes without saying that the global population is currently *increasing*, not decreasing, and the fastest growth is happening in Africa and Asia. [Estimates suggest](#) it is only likely to start decreasing in 2100, by which point there will be 10.9 billion people on Earth.

Dismissing those like the Collinses as quirky people with quirky ideas risks glossing over some very regressive thinking. Indeed, much of the media coverage of pro-natalism is reminiscent of the way in which white supremacists like Richard Spencer were treated as [“dapper” style icons in 2016](#) rather than dangerous Nazis and rebranded as the “alt-right”.

Pro-natalism doesn’t just overlap with racism, but also misogyny. When you start to see women as breeding machines whose job it is to repopulate the Earth, you can justify some very dystopian policies. This week, for example, Elon Musk sat down with Fox News’s Tucker Carlson, argued that abortion and birth control might lead to the end of civilization. “[I]n the past we could rely upon, you know, simple limbic system rewards in order to procreate,” [Musk said](#). “But once you have birth control and abortions and whatnot, now you can still satisfy the limbic instinct but not procreate ... I’m sort of worried that – hey, civilization, if we don’t make enough people to at least sustain our numbers perhaps increase a little bit, then civilization’s going to crumble.” You can see where this is going, can’t you?

Indeed, you only need to look at Hungary to see the end point. Far-right Viktor Orbán is obsessed with getting Hungarian woman to breed and has devoted a huge amount of [resources to pro-natalist policies](#). Some of [these](#) policies are positive (free IVF); many are not. Hungary has recently tightened [abortion rules](#) and there has been concern it is trying to limit access to [the morning-after pill](#). Orbán, who is beloved by conservatives in the US, also hasn’t been shy about explaining the racist ideology behind his pro-natalism. “In all of Europe there are fewer and fewer children, and the answer of the west to this is migration,” [Orbán has said](#). “They want as many migrants to enter as there are missing kids, so that the numbers will

add up. We Hungarians have a different way of thinking. Instead of just numbers, we want Hungarian children. Migration for us is surrender.”

Are the Collinses worried about the misogynistic aspects of their movement? Not at all – they seem to think they’re doing women a favour. “People often compare our group to Handmaid’s Tale-like thinking,” Malcolm told the Telegraph. “[A]nd I’m like: excuse me, do you know what happens if we, the voluntary movement, fails ... ? Cultures will eventually find a way to fix this; how horrifying those mechanisms are depends on whether or not our group finds an ethical way.” It’s a warning that sounds distinctly like a threat.

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Extinction Rebellion activists stage a funeral march with white painted children's prams, London, 31 August 2021. Photograph: Wiktor Szymanowicz/NurPhoto/REX/Shutterstock

[OpinionChildren](#)

**Are you a good parent? OK, so what
are you doing to protect your child
from climate collapse?**

[Elizabeth Cripps](#)



An important part of parenting is securing children's future. Too many of us are reading bedtime stories in a house that's burning down

Fri 21 Apr 2023 05.00 EDTLast modified on Fri 21 Apr 2023 05.36 EDT

Parents do a lot. We spend hours reading stories or freezing on the edges of sports pitches. We buy food, clothes, buggies, car seats, bikes, music lessons, gadgets, [parties](#), holidays, not to mention [hundreds of toys](#). But here's the bad news. While we obsess about our kids as individuals, we're missing a last-ditch collective chance to save them from [environmental catastrophe](#).

Take that seriously, and being a "good" mum or dad is about much more than what you do with your child or the opportunities you buy them. It becomes political.

There are some things we owe our own children because they *are* our children, over and above whatever we should do for other people. That's commonsense morality; it's also what most philosophers think. Some say this is because most parents bring new people into the world, rendering

them vulnerable to its dangers. Others ground this duty in a special commitment: a promise, implicit or explicit, to take on this incredible role.

Whichever of these you start with, good parenting means doing two things. It means looking after our children as children – feeding them, sheltering them, loving and caring for them, and giving them scope to play – and empowering them to thrive as adults. When we cajole our kids to clean their teeth, teach them times tables or referee play dates, we're not just looking after them now: we're trying to secure their future.

Only we aren't securing it. Even in [the UK](#), our children face [floods](#), droughts and [heatwaves](#), food insecurity, [spreading disease](#) and a plethora of mental-health conditions. Then there is the wider toll: an ecologically devastated world, denuded of countless [non-human species](#) and rife with devastating [injustice](#); and the still-worse future awaiting our children's children.

Some philosophers think this iterates. Just as my wellbeing is caught up in that of those I love most – my children – so they cannot truly flourish unless their kids can lead a decent life. Put another way, we wrong them terribly by leaving them the choice between not having kids of their own and bringing them into desperate suffering. But the same is true of our grandchildren, and so on into distant generations. Reason back, and our kids need us to protect the planet for all [their descendants](#).



‘This means doing some things differently; bringing children up motivated and empowered to fight the climate crisis, not hooked on the things that feed it.’ The Cop26 conference in Glasgow, 2021. Photograph: Dominika Zarzycka/NurPhoto/REX/Shutterstock

Whether or not you accept this last philosophical twist, one thing is clear. Our own kids risk a broken future because, between us, we’re destroying the world they will be adults in. Ignore that and we make a mockery of everything else we do to set them up for health, happiness and success; we’re reading bedtime stories in a house that’s burning down. Face up to it, and we may just become truly good parents.

Of course, I can’t save my children from the climate crisis alone. Nor can you. But in our interdependent world, morality is unavoidably collective. As parents, we can – and must – protect them all between us.

This means doing some things differently with our kids. It means bringing them up motivated and empowered to fight the climate crisis, not hooked on the things that feed it. In other words, more communication, more bikes and trains, less meat and dairy; more time outside and fewer throwaway gadgets or plastic toys. (In the process of focusing on outdoor play, incidentally, we could directly boost our children’s physical and [mental health](#).)

Most crucially, though, it means becoming advocates for them: acting together to challenge corporations and governments. Parents have economic clout. The global kids' clothing market alone is worth [\\$170bn globally](#); the baby food market close to [\\$90bn](#). There are also an awful lot of us. Four out of five UK women born in 1975 had had at least one child by 2020. We have a loud collective voice – and some parents are already shouting.

In the 1980s, a group of Black mothers who lived on Carver Terrace in Texarkana in the US discovered they were bringing up their children on houses [built on toxic waste](#). Led by Patsy Oliver, they demanded redress, ultimately getting Congress to buy out the homes. In London, mothers on both sides of the divide successfully objected when a developer tried to [exclude poorer kids](#) from a play park.

In the climate emergency, grassroots parent-activist groups are growing, building networks and doing what harassed mums and dads do best: responding to crisis creatively, with love and determination. They target fossil-fuel enablers with [Mary Poppins](#) or Mother Earth song-and-dance routines outside Lloyd's of London offices, or [superhero protests](#) at the home of BlackRock's chief executive, Larry Fink. They march, [petition](#) political and corporate leaders, and speak directly to them as parents.

I'm not saying this is easy. Parenting is already a precarious juggling act, especially given childcare costs. But I am saying it's necessary. I know it takes herculean efforts for some parents just to keep their kids fed and warm, especially single parents or those caring for disabled children. They cannot take on more. But the rest of us could think very seriously about our priorities.

I never wanted to be an activist but I'll be [demanding climate justice](#) this weekend in London with other parents determined to turn fear into hope. I'll be there because it's what I should do for my own kids, as well as everyone else. And I'll be there because everything I just said as a philosopher can be more simply put as a mother. I love my children, and I'm desperate to protect their future.

- Elizabeth Cripps is a writer and moral philosopher at the University of Edinburgh, and the author of *Parenting on Earth: A Philosopher's Guide to Doing Right By Your Kids – and Everyone Else*
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‘Authoritarian British voters have a history of ultimately preferring Tory toughness to the Labour version, as Keir Starmer may discover in Downing Street – if not earlier.’ Photograph: Stefan Rousseau/PA

[OpinionPolitics](#)

Britain is the most socially liberal it's ever been. Could somebody let our politicians know?

[Andy Beckett](#)



There is a seemingly limitless supply of reactionary politics on offer today. But it looks increasingly out of step with reality

Fri 21 Apr 2023 03.00 EDTLast modified on Fri 21 Apr 2023 09.15 EDT

If you're a social conservative in Britain, these are the best of times and the worst of times. They are the worst because, as the rightwing press warns daily, liberal and other subversive values are spreading: in universities, cultural bodies, local councils, corporate boardrooms and big cities. Even private schools, previously assumed to be a reliable conservative production line, are showing signs of malfunction. "The hard-left's woke private school revolution is here to stay," [despaired the Telegraph](#) last year. "Private schools have started eagerly introducing their pupils to all the hottest new progressive ideas."

Yet while social conservatism appears to be under threat in many institutions, in politics it seems more influential than ever. On complex issues such as crime, immigration, patriotism and the value of work, family and the monarchy, [Labour](#) and the Tories compete to offer the most traditionalist stances and policies, presented in a ritualised language

calculated to appeal to socially conservative voters: “crackdowns”, “security”, “stability”, “respect”.

Meanwhile, Reform UK – the descendent of Ukip currently luring away a crucial portion of the Tory vote – has moved from Brexit purism to promising to “stop all the woke nonsense”. And the SNP, while officially still liberal on social issues, last month almost elected as its leader [Kate Forbes](#), who has expressed highly conservative views on equal marriage, transgender rights and sex outside marriage. The SNP’s continuation as a socially progressive force suddenly looks less assured.



‘The pipe-smoking, calculating Wilson was hardly a 60s radical. But he recognised that Britain was changing.’ Photograph: Frank Martin/The Guardian

To an extent, social conservatism’s political strength can be explained by Britain’s current voting habits and electoral geography. Whether in any future Scottish independence referendum or in Westminster elections, the voters that many party strategists believe matter most are middle-aged or older, traditional in outlook, disproportionately likely to vote but fickle. Some of them live in the endlessly examined red wall; others in rural and

small-town Scotland, which the SNP is assumed to need as much as its younger, more liberal urban strongholds.

This month, the influential centre-left pressure group, [Labour Together](#), identified a further supposedly vital category of illiberal voter. [“Stevenage woman”](#) was said to be like many voters in suburban England: “young, hard-working, but struggling to get by ... leaning a little towards social conservatism”. Britain’s supermarket shelves may regularly be empty these days, but when it comes to socially conservative politics, there is a seemingly limitless supply.

Yet what if that supply is outstripping the actual demand for it? What if our politics is out of step with the way many Britons think about social issues, and how they behave in their own lives?

Gloomy liberals may be surprised to learn that the latest edition of the authoritative [British Social Attitudes survey](#) concludes that “Britain has become markedly more liberal ... over the course of the last decade”. On issues such as immigration, and equal opportunities for women and racial and sexual minorities, “once widely shared assumptions” of a traditional kind “are now being challenged, and ... this development is not confined to a supposed cultural and educational elite”. Much of our politics is lagging behind social trends, the survey implies.

This could mean that Westminster politicians, in order to remain relevant, will ultimately have to liberalise their positions – as the Conservatives eventually did by following the Thatcher government’s [section 28](#), which banned “the promotion of homosexuality” by local authorities, with David Cameron’s legislation for [equal marriage](#). Yet such shifts within parties can take an awfully long time – 25 years in that case – and in the meantime, wider democratic politics is damaged. A major overlooked factor in our modern disillusionment with politicians is that so many socially conservative policies seem cynical and performative, rather than sincere and practical. How many Britons, even those with an authoritarian outlook, really believe that yet another “crackdown on crime” is going to work?

Moreover, many voters know that the lives of politicians often don’t match their stern public stances. As prime minister, Boris Johnson presided over a

benefits system designed by his party to punish poor people for having more than two children, while being typically evasive about his own fathering of more than half a dozen. For Tory politicians especially, as for the tabloid moralisers who urge them on, “traditional values” tend to be something you advocate for everyone else, while living less strictly yourself.

The privileged position of social conservatives in our press and politics also artificially prolongs the life of reactionary attitudes, which are often based more on myths, fear and prejudice than everyday realities. In focus groups held by the main parties in red wall constituencies, voters regularly express a deep hostility to immigrants – while living in places where for decades the population problem has been people leaving rather than arriving.

Important Labour figures argue that “respecting” such views is simply good politics, given the electoral system, which always hugely empowers swing voters, who tend not to have the most progressive values. But even if Labour wins office – an outcome that feels less certain again after weeks of inconclusive squabbles with the Tories about who is toughest on crime – siding with illiberal Britain may be storing up trouble. If being tough on crime was an effective approach, we would have one of Europe’s lowest crime rates, rather than just one of its highest prison populations.

Authoritarian British voters have a history of ultimately preferring Tory toughness to the Labour version, as Keir Starmer may discover in Downing Street – if not earlier. He has been talking up his prosecutorial credentials for months, but this week Rishi Sunak started calling him “Sir Softy”, regardless. Sunak’s smirk as he said it in the Commons suggested the Tories think the smear has potential.

This country has not had a socially liberal government for a very long time – arguably not since Harold Wilson’s premierships in the 60s and 70s. He abolished the death penalty, passed our first laws against racial discrimination, legislated for equal pay for women, loosened divorce law and legalised homosexuality. The pipe-smoking, calculating Wilson was hardly a 60s radical. But he recognised that Britain was changing, that his party could guide and benefit from that change, and that where politically

possible Labour ought to be on the side of freedom and against prejudice. It's well past time that another Labour prime minister did the same.

- Andy Beckett is a Guardian columnist

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Smoke rises during clashes between the Sudanese armed forces and the paramilitary Rapid Support Forces (RSF) on Friday. Photograph: Anadolu Agency/Getty Images

[Sudan](#)

Sudan ceasefire fails as gunfire and shelling continues in Khartoum

Witnesses report shooting in north, west and centre of city, including during call for Eid prayers.

[Jason Burke](#) and [Zeinab Mohammed Salih](#) in Khartoum

Fri 21 Apr 2023 08.39 EDTFirst published on Thu 20 Apr 2023 23.56 EDT

New efforts to halt fighting in [Sudan](#) failed on Friday, as residents of the capital, Khartoum, reported intense shelling and gunfights between soldiers and gunmen from the paramilitary Rapid Support Forces (RSF).

Witnesses said there was shooting in the north, west and centre of the city, including during the call for special early-morning Eid prayers.

The RSF earlier said it would respect a 72-hour truce on humanitarian grounds, but bombing and shelling was reported in several areas of Khartoum after the 6am ceasefire was due to commence.

Both the UN secretary general, António Guterres, and the US secretary of state, Antony Blinken, had separately called for a ceasefire of “at least” three days to mark Eid al-Fitr, the end of the Ramadan fast, in the mostly Muslim country.

Other diplomats, including representatives of the African Union and several Middle East states, were in touch with both sides in the conflict on Thursday in a fresh attempt to broker a truce.

Though some residents of Khartoum told the Guardian the night had been quieter than others since the outbreak of fighting last weekend, witnesses reported the crackle of intense gunfire continuing on Friday morning, with columns of black smoke rising across the city.

Army troops brandishing semi-automatic weapons were greeted by cheers on one street, footage released by the military on Friday showed. Reuters verified the location of the video, in the north of the city, but could not immediately verify when it was filmed. The army separately claimed it had begun “clearing hotbeds of rebel groups” around Khartoum.



Soldiers on a street in Khartoum in a screengrab of footage released on Friday by the Sudanese army. Photograph: Sudanese Armed Forces/Reuters

The Central Committee of Sudan Doctors said several areas of Khartoum had been exposed to shelling and clashes between the armed forces and the RSF.

“We call on all citizens to exercise caution, stay home, close doors and windows and lie down,” the committee said. “We also call on these forces to be responsible and immediately stop fighting to protect innocent lives.”

The World Health Organization said on Friday that it had recorded a toll of 413 people killed and 3,551 injured since the fighting erupted on Saturday, but the true figures are thought to be much higher.

The conflict has pitted army units loyal to Sudan’s military ruler, Abdel Fattah al-Burhan, against the RSF, led by Mohamed Hamdan Dagalo, known as Hemedti, who is deputy head of the ruling council. Their power struggle has derailed a shift to civilian rule and raised fears of a long, brutal civil war.

As fighting continued on Friday, Burhan appeared on television for the first time since hostilities began, to deliver an Eid address as in previous years.

Sitting behind a desk, dressed in military uniform and with two Sudanese flags in the background, he made no mention of a truce.

“For Eid this year, our country is bleeding: destruction, desolation and the sound of bullets have taken precedence over joy,” he said. “We hope that we will come out of this ordeal more united ... a single army, a single people ... towards a civilian power.”

The RSF said in a statement early on Friday morning that it would respect a ceasefire that “coincides with the blessed Eid al-Fitr ... to open humanitarian corridors to evacuate citizens and give them the opportunity to greet their families”. There was no immediate comment from the Sudanese army.



Sudanese army soldiers loyal to army chief Abdel Fattah al-Burhan, at a checkpoint in the Red Sea city of Port Sudan. Photograph: AFP/Getty Images

Thousands of residents have streamed out of the capital since fighting began. On Thursday the UN said [up to 20,000 people had also fled](#) clashes in Darfur to seek safety in neighbouring Chad, with many lacking basic requirements such as food, water and shelter.

The UN's refugee agency said the majority of those arriving were women and children, who were sheltering out in the open, some of whom had been caught up in the fighting that has raged around the country for six days.

“Due to the violence experienced by those crossing the border, psychosocial support is also among our top priorities,” the agency said, citing figures from its teams at the border.

In Nyala, a city in South Darfur, RSF forces have wrested control of many former army bases. Dozens of facilities run by international aid organisations in the region have been looted or burned, along with government offices, and many civilians killed or wounded, according to local civil society sources.

Cyrus Paye, a project coordinator for Médecins Sans Frontières, described conditions at a hospital supported by the organisation in El Fasher in North Darfur as “catastrophic”.

The hospital had seen 279 wounded patients since the fighting began on Saturday, of whom 44 had died. The majority of the casualties were civilians who were hit by stray bullets, including many children.

“There is currently heavy fighting in El Fasher,” Paye said. “It is very unsafe because of the shooting and the shelling. There are so many patients that they are being treated on the floor in the corridors because there simply aren't enough beds to accommodate the vast number of wounded.”

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A spokesperson said President Museveni had asked MPs to consider the rehabilitation of ‘psychologically disturbed persons’. Photograph: Hajarah Nalwadda/AP

[Uganda](#)

Uganda’s president refuses to sign new hardline anti-LGBTQ+ bill

Yoweri Museveni sends bill imposing death penalty for homosexuality back to parliament for reconsideration

[Samuel Okiror](#) in Kampala

Fri 21 Apr 2023 09.53 EDTFirst published on Thu 20 Apr 2023 16.51 EDT

Uganda’s president, Yoweri Museveni, has refused to sign into law a [controversial anti-LGBTQ+ bill](#) that imposes the death penalty for homosexuality, requesting that it be returned to parliament for reconsideration.

The decision was announced on Thursday after a meeting between the president and ruling party MPs who resolved to return the hardline bill to the national assembly “with proposals for its improvement”.

It was not immediately clear whether the proposed changes would make the proposed law even tougher, although a spokesperson said the president had asked lawmakers to consider “the issue of rehabilitation”. “I totally agree with the bill, but my original problem is the psychologically disoriented person,” said Museveni, according to a statement.

Museveni has 30 days within which to either sign the legislation into law, return it to parliament for revisions, or veto it and inform the parliamentary speaker. It may, however, pass into law without the president’s assent if he returns it to parliament twice.

The bill in its current form imposes capital and life-imprisonment sentences for gay sex, up to 14 years for “attempted” homosexuality, and 20 years in jail for “recruitment, promotion and funding” of same-sex “activities”.

An earlier version of the bill prompted widespread international criticism and was later [nullified by Uganda’s constitutional court](#) on procedural grounds. In Uganda, a largely conservative Christian east African country, homosexual sex is already punishable by life imprisonment.

The bill, which the UN human rights head, Volker Türk, last month described as [“shocking and discriminatory”](#), was passed almost unanimously by 389 MPs on 21 March.

The decision to return the bill to parliament prompted mixed reactions, with human rights campaigners calling for it to be shelved entirely.

“This is the reprieve the LGBTIQ community needed,” Clare Byarugaba, an LGBTQ+ advocate in Kampala, said in a [tweet](#).

“If you have never had an abhorrent state-sanctioned hate bill that is a matter of life and death hanging over your head every waking morning, hold your freedom dear. The struggle continues,” she wrote.

Adrian Jjuuko, of the Human Rights Awareness and Promotion Forum in Kampala, said Museveni's decision offered another chance to defeat the bill, but warned that the president's ambiguous comments were still troubling.

“He seems to only want to exclude from punishment persons who come out as gay and seek rehabilitation. This would have the impact of turning some LGBTI persons against others as the one who reports first and plays victim in a consensual relationship would get away scot-free. Secondly, the president seems to have no problem with the vague language around promotion which essentially make any discussions around LGBTIQ to be promotion of homosexuality,” Jjuuko said.

Supporters of the bill also welcomed the move. “It's a good step forward to include in the legislation an amnesty for those giving up sodomy voluntarily,” said pastor Martin Ssempe, one of the main backers of the bill. “And to include in the legislation a road map of rehabilitation including rehabilitation centres. Both amendments are human and legitimate,” he said.

Agnès Callamard, the secretary general of Amnesty International, said the “deeply repressive” bill should be dropped. “Instead of persecuting LGBTI people, the Ugandan authorities should protect their rights by aligning their laws with international human rights law and standards,” she said.

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“Criminalising consensual same-sex conduct blatantly violates numerous human rights, including the rights to dignity, equality before the law, equal protection by the law, and non-discrimination.”

On 17 April, a court in the eastern town of Jinja denied bail to six young educators working for healthcare organisations after they were arrested and charged with “forming part of a criminal sexual network”. The Uganda police force confirmed that it conducted forced anal exams on the six individuals and tested them for HIV.

More than 110 LGBTQ+ people in Uganda reported incidents including arrests, sexual violence, evictions and public undressing to the advocacy group Sexual Minorities Uganda (Smug) in February alone. Transgender people were disproportionately affected, said the group.

Museveni has claimed that his government is attempting to resist western efforts to “normalise” what he called “deviations”. “The western countries should stop wasting the time of humanity by trying to impose their practices on other people,” he said.

This week, a group of leading scientists and academics from Africa and across the world urged Museveni to veto the bill, saying that “homosexuality is a normal and natural variation of human sexuality”. Responding to Museveni’s call for a [scientific and medical opinion on homosexuality](#), the authors of the letter wrote: “The science on this subject is crystal clear.”

Prof Glenda Gray, the president of the South African Medical Research Council, said: “Being gay is natural and normal, wherever it occurs across the world. Sexual orientation knows no borders. Despite the rhetoric, homosexuality is not a pernicious western import.”

“If anything, it’s state-sponsored homophobia that’s un-African and against the principles of *ubuntu* [humanity toward others], not homosexuality,” she said.

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/global-development/2023/apr/20/ugandas-president-refuses-to-sign-new-hardline-anti-gay-bill>

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Rightwing group Moms for Liberty, which has been behind book-banning campaigns in the US, said only eight of its candidates won election. Photograph: Giorgio Viera/AFP/Getty Images

[US education](#)

Rightwing extremists defeated by Democrats in US school board elections

Republican-backed culture warrior candidates fare poorly in Illinois and Wisconsin, offering hope to the left

[Adam Gabbatt](#)

[@adamgabbatt](#)

Fri 21 Apr 2023 05.00 EDTLast modified on Fri 21 Apr 2023 09.13 EDT

Scores of rightwing US extremists were defeated in school-board elections in April, in a victory for the left and what Democrats hope could be effective for running against [Republicans](#) in the year ahead.

In Illinois, Democrats said more than 70% of school-board candidates it had endorsed won their races, often defeating the kinds of anti-LGBTQ+ culture-warrior candidates who have [taken control of school boards across the country](#).

Republican-backed candidates in Wisconsin also fared poorly. Moms for Liberty, a rightwing group linked to wealthy Republican donors which has been [behind book-banning campaigns](#) in the US, said only eight of its endorsed candidates won election to school boards, and other conservative groups also reported disappointing performances.

The results come as education and free-speech organizations have warned of a new surge in book bans in public schools in America. Over the past two years, conservatives in US states have [removed hundreds of books](#) from school classrooms and libraries. The targeted books have largely been texts that address race and LGBTQ+ issues, or are written by people of color or LGBTQ+ authors.

“Fortunately, the voters saw through the hidden extremists who were running for school board – across the [Chicago] suburbs especially,” JB Pritzker, the Democratic governor of Illinois, [said](#) after the results came in.

“Really, the extremists got trounced yesterday.”

Pritzker added: “I’m glad that those folks were shown up and, frankly, tossed out.”

The Democratic party of Illinois spent \$300,000 on races in Illinois, the Chicago Tribune [reported](#), endorsing dozens of candidates. The party said 84 of 117 candidates it had recommended won their races.

Teachers’ unions, including the [Illinois](#) Education Association, endorsed candidates in school board elections around the state. The IEA backed candidates in about 100 races, and about 90% of those candidates won, said Kathi Griffin, the organization’s president.

