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- [Headlines thursday 30 march 2023](#)
- [2023.03.30 - Spotlight](#)
- [2023.03.30 - Opinion](#)
- [2023.03.30 - Around the world](#)
- [Headlines monday 27 march 2023](#)
- [2023.03.27 - Spotlight](#)
- [2023.03.27 - Opinion](#)
- [2023.03.27 - Around the world](#)
- [Headlines tuesday 28 march 2023](#)
- [2023.03.28 - Spotlight](#)
- [2023.03.28 - Opinion](#)
- [2023.03.28 - Around the world](#)
- [Headlines saturday 1 april 2023](#)
- [2023.04.01 - Spotlight](#)
- [2023.04.01 - Opinion](#)
- [2023.04.01 - Around the world](#)
- [Headlines](#)
- [2023.03.31 - Spotlight](#)
- [2023.03.31 - Opinion](#)
- [2023.03.31 - Around the world](#)

## Headlines thursday 30 march 2023

- ['Half-baked, half-hearted' Critics ridicule UK's long-awaited climate strategy](#)
- [Carbon capture Government takes gamble despite scientists' doubts](#)
- [Explainer What is carbon capture, usage and storage?](#)
- [Cheshire Villagers will not be forced to join hydrogen energy trial](#)



A wind turbine at Pakefield, Suffolk, England. Photograph: John Worrall/Alamy

[Energy industry.](#)

## ‘Half-baked, half-hearted’: critics deride UK’s long-awaited climate strategy

UK’s 1,000-page plan criticised as doing ‘little to boost energy security, lower bills or meet climate goals’

- [UK gambles on carbon capture and storage tech](#)

[Jillian Ambrose](#) *Energy correspondent*

Thu 30 Mar 2023 04.07 EDT Last modified on Thu 30 Mar 2023 16.47 EDT

The UK’s new energy plan unveiled on Thursday is a missed opportunity full of “half-baked, half-hearted” policies that do not go far enough to power Britain’s climate goals, according to green business groups and academics.

The 1,000-page strategy has been criticised by many within Britain's green sectors who fear the country could surrender its leading role in climate action because of the government's "business as usual" approach to delivering green investments.

Environmental groups said the plans – which are expected to form the basis of the government's revised strategy to meet its net zero ambitions– also risk falling short of meeting legally binding climate targets, which could [trigger further court action](#).

Grant Shapps, the energy and net zero secretary, announced the wide-ranging strategy, which includes [support for carbon capture projects](#), nuclear energy, offshore windfarms, electric vehicles, home heat pumps and hydrogen power.

However, most of the plans are based on existing government commitments and lack new funding.

Josh Burke, a senior policy fellow at the London School of Economics' Grantham Research Institute, said the lack of a long-term, economy-wide investment plan "undermines investor confidence and prevents the UK from leading the green race".

Joe Biden announced [a \\$370bn green plan for the US last autumn](#) to lower energy costs while accelerating private investment in clean energy solutions as part of his Inflation Reduction Act. Concerns have been raised that the huge subsidies in the plan could lure the UK's key green industries across the Atlantic.

"Instead of grasping this historic moment the government has been left trailing behind the Inflation Reduction Act and is currently failing to capitalise on the opportunities a green transition will provide. Companies are making investment decisions now and in six months' time the UK will be even further behind," Burke said.

He argued that while the government was right to prioritise investment, the focus should be on technologies such as [onshore wind](#) that will reduce

emissions in the short term and ensure energy security.

Ana Musat, an executive director at RenewableUK, which represents onshore wind developers, said the plans did “not go far enough to attract the investment we need in the renewable energy sector” amid “global competition for investment in renewable energy projects [which] is fiercer than ever”.

“We need much more than a ‘business as usual’ approach to kickstart investment on the level we need to boost energy security, cut consumer bills and reach net zero,” Musat said. “Without that, we won’t land the UK-wide economic benefits of building up new clean energy supply chains, as they will go elsewhere where the investment environment is more conducive and attractive.”

Ministers are also expected by the end of the week to publish a revised plan to reduce the UK’s carbon emissions to net zero by 2050, after a successful legal challenge by Friends of the Earth, ClientEarth and Good Law Project against the original plan.