“I would hope that the tide is turning, to make sure that people who want to have those [school board] positions because they want to do good for our kids, continue [to get elected],” Griffin said.

“I think that oftentimes these fringe candidates are funded with dark money. That dark money comes from outside our state.”

The results were disappointing for conservative groups, who had pumped money into races.

The 1776 Project, a political action committee that received funding from Richard Uihlein, a billionaire GOP donor, said [only a third](#) of the [63 candidates](#) it had backed in Illinois and Wisconsin won their races. [Politico](#) first reported on the lackluster performances.

Union-endorsed candidates won two-thirds of their school-board races in Milwaukee, the Milwaukee Journal Sentinel [reported](#), although Republican-supported candidates performed better in rural areas.

Ben Hardin, executive director of the Democratic party of Illinois, said “values were on the line in these races”.

“We knew this work wouldn’t be easy, especially given the organized movement from the far right to disguise their true agenda, but we’re grateful that voters saw through the falsehoods and turned out to support credible community advocates,” he said.

“I’m proud that Illinoisans once again voted for fairness, equity and inclusion in our state.”

With other states holding school board elections later this year – and a critical presidential election in 2024 – the successes offered some hope for [Democrats](#).

At the local level, at least, Griffin said the results “showed the value of having relationships within the community”.

“When you have teachers who are part of the community, who have relationships with parents, with other community members who engage in community activities and support that community, there’s a level of trust that is built and that has happened across our state,” she said.

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People bang pots and pans while French President Emmanuel Macron seeks to diffuse tensions in a televised address to the nation on 17 April 2023 in Paris. Photograph: Thibault Camus/AP

[France](#)

The long history of protesting with pots and pans

Demonstrations against Emmanuel Macron using items usually found in the kitchen are part of a proud tradition that stretches across the world

[Helen Sullivan](#) and agencies

Thu 20 Apr 2023 23.45 EDTLast modified on Fri 21 Apr 2023 14.47 EDT

“At my home, saucepans and eggs are for cooking,” Emmanuel Macron said after authorities in the village of Ganges announced a ban on “portable sound equipment” ahead of a speech the French president was due to make.

The comment came amid increasingly vocal opposition to Macron’s controversial move to raise the [pension age from 62 to 64](#), with protesters

banging pots and pans to express their anger.

As he tours the country trying to mollify the population, the president has come up against large numbers of protesters using kitchen equipment to make their displeasure clear; each of them part of a proud racket-making history that stretches from [France](#) to Argentina, Algeria and Lebanon.



Protesters shout during the ‘pot concert’ against Macron’s speech in Toulouse Photograph: Alain Pitton/NurPhoto/Shutterstock

Banging saucepans in France is thought to hark back to a middle ages ritual in which villagers would seek to humiliate an ill-matched marriage – generally a widower to a much younger bride – with a concert of saucepans, or “casseroles” as they are known.

The saucepan’s double life as a symbol of protest took off in the 1830s after the July Revolution that led to the abdication of Charles X.



Demonstrators take part in a concert of pans to protest French President Emmanuel Macron's televised address to the nation on 17 April 2023. Photograph: Geoffroy van der Hasselt/AFP/Getty Images

Republicans opposed to the new king, Louis Philippe, "sought to make their voices heard by borrowing from reality a customary ritual" known as charivari, or making loud noise, French historian Emmanuel Fureix explained to France Culture radio in 2017.

By the 20th century, the humble saucepan, lid, fork and spoon were taking over the streets.

In the 1950s and 60s there was pot-bashing in Algeria during the country's war of independence, by supporters of the French far-right paramilitary group OAS who wanted to keep the country French.

But the pot only really began to make a racket when it crossed the Atlantic to Latin America, where the ear-splitting tradition of mass "cacerolazos" - banging pots with wooden spoons or bashing them together like cymbals - was born.



Anti-government protesters beat spoons against pots and pans, during ongoing protests against the Lebanese government, in Beirut in 2019
Photograph: Hussein Malla/AP

The first major breakout came in 1971 in Chile against food shortages during the regime of Salvador Allende.

Forty years later, tens of thousands of pot bangers took to the streets of Buenos Aires after finding themselves cut off from their bank savings in the midst of a severe economic crisis.

Since then the saucepan has been a tool of protest across the globe, from Myanmar to Canada. In October 2019, [protesters in Lebanon](#) hit pots and pans, continuing the ritual from balconies even as the mass protests slowed down. At [anti-government protests](#) this year in Kenya, empty pots were both a symbol of the cost of living protest and a way to make noise.



A protester bangs an empty pot on the street during a mass rally in Kenya in 2023 Photograph: Yasuyoshi Chiba/AFP/Getty Images

In Myanmar, where banging pots is believed to be a way to drive the devil from your home, [people protested the 2021 military coup against Aung San Suu Kyi nightly with clashing metal](#), picking up their instruments at 8pm and finding themselves joined by the honking and ping-pong of car horns and bicycle bells.

Clanging pots have made a loud return to France in recent decades as a way to express discontent with politicians and policies.

In 2017, the campaign rallies of conservative presidential candidate Francois Fillon drew sporadic saucepan protests, in a play on the French expression “trainer des casseroles” (skeletons in the closet).

Fillon’s “saucepans” related to a scandal that would scupper his candidacy and land him with a jail sentence, after it was revealed he had [given his wife a fake job](#) as a parliamentary assistant.

Six years later, President Emmanuel Macron’s unpopular pension changes have elicited a new chorus of pot banging.

Pot concerts were organised countrywide on Monday evening to drown out the president when he addressed the nation after signing the bill into law.

And while the reported ban on sound equipment ahead of the president's visit to the Herault region may force protesters to shelve their pots, smartphone apps such as "iCacerolazo" and "Cassolada 2.0" that reproduce the metal clanging suggest some won't be easily silenced.

Agence France-Presse contributed to this report

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Lachlan Murdoch's representatives have announced he will discontinue defamation proceedings against Private Media, publisher of Crikey. Photograph: Brendan McDermid/Reuters

[Lachlan Murdoch](#)

Lachlan Murdoch drops defamation proceedings against independent Australian publisher Crikey

Move comes days after Fox reached a \$US787.5m settlement with the voting equipment company Dominion in a separate defamation lawsuit

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[Amanda Meade](#)

Thu 20 Apr 2023 22.28 EDTFirst published on Thu 20 Apr 2023 20.10 EDT

Lachlan Murdoch has dropped his defamation proceedings against the independent [Australian media](#) company Private Media, the publisher of Crikey.

Murdoch [launched defamation proceedings](#) in August against the independent news site over an article published in June that named the Murdoch family as an “unindicted co-conspirator” in the [US Capitol attack](#). The CEO of the small publisher hailed the news on Friday as a “victory for free speech”.

The [Fox](#) Corporation CEO said he was ending the case in light of the settlement in the US of the Dominion lawsuit against Fox News.

The federal court trial had been set down for October to run for three weeks, with Murdoch expected to attend at least some of the proceedings.

Murdoch said he was confident he would have won but he “does not wish to further enable Crikey’s use of the court to litigate a case from another jurisdiction that has already been settled and facilitate a marketing campaign designed to attract subscribers and boost their profits”.

Murdoch’s lawyers filed a notice in the Australian federal court on Friday morning which was a single line: “Pursuant to rule 26.12(2)(a)(ii) LACHLAN KEITH MURDOCH, the Applicant, discontinues the whole of the proceedings. Date: 21 April 2023”.

Guardian Australia understands Private Media was blindsided by the announcement and is likely to demand costs from Murdoch.

Lachlan Murdoch has discontinued his defamation case against Crikey. He’ll be up for Crikey’s legal costs. We and our client are well pleased.

— marquelawyers (@marquelawyers) [April 21, 2023](#)

A GoFundMe campaign launched by the publisher has raised \$588,735 and Crikey is yet to say what will happen to those donations.

Murdoch's lawyer, John Churchill, said on Friday that he had filed a notice of discontinuance in the defamation proceedings.

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"It is a matter of public record that Crikey admits that there is no truth to the imputations that were made about Mr Murdoch in the article," Churchill said.

"In their latest attempt to change their defence strategy, Crikey has tried to introduce thousands of pages of documents from [a defamation case in another jurisdiction](#), which has now settled.

"In that case, in the US state of Delaware, the trial judge ruled the events of January 6, 2021, in the US Capitol, were not relevant. Further, the plaintiff Dominion Voting Systems made clear it would not argue that Fox News caused the events of January 6, and at no point did it ever argue that Mr Murdoch was personally responsible for the events of January 6. Yet this is what Crikey's article alleged and what Crikey is attempting to argue in Australia.

"Mr Murdoch remains confident that the court would ultimately find in his favour, however he does not wish to further enable Crikey's use of the court to litigate a case from another jurisdiction that has already been settled and facilitate a marketing campaign designed to attract subscribers and boost their profits," Churchill said.

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The CEO of Private Media Will Hayward said it was a substantial victory for legitimate public interest journalism.

“We stand by what we published last June, and everything we laid out in our defence to the court,” Hayward said. “The imputations drawn by Murdoch from that article were ridiculous.

Hayward said it was absurd for Churchill to claim Murdoch “remains confident” he would have won.

“The fact is, Murdoch sued us, and then dropped his case.”

“We are proud to have exposed the hypocrisy and abuse of power of a media billionaire. This is a victory for free speech. We won.”

Earlier this month, federal court Justice Michael Wigney ordered the parties into a second round of mediation, saying the case was being [driven by ego](#).

“It seems to me that both parties at such a mediation could take stock of what is turning into a scorched-earth policy in relation to both sides of the litigation,” he said.

“There does seem to be a hint that this case is being driven more by ... ego and hubris and ideology than anything else.”

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Headlines tuesday 18 april 2023

- [Live SNP treasurer Colin Beattie arrested in connection with funding investigation, say police](#)
- [SNP Treasurer arrested in party funding investigation, say police](#)
- [Ukraine West prepares for Putin to use 'whatever tools he's got left'](#)
- [Live Russia-Ukraine: Putin attends military command meeting in occupied Kherson](#)

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SNP in ‘total meltdown’ following arrests and party funding investigation, say Scottish Tories – as it happened

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Colin Beattie. Photograph: Andrew Cowan/Scottish Parliament/PA

[UK news](#)

SNP treasurer arrested in party funding investigation

Colin Beattie is in custody and being questioned by detectives, says Police Scotland

[Severin Carrell](#) *Scotland editor*

[@severincarrell](#)

Tue 18 Apr 2023 10.27 EDTFirst published on Tue 18 Apr 2023 04.16 EDT

The Scottish National party's treasurer, Colin Beattie, has been arrested as a suspect in the police investigation into the party's funding and finances.

Police Scotland said Beattie, 71, had been taken into custody and was being interviewed by detectives.

Beattie's detention follows the arrest earlier this month of Peter Murrell, Nicola Sturgeon's husband and the former chief executive of the SNP, at their home in Glasgow, and the seizure of a motorhome parked outside Murrell's mother's house in Fife.

Murrell was released later that day without charge, pending further investigation.

Beattie, the SNP MSP for Midlothian North and Musselburgh and a former banker, had previously served as party treasurer for 16 years until he lost the post in an internal election to Douglas Chapman. Chapman then resigned as treasurer in 2021 after protesting that he had not had sufficient access to the party's financial information. Beattie stepped in to replace him.

In a brief statement, the force said: "A 71-year-old man has today, Tuesday, 18 April 2023, been arrested as a suspect in connection with the ongoing investigation into the funding and finances of the Scottish National party. The man is in custody and is being questioned by Police Scotland detectives. A report will be sent to the Crown Office and Procurator Fiscal Service."

Humza Yousaf, Sturgeon's successor as first minister, told reporters at Holyrood he would be talking to Beattie in due course about whether Beattie would remain as party treasurer and as an SNP member of Holyrood's public audit committee.

Yousaf said Beattie's arrest "was a very serious matter", but added: "People are innocent until proven guilty."

Beattie's arrest took place hours before the first minister made a significant policy statement at Holyrood where Yousaf plans to set out the policy priorities of his new government, in an effort to reset the party after weeks of in-fighting.

Yousaf acknowledged the timing of today's police action was therefore "far from ideal".

The police investigation was launched in 2021 after complaints were made about the SNP's handling of over £600,000 in donations given to the party, ostensibly for a fresh independence referendum campaign launched in 2019.

It emerged that money was not put into a separate, segregated SNP account but Sturgeon said it was all accounted for, and the equivalent figure would be spent by the party on that referendum campaign.

Speaking in 2021, Sturgeon said: "Money hasn't gone missing; all money goes through the SNP accounts independently all fully audited. We don't hold separate accounts – we're under no legal requirement to do that. Our accounts are managed on a cashflow basis, but every penny we raise to support the campaign for independence will be spent on the campaign for independence."

So far, no campaign has been launched. Last week, it emerged that Johnston Carmichael, the accountancy firm, quit as the SNP's external auditors.

On Saturday, Beattie reportedly told the SNP executive committee the party was having difficulty balancing its books because it had lost 30,000 members over the last 12 months and had extra costs to pay due to the police investigation.

Humza Yousaf, the newly elected SNP leader, said the party was solvent. Beattie backed Yousaf's main rival in the party leadership contest, Kate Forbes.

Opposition parties said Beattie's party membership should be suspended – a move that has precedent after other SNP parliamentarians were suspended after they came under investigation over financial issues.

Yousaf has previously rejected opposition demands to suspend Murrell and Sturgeon because of the police inquiry, and said on Tuesday he would not suspend Beattie.

Craig Hoy, the Scottish Conservative party chair, said Beattie should step down from his place on Holyrood's public audit committee until the police

investigation was over. He said the police investigation was “consuming the party”.

“Humza Yousaf has to get a grip of the situation, rather than stand by wringing his hands,” he said. “This extremely serious matter is escalating by the day and everyone in the SNP has a duty to be as transparent as possible about what they knew and when.”

Jackie Baillie, Scottish Labour’s deputy leader, said it was another “deeply concerning development” and that the Police Scotland investigation “must be allowed to proceed”.

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G7 ministers on Monday criticised Putin's plan to deploy tactical nuclear weapons in Belarus. Photograph: Gavriil Grigorov/Sputnik/Kremlin pool

[Russia](#)

West prepares for Putin to use 'whatever tools he's got left' in Ukraine

Officials ready for nuclear threats and cyber-attacks as part of Russian response to predicted counter-offensive

[Pippa Crerar](#) in Karuizawa, Japan

[@PippaCrerar](#)

Tue 18 Apr 2023 01.00 EDTLast modified on Tue 18 Apr 2023 03.55 EDT

Western leaders are preparing for Vladimir Putin to use “whatever tools he's got left” including nuclear threats and cyber-attacks in response to an expected Ukrainian counter-offensive against [Russia](#).

British officials at the [G7](#) foreign ministers' summit in Japan said they were expecting Russia to retaliate and “must be prepared” for extreme tactics as

it attempted to hold on to Ukrainian territory.

The former Russian president Dmitry Medvedev said last month that Moscow was ready for the Ukrainians to hit back, warning that his country would use “absolutely any weapon” if Kyiv attempted to retake Crimea, which was annexed by Russia in 2014.

There appeared to be an acknowledgment in Moscow that its forces might soon find themselves on the defensive in [Ukraine](#) as Russia’s own winter offensive appeared to be slowing down.

Russia’s nuclear rhetoric has united the G7 ministers, who issued a statement after their two-hour meeting on Monday condemning the threats as “unacceptable” and criticising Putin’s plan to deploy tactical nuclear weapons in Belarus.

G7 officials said there was an “open exchange of views” in the talks on the approach to the Ukrainian conflict, including on “future prospects” for bringing the war to an end, which Rishi Sunak has said would eventually be around the negotiating table.

However, Foreign Office sources suggested that the only way to finally resolve the conflict would be for Putin to withdraw his troops from Crimea and for the west to give Kyiv the tools to finish the job.

Despite pressure from Ukraine, and others including the former UK prime minister Boris Johnson, to increase military support – including more tanks and fighter jets – the UK believes it is providing what the country needs. Sources said it was already committing its “rainy day fund”.

A transatlantic group of former senior diplomats and high-level military advisers said on Monday that the war in Ukraine was on course to become a stalemate unless the west went “all in” and increased its level of military support.

The group said that “declarations of unwavering support” were not enough and “actions still fail to match the rhetoric” in a reflection of military

assessments in European capitals and Washington.

At the G7 summit, the ministers reaffirmed their commitment to “intensifying, fully coordinating and enforcing” sanctions against Russia, agreeing to be more coordinated to prevent evasion of the measures and to target third parties supplying weapons to Moscow.

It came as the foreign secretary, James Cleverly, demanded the release of a British-Russian opposition leader after he was sentenced to 25 years in prison by a court in Moscow, paying tribute to Vladimir Kara-Murza Jr for “bravely” denouncing Putin’s invasion of Ukraine.

The Kremlin critic, who has twice survived poisonings, was convicted on charges of treason and denigrating the Russian military in what he denounced as a show trial.

The Russian ambassador to the UK, Andrei Kelin, was summoned to the Foreign Office for a dressing down on Monday over Russia’s human rights obligations, including the right to a fair trial.

Meanwhile, the US secretary of state Antony Blinken’s G7 bilateral talks with his French counterpart, Catherine Colonna, over-ran, prompting speculation her talks with the US had been fraught.

The French president, Emmanuel Macron, provoked controversy last week when he said, on a flight back from China, that Europe should not become a “vassal” to the US on foreign policy.

He had previously been accused of naivety when he said Moscow must not be “humiliated” and would need security guarantees. G7 officials stressed that all member nations, including France, were united on the need to prevent Putin’s attempts to divide and conquer.

Eastern European governments, in particular, had accused Macron of failing to learn the lessons of the war. Without US military and financial support for Kyiv, more than 30 times that of France, Ukrainian resistance would have already crumbled, they believe.

In separate talks in Japan, G7 nations including UK, US, Canada, Japan and France formed an alliance to develop shared supply chains for nuclear fuel, aimed at pushing Russia out of the international nuclear energy market.

The UK's Department for Energy Security and Net Zero said the five countries would use their civil nuclear power sectors to undermine Russia's grip on supply chains, cutting off another means for Putin to fund his invasion of Ukraine.

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[Ukraine war live](#)Russia

Russia-Ukraine war live: Putin and Zelenskiy visit troops near frontline

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2023.04.18 - Spotlight

- 'It's not a race, it's a journey' Why a two-day, 75km trail run is a brilliant way to see the Peak District
- 'It made me wish I had made more records' Natalie Merchant on returning to music after losing her voice
- 'She was transgressing expectations' The Victorian war artist who inspired a drag show
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90% of the Peak Divide route between Manchester and Sheffield is run on trails and traffic-free ways. Photograph: Elliott Waring/Peak Divide

[Travel](#)

‘It’s not a race, it’s a journey’: why a two-day, 75km trail run is a brilliant

way to see the Peak District

Billed as an ‘ultra fun run’, the Peak Divide from Manchester to Sheffield is part of a growing trend of trail runs where excellent food and camaraderie are part of the experience

[Davey Brett](#)

Tue 18 Apr 2023 02.00 EDTLast modified on Tue 18 Apr 2023 11.51 EDT

Some trips lend themselves to the last minute and others do not. [Peak Divide](#), a two-day, supported 75km “ultra fun run” from Manchester to Sheffield is one that is best planned ahead. When I tell a friend I’m taking a spare spot with two days’ notice and almost no training, she says her joints are seizing up just at the thought of it. Co-founder Tom Reynolds texts me the day before the run telling me to rest and stay off my feet.

Some people call this burgeoning trend of multi-day running adventures “run-packing”; others refer to it as “fastpacking”. I’m in the latter group as I scramble around Manchester trying to source items from a list that includes trail running shoes, emergency foil blanket and fully-charged head-torch. My longest distance prior to this is 21km along a canal towpath, but Tom reassures me that this isn’t a race, it is a journey. And it isn’t just for trail runners, but for everyone.

It’s not difficult to see why trail running trips and holidays are on the rise, says Simon James, founder of [Run the Wild](#), which organises guided events in the Chilterns and the Alps. He cites increased interest in maintaining good mental health and the positive effects of getting into the outdoors after the pandemic. Founded a decade ago the company had its busiest year to date in 2022.



The Peak Divide's 76 runners gather in central Manchester before their 76km journey. Photograph: Dan Evans/Peak Divide

Like many great masterplans, notably the London Marathon, the idea for Peak Divide began in the pub. Over a pint one afternoon in February last year, founders Tom Reynolds, Luke Douglas and Stef Amato pondered the possibility of running from Manchester to Sheffield.

The trio share backgrounds in bike-packing, running and travel; Luke quickly set about planning a route and last weekend their daydream became a reality. We met – 76 runners of mixed abilities from across the country – at Manchester's Track Brewery taproom for a pre-run briefing. After a short ceremonial walk to the city's Vimto bottle monument, we were off on that day's 40km stretch.

The journey, 90% on off-road trails, had been carefully planned, with road crossings countable on one hand, beauty spots maximised and a team of "beacon runners" guiding groups at different paces. A steady 15km east along the Ashton canal out of the city to Audenshaw soon brought us to the village of Gee Cross on the edge of the Peak District. As Manchester faded into the distance behind us, Kinder Scout plateau – the highest point in the Peak District – beckoned in front.

Strangers quickly become friends, and at different parts of the route you switch between the motivator and motivated

A rest stop at 25km offered a chance to refill water bottles, pick up running snacks and indulge in portions of freshly cooked cheesy gnocchi before the final 15km slog across the western Peaks. After a challenging stretch navigating boulders, waterfalls and bogs we descended into Edale for the night's camping – not before a quick shot of rum at the aptly named Mount Malibu checkpoint. Luggage had been ferried over prior to our arrival.

The evening's spread of luscious carbs came courtesy of Manchester artisan bakery, Companio, with craft beers (alcoholic and non-alcoholic) from Track Brewing Co and Bristol's Left Handed Giant.

With thighs and calves burning, ankles almost rolled and a glowing sense of accomplishment from completing a marathon-length trail, I began to see how the Peak Divide makes sense. The shared masochism of an ultra trail run is a powerful social cohesive. Strangers quickly become friends and at different parts of the route you switch between the motivator and motivated. Awe-inspiring landscapes offer a soothing antidote to tired limbs.



Since the pandemic demand for guided trail runs “has gone through the roof”, especially among solo travellers and women. Photograph: Elliott Waring/Peak Divide

“It’s funny how trail running has become such a cool sport,” says Charlie Knights, founder of Pure Trails, a guided trail running company that organises trips across destinations as far-flung as Albania and Kyrgyzstan. Charlie says that since the pandemic “demand has gone through the roof.” As well as the health benefits of trail running, there’s a pragmatism to the trips. Trail runners cover double the distance they would on a walking holiday over a similar timeframe, which allows for more exploration. Combined with impressively curated food and drink elements, outings to historical sites, wellness workshops and boutique add-ons including saunas and spa hotels, a trail-running holiday becomes an attractive proposition, says Charlie, especially to solo travellers and women.

Back over on the eastern edge of the Peaks, the Steel City is on the horizon. I’m running with two strangers that I now feel a fraternal bond with. We’ve run through heather, across reservoirs and over grassland; navigated treacherous boulders and bogs, and shared snacks. As we drop through Sheffield’s gorgeous riverside parks and botanical gardens, an elderly woman walking her dog gasps when we tell her where we’ve run from.



The writer (centre) poses for an alternative finish line portrait alongside pals from his Manchester running club. Photograph: Cameron Williamson/apres sport

The second day's 35km ends on a final, hobbled hill climb to Perch Brewhouse in Sheffield, with the sound of fellow runners cheering me into the beer garden as I press "finish run" [on Strava](#). The atmosphere is one of pure elation.

On the train home to Manchester, the adrenaline slowly wears off as the landscapes I've just run through whirl past the window – and the magnitude of the trip finally dawns on me. The moment I get signal on the other side of the Hope Valley, I Google "running holidays" on my phone for inspiration. I think I've caught the bug.

The Peak Divide will run again on 20-21 April 2024. Register at peakdivide.com

More holidays for runners

Trails and Vines: Norfolk wine tasting tour

Two nights all-inclusive in Norfolk with daily runs delivered by England athletics coaches. Trails and Vines specialises in wine tastings at award-winning vineyards, with trips including home-cooked food, yoga and strength sessions.

From £395pp, trailsandvines.co.uk

Run the Wild: Introduction to the Alps

A two-day, combined 26km guided trip taking in pine forests and mountain balcony paths overlooking Mont Blanc in the French Alps. Includes two nights' accommodation in a four-star spa hotel, breakfast, dinner on the first night, refreshment stops (including wine and cheese tasting) and technical instruction and training plan.

From €575pp, runthewild.co.uk

Wild Running: Scotland sky running and yoga camp

Four days of guided runs through the dramatic mountainous terrain of Wester Ross. Includes four nights' stay in a hostel close to Loch Torridon,

fully qualified running and mountain guides and yoga sessions.
£420pp, wildrunning.co.uk

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‘I have not been putting my feet up!’ ... Natalie Merchant

[Music](#)

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‘It made me wish I had made more records’: Natalie Merchant on

returning to music after losing her voice

[Sarfraz Manzoor](#)

Emergency surgery on her spine led to months of enforced silence for the former 10,000 Maniacs singer-songwriter. But rather than take it easy, she's been raising her teenage daughter, campaigning against fracking and has a new album out

Tue 18 Apr 2023 02.38 EDTLast modified on Wed 19 Apr 2023 05.50 EDT

It was late 2018 and Natalie Merchant was in London visiting the V&A museum when she felt her arm start to tingle and then go numb. Next came intense pain. She flew home immediately and within days was in hospital having an MRI. The results were not good: she had a degenerative spinal disease. "My spinal column was collapsing into my spinal cord," Merchant says. "I needed to have emergency surgery." The six-hour operation involved making an incision below her throat and shunting her vocal cords to the side while surgeons removed three bones from her spine. When she regained consciousness after surgery Merchant discovered she could no longer sing. "It took me to a place of panic," she says. "It made me wish I had made more records."

Merchant had been a much-cherished singer-songwriter for more than four decades: she joined the alternative rock band 10,000 Maniacs at the age of 17 in 1981; 12 years later, she left to pursue a solo career. Now, an enforced silence stretched from weeks into months, and Merchant started imagining a post-music career sewing, creating artworks and gardening.

But I am meeting her in a London hotel where she is promoting Keep Your Courage, her first album of original material in nearly a decade, and just the tip of the iceberg of her recent activity. "I have not been putting my feet up!" says Merchant, now 59, as she outlines her work in community organising, and environmental campaigning against fracking. Prior to her medical emergency she also rearranged earlier songs for strings, directed a documentary on domestic violence, curated a 10-disc box set and recorded

a collection of songs based on old poems, lullabies and nonsense verse, all alongside raising her teenage daughter as a single mother.

It's almost as if I have to invent a new word to describe the music on this album

Merchant didn't write and record any new material thanks to the demands of motherhood. "Lyric writing demands solitude and when I am in that state there is no eating, no stopping. I won't leave the house for days until it's done," she says. "I did not want to do that to my daughter. I did not want to be one of those artists that valued my work more than my child. I thought if I never make another record, she is the accomplishment on my deathbed." Her spinal condition seemed to make the decision final.

While she was still unable to sing and with the world in lockdown, her friend (and Newsnight presenter) Kirsty Wark sent Merchant *The Long Take*, a novel written in narrative poetry by the Scottish poet Robin Robertson. "I remember opening the book, reading the first chapter and writing to him immediately," she says. "I then sent him a copy of my box set, he sent me some of his other books and I just fell in love with language again." They started corresponding, and – to her great relief – she regained her voice, and started writing songs inspired by their conversation.

These feature on *Keep Your Courage*, an album whose theme is love in its myriad guises. "Love will leave you wounded / love will bring you harm," she sings on *The Feast of St Valentine*. "Love will be the curse and be the charm / Love will be the bruising and the balm." The music melds traditional folk with chamber pop, lush orchestration and soul. "It's almost as if I have to invent a new word to describe the music on this album," says Merchant. "I don't even know what to call it."

The cover of *Keep Your Courage* features an image of a sculpture of Joan of Arc that Merchant first saw as a teenager growing up in Jamestown in upstate New York. Born in 1963, she was the third of four siblings – her parents divorced when she was seven, and she was brought up by her mother. "She was an alcoholic and we never knew who she was going to be next," Merchant says. "I was told not to think there was anything special

about me. My mother would just say: ‘What makes you think you should have a job that you actually like? Life is about waking up every morning to do something you hate with people you don’t like.’” Merchant was dyslexic and shy, and found a way to express and understand herself through music. She went to college at 16 and became a DJ on the college radio station. “I remember playing Joy Division’s She’s Lost Control for an hour straight.”



Michael Stipe performs with Natalie Merchant and 10,000 Maniacs in 1993. Photograph: Lynn Goldsmith/Corbis/VCG/ Getty Images

One day in late 1980, Merchant – who was still only 16 – went to an open mic audition in her home town, improvising lyrics based on a book she had bought earlier from a charity shop. “I had smoked some pot,” she reasons. The others were impressed enough to ask her if she wanted to be their singer; Merchant graduated aged 18 and joined the band, later named 10,000 Maniacs.

They signed with Elektra and their albums *The Wishing Chair*, *In My Tribe* and *Blind Man’s Zoo* were acclaimed for a jangly, lilting, reggae-infused sound that reminded one critic of “Debbie Harry fronting a folked-up New Order”. 10,000 Maniacs sang about poverty, pollution and the plight of the illiterate but also appeared on Johnny Carson’s primetime chatshow. Merchant was much younger than everyone else in the band and the only

woman. “It was frustrating at times,” she says. “The record companies saw the raw material for making a starlet. I thought of myself as a serious artist and it did not make any sense for me to be wearing a short tight skirt when I’m singing about societal disparities.” She recalls being asked by one magazine to wear a bathing suit. “I started crying,” she says. “I told them my aunt had died and I had just had the news – I invented a dead relative and got the fuck out of the room.”

Merchant felt misunderstood and unsure of her place in the music industry but that changed the first time she heard Michael Stipe sing. “There was something about his voice that I was really attracted to,” she says. “It was something very primal and which made me feel connected to him, so I sought him out.” Merchant and Stipe became friends, briefly dated, and REM and 10,000 Maniacs toured together. There were other friends including Philip Glass, David Bowie, Patti Smith and Allen Ginsberg. “The first thing Allen said to me was: I hear you’ve written a song about Jack [Kerouac]”, she says. “We eventually became friends and before he died he gave me one of his harmoniums.” At a memorial for Ginsberg, Merchant appeared with Smith and later that night they ended up in a club singing *Because the Night* together.

There were also less savoury encounters. A television journalist in New York interviewed her and then made a sexual approach. “He grabbed my arm and tried to pull me and said: get in the car,” she says. “My manager was there and told him to back off, but I wonder what it would have happened if I’d been by myself.”

Merchant’s gift is that her songs are not always comfortable listening, but they are comforting. *Tell Yourself* was written after a niece attempted suicide at 13, *Life Is Sweet* offered hope to those “who have jobs that make them feel beaten down” and *Wonder* was inspired by working at a day camp for children with special needs. Even in a bland hotel room, Merchant radiates empathy. She tells me about a young woman she met at a political rally who was an activist for disabled people. “She said: I started listening to you when I was a teenager, and your song *Wonder* completely changed the way I thought about myself,” she says, tearing up. “That’s pretty profound, to have had that influence.”

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Natalie Merchant performing at the Shepherd's Bush Empire, London, in 1998. Photograph: Nicky J Sims/Redferns

Merchant left 10,000 Maniacs in 1993 having felt that she had outgrown the band and went on release a series of solo records starting with Tigerlily, which sold 5m copies in the US. She hasn't matched that level of popularity since, but "there is a certain loyal base of people who will be open-minded

about whatever it is I am doing,” she says. “Whether I am doing klezmer music or early jazz or so many different styles of music that I have explored since I went solo – people will go with me on the journey.”

Merchant is now fully recovered from her health crisis. It’s nine years since she did a tour that lasted longer than three weeks: her world tour begins this month and will come to the UK in November. “Writing is a solitary time of tinkering and pondering,” she says. “Studio work is communal but it’s more like a massive building project that requires engineering and so much diplomacy. Live performance is when I get a chance to roam around inside the structure I built and discover unexpected things, marvel at the acoustics or linger in my favourite room to notice the way the light pours in a window.”

She is also learning Italian in preparation for a future musical project that will adapt Italian poetry. “I fund everything myself so there is no diluting the work; I don’t consult with anybody in the corporate realm. I take the risk and I accept the risk. My relationship to the music business is very remote – I exist in my own world.”

Motherhood had both expanded and shrunk that world but with her daughter having left for college in late 2021, Merchant is relishing being newly free again. “I’ve been able to rediscover myself as a creative person,” she says. “I feel like I can do anything I want.”

Keep Your Courage is out now on Nonesuch Records. Natalie Merchant [tours the UK in November](#).

This article was amended on 18 April 2023. Natalie Merchant was 17, not 16, when she joined 10,000 Maniacs; and she graduated from college, rather than dropping out as an earlier version said.

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In demand ... detail from *The Roll Call*. Photograph: Artepics/Alamy

[Theatre](#)

‘She was transgressing expectations’: the Victorian war artist who inspired a drag show

Her military painting was such a sensation that it was bought by Queen Victoria. A new play explores Elizabeth Southerden Thompson’s trailblazing art, her privilege – and the prejudice she faced

[Natasha Tripney](#)

Tue 18 Apr 2023 04.19 EDT Last modified on Wed 19 Apr 2023 07.42 EDT

Elizabeth Southerden Thompson’s 1874 painting [The Roll Call](#) was a sensation in its day. People queued for hours to see her depiction of a line of wounded and fatigued soldiers during the Crimean war. The demand to see it was such that a police officer was deployed to hold back the crowds.

Yet, despite her talent and fame, Thompson was not elected to the prestigious Royal Academy – she lost out by two votes – and her name is not well enough known today. Playwright Ellen Brammar first heard of her via Malcolm Gladwell’s Revisionist History podcast and was immediately intrigued by her story. The artist is the subject of Brammar’s new play, *Modest*, a co-production between Hull gig-theatre specialists [Middle Child](#) and the queer-led theatre company [Milk Presents](#).

The playwright says that a line in Thompson’s autobiography encapsulates her character: “I will single myself out.” She did so by painting military scenes rather than more traditionally feminine subjects such as fruit and flowers. She did not glorify war but showed soldiers exhausted by battle, bloodied and at the point of collapse. There was an honesty to them that people found moving.



‘I feel very affectionate towards her, but I also find her infuriating’ ... Ellen Brammar. Photograph: T Arran Photo

Thompson’s story is all about “breaking down barriers” says Paul Smith, artistic director of Middle Child. “One of the main reasons we exist as a theatre company is to try to widen who makes art, who speaks about art and who accesses it.”

Smith had seen Milk Presents' previous shows including [Joan](#), a reimagining of the story of Joan of Arc, and liked the way that the company used drag to interrogate myth and history. A play about a Victorian artist who was hugely popular in her day but has since been largely forgotten felt like the ideal basis for a collaboration.

"She was transgressing gender and the expectations of women at the time," says Milk Presents' Luke Skilbeck who will co-direct the production with Smith. "That's a queer act." It is also important to remember, Skilbeck adds, that Thompson was a woman of considerable privilege, creating work that chimed with the sensibilities of her day. "She was someone whose popularity was tied to empire" – to the extent that Queen Victoria ended up buying *The Roll Call*.

The paradox of Thompson's privilege, what it allowed her to achieve and the barriers she nevertheless faced, sits at the heart of the production.

The play will show the modest and humble version of herself that Thompson presented to the public – "there's a whole song about her being a sweet little woman," says Brammar – and the person she was in private, who knows she has talent and feels she deserves recognition. "I love the idea of having this woman on stage who was unapologetically arrogant and confident," she says.

Modest's cast is made up of drag performers including [Death Drop](#)'s LJ Parkinson and Emer Dineen who plays Elizabeth. Drag kings will depict the academicians, those men intent on keeping Thompson from having a seat at the table. "If we had men saying the things that they said it would be gross. We're sending it up a little bit," says Brammar.

"Drag brings a playfulness and irreverence to things," says actor and drag king Isabel Adomakoh Young, who also stars in the show. "It's a vehicle for having quite difficult conversations. It puts things in this stylised, heightened comic space."



‘I will single myself out’ ... Elizabeth Southerden Thompson. Photograph: Hilary Morgan/Alamy

The show will also be informed by the spirit of music hall, Smith explains, because it was a popular form of entertainment at the time and it accommodated different forms of gender expression. While the language of the period may have been different, says Skilbeck, “If I was transgender at the time and wanted to find other trans people, I’d probably find them in the music hall.”

“I want people to have the sense that they are in a queer space,” they continue. “So, we cast people who really know how to work the crowd.”

“The show is not a straightforward biography,” stresses Smith. It doesn’t set out to deify Thompson, rather it presents her as someone flawed and nuanced. Brammar echoes this. Having created a version of Thompson for the stage, “I feel very affectionate towards her, but I also find her infuriating. She doesn’t have all the answers. She often makes choices you don’t want her to make.”

This is part of what makes her so appealing as a character, Brammar adds. She isn’t a beacon or a woman out of time. “I sometimes wonder whether

she would like what we are doing with her story. And, actually, I'm not sure," says Skilbeck.

Modest is at [Hull Truck](#) from 23-27 May, then [touring](#) until 15 July.

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Sleeping beauties: the evolutionary innovations that wait millions of years to come good

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2023.04.18 - Opinion

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‘We need to go in and ask questions, as Dame Louise Casey did throughout the Metropolitan police.’ Photograph: Kirsty O’Connor/PA

[OpinionEthics](#)

For all the scandals, a toxic culture in places like the CBI and the Met can be changed. Here’s how

[Cath Bishop](#)



I spend a lot of time helping troubled organisations, and the recurring problem is bosses prioritising targets over clear and decent values

Tue 18 Apr 2023 05.00 EDTLast modified on Tue 18 Apr 2023 05.23 EDT

The [Metropolitan police](#) has clear values on its website and a detailed ethics code. The [fire service](#) has a similarly robust code of ethics. Tony Danker, then director general of the Confederation of British Industry, gave a speech to a Future of Work conference about the [importance of values in the workplace](#) and how they matter now more than ever. Yet in all three organisations, toxic cultures have come to light in recent weeks. Days after his speech, [Danker was sacked](#).

We know now that there is a big gap between what these organisations and their leaders say is important and what actually happens within them. Noticing and learning about that gap is what understanding culture is all about. It should be the number one priority for senior leaders. But ask them what's on their priority list, and they're likely to talk about quarterly results, growth or hitting targets.

What is clear is that we cannot judge a leader or their organisation by the mission statement on the wall or the values on their website. If we want to know the true or “deep” culture, we need to go in and ask questions, as Dame Louise Casey [did throughout the Metropolitan police](#), and the CBI board member Jill Ader is about to start doing there with a [review of culture, governance and processes](#). Questions about the experiences that people have at work, what it feels like to do their job, whether they feel safe to speak up and share their ideas and worries, whether they feel supported if someone behaves inappropriately towards them, and whether values come first or last in times of pressure.

A few simple questions like these can unlock the true picture of what a culture is like. But it’s become all too easy to ignore in a world where working life is dominated by short-term metrics about things, stuff, tasks, numbers, data, outputs – not about people. The oversight that comes from boards is clearly often insufficient. They have a wealth of data yet no idea what it’s like to work in a company.

Engagement surveys are often held up as people-focused but these also operate at a surface level. They might indicate where a leader could follow up and find out more about what’s going on behind the responses, but all too often there’s no follow-up, a new set of targets for the next annual survey is set and leaders move on.

Louise Casey criticises Met chief's response to damning report – video

Metrics have a lot to answer for – they explain why leaders in the CBI, Metropolitan police and fire services (and [Yorkshire Cricket](#) and [British Gymnastics](#), for that matter) stayed in place for years, without understanding fully (or worse, without caring about) what was going on around them. These leaders have been judged, appraised and rewarded for other things than culture – I wonder if it even came up in their annual reviews.

As outcomes and results have become the chief metrics, leaders pay less attention to how those outcomes are achieved. And if you don’t value or measure “how” something has been achieved, corruption and poor

behaviour follow. If you're never rewarded for upholding values, you quickly learn what matters, what has currency, what the "real" values are.

Cultural change is both easy and hard. It can happen both quickly and slowly. Let me explain. It's easy because it's about treating people with respect. It doesn't require academic qualifications or great intellect – in fact, that can even get in the way sometimes. People get promoted for being incredibly clever in their knowledge of engineering or law or economics or for getting results. But we should really be promoting leaders who enable those around them to develop and thrive, and help those who are heard less in the organisation to speak up.

We need our leaders to want to listen to difficult feedback and seek it out rather than suppress it. At any point over recent decades, senior leaders at the Met could have found out what Casey found if they'd wanted to.

But leading cultural change can be challenging: you need to role-model your values under intense pressures from those in power above you (maybe shareholders or government) who don't share those values. And step in when respect isn't shown in a small moment in the middle of a busy day, when it's easier to look the other way. And hold your "top performer" to account who delivers the best sales figures but acts as a bully. Though all of that is actually easy to do if you are genuinely rooted in your values.

James Timpson, the head of the shoe repair and locksmithing company Timpson, offers an [inspirational example](#). He doesn't believe in mission statements, keen to stay rooted in reality rather than some shiny PR construct. He recruits on personality, employs prison leavers and focuses on supporting colleagues, convinced this is the best way to help colleagues "outperform", as he calls it.

I have witnessed John Morgan, co-founder and CEO of the construction giant [Morgan Sindall](#), visit every single one of his company's leadership programmes. He doesn't highlight sales figures or growth targets – he spends his entire session discussing the organisation's values. He even gets the leaders to act them or mime them and consider which matter most in order to bring them to life.

When [Glenn Earlam came into David Lloyd](#) in 2015, he went round every club leading a conversation on values which were embedded in everything that happened. He ensured that they returned to pre-pandemic membership within weeks of post-Covid reopening.

Although drastic culture change is needed in multiple organisations, we shouldn't kid ourselves this can be fixed by "diktat". It's the existence of fear that has prevented people from speaking out so far. Creating more fear won't improve things. Bullies and abusers cannot be tolerated and the response to their behaviour sends ripples through the culture. But as teachers know, when you punish the whole class for what one kid did, you sow resentment, disengagement and a lack of trust. And as parents know, consistent boundaries are needed, but after that it's care and respect, listening and compassion that help develop our children. The same goes for the workplace.

If there's one clear message to learn from these shocking cultural crises, it's that the daily role of leaders and their priorities must change and success metrics for organisations must shift. It's not rocket science but it needs consistent attention: culture is built and values are brought alive one conversation at a time. Conversations, experiences and stories offer us the best measures of long-term success – leaders must start listening to them.

- Cath Bishop, a leadership and culture coach, is an Olympian and author of *The Long Win*
- ***Do you have an opinion on the issues raised in this article? If you would like to submit a response of up to 300 words by email to be considered for publication in our [letters](#) section, please [click here](#).***

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Explicitly prioritising traits other than taste ... coronation chicken.
Photograph: bhofack2/Getty Images/iStockphoto

[OpinionFood](#)

Pity the coronation chefs – theirs is a thankless and debasing task

[Zoe Williams](#)



Creating a commemorative recipe is tricky. Coronation chicken is delicious, but its specific mix of ingredients and colonialism wouldn't be appropriate in 2023

Tue 18 Apr 2023 02.00 EDTLast modified on Tue 18 Apr 2023 12.33 EDT

I thought the most thankless and debasing task in the country, where royal events were concerned, was poet laureate. You have to be medium thoughtful to be a reputable poet – sensitive, at least occasionally profound, interested in the big stuff – and then someone makes you write a poem about a baby. It's like the world's worst copywriting gig: trying to distinguish your product, this baby, from all other products, different babies, which are just as good. Investitures and coronations, even worse: they are already metaphors, and then some poor schmuck has to spin a load of meta-metaphors about them.

That was before Prue Leith, Tom Kerridge and Rick Stein unveiled their coronation recipes. The pressure's not the same, because these weren't solicited by the palace, but by a newspaper, and obviously (no offence) in a rush. There is nothing inherently wrong with any of the dishes, which all

look fine – a kedgeree from Stein, a carrot hummus from Leith, a cheesecake from Kerridge – if a little underwhelming.

The problem is the precedent: coronation chicken, invented in 1953 by Rosemary Hume, performed some manoeuvres that are still incredible to this day. Originally, it deliberately put apricots, and nowadays, mango chutney, near meat and is still delicious. It explicitly prioritised traits other than taste – make-ahead potential so the cook could watch the telly, edible with only a fork so you can toast each other at the same time – and yet is still delicious. And it thriftily mixed chicken, almonds, curry powder, mayonnaise and colonialism in a way that *OK, is delicious* but would be quite a hard sell in 2023.

Today's chefs were in a bind. There wasn't a single reference they could make from across the Commonwealth that wouldn't leave a bit of a dodgy taste in the mouth, whether it was delicious or not. The alternative of a random-fusion recipe, namechecking so many other nations that it didn't reference imperialism at all and merely made us sound open-minded, would have lacked driving purpose. Yesterday, the palace released Coronation Quiche. They've gone full emerald isles, spinach, broad beans, tarragon, not a seasonal flavour in there you wouldn't be able to find in your uncle's allotment. It's veggie, simple, and uncontroversial, but the equivalent, in poetry terms, would be: "There's a new king/ and he seems nice." You're welcome, Simon Armitage.

- Zoe Williams is a Guardian columnist



‘There is a debt Britain owes to these pioneers’: Jamaican immigrants are welcomed at Tilbury docks. Photograph: PA/PA Archive/PA Images

[Opinion](#)[Windrush scandal](#)

**Message to Suella Braverman: you are
betraying the Windrush scandal
survivors, but we will defend them**

[Wanda Wyporska](#)



A new report says the UK's compensation scheme is 'hostile'. When will ministers live up to their responsibilities?

Tue 18 Apr 2023 02.00 EDTLast modified on Tue 18 Apr 2023 11.02 EDT

As we mark 75 years since the Empire Windrush anchored in Tilbury docks, heralding the arrival of many Commonwealth citizens to help rebuild the country after the second world war, the question must be asked: is there any further indignity the UK state can inflict on them?

Consider this week's [report from Human Rights Watch](#) into the administration of the scheme. It confirms the worst fears of the Windrush scandal victims and survivors, many of whom predicted that the institutional prejudice, ignorance, carelessness and inhumanity that drove the scandal would resurface if the Home Office were allowed to manage the compensation scheme.

And so it has proved. The department has created a process so bureaucratic that some [Windrush scandal](#) victims have died before they could successfully complete it. To add insult to unimaginable injury, surviving

claimants have been prevented from getting the legal aid they urgently need to help complete the process and begin to rebuild their lives.

It is indignity heaped on indignity. The [review](#) into the Windrush scandal, led by HM Inspector of Constabulary and Fire & Rescue Services, Wendy Williams, made 30 recommendations for change and improvement. She said: “While I am unable to make a definitive finding of institutional racism within the department, I have serious concerns that these failings demonstrate an institutional ignorance and thoughtlessness towards the issue of race and the history of the Windrush generation ... consistent with some elements of the definition of institutional racism.”

Priti Patel, as home secretary, [accepted all 30 recommendations](#) and agreed to set up a compensation scheme in acknowledgment of the losses the Windrush generation suffered. There was even a comprehensive implementation plan setting out what needed to be done.

But Suella Braverman has [refused to implement](#) three of the recommendations. She has also overseen the gross mismanagement of the compensation scheme.



Windrush campaigners hand in a petition signed by 53,565 people at No 10 on 6 April. Photograph: Tolga Akmen/EPA

This matters. There is a debt Britain owes to these pioneers. It seems loath to pay it. The hurt runs deep, for we know, from [personal accounts](#), from stories passed down from generation to generation, how tough it was. I heard this from my father. We know about the reception they received, which oscillated between [gratitude](#) and naked, unapologetic hostility. We know that despite the abuse, threats, isolation and violence many of the Windrush generation faced, they were determined to do their best to support the motherland in its hour of need. Many of them had, of course, served in allied and British armed forces during world war two.

They carried on as politicians used inflammatory language to demonise them, as the police brutalised them, and as the education system stigmatised them and their families. All in the hope that their sacrifice would count for something, and that they would be allowed to access the same opportunities as other citizens, and that life would be better for their children.

Now, 75 years later, many are struggling to cope with the trauma of losing jobs, homes and liberty because they were targeted by the creation of a hostile environment and a Home Office that branded them illegal immigrants, and then treated them as such.

This must be addressed, this neglect cannot stand. The Home Office must be stripped of the [administration of the compensation scheme](#). Today, the [Black Equity Organisation](#) adds its voice to campaigners and survivors calling for an independent body focused on the needs of victims, and for Windrush scandal survivors be able to access legal aid.

It is unforgivable that the horrific damage done to our elders is being compounded by the gross mismanagement of the scheme and an antagonistic and inflammatory approach to migrants coming from the Home Office.

I had hoped that society had moved well beyond the need for discussions about the legitimacy of describing migrants as invaders. But it appears that for every step forward we make, we take at least two steps back.

The Black Equity Organisation has [launched legal proceedings](#) against the home secretary for reneging on the promise to implement all the Windrush review recommendations, and will be working with survivors, community groups and the public to hold Suella Braverman and the Home Office to account. We need to believe that when a government minister makes a promise, it will be kept. The Windrush pioneers need to know that if ministers who profess to care won't fight for them, the community will.

- Dr Wanda Wyporska is chief executive of the Black Equity Organisation

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‘How much suffering at Xi’s hand will China and the whole world experience?’ Photograph: Héctor Retamal/AFP/Getty Images

[OpinionChina](#)

China’s ‘zero Covid’ policy was a mass imprisonment campaign

[Murong Xuecun](#)

The Chinese government used the pandemic to accumulate ever more power. The result was a totalitarian, anti-scientific humanitarian catastrophe

Tue 18 Apr 2023 03.00 EDTLast modified on Tue 18 Apr 2023 09.35 EDT

In one week last December, five members of Guan Yao’s family in Beijing died, including his father, his father-in-law and his grandmother. In an interview with a journalist, Guan, who lives in California, appeared powerless and dejected. Yet – for reasons that anyone from China understands – he chose his words carefully. Avoiding directly mentioning the Chinese government, he referred only to an ambiguous “them”. “It is

difficult to understand,” Guan [said](#), “why *they* abruptly lifted all restrictions.”

If you choose to believe official Chinese government documents, the deaths of Guan’s five relatives had nothing to do with Covid. They may have been infected with Covid, but government rules – rules that can’t be made public and can’t be questioned – required that doctors who issue death certificates come up with other causes of death. Guan’s uncle died of Parkinson’s, his grandmother of kidney failure.

During this time, not a single citizen of [China](#), a country of 1.3 billion people, officially died of Covid. A tidal wave of coronavirus was inundating cities and villages, leaving piles of corpses in mortuaries; crematoria working day and night could not keep up with demand. But in order to prove its accomplishments in the anti-Covid battle the Chinese government persisted for almost two weeks with its claim that no one had died of Covid.

This is nothing new. From the moment Covid-19 first appeared, the Chinese government assiduously controlled the mortality figures in the same way an unfaithful husband under interrogation by his wife at first denies everything. Then, when he can no longer continue with his denials, he tries to limit the damage. “Um, all right, but it was just once or twice.”

No wife ever believes such lies; neither do the Chinese people. Supporters of the Chinese Communist party tend to walk a careful line. A businessman friend is an example. “The government’s numbers are not necessarily accurate, but you have to look at the positive side,” he told me. “They did it for us.”

Not that you need to be concerned for the Chinese government. It is not suffering a crisis of confidence. China has hordes of police, both uniformed and plainclothed, with ample ability to make people believe the government. A secret policeman once said to me directly: “You don’t believe it, but what are you gonna do about it?”



Police officers stand guard as people protest coronavirus restrictions and hold a vigil for the victims of a fire in Urumqi, China, in November 2022. Photograph: Thomas Peter/Reuters

My businessman friend is not alone. Inside China, government-controlled media and covert propaganda officers are sparing no efforts to sing the praises of the pandemic-prevention policies: “Thank you, Chairman Xi! Thanks to the Communist party!” “Our policy has the approval of the people, and it will stand the test of history.” “The state protected us for three years. The government did its utmost!”

Outside China, some western observers employ “although ... but ... however” syntax to express their own often fulsome support: *Although Xi’s policies may have seemed a little extreme, the initiatives characterized by the People’s Daily as correct, scientific and effective not only reduced the transmission of the virus but also reduced the death rate to well below that of other countries ...*

I disagree. As I see it, Xi Jinping’s measures have very little to do with public health. They have been a masterclass in dictatorship with an underlying theme of “how to more effectively control society after a disaster strikes”. The primary objective is not protecting people’s lives and health, but protecting and expanding his power as much as possible.

Totalitarian pandemic-prevention policies have no obvious efficacy other than to wreak havoc on hundreds of millions of people. Such policies do not merit any praise. They are the source of an anti-scientific humanitarian catastrophe.

Before 7 December 2022, Xi's government pushed a "zero Covid" policy. That is not as benign as it sounds. In essence, it is a mass imprisonment campaign. In my book *Deadly Quiet City: True Stories from Wuhan*, I report on how the Chinese government turned Wuhan, a city of 11 million people, into a massive and miserable prison.

Then Xi obviously realized that the anti-pandemic measures brought him benefits. He doggedly expanded the policy to encompass the whole country. In many places, just one positive case or sometimes not a single positive case, resulted in a district or even an entire city being completely locked down, transportation links severed, shops closed, and residents confined behind layers of fences topped with razor wire. No one could leave their homes even to exercise their most basic of rights – the right to food and to seek medical attention.



A visitor stands near an image of Xi Jinping during an exhibition on coronavirus at the Wuhan Parlor Convention Center. Photograph: Tingshu Wang/Reuters

This is how the Chinese government accumulated ever more power. No warrants are needed to storm into residences. Thousands and tens of thousands of people can be forced into isolation at any time, transported to facilities resembling concentration camps with insufficient food and a total lack of privacy. If anyone is brave enough to resist, a succession of punishments relentlessly rains down – policemen, government officials and so-called volunteers, often in full white PPE, need no authorization to surround and kick and punch their victim, who is then dragged to jail or publicly humiliated.

A notorious [photograph](#) from 17 November 2022 showed two young women who were beaten and humiliated after allegedly refusing to cooperate with pandemic-prevention officers: one lay prone, bound hand and foot; the other, hands tied together, was forced to kneel.

Punishments were not limited to the purported offenders. Entire families were dragged into the maelstrom. In Shanghai, in May 2022, police threatened a youth who expressed mild objections: “Your punishment will affect you for three generations!” The youth retorted loud and clear: “We are the last generation, thank you very much!”

China’s pandemic-prevention policies led to countless deaths and tragedies: ill seniors killing themselves because they couldn’t get medical treatment; youth jumping off buildings because they couldn’t make a living; unborn babies dying in their mother’s wombs while their mothers awaited treatment. When a fire broke out in an apartment building in the far western city of Urumqi, on 24 November 2022, the pandemic prevention policy of turning residential zones into prisons prevented fire engines gaining access. Residents struggled to escape the inferno. Ten died and many more were injured.

Two weeks later, on 7 December, the government made an unexpected 180-degree turn. No more city-wide lockdowns, no more forced PCR testing. In fact, no effective mitigation measures at all. It was like a flood control officer opening the floodgates and standing on high ground to coldly watch the raging torrent surge towards cities and villages.

In the following days incalculable numbers of people died, including respected scholars, journalists, film directors, celebrities and even some high-level Communist officials and military officers. Even in a wealthy city like Shanghai, there was a severe shortage of medicines, including the most basic fever medications and painkillers. Every hospital was overcrowded. Doctors and nurses – some themselves infected – endured the wailing and moaning of patients as they filled out a cascade of death certificates.

This was when Guan Yao's relatives died. There were so many deaths that cremation fees doubled and tripled. His family spent 30,000 yuan – about \$4,300 – for his father's cremation. His grandmother had to wait 10 days for cremation. Hospital and mortuary freezers were filled with bodies. In many cities, local governments requisitioned seafood and meat-storage freezers to hold the deluge of corpses.

And then there are the remote townships and hamlets that on a map of China are like a tiny fold in the Mariana Trench where there are no lights and where the party's kindness never reaches. According to investigations by citizen journalists, many rural villages are experiencing widespread infections but are virtually without medicine. Impoverished farmers scramble like their Stone Age ancestors for herbal remedies. Some have never heard of coronavirus or the Omicron subvariant and have no idea how to treat them. They believe that a broth made with pears can suppress coughing; that is all they have to fight the virus, and in some remote hamlets old people struggle to shake the leaves and flowers off loquat trees in the belief they will save their lives.

The endless tide of death and suffering has so far been insufficient to prove to Xi's government that any mistakes were made

Yet the endless tide of death and suffering has so far been insufficient to prove to Xi's government that any mistakes were made. In fact, party officials hold grand celebrations and publish volumes of self-congratulatory articles. They know that in an autocratic society, the truth is what you say it is.

Four months ago, Xi broke with convention and got his wish for a third term. Soon he, like Chairman Mao Zedong, will in effect become emperor for life. Over the past 10 years and especially in the last three years of Covid, this overconfident author (Xi has more than 100 books to his name) and ruler has fully demonstrated his ability to wreak suffering. In the future, how much suffering at his hand will China and the whole world experience?

To ring in the new year, Xi appeared on TV wearing a dark blue suit with a red tie. He smiled wryly and announced a line that he may not himself believe: “We have always insisted upon the primacy of the people and their lives ...”

A few days later, the Chinese government entered a new round of negotiations with Pfizer. For the past three years, the Chinese government refused to import efficacious western coronavirus vaccines and treatments while strenuously pushing domestic vaccines and promoting herbal concoctions.

This latest round of negotiations – which many believe was just for show – not unexpectedly failed because the Chinese government says Paxlovid is too expensive. Pfizer’s CEO, Albert Bourla, responded: “They have the second largest economy in the world, and I don’t think that they should pay less than El Salvador.”

Heated discussion in China ensued. One of my friends had an interesting point of view. “It’s not about the price of the Pfizer drug.” To the Chinese government, “our lives are not worth the money”.

- Murong Xuecun is one of China’s most famous contemporary authors. His work includes *The Missing Ingredient*, *Leave Me Alone*, *Dancing Through Red Dust*, and [Deadly Quiet City: True Stories from Wuhan](#). He wrote a New York Times opinion column from 2011 to 2016. He lives in Australia

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The Indian government has expressed its opposition to same sex marriage as the supreme court begins hearings on the rights of LGBTQ people to marry. Photograph: AP

[India](#)

Indian government labels same sex-marriage ‘elitist’ as supreme court hearing begins

Rights of LGBTQ people to be married under the law will be heard in India’s highest court

[Hannah Ellis-Petersen](#) in Delhi

Tue 18 Apr 2023 02.21 EDT Last modified on Tue 18 Apr 2023 16.51 EDT

The Indian government has expressed its vehement opposition to the legalisation of same-sex marriage, calling it an “urban elitist concept” that undermines religious and social values, as the supreme court begins hearings on the rights of LGBTQ people to be married under the law.

On Tuesday, dozens of petitions from LGBTQ couples and activists were brought before the country's highest court as part of a collective lawsuit that is battling for the right of LGBTQ people to be married and have equality under the law.

It is the most significant challenge to the gay rights status-quo since 2018 when, in a landmark judgment, the supreme court struck down a colonial era law criminalising homosexuality.

The hearings on same-sex marriage come amid a gradual societal shift in India where LGBTQ people are becoming more visible, particularly in popular culture and in pride marches held in major cities, while there is a growing awareness around the right to equality. However, most accept there is still a long way to go in terms of full social acceptance and safety from stigma and harassment, as the country remains deeply traditional and patriarchal.

The chief justice has called the marriage issue one of "seminal importance" and a five-judge panel will hear the case, which is expected to go for at least two weeks.

On Monday the Hindu nationalist government, led by prime minister Narendra Modi, submitted a strongly worded affidavit to the supreme court expressing its opposition to same-sex marriage and seeking to get the case thrown out of the court.

"A valid marriage is only between a biological male and a biological woman," said the government's submission, stating that any equality offered to same-sex couples went against religious values and "seriously affects the interests of every citizen", arguing that such a decision should be made by parliament not the courts.

The Modi government also recently opposed the promotion of a gay lawyer to the supreme court on the basis of his sexuality.

The lawyers and petitioners who brought the lawsuit were optimistic about the case, emphasising that the supreme court had made several significant rulings on LGBTQ rights even in the face of government opposition, including a 2014 case which recognised transgender people as a “third gender”.

Among those fighting the case are Kavita Arora and Ankita Khanna, a couple from Delhi who have been together for 11 years, after working together and eventually falling in love.

Their motivation for bringing the case was both practical – the need for a joint bank account, to give each other medical consent and to be legally recognised for inheritance – but also, said Khanna, a “fundamental belief that India as a democracy is a place for diversity, equality and justice for all and under the constitution our rights are no less than others.”

Arora added: “As we have grown together, we’ve understood that marriage in our country, in our culture, means a lot of important things: It means a sense of social recognition, a sense of validation and legally it sanctions a whole lot of different rights that queer couples are denied.”

The couple had first attempted to get married in a civil union September 2020 but were turned away and decided to take their case to the courts. “We do have faith in the fairness of the judiciary so we thought, why just complain about it? It deserves a debate in the highest court,” said Arora.

Arora and Khanna, who both work in child mental health, said that in a country like India where marriage holds huge social capital, and is almost the bedrock of society, opening up the institution to same-sex couples would be a momentous step forward in acceptance.

“We realised that this isn’t just about us,” said Khanna. “This is about so many of the young people we meet and the kind of future that they should have without thinking that just because they’re queer, they can’t have an identity and a life.”



A pride parade in New Delhi in 2018. Photograph: Dominique Faget/AFP/Getty Images

If India legalises same-sex marriage, it will only be the second country in Asia [after Taiwan to do so](#). Menaka Guruswamy, one of the lawyers fighting the case who was also at the forefront of the decriminalisation of homosexuality case in 2018, said she had “complete faith in the court”.

Among the issues being raised in the case is not just marriage but also the rights of same-sex couples to adopt children and for their families to have the same rights as heterosexual parents. This matter has also been opposed by the government body, the national commission for protection of child rights, which in a submission to the supreme court said “allowing adoption to same sex couple is akin to endangering the children.”

The case is also pushing for the rights of trans people to have their relationships and families of their choice legally recognised, arguing that it goes against a previous judgment by the supreme court.

Zainab Patel, a trans woman who is among the petitioners, said she expected it to be a long fight but said the denial of marriage to LGBTQ people “makes a mockery of our constitution and makes us second class citizens”.

Rohin Bhatt, another lawyer fighting the case who identifies as queer, said the case had implications not just for LGBTQ couples but also about equality for all under the constitution, and the right to marry who you chose, regardless of gender, religion or caste; significant at a time when inter-faith and inter-caste marriages are under attack from the Hindu right wing.

Bhatt described it as “dehumanising and disenfranchising” to hear the government’s arguments opposing same-sex marriage, accusing them of “emboldening homophobia”. He described it as part of a wider project of Modi’s government, as it shifted the country away from the democratic values of the constitution and towards the rule by religion.

“It’s about fundamental rights of citizens,” said Bhatt. “What we are asking for as queer people in this country is merely that the rights which exist for heterosexual couples be extended to us; nothing more and nothing less.”

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RentAHitman.com is a parody site, not an actual website for hiring hitmen.
Photograph: Charlie Neibergall/AP

[FBI](#)

FBI arrests guardsman who applied for job on RentAHitman.com

Josiah Garcia reportedly told undercover agent he was an excellent shot and willing to torture people and cut off fingers or ears

Guardian staff and agencies

Tue 18 Apr 2023 02.00 EDTLast modified on Wed 19 Apr 2023 05.50 EDT

Fake website RentAHitman.com has snagged another would-be killer-for-hire after a US soldier applied to be an assassin and accepted his first (fake) mission apparently believing it to be real.

Josiah Garcia, a [Tennessee](#) air national guardsman, was arrested after federal agents said he responded to an online ad through the parody website.

The site was [originally created](#) in 2005 to advertise a cybersecurity company that never took off. However, it received many inquiries over the years about murder-for-hire services, according to the affidavit. Eventually, the site administrator turned it into a parody site with fake testimonials, an intake form to request services and an application form to become a hired killer.

Garcia submitted an employment application on 16 February and sent several follow-up emails over the next month.

In one follow-up he added a section on “Why I want this Job”, according to the affidavit. “Im looking for a job, that pays well, related to my military experience (Shooting and Killing the marked target) so I can support my kid on the way. What can I say, I enjoy doing what I do, so if I can find a job that is similar to it, (such as this one) put me in coach!” it reads.

At the beginning of April, an undercover [FBI](#) agent claiming to be a “field coordinator” for the company reached out to Garcia.

Garcia told the agent he needed money and thought he would be good at killing people because of his military experience and because he was an excellent shot, according to a legal affidavit.

They spoke about the supposed job, including whether he was willing to torture people and cut off fingers or ears. Garcia responded positively. Asked why he wanted to get involved, Garcia told the agent that he was looking into civilian law enforcement but wanted to do something more exciting.

On Wednesday, Garcia met the agent in a park where the agent provided him with a fictional “target package”. The agent also paid Garcia \$2,500, supposedly the first of two installments. Garcia was arrested the same day.

Garcia told agents after his arrest that he had not intended to go through with the contract killing. He said he just received a job offer at a Nashville medical center that he intended to take instead.

If convicted, Garcia faces up to 10 years in prison, according to a news release from the US attorney's office for the middle district of Tennessee.

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Animal rights activists carry ‘hands off animals’ placards during a demonstration in Rome on Saturday. Photograph: Patrizia Cortellessa/Pacific Press/Shutterstock

[Animals](#)

Italy captures brown bear that fatally mauled jogger

Court previously suspended order to put down female brown bear after appeal by animal rights group

[Angela Giuffrida](#) in Rome

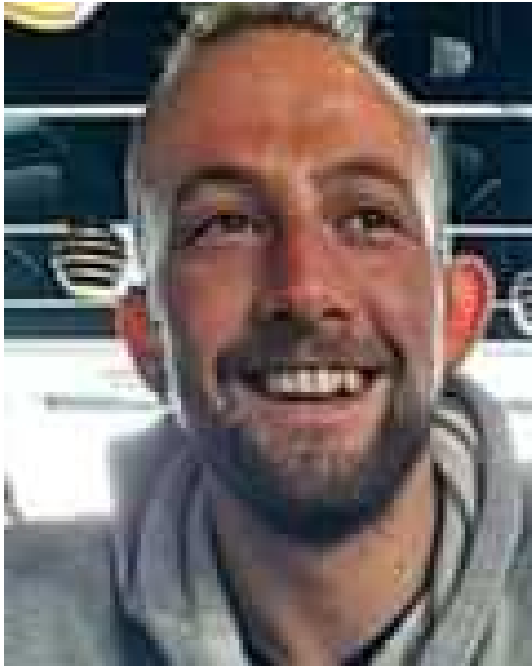
Tue 18 Apr 2023 05.11 EDTFirst published on Tue 18 Apr 2023 05.09 EDT

A bear that killed a man while he was jogging in the woods close to a mountain village in northern [Italy](#) has been captured.

Authorities in Trento said the bear - a 17-year-old female identified as JJ4 - was captured overnight using a tube trap and taken to an enclosure in a wildlife park in Castellar.

Maurizio Fugatti, the president of the province whose order to have the animal put down was suspended by an administrative court last week, told a press conference “we wanted to shoot the bear during the capture”.

Andrea Papi, 26, was [mauled to death while out running](#) on a path near his village of Caldes on 5 April. He was the first person in Italy to be killed in a bear attack in modern times.



Andrea Papi, who died on 7 April. Photograph: Shutterstock

Papi's death pitted animal rights groups' against Fugatti, whose previous order to kill JJ4 [after it attacked two hikers](#), a father and son, in 2020 was [cancelled by the administrative court](#).

The court is expected to decide on the issue on 11 May.

“If the court proves us to be right, the bear will be put down,” Fugatti said. “It is the news we would have liked to have given in 2020 following the attack against a father and son. There is bitterness about what has happened this time.”

Fugatti said he was preparing to issue orders for the culling of two other bears deemed to be dangerous - MJ5, which attacked a man in March, and

M62.

JJ4 was born in Trento after mating between two bears that had been brought to Italy from Slovenia in the early 2000s through Life Ursus, a project aimed at reversing the area's dwindling brown bear population.

There are now about 100 bears in the Trento area, and close encounters with humans are becoming more frequent.

Papi's parents said they did not want JJ4 to be killed but that they want justice for their son. "It's too easy to say he shouldn't have been running there," his mother told Rai 2. "The population didn't know there were four problematic bears."

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The arcade claw machine at the North Carolina state fair in Raleigh, North Carolina, on 16 October 2022. Photograph: Allison Joyce/AFP/Getty Images

[North Carolina](#)

Boy trapped inside claw machine after climbing in to get a prize

Thirteen-year-old was rescued and banned from North Carolina amusement park for one year for attempted theft

Associated Press

Tue 18 Apr 2023 01.00 EDTLast modified on Tue 18 Apr 2023 07.10 EDT

A 13-year-old boy had to be freed from a claw machine after he climbed inside hoping to score a prize, according to an official at a [North Carolina](#) amusement park.

Carowinds officials were alerted just before 2pm on Sunday that the boy was inside the Cosmic XL Bonus Game, which contained plush prizes,

according to Courtney C McGarry Weber, a spokesperson for the park south of Charlotte.

A medical response team unlocked the machine and the boy was able to get out, she said. He was treated and released from first aid to his guardian.

The boy has been banned from the park for one year for attempted theft, Weber said.

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In the first quarter of 2023 China's GDP grew by 4.5% compared with the same quarter a year earlier. Photograph: AFP/Getty Images

[Chinese economy](#).

China's economy rebounds faster than expected after Covid reopening

First quarter growth rate was higher than forecast by analysts as the country's retail sector performed better than expected

Gregor Stuart Hunter in Taipei

Tue 18 Apr 2023 00.58 EDTLast modified on Fri 21 Apr 2023 06.54 EDT

China's economy rebounded faster than expected, surpassing growth estimates for the first quarter of the year, after the country relaxed its onerous Covid-19 restrictions and consumer spending surged.

The world's second largest economy grew at a rate of 4.5% compared with the same quarter a year earlier, according to the National Bureau of

Statistics. The pace of increase was the fastest in a year and beat the 4% rise forecast by analysts polled by Reuters.

China's consumer economy showed signs of resurgence, with retail sales rising 10.6% in March, representing the biggest jump in almost two years and more than double the forecast rate. During the same month, industrial production also rose 3.9% compared with a year earlier, a five-month high.

"The speed of the recovery has exceeded even our relatively upbeat expectations," said Julian Evans-Pritchard, head of China economics at Capital Economics, adding that full-year growth could reach 6%, exceeding the government's official target of about 5%.

"With consumer confidence on the mend and credit growth accelerating, there is still scope for a further pickup in activity over the coming months," he said.

China's economy is accelerating after pandemic restrictions and trade restrictions with the US slowed growth. For almost three years the Chinese government persisted with rolling lockdowns and mass testing to stop Covid-19 from spreading. In 2022, [China's GDP expanded at its slowest pace since the mid-1970s](#), bar the Covid-hit 2020 year.

After [widespread protests in November](#), health authorities abruptly ended most quarantine requirements and reopened borders for international travellers, creating chaotic scenes across the country as the death toll from Covid-19 suddenly spiked.

Analysts has expressed concern that disruptions to supply chains could dent China's economic recovery.

In March, [China set a modest annual growth target of 5%](#), while admitting that Covid-19 and other domestic and international factors had affected the country's economy "beyond our expectations".

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/business/2023/apr/18/chinas-economy-rebounds-faster-than-expected-after-covid-reopening>.

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Headlines monday 17 april 2023

- [Sudan Death toll nears 100 as fighting rages and hospitals run short of supplies](#)
- [Antony Blinken US secretary of state calls for immediate ceasefire](#)
- [Explained What is at stake?](#)



Satellite image of Khartoum, Sudan, on Sunday as clashes between the army and paramilitary group continued. Photograph: Maxar Technologies Handout/EPA

[Sudan](#)

Sudan death toll nears 100 as fighting rages and hospitals run short of supplies

WHO warns some hospitals in Khartoum short of blood and other critical supplies to treat wounded and clashes enter third day

- [Explainer: why is there fighting in Sudan?](#)

[Pippa Crerar](#) in Karuizawa and agencies

Mon 17 Apr 2023 02.29 EDTFirst published on Mon 17 Apr 2023 00.01 EDT

At least 97 people have been killed and hundreds wounded as clashes spread across [Sudan](#), and the World Health Organization (WHO) said some hospitals were running out of critical supplies to treat the injured.

Fighting erupted on Saturday between army units loyal to Gen Abdel Fattah al-Burhan, the head of Sudan's transitional governing Sovereign Council, and the paramilitary Rapid Support Forces (RSF), led by Gen Mohamed Hamdan Dagalo, known as Hemedti, who is deputy head of the council.

It was the first such outbreak of fighting since both groups joined forces to oust the veteran Islamist autocrat Omar al-Bashir in 2019. The violence was sparked by a disagreement over the integration of the RSF into the military as part of a transition towards civilian rule to end the political-economic crisis sparked by a military coup in 2021.

Burhan and Hemedti agreed a three-hour pause in fighting from 4pm local time (1400 GMT to 1700 GMT) to allow humanitarian evacuations proposed by the United Nations, the UN mission in Sudan said, but the deal was widely ignored after a brief period of relative calm.

In a statement early on Monday, the doctors' trade union said at least 97 civilians had been killed and 365 others injured since fighting erupted.



Smoke rises as clashes continue in the Sudanese capital on Sunday.
Photograph: Anadolu Agency/Getty Images

The UN's World Food Programme suspended operations in the country after three of its employees were killed in clashes in Darfur. Fighting was also reported in the eastern border state of Kassala.

The US secretary of state, Antony Blinken, called for an immediate ceasefire and a return to talks to put Sudan back on track to a civilian-led government.

Speaking at the G7 foreign ministers' summit in Japan, he said: "There is a shared deep concern about the fighting, the violence that is going on in Sudan, the threat that that poses to civilians, that it poses to the Sudanese nation and potentially poses even to the region.

"There's also a strongly held view across all of our partners on the need for an immediate ceasefire and a return to talks. Talks that were very promising in putting Sudan on a path to a full transition to civilian-led government.

"People in Sudan want the military back in the barracks, they want democracy, they want a civilian-led government. Sudan needs to return to that path."

Standing alongside his US counterpart, the UK foreign secretary, James Cleverly, said a return to negotiations was the “ultimate desired outcome” in Sudan.

He said: “We call upon an immediate cessation of violence, a return to the talks, talks which seemed to be heading in the direction of civilian government. That, of course, is the ultimate desired outcome.

“Ultimately the immediate future lies in the hands of the generals who are engaged in this fight. We call on them to put peace first, to bring an end to the fighting, to get back to negotiations.

“That’s what the people of Sudan want, that’s what the people of Sudan deserve. We will continue to seek ways to support that road back to peace.”

Cleverly added that his “first priority” was the protection of British citizens in Sudan and said the government would provide “what support we can” to them. The UK has previously changed its travel advice to warn against travel to Sudan.

As clashes continued, the WHO said hospitals were running short of medical supplies.

“Several of the nine hospitals in Khartoum receiving injured civilians have run out of blood, transfusion equipment, intravenous fluids and other vital supplies,” the agency said.

Heavy fighting was reported around Khartoum international airport and the military headquarters on Sunday. Witnesses said the army had carried out airstrikes on RSF barracks and bases – including in Omdurman across the Nile River from Khartoum – and managed to destroy most of their facilities.

A statement by the army said there were ongoing clashes in the vicinity of military headquarters in central Khartoum, and said that RSF soldiers were stationing snipers on buildings, but that they were “monitored and being dealt with.”

[map of khartoum, sudan](#)

In Nyala, the capital of South Darfur and Sudan's most populous city after Khartoum, local people told of being forced to flee due to fighting between the two rival factions.

Selma Ahmed, from the city's Khartoum Belail neighbourhood, said that her area had been emptied of people. "Nobody has remained here, the fight was heavy, people had to flee and reports of looting by armed forces – they love taking cars, even if the car can't move they just [take it] with a bigger vehicle," she said.

"The RSF seized control of the western military basement in Nyala yesterday from the army and today they seized the international airport."

Earlier on Sunday, witnesses and residents told Reuters that the army had carried out airstrikes on RSF barracks and bases in the Khartoum region and managed to destroy most of the paramilitaries' facilities.

"We're scared, we haven't slept for 24 hours because of the noise and the house shaking. We're worried about running out of water and food, and medicine for my diabetic father," Huda, a young resident in southern Khartoum told Reuters.

"There's so much false information and everyone is lying. We don't know when this will end, how it will end," she added.



Satellite photo by Planet Labs PBC shows two burning planes at Khartoum international airport on Sunday. Photograph: Planet Labs PBC/AP

Efforts by neighbours and regional bodies to end the violence intensified on Sunday. Egypt offered to mediate, and regional African bloc Intergovernmental Authority on Development plans to send the presidents of Kenya, South Sudan and Djibouti as soon as possible to reconcile Sudanese groups in conflict, the office of the Kenyan president, William Ruto, said on Twitter.

The [long-feared violent crisis](#) between the two main factions of the ruling military regime threatens to destabilise not just Sudan but much of the region, as well as exacerbating a battle for influence that involves major Gulf powers, the US, EU and Russia.

Fighting between Sudan military rivals breaks out in Khartoum amid power struggle – video

Reuters and Agence France-Presse contributed to this report

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Explosions and fire at Khartoum airport as fighting continues in Sudan – video

[Sudan](#)

Sudan violence escalates as rival factions reject ceasefire calls

Neither side shows any willingness to heed appeals from US, UK, African Union and Arab states as death toll nears 200

- [Explainer: why is there fighting in Sudan?](#)

[Zeinab Mohammed Salih](#) in Khartoum, [Jason Burke](#), [Pippa Crerar](#) and [Julian Borger](#) in Washington

Mon 17 Apr 2023 12.54 EDTFirst published on Mon 17 Apr 2023 03.55 EDT

Rival government factions in [Sudan](#) have rejected calls for a ceasefire and intensified their battle for control of the vast and strategically important country as diplomatic efforts to end the conflict gather momentum.

At least 185 people have been killed and more than 1,800 injured, UN envoy Volker Perthes said as clashes have spread since Saturday, when violence erupted between army units loyal to Gen Abdel Fattah al-Burhan, the head of Sudan's transitional governing Sovereign Council, and the paramilitary Rapid Support Forces (RSF), led by [Gen Mohamed Hamdan Dagalo](#), known as Hemedti, who is deputy head of the council.

Fighting in Khartoum has centred on key sites such as the international airport, presidential palace and the army headquarters, where Burhan is thought to be based.

Josep Borrell, the EU foreign policy chief, said that the EU ambassador in Khartoum had been assaulted at his residency. Borrell did not say if the ambassador, Irish diplomat Aidan O'Hara, had been badly injured, but called the attack "a gross violation of the Vienna Convention", which is supposed to guarantee the protection of diplomatic premises.

US national security council spokesperson, John Kirby, said that the Biden administration had been in contact with both sides urging an immediate unconditional ceasefire, but the call went unheeded.

Kirby said the US was not, for the time being, planning an evacuation.

Burhan raised the stakes in the violence still further on Monday, ordering the dissolution of the RSF, which he called a "rebellious group". For his part, Dagalo called Burhan "a radical Islamist who is bombing civilians from the air".

Military jets flew low over the capital through much of Monday as repeated bouts of firing and shelling continued there and in Omdurman, Khartoum's sister city across the Nile. Witnesses have reported dozens of bodies in one central neighbourhood of the capital, and hundreds of students remain trapped by the fighting in schools.

[Map](#)

Hospitals have been particularly affected, with essential supplies badly disrupted by the fighting. Hundreds of patients have been evacuated, while medical staff work to move others from intensive care or dialysis units to places of safety.

"We had to move them to the isolation centres along with 70 doctors and nurses, all have been trapped here with no oxygen for the chest patients and that's really dangerous ... The oxygen we have is from the time of the pandemic and it's limited," one nurse said.

A shell hit one Khartoum teaching hospital on Monday morning, injuring several patients and relatives. Another hospital has appealed for fuel to keep

generators running. A dentist taking her sick father for treatment at another facility was killed, according to activists in the UK.

A doctor who spoke to the Guardian from the basement of the Khartoum teaching hospital described heavy shelling and orders from army soldiers to leave the premises.

“We are basically in the crossfire between the RSF and the army. They are firing at each other from their positions and we are in between.”

The doctor, who asked to remain anonymous, described an acute need for food and drinking water.

Fighting between Sudan military rivals breaks out in Khartoum amid power struggle – video

Dr Sara Ibrahim Abdelgalil, a UK-based Sudanese democracy activist who is in touch with many health professionals in Khartoum, said: “It is very bad. The real issue is that the armed conflict is inside residential areas. We don’t know how many casualties. Neither the RSF nor the army are promising protection of health workers, patients, humanitarians, the Red Crescent or ambulances and there’s no suggestion that they will in the future.”

In some parts of the city, informal neighbourhood committees have taken over the distribution of painkillers and rehydration salts to ill children who cannot be taken for treatment.

“Three families have contacted me to tell me about sick kids who they can’t get to medical attention. They can’t even get paracetamol to bring the temperature down,” Abdelgalil said.

With replacements unable to risk the streets of the city, many staff have been on duty since Friday and are exhausted.

With water and power cut across large parts of the capital, long queues formed at bakeries as some residents ventured out to buy food. There has

been no police presence on the streets of Khartoum since Saturday, and witnesses reported cases of looting.

“We’re scared our store will be looted because there’s no sense of security,” 33-year-old shopkeeper Abdalsalam Yassin told Reuters.

UN chief António Guterres urged a return to calm, saying an already precarious humanitarian situation was now catastrophic.

Aid workers in remote parts of Sudan also reported tensions or violence. One based in on the eastern border with Ethiopia described the regular army overwhelming a small RSF contingent and seizing their base amid sporadic shooting. Officials also reported fighting in the east, including the provinces of Kassala and El Gadaref.

There were also reports of clashes at Merowe, 185 miles (300km) north of Khartoum, and in many parts of the Darfur region.

[Map](#)

The more heavily armed regular military loyal to Burhan appeared to have the upper hand in the fighting over the weekend, but both sides are making claims and counterclaims that are impossible to verify.

“The army seem to be doing well but the RSF have lots of men, weapons and vehicles so could hold out for a really extended time and that’s the scary thought. We just don’t know,” said one aid worker based in El Gedaref, south-east of Khartoum.

The [conflict threatens to plunge](#) one of Africa’s biggest and most strategically important countries into chaos. Analysts say only pressure from “heavyweight” intermediaries will have a chance of ending the fighting.

In Washington, Kirby said the administration was trying to coordinate with the African Union, the Arab League, and the regional organisation, the Intergovernmental Authority on Development, “about how we collectively press the parties to end the fighting”.

“We’ve been very clear what we want to see happen here, which is a ceasefire, a return to an approach that is supportive of the democratic institutions and the elected civilian leadership,” he said.

In a speech broadcast by Egyptian state television late on Monday, Egypt president Abdel Fattah al-Sisi said he was in regular contact with the army and RSF to “encourage them to accept a ceasefire and spare the blood of the Sudanese people”.



Antony Blinken arrives for a G7 foreign ministers’ meeting in Karuizawa, Japan. Photograph: Reuters

The African Union’s top council has called for an immediate ceasefire “without conditions”, while Arab states with stakes in Sudan – Qatar, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates – made similar appeals. The UN security council was to discuss the crisis on Monday.

Neither of the factions fighting for control of Sudan and its precious resources has shown any willingness to compromise.

Burhan’s followers have called for the dismantling of the RSF, while [Dagalo](#) told the satellite news network Al Arabiya that he had ruled out negotiation and called on Burhan to surrender.

The roots of the conflict lie in the divide-and-rule strategy pursued by the veteran Islamist autocrat Omar al-Bashir, who took power in 1989. The RSF was drawn from the feared Janjaweed militia accused of genocide in Darfur and acted as a counterweight to the regular army, whose loyalty Bashir doubted.

The two forces joined to oust Bashir in 2019 after months of mass popular protests, but relations between them remained tense. Many analysts and diplomats in Khartoum predicted a violent contest after a military coup in October 2021 that derailed a gradual transition to civilian rule.

Sudan is in a deep economic crisis, with soaring inflation and massive unemployment. Khalid Omar, a spokesperson for the pro-democracy bloc that negotiated with the generals in recent months, warned that the conflict could lead to war and the country's collapse.

Reuters contributed to this report

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Fighting between Sudan military rivals breaks out in Khartoum amid power struggle – video

[Sudan](#)

[Explainer](#)

Sudan conflict: why is there fighting and what is at stake in the region?

Power struggle between military factions erupted after faltering transition to civilian-led government

- [Sudan power struggle enters second day as fighting leaves at least 56 dead](#)

[Adam Fulton](#)

Sun 16 Apr 2023 05.45 EDTLast modified on Sun 16 Apr 2023 16.06 EDT

Clashes between Sudan's military and the country's main paramilitary force have left at least 56 dead, while control of the presidential palace and the international airport in Khartoum is in doubt after disputed claims from both sides, in fighting that threatens to destabilise [Sudan](#) and the wider region.

What's behind the fighting?

The clashes erupted amid an apparent power struggle between the two main factions of Sudan's military regime.

The Sudanese armed forces are broadly loyal to Gen Abdel Fattah al-Burhan, the country's de facto ruler, while the paramilitaries of the Rapid Support Forces (RSF), a collection of militia, follow the former warlord Gen Mohamed Hamdan Dagalo, known as Hemedti.

The power struggle has its roots in the years before a 2019 uprising that ousted the dictatorial ruler [Omar al-Bashir](#), who built up formidable security forces that he deliberately set against one another.

When an effort to transition to a democratic civilian-led government faltered after Bashir's fall, an eventual showdown appeared inevitable, with diplomats in Khartoum warning in early 2022 that they feared such an outbreak of violence. In recent weeks, tensions have risen further.



Sudan's armed forces are broadly loyal to Gen Abdel Fattah al-Burhan, the country's de facto ruler. Photograph: Ashraf Shazly/AFP/Getty Images

How did the military rivalries develop?

The RSF was founded by Bashir to crush a rebellion in [Darfur](#) that began more than 20 years ago due to the political and economic marginalisation of the local people by Sudan's central government. The RSF were also known by the name of Janjaweed, which became associated with widespread atrocities.

In 2013, Bashir transformed the Janjaweed into a semi-organised paramilitary force and gave their leaders military ranks before deploying

them to crush a rebellion in South Darfur and then dispatching many to fight in the war in Yemen, and later Libya.

The RSF, led by Hemedti, and the regular military forces under Burhan cooperated to oust Bashir in 2019. The RSF then dispersed a peaceful sit-in that was held in front of the military headquarters in Khartoum, killing hundreds of people and raping dozens more.

A power-sharing deal with the civilians who led the protests against Bashir, which was supposed to bring about a transition towards a democratic government, was interrupted by a coup in October 2021.

The coup put the army back in charge but it faced weekly protests, renewed isolation and deepening economic woes. Hemedti swung behind the plan for a new transition, bringing tensions with Burhan to the surface.

Hemedti has huge wealth derived from the export of gold from illegal mines, and commands tens of thousands of battle-hardened veterans. He has long chafed at his position as official deputy on Sudan's ruling council.



The paramilitary Rapid Support Forces are loyal to Gen Mohamed Hamdan Dagalo, known as Hemedti. Photograph: Ashraf Shazly/AFP/Getty Images

What are the faultlines?

A central cause of tension since the uprising is the civilian demand for oversight of the military and integration of the RSF into the regular armed forces.

Civilians have also called for the handover of lucrative military holdings in agriculture, trade and other industries, a crucial source of power for an army that has often outsourced military action to regional militias.

Another point of contention is the pursuit of justice over allegations of war crimes by the military and its allies in the conflict in Darfur from 2003. The international criminal court is seeking trials for Bashir and other Sudanese suspects.

Justice is also being sought over the killings of pro-democracy protesters in June 2019, in which military forces are implicated. Activists and civilian groups have been angered by delays to an official investigation. In addition, they want justice for at least 125 people killed by security forces in protests since the 2021 coup.

What's at stake in the region?

Sudan is in a volatile region bordering the Red Sea, the Sahel region and the Horn of [Africa](#). Its strategic location and agricultural wealth have attracted regional power plays, complicating the chances of a successful transition to civilian-led government.

Several of Sudan's neighbours – including Ethiopia, Chad and South Sudan – have been affected by political upheavals and conflict, and Sudan's relationship with Ethiopia, in particular, has been strained over issues including disputed farmland along their border.

Major geopolitical dimensions are also at play, with Russia, the US, Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates and other powers battling for influence in Sudan.

The Saudis and the UAE have seen Sudan's transition as an opportunity to push back against Islamist influence in the region. They, along with the US and Britain, form the "Quad", which has sponsored mediation in Sudan along with the UN and the African Union. Western powers fear the potential for a Russian base on the Red Sea, which Sudanese military leaders have expressed openness to.

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It is assumed that Charles has inherited almost all of the artwork previously owned by the queen, Prince Philip and the queen mother. Composite: Guardian Design/Getty Images/Alamy

[Cost of the crown](#)[Monarchy](#)

The other royal collection: Windsors' multimillion-pound private trove of art may include official gifts

Guardian identifies almost 400 artworks as being privately owned by family, including works by Dalí, Monet, Freud, Chagall and Lowry



[Maeve McClenaghan](#) *Investigations correspondent*

Mon 17 Apr 2023 01.00 EDT

Prince Philip was accompanying [Queen Elizabeth II](#) on an official visit to Denmark when the venerated modernist painter Marc Chagall pressed a gift into his hands. It was 1960 and the pair had just met at a ceremony where Chagall was presented with the prestigious Erasmus prize. Philip would later recall the artist's "jocular attitude" as he showed him around his exhibition.

"He gave me this Bible he has illustrated, just out of the blue. He was a very strange man," Philip reportedly said. It was also something of a strange gift. Inside the Bible, Chagall had daubed colourful illustrations in

watercolours, chalk and ink. Those two illustrations could now be worth as much as £60,000.



Image from Chagall's Bible given to Prince Philip. Photograph: His Majesty King Charles III 2023

As contemporary artworks go, that is not a huge sum. However, the Chagall Bible is one of an extraordinary collection of almost 400 artworks, some worth much more, that have been exhibited by the Windsors in “personal” or “private” collections.

They are, in total, likely to be worth tens of millions of pounds, possibly more, and include pieces by Salvador Dalí, LS Lowry, Claude Monet and Lucian Freud.

Many of the items, however, raise questions for the Windsors about whether all of these artworks should really belong to them.

Royal art can broadly be separated into two categories. Most of it is part of the royal collection, more than a million items that are held in trust by the sovereign for the benefit of the nation. Described as one of the greatest art collections in the world, it is the nearest the UK has to a public custodian of royal-linked art.

The second, much more elusive category is that which the royals treat as their own: the Windsors' private collection. There is no public register of these works and Buckingham Palace refuses to comment in any detail on what it regards as private wealth. However, items such as the Chagall Bible raise questions about what falls under that definition.

Not in the royal collection, the artwork casually given to Philip on a state visit appears to have been absorbed into his own collection. At a special exhibition in Holyrood Palace in 1994, the Chagall piece was on display as part of the prince's "personal collection".

Buckingham Palace's [gift policy](#), introduced the following year, distinguishes between "official gifts", which are generally those received in the course of formal duties and functions, and "personal gifts", from people whom members of the royal family know personally. The policy adds: "In all cases, and particularly on official overseas trips, organisations and individuals should be discouraged from offering extravagant gifts, ie gifts of high monetary value."

Contacted by the Guardian, the palace declined to comment on the ownership status of the Chagall or more than a dozen other artworks that would appear to have been official gifts but have been exhibited as part of the Windsors' personal or private collections. "It is incorrect to suggest that the artworks you list were all official gifts," a spokesperson said. "We would not comment on the value of works of art."

A Monet worth millions

A watercolour artist himself, [King Charles III](#) is an aficionado of fine art. The four floors of his London residence, Clarence House, are filled with artwork, much of which is unequivocally the private property of the Windsors.



TV presenter Claire Balding (L) talks to Camilla, the Queen Consort, during an event at Clarence House in April 2010. Photograph: Leon Neal/AFP/Getty Images

Charles can largely thank his grandmother for the art adorning the walls of Clarence House. An avid private collector, Queen Elizabeth the [Queen Mother](#) bought dozens of valuable artworks between the 1930s and 1950s, when prices were lower because of the war, and bargains could be found in the frequent country house sales of the time.

Over the years, the queen mother filled Clarence House, then her London residence, with a collection worthy of any great gallery, although its presentation was more homely.

In the corner of the Morning Room, behind a side table covered with family photographs and the shade of a table lamp, hangs what is probably the most valuable of all the art in the royals' private collection: Claude Monet's *Study of Rocks; Creuse: Le Bloc*. The painting was bought by the queen mother in 1945, at the Wildenstein gallery in Paris. The second world war had dampened art prices and she snapped it up for £2,000, the equivalent of £110,000 today.



Camilla meeting the broadcaster Chris Evans at Clarence House in 2015 with Monet's *Study of Rocks*; *Creuse: Le Bloc* hanging on the wall behind her. Photograph: Heathcliff O'Malley/Shutterstock

Susan Orringe, of Prestige Valuations, told the Guardian the painting could fetch up to £20m if it were sold today. However, she clarified that the estimated price was highly speculative and the paucity of Monets on the market, coupled with the fact that it had hung for decades in the queen mother's front room, could raise its value much higher.

Clarence House, which used to be open to the public, has been closed since 2019. The Monet and other artworks can be seen in a [virtual tour](#) of the residence.

The artworks also include *Fylde Farm* by LS Lowry, worth about £120,000, and a portrait of George Bernard Shaw by Augustus John, worth about £70,000. Elsewhere in the house are multiple other works, including paintings by Paul Nash, Raffaellino del Garbo and Alfred Sisley. *The Eve of St Agnes* by John Everett Millais, which the queen mother bought at auction in 1942 for £630, could be worth about £1.5m today.

Charles moved into Clarence House in 2003, after the death of the queen mother the previous year. He has previously said that among his favourite

works are a moody series of paintings of Windsor Castle by John Piper. They hang on the wall of his dining room. The queen mother paid £10 each for them (equivalent to £646 in today's money). Today the set could be worth £150,000.

It is assumed Charles has inherited almost all of the artwork previously owned by the queen mother, the queen and [Prince Philip](#). As monarch, he is exempt from the inheritance tax that would be due on any high-value bequests to his siblings.

However, it is impossible to know precisely who owns which pieces in the Windsors' private collection, and how much it may all be worth.

The Guardian consulted experts on the value of 60 of the most significant works on a list of 392 identified as being privately owned by the Windsors. The total value of the 60 was estimated to be at least £24m. But that valuation is based on only a fraction of a much larger collection.

Quick Guide

How the Guardian identified art owned privately by the royal family

Show

The Guardian scoured press reports, exhibition guides and photographs and visited palaces to create a log of 392 artworks that appear to be owned by central members of the royal family. We focused on reports and exhibitions describing the personal or private collections of the Windsors.

This is likely to be just a fraction of the total. The queen mother, for example, owned 1,200 prints, paintings and drawings, according to the art historian Dr Susan Owens. Prince Philip was estimated by the art expert Robin Simon to have had more than 1,500 works. It is not known how many the late queen owned, but it was presumably hundreds.

The log was then checked against the Royal Collection Trust, both via the online catalogue and through direct inquiries to the trust, which confirmed that none were officially part of the collection.

All 392 items are therefore believed to have been owned privately by the queen mother, Prince Philip, Queen Elizabeth II or King Charles III.

Where possible, we logged details of how and when the artwork was acquired. We then asked the palace detailed questions about the ownership status of those we believed fell into the category of 'official gifts', according to the royal gift policy.

Experts estimated the potential sale value of 60 of the most significant pieces on the list based on comparable works by each artist, while working with limited information and without physical inspection.

The estimates did not take into account any 'royal premium' buyers might pay for artworks previously owned by the Windsors.

Susan Orringe, from Prestige Valuations, estimated works by Monet, Grant, Seago, Fantin-Latour, Topolski, Constable, Piper, Lowry, Chagall, Millais, Freud.

Robert James, from Coram James, estimated works by Augustus John, Nash, Del Garbo, Dali, Gainsborough.

Jane Raffan, from ArtiFacts, in Australia, estimated works by Namatjira, Pugh, Friend, Jack, Battarbee, Hill, Drysdale, Dobell, Landara, Inkamala, Pareroultja, Raberaba, Crooke, Charles Pro Hart, Swann, Dridan and Garner.

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In 2020, the historian David McClure estimated that the queen mother's private collection, said to have comprised 1,200 prints, paintings and drawings, was worth £30m. He concluded that Prince Philip's collection, said to include more than 1,500 items, was worth £2m. In 2001, the art expert Robin Simon valued the queen's collection for the Mail on Sunday and concluded it was worth £150m (the equivalent of £261m today).

That would suggest the Windsors' private collection could be worth more than £290m. However, the lack of any public register of these works means all of these estimates are speculative. It is impossible to say anything with certainty about the value of the private art collection, although there is no doubt it is worth many millions of pounds.

Dalí and Freud

The value of the private collection matters because while much of the Windsors' private art is unequivocally theirs, some of it might be better described as belonging to the nation. The royal policy on accepting gifts states that items presented on official duties, by people not considered close personal friends, "are not the private property of the member of the royal family who receives them".

More than a third of the 392 pieces identified by the Guardian in private royal collections appear to have been gifts of one sort or another. Some were wedding presents, while others were official gifts on overseas trips, including from artists themselves. All were displayed in exhibitions of "personal" art collections. None are part of the public royal collection.



Charles presents the Prince of Wales medals for arts philanthropy at Clarence House in November 2011. Photograph: Anwar Hussein/Getty

Images

One such instance was a gift from the Spanish surrealist Salvador Dalí, whom Philip met in 1972 while staying near Avignon on a state visit to the south of France. Not much is known about that meeting, but at some point Dalí presented Philip with an etching called *Hommage*, as well as a special edition of his book adorned with sketches in ballpoint pen.

Those gifts could be worth in the region of £10,000 today. Philip included them in an exhibition of work described as his personal collection in 1994.

An infamous portrait of Queen Elizabeth II by Lucian Freud is another example of a direct gift from an artist. The 2001 work divided opinion, prompting the Sun's royal photographer Arthur Edwards to declare: "Freud should be locked in the Tower [of London] for this."

But it would appear that the queen liked it enough to adopt it as part of her personal collection. The small oil painting has now passed into the possession of the king, who loaned it to a Freud exhibition late last year.

The painting joins another by Freud, *Small Fern*, which was given to Charles for his 50th birthday in 1998 and exhibited as one of his privately owned works in 2018. Oils by Freud are considered extremely valuable; Orringe estimated the botanical painting could fetch up to £600,000.



A curator dusts a portrait by Lucian Freud of Queen Elizabeth II as part of the exhibition *The Queen: Portraits of a Monarch* at Windsor Castle in 2012. Photograph: Steve Parsons/PA

Other artworks given to the royals on state visits include a watercolour of an Australian bird by Carol O'Connor, presented to Philip on an official visit to Perth in 1990; an acrylic on masonite of pelicans by Robert Bateman, given to Philip in 1987 to mark 100 years of national parks in Canada; both were exhibited as part of Prince Philip's "personal collection". A watercolour painting by Charles Decimus Barraud, given to the queen mother by the mayor of Auckland, New Zealand, in 1958 was included in a list of her collection, which passed to the queen on her death.

In their statement, the palace spokesperson did not shed any light on whether specific artworks exhibited in private collections were regarded as official or personal gifts.

"Official gifts are not the personal property of the member of the royal family who receives them, but may be held by the sovereign in right of the crown or designated in due course as part of the royal collection," they said. "Even when works of art are privately held by members of the royal family, they are frequently lent to public exhibitions."

The palace declined to say why none of the artworks were contained in the royal collection.

Quick Guide

What is Cost of the crown?

Show



Cost of the crown is an investigation into royal wealth and finances. The series, published ahead of the coronation of King Charles III, is seeking to overcome centuries of secrecy to better understand how the royal family is funded, the extent to which individual members have profited from their public roles, and the dubious origins of some of their wealth. The Guardian believes it is in the public interest to clarify what can legitimately be called private wealth, what belongs to the British people, and what, as so often is the case, straddles the two.

- [Read more about the investigation](#)
- [Fund Guardian investigative journalism that uncovers the secrets of the powerful that we all need to know](#)

Photograph: Universal History Archive/Universal Images Group Editorial

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Haggling over prices

The royal collection contains 5,600 paintings, including works by Mantegna, Rubens, Rembrandt and Canaletto. The royals have the privilege of borrowing items in the collection free of charge to hang in their private residences, while others appear in Windsor Castle and Buckingham Palace.

But Philip, who married into the monarchy with very little wealth of his own, was said to have found the art of the royal collection stuffy. Unimpressed, he began to collect more contemporary artists, perhaps drawing on his wife's funds to do so.

“We could have borrowed, of course,” he said in a 1994 interview with the Scotsman, “but I thought it would be more fun to have our own.”

Of the 392 works identified by the Guardian, 80 were bought privately by either Philip or the queen mother – and are, in that sense, indisputably theirs.

Philip, in particular, liked a bargain, boasting of his James Morrison oil paintings: “I bought them, I don't know, for £1,000 or something. I don't know what he charges now, about £30,000 or something.” (The record price for a Morrison was set in 2014 at £81,000.)

Letters between Philip and Feliks Topolski, a Polish-born artist whom he considered a friend, [show Philip haggling](#) over the price of an equestrian portrait for two years. He eventually drove down the price and got the work for £834 – the equivalent of £12,000 in today's money. This was a 63% discount on what experts had told him it should be worth.

Philip and the queen mother are known to have taken advantage of trips to the Commonwealth to add to their private collections, which, for example, contain 27 works by Australian and Indigenous artists.



Queen Elizabeth and Prince Philip in Adelaide, Australia, in 1963.
Photograph: Reginald Davis/Rex/Shutterstock

The most valuable of those is *Home Leave* by Russell Drysdale, which was acquired by the queen mother and is now worth an estimated £1.7m. Philip bought works by Sidney Nolan and was given two paintings by William Dobell, which together are now worth in the region of £570,000.

Jane Raffan, an Australian art expert and valuer, said that in the 1950s and 60s royal visitors behaved like “upper-level tourists in that they were looking to acquire something, a souvenir from their trip, but they were not buying something from a tourist tat shop ... in many ways it was a case of right time and place in regard to the Dobells, the Nolans and the Drysdales.”

‘I cannot resist it’

Another blurred line around the Windsors’ private collection relates to works produced by artists who accompany them on official tours. Philip befriended Edward Seago over the years and the Norfolk-based artist gave him and the queen mother many paintings. Sixty of those came from a trip Seago took with Philip on the Royal Yacht *Britannia*, when, after a state visit to Australia in 1956, they sailed on to the Antarctic.

“He painted all these pictures and said: ‘You can have them’,” Philip told the Scotsman newspaper. While the two men were friends at that point, the paintings were made and presented as part of an official royal trip. Yet none of them are in the royal collection. The trove of oils passed to the royals by Seago could now be worth as much as £2.6m.

Charles has also been known to take artists on royal tours overseas; a palace spokesperson stressed they were “personally funded” by him. Artists including John Ward, Susannah Fiennes, Robbie Wraith and Warwick Fuller accompanied Charles, when he was Prince of Wales, to various destinations, from Oman to South Africa.



Charles painting in the Bhutan Himalayas, while trekking to a monastery on a 1998 visit. Photograph: John Stillwell/PA

In 1989, Charles explicitly said that the practice of taking artists with him overseas would benefit the public collection of art held in trust for the benefit of the nation. “It is such a good way of providing a record, adding to the royal collection, obtaining some tips on painting, and meeting other artists, that I cannot resist it,” he said.

The Guardian has identified 25 pieces produced by artists on such foreign trips. None are in the royal collection. They have, presumably, been

incorporated into the king's private assets. Buckingham Palace declined to say where they were being kept, or why they were not in the royal collection. The locations of the works given to the royal family by Dalí, Chagall and Freud also remain a mystery.

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‘I thought, ‘If that guy on the internet can do it, I can do it’ ... Jones with his accordion. Photograph: Diane Para

[A new start after 60](#)Life and style

A new start after 60: I don’t like being defeated – so at 71, I learned Welsh

It’s not easy to find Welsh speakers in Ohio, but Dafydd Jones was determined to learn the language of his parents and connect with his homeland 3,800 miles away



[Emma Beddington](#)

Mon 17 Apr 2023 02.00 EDT

Dafydd Emrys Jones describes himself as a “passionate Welshman”, although he hasn’t lived in the country since childhood. For the past 32 years he has made his home in Cincinnati, Ohio, but the 74-year-old has had “a long journey” to get there. He was born in Wrexham, north Wales, “a city put on the map by the generosity of Ryan Reynolds,” he notes (Reynolds and co-owner Rob McElhenney [bought the local football club](#) in 2021). He moved south to Cardiff, then passed through England, Germany, Belgium, France, Switzerland and the Netherlands during his career as an IT troubleshooter, but his Welsh identity has always remained precious. When people ask if he’s English, he tells them firmly that he’s Welsh: “They say ‘oh, it’s the same thing’; I say no!”

He did not, however, speak Welsh – a source of embarrassment. But when the Covid pandemic hit, Jones realised he had an opportunity to rectify that. As everything closed down, his usual hobbies – tango and ballroom dancing, or playing music with his Celtic band, [Ceol Mhor](#) – were not available to him. “I’m not married, I have some friends, but I wasn’t going out. I was getting bored every night. So I sat at home thinking, bad as this Covid thing is, it also gives me an opportunity.”

Although his parents spoke Welsh – and it was his father’s first language – Jones and his siblings grew up speaking English. At school in Cardiff, he had two years of lessons, but, he says, “I wasn’t interested then.” Now he was. Jones is not short of determination, as he proved aged 65 when he set himself the task of learning the button accordion. A late-night meander on YouTube led him to fall in love with the beautiful but fiendishly complex instrument. “I thought, before I die, I would love to get my hands on one of those.” The next day he bought a \$6,600 Italian-made beauty online, then set about trying to learn how to play it. With no local teachers, he was soon back on YouTube, and within five weeks, he had managed to master his first tune. “I don’t like to be defeated by things. Early on, I was thinking I’ve bitten off more than I can chew, but I thought, ‘If that guy on the internet can do it, I can do it.’”

At 71 and with a calendar emptied by Covid, he turned that determination towards learning the language of his homeland, even though it was 3,800 miles away. Jones started out using the [Duolingo](#) app, and still does. “If I look on Duolingo, I could tell you, I’ve done something like 838 consecutive days of Welsh.” Duo, the app’s notorious guilt-tripping owl, must be happy: “*Tylluan*,” he says. “That’s owl in Welsh.” The hardest part is the pronunciation, he says, but a childhood surrounded by Welsh speakers helped hugely.

Jones began listening to Welsh podcasts and joined online conversation classes with the [Welsh Studies Institute in North America](#), which brings together Welsh speakers from across the US and beyond. “You’d be amazed at the number of people in America with Welsh heritage. They were born here but they speak Welsh; it just amazes me.” He has risen through the ranks: having started on the beginner level, he is plotting the jump to “advanced” imminently. Last summer, he even entered a Welsh essay competition. “The subject was *Daw yr Haul ar y Bryn*, which means ‘the sun is coming over the hill’. Most people wrote about the end of the pandemic, how the sun is shining again. But I’m very into sports and decided I’d do something different.” Jones wrote about the Welsh football team (he calls it soccer, betraying his 32 years in the US) and their journey to the 2022 World Cup finals: “I told the whole story in Welsh.” He won. “I was delighted, and proud and all the rest of it.”

Finding people to speak Welsh with has proved predictably tricky in Cincinnati. “I haven’t found many and certainly not around here.” This summer, he’ll get the chance at a language immersion class he’s attending in Vermont. In the meantime, he has written a song in Welsh: *Mae gen i* (I have). The first verse, *mae gen i angen* (I have a need), he explains, is about nostalgia for people he has lost in his life. The second, *mae gen i obaith* (I have a hope), wishes for less conflict and more peace in the world. “Fat chance of that happening but one can always hope ...” A third verse, *mae gen i breuddwydd* (I have a dream), is about the Welsh football team’s World Cup hopes, again. The rhymes were a challenge, but he’s keen to continue writing songs in Welsh.

The rest of his family are back in the Cardiff area but, despite that, none of them have taken to Welsh like he has. “My sister speaks some, but she’s not into it in the same way.” He has followed the resurgence of Welsh back home with keen interest: “It’s growing; it’s the oldest living language from Europe which is still being spoken. It’s never died.” Jones is overdue a visit – he hasn’t been since he learned the language – and has even considered moving back. “I’m still trying to figure out my life,” he says. For now, sunny mornings spent playing the accordion on his deck give him pause; it’s 27C over there. “Then I watch a rugby game and see the abysmal weather, high winds and torrential rain, and I think well, the sun’s shining here in Cincinnati ...”

- [Tell us: has your life taken a new direction after the age of 60?](#)

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‘I had a sense of determination to succeed because of my childhood’ ...
Fatima Whitbread at home in Essex. Photograph: Teri Pengilley/The
Guardian

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‘Your childhood can haunt you’: Fatima Whitbread on trauma, triggers, therapy – and how sport saved her

[Emine Saner](#)

Left for dead as an infant, raised in care and abused as a child, Whitbread became an exceptional athlete. She explains what it takes to be the world’s best javelin thrower, survive a breakdown and bounce back from financial ruin



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Mon 17 Apr 2023 01.00 EDTLast modified on Mon 17 Apr 2023 08.53 EDT

In the latest of the many lives of Fatima Whitbread, the former champion javelin thrower has become a formidable reality TV star – and it suits her. She is surely one good show away from “beloved” status, which might prove to be the I’m a Celebrity ... Get Me Out of Here! spin-off in which she is soon to star, alongside a select group of other former participants in the ITV show.

She was on I'm a Celeb in 2011, when her nasal cavity became home to a cockroach during one of the challenges – “There’s definitely something wriggling about in there!” – and it took an hour for the camp doctor to flush it out. But I liked her best in last year’s Celebrity SAS: Who Dares Wins, the Channel 4 series in which celebs do Special Forces training; Whitbread cracked three ribs jumping out of a helicopter, but kept it a secret because she didn’t want to leave the show. She was charming, warm, capable and – having filmed it at 60 – ripped.

This morning, she has been out exercising for two hours. She does an hour of cardio or weights every day. Even her jack russell terrier, Bertie, is ageing well; the vet remarked recently on his good health. “They said he’s got a heartbeat like an athlete,” says Whitbread, smiling. That is what you get when you are owned by an Olympic medallist and former world champion who once broke the women’s javelin world record. Bertie sits between us on a large sofa in Whitbread’s spotless, clutter-free home in Essex. The only hint at the greatness of her sporting career is a bronze cast of her hand, strong fingers wrapped around a javelin’s grip, given to her by Madame Tussauds.



With her dog, Bertie. Photograph: Teri Pengilley/The Guardian

Whitbread, 62, has led an extraordinary life. This decade has been defined so far by physical and psychological challenges. Last year, as well as the SAS show, she climbed Mont Blanc. About a year ago, for the first time, she started having therapy (even when she had a breakdown in her 20s, she powered through without professional help). “I’ve realised I’ve done bloody marvellous without it, but sometimes things trigger and all those childhood years can come back to haunt you,” she says.

As a baby, Whitbread was abandoned in a flat in London and essentially left to die. After hearing her cries, neighbours called the police. Whitbread recovered in hospital from malnutrition, dehydration and her terrible physical condition, then spent her childhood in children’s homes. “I felt this deep sense of loss within me,” she says. When she was five, she was introduced to her biological mother – having had no idea of her history – and moved to a children’s home in Essex, where she had two half-siblings. “That was the first time I started questioning what was going on in my life and what was to become of me.”

It was a life of deprivation, physical and emotional. There wasn’t enough food and they had few clothes. The children played in a cold garage with a concrete floor. Love and affection were scant. She was abandoned again and again. Occasionally, her biological mother would arrive to take her half-siblings home for a visit, but not Whitbread. Once, the woman she calls “the biological mother”, never “my biological mother” – a Turkish Cypriot woman who spoke almost no English – did take her, but changed her mind and sent her back to the home.



Whitbread with Ferne McCann on Celebrity SAS: Who Dares Wins in 2022. Photograph: Pete Dadds/Channel 4/PA

Whitbread's biological father, a Greek Cypriot, also surfaced. She spent a week with him, with the promise that he would be back to collect her again the weekend after, but he didn't appear. "I sat on the front wall for a whole weekend," she says. "The second weekend, I did the same thing. I think that cracked me, emotionally. I put these walls up around myself to secure me."

The only person who showed Whitbread any love was a woman who worked in the home, known as Auntie Rae. It was Rae who stopped Whitbread's biological mother, who arrived one day with three men, from taking her out of the home. Rae's suspicions proved horrifyingly true: at a later date, when her biological mother was able to take her to London for a while, 11-year-old Whitbread was raped by a man who was staying at the flat.

Back at the children's home and traumatised, Whitbread refused to go to school. "I just became withdrawn. Having not spoken to anyone about it, I felt ashamed, dirty." Eventually, she told Rae what had happened. Whitbread says it was reported, but nothing was done (she was referred to a child psychologist for a couple of weeks). "Unbelievable what went on back then. You were never taken seriously. We had a social worker and I

would talk to him about it. Nothing ever happened. Nobody took notice of the kids.”

Sport gave me a sense of freedom, forgetting all the problems that were going on in the home

Is she angry at the system that failed her so spectacularly? “Well, it does make me ...” She pauses. “Even today, some of the crazy policies – ousting kids [from care] at 16 is appalling. My son still lives at home; he’s 25. At 16, these are vulnerable kids.” At present, councils are allowed to put 16- and 17-year-old children in unregulated accommodation, although [a ban on the practice](#) will come into force in October. “For a lot of young kids, history starts repeating itself: they start getting in trouble, or offending, and it costs the state a whole lot more. These young kids need that support, because once they get out there they’re easily preyed upon. They’re still kids.”

She worries about the cost of living crisis, inequality and poverty: “The kids are the ones that are getting the damage done.”

Sport saved her, she says. “It gave me a sense of freedom, forgetting all the problems that were going on in the home and the life we were living. It gave me a sense of achievement, that here was something I was good at. I got validation from my PE teachers and my school friends and started to realise life was a bit more positive. I realised that this could be my way out.”

Whitbread became the school netball captain and started going to a local athletics club. The javelin coach, Margaret Whitbread, recognised her talent. When she found out Whitbread lived in a children’s home, she gave her some secondhand boots and a javelin. When Whitbread was grounded for a month, she managed to get a note to Margaret, fearing the coach would think she had left. She wrote that she hoped Margaret would take her back and that she intended to become the best javelin thrower in the world. “It was the start of a dream,” says Whitbread.



At the Commonwealth Games in Edmonton, Canada, in 1978. Photograph: Tony Duffy/Getty Images

Margaret and her husband eventually fostered Whitbread, who changed her surname, Vedad, by deed poll. At 14, she finally had a family, which included the Whitbreads' two young sons. "That was amazing, the best thing that happened, to be a part of a family, which I'd always wanted," she says. "It wasn't straightforward, because all families have their problems. Both as mum and daughter and athlete and coach, we worked it out somehow – and we conquered the world."

Whitbread began training hard. "I started taking more responsibility for myself," she says. "You have a whole lot of people that help you, but I've got to get myself out at 5am, down the gym, three times a day training, seven days a week." She trained in a wooden shed at the bottom of the garden of a family friend. She smiles when she talks about how different facilities are now: "I wouldn't have had it any other way. I loved every minute of it."

Just two years later, in 1979, Whitbread was crowned European junior champion – becoming the first British woman to hold the title. At less than 1.65 metres (5ft 5in) tall, she wasn't built like a champion javelin thrower, but what she lacked in reach she made up for in determination: "I had little

room to manoeuvre where making mistakes was concerned, so I had to work exceptionally hard at analysing everybody's techniques and working out the best for me."

After retiring, the sense of loss, of identity and purpose, is very hard

What made her a good – at one stage, the best – thrower? "I think the inner strength that I created as a child. If you asked me: 'Would I change anything about my life?' I'd say no, because that created who I am. I had steely inner strength and a sense of determination to succeed because of my childhood. I possibly wouldn't have had that otherwise." She pauses. "There are some things you would have wanted to change."

Whitbread had an incredible career – she was European and world champion and won bronze and silver at the 1984 and 1988 Olympics respectively. In 1986, she broke the world record with a throw of 77.44m. "That was a monumental experience," says Whitbread. As she let go of the javelin, she knew it was a good throw. "The hours and hours and hours of work that you put in, in order to get everything to click at the right time on the right day ..."

People told her it was the wrong day – it was the qualifying round for the European championships, so she had to go back and do it again. "I just thought: I'll give it 100% and see what happens. I never allowed all that talk to get into there," she says, pointing at her head. "I kept my mindset focused." She didn't manage to break her own record, but threw well enough to take gold.

Much was made of her rivalry with the other British champion javelin thrower, Tessa Sanderson, who won the gold medal at the 1984 Olympics (Whitbread took bronze). "Between us, we achieved everything you could in an event. That's quite an astounding achievement for a country that wasn't known for its power events, so Tessa and I really flew that flag."



With her bronze medal at the 1984 Olympics. Photograph: Tony Duffy/Getty Images

The rivalry was real – although Whitbread says her main rival was East Germany’s Petra Felke – but the media amped it up. Sanderson, who is a few years older, had been Whitbread’s idol. Whitbread says she would have liked to have been friends. “I thought there’s nothing better than to be able to have a good friendship in an event where you can pull together. But everyone’s different, aren’t they? The media, what they instigated, it didn’t lend itself very well [to friendship].”

Whitbread was aware of the comments in the media about her muscular physique. Did she care about that? “It’s tools for the job,” she says of her body. Had she been taller, maybe her muscles wouldn’t have been so noticeable, but she was “stubby”, she says, laughing. “But I didn’t care, because I loved what I did and that’s what it took for me to succeed. I didn’t take notice; I was just proud of my work ethos. But sometimes they could be unkind.”

As a child in the 80s, I say, I loved watching Whitbread and Sanderson – so strong and powerful, like warrior goddesses. She smiles: “I think there were a lot of people who felt like that.”

Her success brought fame – and intrusion. The tabloids found her biological mother. The trauma resurfaced. “It forced me to have to tell my story. That was really the start of the demise in my athletic career, because it brought me to a physical and mental breakdown.” While training for the 1988 Olympics, she was also writing a book about her childhood, to try to get control of her story. “It was awful. I shouldn’t have gone to that Olympics, but I managed to pull on all my reserves and I came away with the silver medal.”

In the run-up, when she should have been training hard, she lost “all sense of time. My procrastination was terrible. When I was throwing, it was all over the place – 30 metres, 40 metres, 70 metres.”

A shoulder injury, made worse by Whitbread’s inability to train properly, ended her career officially in 1992. “It was eight years short, really,” she says. “It was a big loss. For three or four years after that, when I went to championships, I would be watching with sadness, because I probably would still have been out there, winning.”

She had wanted more gold medals, including an Olympic one, and was aiming to throw more than 80m: “I think I could have done.” But it wasn’t about the medals, she says. “The sense of loss, of identity and purpose, and then having to reinvent yourself in something that fills that void and the passion you had, is very hard.” She went into sports marketing and did coaching and development.



With Andy Norman in 1990. Photograph: John Gichigi/Getty Images

In 1997, she married Andy Norman, the controversial athletics promoter, with whom she had a son, Ryan, a year later. (Norman had been [implicated by the coroner](#) in the 1994 suicide of Cliff Temple, a Sunday Times journalist who had been investigating Norman's conduct as promotions officer of the British Athletics Federation.) After her traumatic childhood, she was determined that her son's would be different. "I felt I would be a good mum," she says. "I believed in myself. It was important for me to be able to prove that I could be a good mum and break the mould of what I'd been through."

She and Norman had experienced years of infertility, followed by a miscarriage, before their son was born via a third round of IVF. Norman left her for another athlete when Ryan was small, although he and Whitbread managed to remain close. Then, in 2007, he died suddenly, leaving Whitbread to raise Ryan alone. On top of that, it emerged that Norman had taken out loans, partly in Whitbread's name, which put her tens of thousands of pounds in debt. She had to sell the family home. The fees from reality TV kept her afloat and helped her rebuild her profile.

She seems content, although a long friendship ended recently, which has saddened her: "It's not until something goes wrong in your life that

everything else starts to come back and chase you.” This is why she will stick at the therapy – she has found some kind of acceptance. The older she has got, she says, the more she has realised that “life is about absorbing the good and the bad, learning from both and still moving forward”. She made a choice, she says, not to feel angry or bitter. “That’s only damaging to yourself. It blurs your vision, it doesn’t allow you to progress. When I go back and talk to the five-year-old or the 11-year-old Fatima, I take her by the hand and say: don’t worry, I’ve got you now.”

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A future at risk: drought forces Kenya's camel herders to leave their homes – a photo essay

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Qureisha Juma, 17, brings her niece Suheyba Faisal for a screening at Iftin hospital in Garissa, which is seeing a rise in patients from other areas where the drought is worse. Photograph: Patrick Meinhardt/The Guardian

[Global development](#)

‘From bad to worse’: drought puts Kenya’s hospitals under pressure

New mothers at a rural hospital running out of water and power tell of their struggles as health workers leave for safer areas

- [Read more: A future at risk: drought forces Kenya’s camel herders to leave their homes](#)

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[Caroline Kimeu](#) in Garissa County

Mon 17 Apr 2023 01.30 EDTLast modified on Mon 17 Apr 2023 02.17 EDT

The morning rounds at Modogashe hospital in Lagdera do not take long. Most of the rooms opening on to its narrow hallway are empty. “We don’t get that many patients these days,” says Saveria Njoki, the head of nursing. Only three patients were on the ward that day, and none would be staying very long.

According to a local official, patient numbers in Lagdera – a district in Garissa County, in the east of [Kenya](#) – have dropped from nearly 12,000 in 2019 to just over 8,000 last year, as people move away in search of water.

Kenya, Ethiopia and Somalia are experiencing their worst drought in 40 years, with their [sixth consecutive failed rainy season](#). The number of people in Kenya facing severe hunger is expected to rise to [5.4 million this year](#), particularly in the north of the country, where about [95%](#) of surface water sources have dried up. Garissa County is among the worst-hit regions and hordes of people have moved from the countryside to Garissa town, which sits on the Tana River.



Usba Hussein, 20, walked for more than two hours to reach Modogashe hospital with her daughter Fatima, who was suffering from malnutrition. Photograph: Patrick Meinhardt/The Guardian

Water has always been a problem at Modogashe hospital, which is located along a dusty, windy road. But the situation has got much worse over the past three years as the nearby rivers that provided it with some water have dried up. It is now reliant on water being delivered by road – which can be infrequent because there are not enough trucks.

Lack of water and electricity has already forced the hospital to close its operating theatre and neonatal unit.

Usuba Hussein, 20, brought her baby to the hospital because she was malnourished. Hussein fetches a 20-litre barrel of water from the hospital storage tank and uses her feet to shuffle it back to the ward. “This water needs to last me and my baby for four days,” she says. That includes drinking and washing.

“Things have gone from bad to worse,” says Njoki. “I stay because it’s very difficult to move elsewhere when you’re employed by the government, so I can only wait for retirement.”



Head nurse Saveria Njoki checks on Athar Khalif, 22, at Modogashe hospital. Khalif gave birth on her way there. Photograph: Patrick Meinhardt/The Guardian

In the maternity ward, Athar Khalif, 22, lies on a bed recovering. She gave birth to her daughter on her way here. She wanted to be at the hospital because she bled heavily last time she had a baby and needed to be near trained medics. But she had to wait for a water truck to arrive at home. [Women](#) giving birth at Modogashe hospital usually bring a jerrycan of water with them, because the facility will probably not have enough.

In times of extreme water shortages, like now, health workers ask mothers help out. “I was rushing with my children to get water, then I felt some sharp pains. I knew I wouldn’t get to the hospital in time,” says Khalif.

With no water, Njoki has sometimes had to use saline solutions from IV drips to stop infections during deliveries and manage postpartum haemorrhage, the leading cause of maternal deaths. Garissa County has the highest maternal mortality rate in the country: 641 deaths for every 100,000 live births, according to [2019 data](#) by Kenya’s National Bureau of Statistics.

“Put yourself in that situation,” says Njoki. “There’s no water, the mother is bleeding, and you are there and have to do something. Sometimes you have two deliveries without water and a third one on the way. Your only aim is to see the mother and the child alive.”



Nurse Morrice Mugambi at Afwein dispensary in Garissa. Unicef says many hospitals in the area are operating under conditions that place patients at risk. Photograph: Patrick Meinhardt/The Guardian

Mohamed Abdullahi, the chief of Unicef’s Garissa office, says many hospitals in the area are operating under conditions that place patients at risk. “They may be admitted with one issue but pick up an infection while being treated,” he says.

Modogashe has had to cancel some of its critical outreach work because nearly half the community health volunteers who run the programme have left because of drought, leaving the service overstretched.

“Things are really bad,” says Mohammed Sede Dif, 60, a community health worker. “Many [volunteers] have moved to other places. When it rains, they’ll come back, but for now, there’s a big problem. There are so many households that need us and just a few of us left. We receive one call from this side, and another call from the other, so we do what we can but we can’t respond to everything.”



Usba Hussein, 20, rolls a jerrycan of water at Modogashe hospital. Patients are asked to bring their own water to help with their care. Photograph: Patrick Meinhardt/The Guardian

Many of the people who have left the countryside have gone to Garissa town, about 150km (90 miles) south of Lagdera. The town’s three hospitals have reported an increase in patient numbers in recent months, but at least the facilities have underground boreholes, running water and storage facilities – for now.

Unicef said about 3,000 men, women and children have arrived in the town this year from Wajir, another northern region severely affected by the

drought. The UN agency estimates that about 80% were unwell or had injuries when they arrived.

“We are now seeing internally displaced people within Kenya for the first time in this crisis,” says Abdullahi. “This is placing an enormous pressure on hospitals in the main towns in drought-affected regions, which are responding to influxes of patients from a widening area.”



Fatuma Aden, 26, holds her four-month-old son Qamar Mohamud as he is examined at Modogashe hospital. Photograph: Patrick Meinhardt/The Guardian

At Garissa town’s Iftin hospital, the waiting areas are full and workers bustle around the corridors. A line of patients wait outside the malnutrition centre.

“Resources are getting finished earlier than expected – we are really feeling the pinch,” says Bishar Hassan, the hospital chief. “For now we are able to handle it, but we are concerned that the cases of waterborne diseases may flare up.”

Garissa is still battling a cholera outbreak, which began in October, triggered by the severe drought. The World Health Organization says [7,800 cases](#)

[have been recorded](#) in the country.

Kenya's Ministry of Health has launched an [oral vaccine](#) campaign to reach 2.2 million people.



A nurse distributes ready-to-use therapeutic food (RUTF) at Ifin hospital. Many child patients are badly malnourished. Photograph: Patrick Meinhardt/The Guardian

Unicef has also rehabilitated 21 boreholes in Garissa and begun prospecting for underground water sources in a number of northern counties. This involves using specialist equipment to more accurately track where water might be found and improve drilling rates.

“The key is to build the capacity of county governments to manage scarce water resources in ways that suit the environment and climate,” says Abdullahi. “The anticipation of future needs is vital.”

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2023.04.17 - Opinion

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- Is a British pub racist for displaying golliwogs? Think how that question makes people of colour like me feel
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Volodymyr Zelenskyy and Rishi Sunak meet Ukrainian troops being trained at a military facility in Dorset, England. Photograph: EyePress News/Rex/Shutterstock

[OpinionUkraine](#)

Freedom needs to be better supplied than tyranny. If democracies stand firm, Putin's war on Ukraine will fail

[Simon McDonald](#), [Christoph Heusgen](#), [Stéphane Abrial](#), [Jim Jones](#) and [Stefano Stefanini](#)

We are diplomatic and military experts from across Europe. And we say give Ukrainians more arms, or risk a terrible stalemate

- [Report: Former senior diplomats urge west to 'go all in' on military support for Ukraine](#)

Mon 17 Apr 2023 05.00 EDTLast modified on Mon 17 Apr 2023 10.40 EDT



Simon McDonald



Christoph Heusgen



Stéphane Abrial



Jim Jones



Stefano Stefanini

When Vladimir Putin [ordered his troops into Ukraine](#) on 24 February 2022, he flagrantly violated international law and committed a breach of the [UN charter](#). Denying Ukraine's right to exist, he used massive force to try to erase it from the map of Europe, leaving an ever-increasing trail of gross human rights abuses and war crimes in the process. One year later, Putin has not given up his objective of taking over Ukraine; he believes he has more staying power than Ukraine and the international coalition that supports it.

If he succeeded, Putin would no doubt set his eyes on Moldova and possibly the Baltic states, increasing the risk of a direct confrontation between Russia and Nato. A Russian victory in [Ukraine](#) would undermine the rules-based international order and fundamental principles of territorial integrity and national sovereignty, setting a dangerous precedent for territorial conquest elsewhere.

However, if the countries supporting Ukraine adopt the right strategy and remain steadfast in its execution, Putin will fail; he underestimates – totally – the power of freedom. Putin faces brave opposition from pro-democratic forces: in Ukraine, of course, but also in Belarus, Moldova, Georgia, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Central Asia and even in his own country. Nato is

united and stronger than before the conflict, as is the EU. Russian allies such as Iran and North Korea are politically and militarily weaker; China is not willing to provide full support for Putin's war aims. Freedom exerts a stronger external appeal than tyranny.

Victory is not preordained. Freedom needs to be defended; the Ukrainian freedom fighters need to be supported by all means – including military. At this year's [Munich security conference](#), transatlantic leaders affirmed that Ukraine “must win this war”. But a declaration of unwavering support is not enough, and actions still fail to match the rhetoric. Current levels of incremental and halting military support will only produce a stalemate on the battlefield.

Putin miscalculated every aspect of the war before launching the full-scale invasion last year. He thought his army was strong, China a solid partner, the west divided and Ukraine contemptible. He could not have been more wrong. Now, his only hope is that his determination is greater than his opponents', and he can win a war of attrition. We must prove him wrong once more.

We have to go “all in” in our support for Ukraine. The coalition of states supporting Ukraine has delivered an impressive performance, but this is no time for complacency. We have to provide the weapons and ammunition Ukraine needs to fight, and defeat Putin's war of aggression. The faster Putin understands that he will not achieve his objectives in Ukraine, the earlier peace can be achieved, and the sooner the suffering of the Ukrainian people will end. Ukraine needs the combined force of tanks, longer-range missiles and aircraft to conduct a successful counterattack, paving the way to Ukrainian victory and peace negotiations on acceptable terms.

When speaking about possible peace negotiations, we should be wary of China's role in this conflict. Beijing is already helping Putin's war efforts, supplying non-lethal aid and permitting North Korea to transfer weapons to Russia. John McCain's 2014 prediction that Russia would serve as China's “[gas station](#)” is increasingly true; during [Xi Jinping's recent visit to Moscow](#), Russia looked content to play the part of China's junior partner.

But we should have no illusions: wary of democracy and Russia becoming an open society, China has every interest in keeping Putin in power.



Ukrainian soldiers near the Bakhmut front in Donetsk, Ukraine, this week.
Photograph: Anadolu Agency/Getty Images

In order to counter Moscow and Beijing, we have to be much more active outside the transatlantic community. In many parts of the world, China and Russia are successful in convincing governments and publics of their narratives, blaming Nato for the war in Ukraine and accusing US and European allies of neocolonial practices and double standards in their foreign policies. One-off actions will not suffice. Instead, we need to shine a spotlight on Russia's and China's malign activity and work on our partnerships with countries in Africa, Latin America and Asia – by constantly engaging with them, continuing to address past failings, and fulfilling the promises we have made, including on climate finance and more inclusive international institutions. After the end of the cold war, many government bodies became non-strategic. To compete successfully in this new era of rising geopolitical tensions, we need to reform our foreign ministries as well as development aid and trade agencies, and better align their efforts.

If the world's democracies are going to deter and, if necessary, defend themselves against Russia and China, major economies like Germany will have to do their fair share. It is no longer acceptable that [Germany and Italy](#) do not spend 2% of their GDP on defence; the 2024 budget will be a litmus test. With regard to France, the move by the defence industry to a “[war economy](#)”, as called for by the French government, needs to be genuinely pursued. In similar vein, Europe needs to live up to its decades-old promises of strengthening European defence capabilities. Recent steps such as the [EU's Strategic Compass](#) or the EU's joint military support of Ukraine point in the right direction, but more needs to follow. This stronger European contribution is also necessary to help preserve bipartisan US support for Ukraine. Putin counts on “Ukraine fatigue” in the US; he needs to be proven wrong.

On the economic front, the EU, the US and international partners implemented stinging sanctions with unprecedented speed; they significantly degraded Russia's military capabilities and weakened its economic prospects. But, as a global financial centre, the UK has more work to do on sanctions implementation, since the current sanctions regime still has too many holes. By boosting reverse south-north gas flows from suppliers across the Mediterranean, Italy can help strengthen European energy security and mitigate the ripple effects of Russian energy warfare.

Putin launched his full-scale invasion of Ukraine in the erroneous belief that Ukraine would be defeated within a few weeks. More than a year later, Ukraine's unity and resilience in the face of Russia's aggression have shown the country's remarkable strength. Instead of ruling an empire, Putin has become an international outcast, [facing an arrest warrant](#) for his war crimes, issued by the international criminal court. To continue its fight for freedom and defeat Putin, however, Ukraine needs more support. Ukraine's partners have to step up; when freedom is better equipped than tyranny, its victory is assured.

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- Stéphane Abrial is a former Supreme Allied Commander Transformation (Sact), former chief of staff of the French air force and former chief of the military staff to Prime Minister Jean-Pierre Raffarin
- Jim Jones was a national security adviser to President Barack Obama, is a former Supreme Allied Commander Europe (Saceur) and chair emeritus of the Atlantic Council
- Stefano Stefanini is senior fellow at the Atlantic Council, senior adviser at the [Italian Institute for International Political Studies](#) and a former diplomatic adviser to President Giorgio Napolitano

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Behind the bar at the White Hart Inn in Grays, Essex, from where police removed a display of golliwog dolls. Photograph: David Levene/The Guardian

[OpinionRace](#)

Is a British pub racist for displaying golliwogs? Think how that question makes people of colour like me feel

[Nesrine Malik](#)



We cope with the micro slights and othering. But what are we to do when openly racist attitudes are exploited for political gain?

Mon 17 Apr 2023 01.00 EDT

There is something particularly grotesque about a golliwog. It's the smile, I think, its teeth frozen in a rictus grin behind the exaggerated redness of the lips. The golliwog seems to say that not only is it OK to "minstrelise" black people and display them as dolls, but that they should enjoy it.

That smile is the price of entry into white British society, of acceptance and integration into workplaces, social groups and our wider politics and culture. The golliwog, despite it being a relic of the past, is in fact a symbol of the present. You are only allowed visibility as a black figure if you're grateful, permanently smiling in all circumstances. Your status, as someone who is part of Britain and therefore gets a say in how they experience it, is conditional on the fact that you must never suggest that the country is not quite so hospitable to you sometimes. Ideally, if you want social and professional mobility as a person of colour, if you want to be moved from the bottom shelf to a position of higher prominence, you must go further.

You must grin harder and always maintain that Britain is, in fact, a race-relations utopia, even as things regularly happen that prove that we are far from that.

Let's take just last week. A pub in Essex had its [collection of golliwogs confiscated](#), after which they were promptly [replaced with a new collection](#) by the landlady, who refuses to accept that they are racist. Some of the new golliwogs she says were sent in by sympathetic supporters. In the same week, a [Tory councillor was suspended](#) after he was reportedly recorded saying "all white men should have a Black slave" and that black people "are a lower class than us white people". Neither of these incidents suggest that Britain is a uniformly racist place, but clearly, I think it's safe to say, something is going on.

And that something is that it is possible for a society to make large strides towards racial equality, and still be meaningfully prejudiced in ways that make life difficult and uncomfortable for a significant number of people of colour. This is not a complicated fact. Racism isn't a disease that is cured by a single shot of medicine, it's a combination of attitudes and social values around which there are varying levels of agreement. We have agreed, for example, that you can't say the N-word. But, it seems, not against the hanging of golliwogs in public places, as the pub landlord [commented on a Facebook post](#), the way "they used to hang them in Mississippi years ago". You might think we also agreed that we couldn't say white people should own black slaves, but it seems that even that is not a certainty.

Constantly realising all the questions you thought were settled are in fact not, is my abiding experience of being a non-white Briton. Along with those realisations comes a queasy sense of foreboding, because I know that suggesting that all might not be well in Britain on the race front isn't going to be pretty. In choosing not to smile, there is a price to pay. You'll have to be subjected to the usual: that you are oversensitive, woke, and in fact, actually the one making it about race when it's just some dolls hanging like they used to hang black folk in Mississippi. Despite all recent fictions about Black Lives Matter (BLM) ushering in an age of deference to black people, one only has to look at how race incidents are discussed in our politics, and

our media, to see that our group response to expressing discomfort about race isn't exactly "let me kneel in solidarity this very moment".

Any questions asked of the appropriateness of our symbols or historical legacies is not merely met with a lack of deference, but with punishment. Students who suggest modifying curriculums are [mauled in the press](#); others who campaign against systemic racism, such as BLMUK, are [investigated](#) for something called "progressive extremism" and [struggle to open bank accounts](#) to disburse funds raised to support precariously employed and housed people. People such as Ngozi Fulani, who had the misfortune of expecting enlightened views of the royal household, are [savaged](#) by the press and, in turn, members of the public, for pointing out that it's not very nice to be aggressively asked where you are from.

It's a sort of law of racial gravity – for every claim of a racist action there is a wildly unequal and disproportionate reaction. Most of the time I don't particularly care about who asked whom where they were from, or if there's a pub that wants to display golliwogs. Sometimes I actively will myself not to care, because really, in the grand scheme of things these are relatively small incidents that do not make up the sum total of the experience of being a person of colour in the UK. But one is forced into a state of outrage by a government and media that then throw their weight behind the aggressors. If we can be convinced that there is a powerful onslaught against the good British people and their history and traditions by radical leftwing identity politics, then maybe there's a chance we can be distracted from the colossal failures of the last 13 years.

The home secretary, Suella Braverman, apparently found time to let it be known that she had [rebuked](#) the police for getting involved in the golliwog matter. In truth, according to weekend reports, [no real attempt](#) was made by Braverman to contact Essex police. But no matter, for that starts a process. A columnist in the Telegraph laments the demonisation of the innocent golliwog and [says your teddy bears could be next](#). The matter then becomes not one of outliers and hold-outs, but rightwing state and media sanction of their positions. The result is an encouragement and entrenchment of racist views, that is a constant drag on a Britain that is [becoming increasingly enlightened](#) on race.

Racism as individuals acting out is ultimately a diversion from racism as threat to life and liberty. In the same week that golliwogs dominated, it was revealed that black girls are [three times more likely](#) to undergo an invasive strip-search by Met police than white girls, and that [more than a third](#) of people from ethnic and religious minorities have experienced racially motivated physical or verbal abuse. But when the Home Office gets involved to protect the right to insult you, then you have to care about golliwogs too. Because now they are now a matter of national debate, of dinner party conversations and school playground taunting, and [actual YouGov polling](#) that asks if golliwogs are racist – a swirling national discourse in which the final arbiter of what is racist is never you.

It's dizzying, trying to calibrate the appropriate response to these travesties, because, yes, of course things are getting better. But they are also getting worse, because the frontier for what constitutes racial equality is always shifting. The questions are new: not ones of civil rights, but of all the cultural adjustments that are required to make people of colour feel at home and equal, not erased from history, not subject to the glorification of imperial overlords, not having to drink a pint as a golliwog hangs over them or as a nation debates whether they should be forced to. It's an awful lot of contempt to carry around with you, while simultaneously disciplining and reminding yourself that it's not all this nation has to offer. So forgive me, for not smiling.

- Nesrine Malik is a Guardian columnist

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Pedro Pascal ... touted as a poster boy for late bloomers, but his age is irrelevant. Photograph: John Salangsang/Rex/Shutterstock

[OpinionAgeing](#)

**I turn 50 soon. Why would I want
anyone to assume I am younger?**

[Viv Groskop](#)



The obsession with agelessness puts pressure on us to look and act forever young. But it's far more liberating to be old and cheerfully weary

Mon 17 Apr 2023 02.00 EDTLast modified on Tue 18 Apr 2023 04.44 EDT

Who wants to be ageless? Not me. I am old. Hear me creak. To be old and to be able to participate, even if with increasing cynicism and decrepitude, in the unpredictable verb of “ageing” is surely a blessing. It is a gift famously more attractive than the perennially unpopular alternative. I will turn 50 this year and I have realised that I couldn't care less if people think I am 70 or 80, let alone 50. I'm just happy to be around. I don't need anyone to think I'm not 50, and I certainly don't need them to believe I'm any younger. What would be the point? If people think you're younger than you are (or, worse, that you “look good for your age”), there's a pressure there. It might be manageable this month. But how are you going to maintain that over the next five years? Or 10 years? Let's be optimistic. Better to act like you're 90 now. I mean, you might never get there in reality. So channel that age. Get the practice in.

The thing is, we are monumentally spoilt, even with the latest alarming news of the UK's stagnant life expectancy, which is [slowly creeping](#)

[downwards from the upper 80s](#), according to the Institute for Fiscal Studies. Because only 2,000 years ago, it was completely normal to expect to die a horrible death between the age of 20 and 35. Old people were outliers. It was only from around 1800 that average life expectancy in Europe pushed up to 40, and only in the past 200 years that it has moved beyond all previous imagining and we had to invent stupid sayings like “Age is just a number” and “60 is the new 50.” But if it really were just a number, then no one would need to say that it’s just a number. And if it’s all just numbers, then no number needs to be the new version of another number.

If success is ageless then you can pressure everyone to ‘keep grinding’ until they drop dead

This double-think struck me in [the current circus surrounding actor Pedro Pascal](#). I am a fully paid-up member of this circus, dedicated to celebrating and championing the career of my close coeval and imaginary boyfriend Pedro Pascal, break-out star of the hit TV series [The Last of Us](#) and [The Mandalorian](#). I will happily tend the elephants in this circus, and I will do so with no requests for remuneration. However, I object to one of the circus’ mantras: that Pedro Pascal’s age is significant. Pascal just turned 48, and somehow this is supposed to give us all hope: that it’s never too late to have a late-blooming acting career as a bounty hunter with paternal instincts, and that somehow success is “ageless”. But Pascal is hardly late-blooming. He has been very happily having a busy and successful life in dozens of films and TV shows since his early 20s. It just so happens that the limelight of extreme, obsessive celebrity has fallen on him at this particular moment. It’s not inspiring that he’s old; it’s just a fact and a coincidence. Success and celebrity are not “ageless”. They are subjective and fickle.

The obsession with agelessness is becoming so pervasive that people are now even embracing it before puberty. I recently boggled at [a nine-year-old “fashion influencer”](#), with more than 350,000 followers on Instagram, expressing the view that “fashion has no age”. I mean, who would disagree? But how convenient. If fashion is ageless then you can market to consumers from the moment they exit the womb. If success is ageless then you can

pressure everyone to “keep grinding” until they drop dead. Far more liberating? Just be old and cheerfully weary and do things in the manner of an old, cheerfully weary person. We need to see all kinds of people represented in society, and the way things are going, even with the life expectancy wobble, there are only going to be more of the old and cheerfully weary around.

We feel obliged to bang on repeatedly about the fact that ageing doesn't matter. But, the fact is, if age really had no meaning then: (a) we would not bang on about it not mattering, because when things really don't matter they don't get mentioned, and (b) digital algorithms would not repeatedly segment us according to our date of birth. The algorithm knows the truth: we're not getting any younger.

- Viv Groskop is a writer, broadcaster and standup comedian

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‘A collective performance, free of charge, unfolding across all Britain to all people.’ Mistle thrush in Warwickshire. Photograph: Mike Lane/Alamy

[OpinionBirds](#)

**Look up, listen, and be very concerned.
Birds are vanishing – and their crisis is
our crisis**

[Mark Cocker](#)



More than 40m birds have disappeared from UK's skies since 1970: a trend that imperils the network that gives us life

Mon 17 Apr 2023 03.00 EDTLast modified on Mon 17 Apr 2023 13.00 EDT

Most mornings in spring I listen for a sequence of birdsongs to know that my local area is in good heart, but also to reassure myself that the world is working largely as it should. The default soloist of my dawn in Buxton, Derbyshire, is a mistle thrush that delivers from the ash tree above our house.

As I listen to my soloist there is an added delight in knowing that, from Cape Wrath in northernmost Scotland to Kingsdown in Kent, his voice unites with tens of millions of other dawn birds. The blue and great tits of the inner cities, blackbirds and robins among the English villages, chaffinches and wrens through the remotest Scottish glens: it is a collective performance, free of charge, unfolding across all Britain to all people.

Have we time enough and opportunity, we can attune ourselves to one of the greatest events of every April morning on our planet, since birdsong

unfolds across all Eurasia and North America as daylight processes over those lands too. Think of it as the Earth rejoicing at the sun's cyclical return.

The global chorus may unite us in planetary ritual but increasingly, as underlined by a recent report, there are more and more gaps in the avian responses to this daily passage. Both in the long and short term, Britain's birds are now shown to be on a [dangerous downward trajectory](#).

The UK [has lost 40m birds](#) since 1970 and Europe as a whole [has lost 600m birds](#) since 1980. The British figures, especially for farmland species such as skylark and lapwing, have long been the worst of any country in the region. The North American continent, meanwhile, but especially the US, has seen avian populations [fall by almost a third](#) since 1970, losing a cumulative 3bn birds.

What is at stake is not simply some aesthetic thrill or existential reassurance which we have long vested in our avian neighbours, although the prospect of these losses alone is crushing. Aldous Huxley once suggested that if you took birds out of the English poetic canon you would have to lose half the nation's verse.

We have yet truly to understand how much environmental loss is also cultural impoverishment, but the lesson is now among us. Imagine the arts without the following: music without Vaughan Williams' The Lark Ascending, ballet without Tchaikovsky's Swan Lake, poetry without Keats's Ode to a Nightingale, literature without JA Baker's The Peregrine.



‘If you took birds out of the English poetic canon you would have to lose half the nation’s verse.’ Eurasian wren. Photograph: Arterra Picture Library/Alamy

In its 150-year history as a science, ecology has increasingly revealed how life functions as an infinitely complex yet always interconnecting process. Affect a single part of nature and we invariably see major, often unforeseen, even counterintuitive, consequences elsewhere. The best recent illustration of this was a [study from Germany](#) in 2017 known as the Krefeld report.

It showed what impacts had resulted from 60 years’ use of agricultural poison – the so-called pesticides that are a default instrument of intensive agriculture. And revealed that Germany’s insect biomass had declined by 75%. Most alarming was the fact that losses were recorded not among serried fields of chemically drenched maize, but inside the nation’s network of protected nature reserves. No arrangement of our affairs in our heads, or on paper, can gainsay life’s indivisible unity. In nature there is only one place. And it is everywhere, even in our towns and cities.

As the most charismatic component of our full wildlife spectrum, birds enjoy major, some would say disproportionate, concern and attention. Our largest wildlife charity is still the Royal Society for the Protection of [Birds](#), with 1.3 million members. Yet our so-called feathered friends perform an

infallible service to other lifeforms that don't enjoy the same levels of love such as insects, lichens and fungi.

Birds are the ultimate vertebrate life form arising in almost all environments, whether it is a kittiwake on a sea cliff, or a blue tit hunting for caterpillars in our garden, or a worm-probing curlew on high moorland, or a barn owl patrolling down the cornfield's hedge border. Each is completely dependent upon the continued healthy functioning of all the other parts of life in their specific places: the bacteria, protists, tardigrades, nematodes, springtails, insects, arachnids, fungi, lichens, mosses, flowers, trees, molluscs, crustacea, fishes, amphibians, reptiles and mammals. If birds are in trouble, then we can be absolutely sure that the rest of the system is in crisis too.

Our own species shares a place at the top of this pyramid of life. If birds continue to decline then so too shall the very network on which the human project depends. And we depend on this network in its entirety.

- Mark Cocker is an author and naturalist, based in Derbyshire. He writes for the Guardian's Country Diary

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2023.04.17 - Around the world

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Brazil's foreign minister, Mauro Vieira, left, meets his Russian counterpart, Sergei Lavrov, in New Delhi last month. Photograph: Russian Foreign Ministry/AFP/Getty Images

[Brazil](#)

Lavrov's Brazil visit highlights Lula's neutral foreign policy despite US dismay

Brasília encounter, like Brazilian president's recent trip to China and offer of peacemaking in Ukraine, is part of diplomatic reset

[Constance Malleret](#) in Rio de Janeiro

Mon 17 Apr 2023 02.00 EDT

Russia's minister of foreign affairs, Sergei Lavrov, is due to arrive in Brasília on Monday for talks with his Brazilian counterpart, Mauro Vieira, in the latest of a series of bilateral encounters likely to ruffle the US.

Lavrov arrives just as Brazil's president, Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva, returns from a state visit to China, and both missions are part of a diplomatic reset Lula has pursued since returning to power this year, as he strives to [recover Brazil's international reputation](#) after his predecessor, Jair Bolsonaro, dismantled Brazil's established tradition of cooperation.

For [Brazil](#), that means rebuilding and maintaining ties with all partners, regardless of geopolitical tensions elsewhere.

“To return to international politics, Brazil must have positive relationships with all countries,” said Rubens Duarte, coordinator of Mundolab, a Brazil-based research centre for international relations. This is coherent with Brazil's traditional [pursuit of multilateralism](#), he added.

It is a pragmatic approach too: Brazil's top trading partners are [China](#) and the US, while the South American country relies heavily on Russia for fertiliser imports.

But Lula also harbours more ambitious foreign policy objectives and even aspires to Brazil playing a peace-brokering role in the conflict between Russia and Ukraine.

Lula first floated the possibility during a meeting with Olaf Scholz in January, when he rebuffed the German chancellor's request for Brazil to contribute ammunition to Ukraine's war effort.

He has since raised the idea of a “peace club” of neutral countries with a number of foreign leaders including the US president, Joe Biden, and, during his postponed trip to Beijing last week, Xi Jinping. He sent his top foreign policy adviser, Celso Amorim, to discuss prospects for peace with Vladimir Putin on a discreet trip to Moscow at the end of March.

Gestures like these and Lavrov's visit – part of a Latin American tour that will take him to Venezuela, Cuba and Nicaragua, bastions of anti-US sentiment – do not sit well in Washington.

Although Brazil voted to condemn the Russian aggression at the United Nations in March, Lula has often been ambivalent about the conflict. He recently suggested Ukraine should consider giving up Crimea to achieve peace and Speaking to reporters in China on Saturday, he said the US should “stop encouraging the war” and that the European Union “must start talking about peace”.

“Lula’s approach to the issue in Ukraine, both in substance and rhetoric, is causing a lot of mistrust in Washington and other western capitals in Europe,” said Bruna Santos, director of the Brazil Institute at the Wilson Center, a Washington-based thinktank.

In Brazil, the approach to the war in Ukraine is seen as part of a longstanding foreign policy tradition of neutrality.

And this would not be Brazil’s first attempted foray into international peace negotiations under Lula: during his first stint in office, between 2003 and 2010, his government sent a peacekeeping mission to Haiti and in 2010 attempted to broker a nuclear deal with Iran alongside Turkey.

“Brazil’s relations with Russia are very solid, [...] but I don’t think this really changes Brazil’s position. Even if it was a war involving countries that Brazil does not have a strong relationship with, it wouldn’t change, as Brazil has always had a position as a peacemaker, as a mediator,” said Guilherme Casarões, a professor of international relations at the Fundação Getulio Vargas university.

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Fumio Kishida in Wakayama, on Saturday. A police officer received minor injuries in the attack. Photograph: KYODO/Reuters

[Japan](#)

Japan's PM gives G7 security pledge after pipe bomb attack

Security tightened ahead of summit in Hiroshima next month after incident on Saturday

[Justin McCurry](#) in Osaka

Mon 17 Apr 2023 03.14 EDTLast modified on Mon 17 Apr 2023 08.54 EDT

Japan's prime minister, Fumio Kishida, has vowed to ensure the safety of politicians and officials attending this year's round of G7 meetings, days after he [escaped unharmed](#) after apparently being targeted in a pipe bomb attack.

The incident on Saturday came as [foreign ministers](#) began three days of talks in Japan, this year's [G7](#) president, that will be followed by other high-level meetings culminating in the leaders' summit in Hiroshima in May.

The attack was an uncomfortable reminder of last summer's [assassination](#) of Shinzo Abe, and again called into question security arrangements for senior politicians and other dignitaries.

Japan's environment minister, Akihiro Nishimura, who hosted the G7 climate, energy and environment meeting in the northern city of Sapporo this weekend, said security was noticeably tight.

"My security has become even heavier this morning," he told reporters at his hotel. "It's so tight I think it is going to be difficult to go out into the city."

A police officer received minor injuries in the incident involving Kishida, and a suspect – identified by police as Ryuji Kimura, 24 – was arrested on the spot. Kimura was also carrying a knife when he was arrested, as well as a possible second explosive device he dropped at the scene after being tackled by bystanders and police officers, Kyodo news agency reported.

He was initially confronted by local fishers after he reportedly threw what appeared to be a pipe bomb at Kishida, who was visiting a fishing port in Wakayama, western [Japan](#), to campaign for his party's candidate in an upcoming lower house byelection.

A 54-year-old fisher told Kyodo he had jumped on the suspect "instinctively" after the device had been thrown, as the suspect was "still doing something with his hands".

Police believe Kimura was armed with two explosive devices, including the one used in the attack, Kyodo said, citing investigative sources. The device exploded as the suspect was being held on the ground, while bodyguards quickly removed Kishida from the scene.

The fishers said they had been surprised by the lack of security surrounding Kishida.

“I never thought a crime like this would happen in my home town, which is a rather small fishing port,” said Tsutomu Konishi, 41, who had been among about 200 people waiting to listen to Kishida’s speech on Saturday.

“I’m still shocked and stunned. At a time when Japan’s prime minister was visiting, perhaps there should have been a metal detector,” added Konishi, who held on to the suspect’s leg while police officers pulled him to the ground.

Another fisher, Masaki Nishide, said Kimura, who had been carrying a silver-grey rucksack, stood out as most of the people attending the speech were local residents.

“People here all dress like me, and nobody carries a backpack; it was only him,” Nishide said. “If I had been in charge of security, I would have asked for a bag check.”

Abe, too, was addressing voters ahead of an election when he was shot dead with a homemade gun fired at close range outside a railway station in Nara, western Japan, last July. The suspect in Saturday’s incident was also able to get within 10 metres of his apparent target.

The suspect in Abe’s murder, Tetsuya Yamagami, has been charged with murder and several other crimes, including violating Japan’s strict [gun-control](#) laws.

An investigation revealed [serious flaws](#) in the security arrangements for Abe – Japan’s longest-serving prime minister – but most politicians have continued the tradition of making public speeches and mingling with voters.

Kishida, who resumed campaigning immediately after the incident, said it should not be allowed to derail the democratic process. “A violent act taking place during elections, the bedrock of democracy, can never be tolerated,” he told reporters at his residence on Sunday.

The chief cabinet secretary, Hirokazu Matsuno, said police had been instructed to boost G7 security, adding that the government would do everything necessary to ensure that foreign leaders and delegations visiting [Hiroshima](#) next month would be kept safe.

Grant Shapps, Britain's secretary of state for energy security, who attended the Sapporo meeting, said he was confident the leaders' summit would pass off without incident.

“As politicians, we have to go out and campaign sometimes ... it means we have to be exposed to the public,” he told Reuters. “But I am quite sure that in the context of the [G7](#) with our prime minister and other world leaders coming to Japan, we are perfectly safe.”

Police retrieved metal pipes and tools, as well as powder-like substances that could be gunpowder in an eight-hour search of Kimura's home on Sunday, Kyodo quoted investigative sources as saying.

The motive behind the attack remains unknown, and Kimura has reportedly refused to answer questions until he is accompanied by a lawyer.

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Fox News, owned by Rupert Murdoch, pictured, may be pushing to settle with Dominion Voting Systems out of court, according to a report. Photograph: Noam Galai/Getty Images

[Fox News-Dominion case](#)

Judge delays Dominion and Fox News trial amid reports of settlement talks

Rupert Murdoch's channel sued for knowingly or recklessly broadcasting outlandish lies about voting equipment after Trump lost election

[Sam Levine](#) in Wilmington, Delaware

Mon 17 Apr 2023 10.43 EDTFirst published on Sun 16 Apr 2023 21.18 EDT

The trial in the closely watched \$1.6bn defamation lawsuit between Dominion Voting Systems and Fox will begin a day later than scheduled, the judge overseeing the case announced on Sunday evening, hours before opening arguments were set to begin on Monday and amid reports of settlement talks.

The trial was rescheduled to begin on Tuesday. Eric Davis, the Delaware superior court judge overseeing the case, did not say why the trial was being delayed. “The court has decided to continue the start of the trial, including jury selection, until Tuesday, April 18, 2023 at 9am. I will make such an announcement tomorrow [Monday] at 9am in Courtroom 7E,” he said in a statement released through a court spokesperson.

The Wall Street Journal, citing a person familiar with the matter, [reported on Sunday](#) that Fox had made a late push to settle the case out of court. Reuters also reported that the delay was due to settlement talks, according to a source familiar with the situation, as did the [Washington Post](#), citing two sources. Spokespeople for Fox and Dominion did not immediately return a request for comment. A settlement could theoretically come at any time.

In a brief court hearing on Monday morning, Davis offered no more details on his decision to push back the start date.

“This is not unusual,” he said to a courtroom filled mostly with reporters. “I have not gone through a trial longer than two weeks that has not had a day delay.”

Only one lawyer from each side was present in the courtroom on Monday. Davis spoke privately with them in a corner of the room as white noise was played over a loudspeaker.

The announcement of a delay came on a quiet Sunday evening in Wilmington, the venue for the trial because Fox, like many US corporations, is incorporated in Delaware, where there are generous tax benefits. A reporter or two could be seen doing a television standup outside the courthouse on Sunday afternoon.

A Fox spokesperson claimed on Monday that Dominion was reducing the amount of money it was seeking in damages. The spokesperson pointed to a Friday email in which a Dominion lawyer said that the company would not present a claim on “lost profit damages” to the jury because it was duplicative of “the lost enterprise value damages”. In its original 2021

complaint, Dominion claimed \$600m in lost profit damages in addition to \$1bn in lost enterprise value. Fox has argued that Dominion is inflating the financial damage it suffered.

“The damages claim remains. As Fox well knows, our damages exceed \$1.6bn,” a Dominion spokesperson said in a statement.

Lee Levine, an attorney who has defended media companies, said it was “a little surprising to change or amend damages theories so late in the game” but that Dominion’s move was not “earthshaking”.

“Typically, the plaintiff would have nailed down its damaged theories by this time but it’s really no big deal,” he said.

Dominion is asking a Delaware jury to award damages because it says Fox knowingly or recklessly disregarded the truth when it broadcast outlandish lies about its voting equipment. US law sets a very high bar to win a defamation lawsuit and cases rarely go to trial.

Dominion’s case, experts say, is unusually strong. It has drawn national attention because it amounts to one of the most aggressive efforts to hold Fox, or anyone, responsible for spreading misinformation about the 2020 election. Over the last several months Dominion has produced a trove of internal communications from Fox employees showing they knew what they were broadcasting was false.

The trial has been expected to be a blockbuster, with top Fox executives Rupert and Lachlan Murdoch expected to testify in person, along with top Fox hosts Sean Hannity, Tucker Carlson, Maria Bartiromo and Jeanine Pirro.

Fox accuses Dominion of cherry-picking evidence and has argued that it is defending the first amendment, and that a win for Dominion would lead to more lawsuits against media outlets and weaken press protections in the US. Some experts share that concern. “Unfortunately, I’d predict if Fox loses, we’ll see a significant uptick in libel cases against all news organizations,” Jane Kirtley, a professor at the University of Minnesota and

former executive director of the Reporters Committee for Freedom of the Press, wrote in an email.

Other experts say the evidence against Fox is so strong that this case could show existing media standards still provide workable protections under which outlets can be held accountable.

“The key question here is whether Dominion is asking for a watering down of the constitutional standard. Or whether it is arguing that it can clear even the staggeringly high constitutional barrier as it now exists. Everything that I have heard and read from Dominion suggests that it is the latter,” said Ronnell Andersen Jones, a first amendment scholar at the University of Utah.

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Four people killed and others injured in Alabama shooting – video

[Alabama](#)

Four people killed and 28 injured in Alabama shooting at birthday party

Most of the victims teenagers from shooting at dance studio during 16th birthday party in Dadeville

[Adam Gabbatt](#) in New York and agencies

Mon 17 Apr 2023 01.48 EDTFirst published on Sun 16 Apr 2023 10.01 EDT

At least four people were killed, including a high school football player, in a shooting that erupted during a birthday party held inside a dance studio in the small town of Dadeville, [Alabama](#), state police and local news media said.

More than 28 people were injured, some critically, during the shooting about 60 miles (100km) north-east of the state capital of Montgomery, authorities said. The shooting started shortly after 10.30pm on Saturday.

Law enforcement officers did not immediately say if a suspect was in custody or if investigators knew about any motivation. The police called for people to come forward with information.

“We’re going to continue to work in a very methodical way to go through this scene, to look at the facts, and ensure that justice is brought to bear for the families,” said Jeremy Burkett, a sergeant with the Alabama law enforcement agency, during a news conference on Sunday.

“We’ve got to have information from the community,” Burkett said during a Sunday evening news conference.

President Joe Biden said in a statement on Sunday: “What has our nation come to when children cannot attend a birthday party without fear?” Biden called the rising gun violence in the US “outrageous and unacceptable”, and urged Congress to pass laws that would make firearms manufacturers more liable for gun violence, ban assault weapons and high-capacity ammunition magazines, and require safe storage of firearms and background checks for gun sales.

Philstavious “Phil” Dowdell, a Dadeville high school senior who had signed with Jacksonville State University, was celebrating at his sister Alexis’s party before he was fatally shot, his grandmother Annette Allen told the [Montgomery Advertiser](#).

“He was a very, very humble child. Never messed with anybody. Always had a smile on his face,” Allen told the newspaper, calling it “a million-dollar smile”.

Dowdell’s mother was among those hurt in the shooting. “Everybody’s grieving,” Allen said.

Pastor Ben Hayes, who serves as the chaplain for the Dadeville police department and for the local high school football team, said most of the victims were teenagers. Dowdell was within weeks of graduation and faced a bright future, Hayes told the Associated Press.

“He was a strong competitor on the field,” Hayes said. “You didn’t want to try to tackle him or get tackled by him. But when he came off the field, he was one of the nicest young men that you could ever meet, very respectful and well respected by his peers.”

Hayes said worried families swarmed the local hospital on Saturday night trying to find the condition of their children. He said serious crime was rare in Dadeville, and the small city was “sad, traumatized, in shock”.

This is at least the second time in recent years that multiple people were shot in Dadeville. Five people were wounded in July 2016 during a shooting at an American Legion hall, and a man was later charged with five counts of attempted murder, news outlets reported.

Investigators believed an altercation led to the shooting at the Mahogany Masterpiece studio, WRBL reported.



At least four people were killed in a shooting at a dance studio in Dadeville, Alabama. Photograph: Cheney Orr/Reuters

Jonathan Floyd, chief of the Dadeville police, said at a news conference: “What we’ve dealt with is something that no community should have to endure. I just ask for your patience. It’s going to be a long process, but I do earnestly solicit your prayers.”

More than 12 hours after the shooting, investigators continued filing in and out of the Mahogany Masterpiece dance studio on Sunday.

City and county officials milled about the Tallapoosa county courthouse less than a block away, where officials lowered the American and Alabama flags to half-staff.

“This morning, I grieve with the people of Dadeville and my fellow Alabamians,” Kay Ivey, the governor of Alabama, said [on Twitter](#).

“Violent crime has NO place in our state, and we are staying closely updated by law enforcement as details emerge.”

[In 2022](#) Ivey signed a bill into law that ended the requirement for a person to obtain a permit to legally carry a concealed handgun in public. The National Rifle Association (NRA) had lobbied for it.

In [an ad](#) for her re-election campaign last year, Ivey was shown withdrawing a handgun from her purse as she touted her gun-friendly approach, describing the second amendment as “sacred”.

Alabama has the third-highest rate of gun deaths in the US, according to a [2020 report](#) by Everytown, an organization that works to improve gun safety and end gun violence.

Biden asked what was wrong “when parents have to worry every time their kids walk out the door to school, to the movie theater, or to the park? Guns are the leading killer of children in America, and the numbers are rising – not declining. This is outrageous and unacceptable.”

Biden called on Congress to “require safe storage of firearms, require background checks for all gun sales, eliminate gun manufacturers’ immunity from liability, and ban assault weapons and high-capacity magazines”.

The latest shooting comes as two people were killed in a shooting in Louisville, Kentucky, on Saturday night, days after a gunman [shot and killed](#) five people in the city. Associated Press [reported](#) that an unidentified suspect fired a gun into a crowd of hundreds in Chickasaw Park in Louisville, killing two people and wounding four others.

On Monday five people were killed when a man opened fire with an assault-style rifle at the Louisville bank where he worked. Eight others were wounded.

“This has been an unspeakable week of tragedy for our city,” Louisville mayor Craig Greenberg on Saturday night. “On Monday, we lost five of our fellow citizens to a horrific act of workplace gun violence,” Greenberg said. “And now, five days later, we’re at another scene of a reckless act of gun violence.”

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President Erdoğan visits a disaster zone in the city of Kahramanmaraş in south-east Turkey, two days after the earthquake, on 8 February 2023. Photograph: Adem Altan/AFP/Getty Images

[The Observer](#)[Recep Tayyip Erdoğan](#)

Will Turkey's elections finally spell the end of Recep Tayyip Erdoğan?

Toppling the president and his AKP party in May is no longer unthinkable. But voters in Ankara seem finely balanced

[Ruth Michaelson](#) and [Deniz Barış Narlı](#) in Ankara

Sun 16 Apr 2023 08.00 EDTLast modified on Sun 16 Apr 2023 08.16 EDT

On the outskirts of the Turkish capital in a contested electoral district, two young voters tussled over the approaching election in a dessert shop, the smell of sugar and hot butter wafting through the air. İlah Oluklu, a skinny 23-year-old with bleached hair, black jeans and a fitted black T-shirt, chastised his friend for disrespecting some supporters of the Turkish president while they were playing an online video game.

The two friends are split in their allegiances. Oluklu described himself as a nationalist, and said he intended to support Recep Tayyip Erdoğan in a tightly contested [presidential election](#) on 14 May. “Erdoğan is like a father figure for us in Turkey. He’s been running the country for 20 years. I don’t think it’s impossible to remove him as leader, but especially among *this* opposition, there’s no one who can replace him,” he said.

His friend Kaan, a longtime supporter of the main opposition Republican People’s party (CHP), who declined to give his surname, quietly disagreed. “I just don’t think this country is governed well, and I want people’s voices to be heard by those in power,” he said. “I really think this might be the end for Erdoğan,” he added cautiously. “Or, at least, I hope so.”

After two decades in power, Erdoğan is facing a concerted challenge. Polls show his main rival, [Kemal Kılıçdaroğlu](#), a former accountant and longtime bureaucrat, has a slight edge. The vote presents a stark choice for the Turkish public, between Erdoğan and the possibility that re-electing him will entrench one-man rule, or his opponents who have promised to overhaul the presidential system and return Turkey to parliamentary democracy.

Turkey’s opposition, a six-party coalition headed by Kılıçdaroğlu and united by the sole aim of removing Erdoğan from power, believes that the problems facing the country should make this choice easy. A deep [economic crisis](#) and a [lacklustre government response](#) to two powerful earthquakes that struck the country in February have capped 20 years under Erdoğan and his Justice and Development party (AKP), which appears poised to suffer losses in parliamentary elections held in tandem with the vote for president.



Kemal Kılıçdaroğlu, who leads the opposition coalition, at a rally in Çanakkale, western Turkey, on 11 April. Photograph: Ozan Köse/AFP/Getty Images

Kaan's father, Hasan, smoothed the fine mesh of net curtains hanging in his fabric shop next to Oluklu's dessert shop as he explained why he won't be voting for either the AKP or Erdoğan for the first time in his life. "It's simple: he took all the money out of my pocket," he said. "The fabric we sell here, for us to buy it wholesale costs five times more than before. But my rent has more than doubled."

Hasan's views on the economy are matched by the pro-business Democracy and Progress party (Deva), led by a former senior AKP official who is now a member of the opposition coalition. "The situation regarding this economy is clear, as well as the experience of this presidency. Look at the economic indicators – inflation, income distribution, poverty. All of this has deteriorated significantly under this presidential system," said İbrahim Çanakcı, a Deva cofounder and former Turkish treasury official.

"Erdoğan used to blame ministers, institutions or foreign forces. But now people see clearly that when it comes to this system of one-man rule, that means there's only one person responsible for this outcome," he said.

But putting an abrupt end to two decades of rule by both Erdoğan and the AKP is no simple task. While many polls indicate the opposition coalition could gain a majority in the parliament, the race for the presidency remains tight. Without winning both the presidency and the parliament, the opposition will be unable to enact the sweeping constitutional reforms they have promised. The risk that Erdoğan could hang on as president even if his party suffers a defeat in parliament could further concentrate power around the presidency, cancelling out any opposition gains.

Onursal Adıgüzel, a deputy and fierce supporter of Kılıçdaroğlu, was unconcerned. Speaking from a makeshift opposition campaign office decorated with beatific posters of Kılıçdaroğlu meeting farmworkers and young people, he said CHP would triumph by targeting pensioners and elusive undecided voters.



A billboard in Kahramanmaraş shows President Erdoğan embracing an earthquake survivor. Photograph: Mehmet Kacmaz/Getty Images

“Personally, I believe it will be easier for us to win the presidential election than the parliamentary vote,” he said. “Two years ago, Kılıçdaroğlu wasn’t considered a strong rival for Erdoğan and now he’s leading in the polls. But, most of all, he’s a person who can deliver peace to [Turkey](#), and he’s not using polarising language like Erdoğan.”

Asked to define the appeal of Kılıçdaroğlu's candidacy, most voters and members of his coalition said he provided an alternative to Erdoğan and represented change. Few managed to articulate what might encourage undecided voters or lifelong Erdoğan supporters to choose him. The 74-year-old bespectacled politician has also [faced public criticism](#) from his main coalition partner, the nationalist IYI Parti (Good party), that he muscled his way to the candidacy, forcing others out of the running despite polls showing that every other potential option stood a better chance of beating Erdoğan.

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“Erdoğan will lose and Kılıçdaroğlu will win this election – we’re confident in that,” said Çanakkı. “The decision about the candidate is already made. There’s no use questioning how fitting Kılıçdaroğlu is. In our view, he fits the position perfectly.”

Uğur Poyraz, general secretary of the IYI party, said their hesitancy about Kılıçdaroğlu's candidacy was because of the high stakes of this election, where Turkish democracy was on the line. “Our position on the candidate is about our position on victory, and ultimately this is about the good of our country,” he said.

As for how they plan to topple a president who had built up a cult of personality over two decades, Poyraz said he believed that reality would work in their favour, and that the Turkish public no longer trusted Erdoğan or his party. His IYI party will contest every seat in the hope of winning over what they see as a silent majority of AKP voters who are ready to defect.

“Our problem is not with any one individual, it’s about a system that is tainting every aspect of Turkish society. It’s that system we’re setting out to change, not a person we’re fighting ... The public is by and large convinced that it’s time for this government to change, that it’s irredeemable, incurable and that there is no redemption for them,” he said.

Not all voters are convinced. For those like Oluklu’s cousin Kamuran Özcip, who has voted Erdoğan in every single election in his adult life, the prospect of ending the president’s rule is impractical. “I like Erdoğan, maybe it’s his politics, maybe it’s his personality. He’s a really experienced statesman,” he said, pointing up at a television showing news of the president’s latest speech in their family’s dessert shop.

Özcip was baffled by the opposition’s offer of radical change. He’d prefer, he said, to hope that Erdoğan could improve things. “There are some minor problems, with the economy, with people being unable to speak, or people being sent to jail. If Erdoğan changed these things, life wouldn’t be perfect, but it would improve,” he said. “Everyone wants change, and honestly I don’t know what they’re thinking. If Kılıçdaroğlu wins the election, it’s completely unpredictable,” he added.

His nephew Oluklu leaned across the table with a gentle smile. The opposition, he said, misunderstands voters like him who support Erdoğan and his coalition. “People talk about us, those who vote for Erdoğan and the AKP like we’re sheep, as if we vote for them blindly. But that’s not the case at all, we have free choice and we vote accordingly,” he said.

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