Mike Childs, Friends of the Earth’s head of policy, said the groups lawyers were poised to act if the revised plan fell short. He warned that the government should be scaling up and accelerating the race to net zero, but the latest plans looked “half-baked, half-hearted and dangerously lacking ambition”.

“These announcements will do little to boost energy security, lower bills or put us on track to meet climate goals,” he said.

Mark Maslin, a professor of climatology at University College London, said: “At the moment the government announcement is more of the same, lacks insight to the energy issues and invests money in dead-end technology such as hydrogen.

“Yet again the UK government has missed the opportunity to radically change the UK energy production and market. This is the time that innovative business-led initiatives are needed.”

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| [Section menu](#) | [Main menu](#) |



While Grant Shapps, energy and net zero secretary, is ‘very keen’ to fill caverns under the north sea with captured carbon, Mark Maslin, professor of earth science at UCL, says he is ‘unaware of any CCS that works’. Photograph: David Jones/PA

[Carbon capture and storage \(CCS\)](#)

## UK government gambles on carbon capture and storage tech despite scientists’ doubts

Controversial technology is at centre of ‘powering up Britain’ strategy, but critics argue it has ‘little merit’ and ‘delays real cuts in emissions’

[Fiona Harvey](#) and [Jillian Ambrose](#)

Wed 29 Mar 2023 19.01 EDT Last modified on Thu 30 Mar 2023 05.55 EDT

The UK government will defy scientific doubts to place a massive bet on technology to capture and store carbon dioxide in undersea caverns, to enable an expansion of oil and gas in the North Sea.



Grant Shapps, the energy and net zero secretary, will on Thursday unveil the “powering up Britain” strategy, with carbon capture and storage (CCS) at its heart, during a visit to a nuclear fusion development facility in Oxford.

Shapps said the continued production of oil and gas in the North Sea was still necessary, and that the UK had a geological advantage in being able to store most of the carbon likely to be produced in Europe for the next 250 years in the large caverns underneath the North Sea.

“Unless you can explain how we can transition [to net zero] without oil and gas, we need oil and gas,” he said. “I am very keen that we fill those cavities with storing carbon. I think there are huge opportunities for us to do that.”

Shapps pointed to [the £20bn the government is planning to spend over 20 years on developing CCS](#), which he said would generate new jobs and make the UK a world leader in the technology.

Among the 1,000 pages of proposals to be published on Thursday will be boosts for offshore wind, hydrogen, heat pumps and electric vehicles. A [green finance strategy](#), to be set out by the chancellor of the exchequer, Jeremy Hunt, will be aimed at mobilising private-sector money for investments in green industry, and there will be a consultation on [carbon border taxes](#), aimed at penalising the import of high-carbon goods from overseas.

But the plans contain no new government spending, and campaigners said they [missed out key elements](#), such as a comprehensive programme of home insulation and a [full lifting of the ban on new onshore wind turbines in England](#).

Ministers are also thought to have rejected or modified scores of the 130 policy recommendations made by Tory MP Chris Skidmore in his review of the net-zero strategy, published in January. For instance, oil and gas companies will not be forced to stop flaring, and the ban on sales of new gas boilers from 2035 will not be brought forward.

Meanwhile, the government is in [the midst of a new licensing round for North Sea oil and gas development, which will run until next June](#), and oil and gas companies, which have made record profits in recent months, are proposing new developments, encouraged by [tax breaks for investment in fossil fuel assets under the windfall tax](#).

Proposals under consideration include a potentially massive new field called Rosebank, which campaigning group Uplift said could receive an effective subsidy of £3.75bn under the windfall tax.

Scientists told the Guardian that an overdependence on CCS was ill-advised. More than [700 scientists have written to the prime minister asking him to grant no new oil and gas licences](#), describing CCS as “yet to be proved at scale”, and the UN secretary-general [called on governments last week to stop developing oil and gas](#).

Bob Ward, head of policy at the Grantham Institute, said CCS technology would be needed for certain industries, but that using it to enable the continued use of fossil fuels was a mistake. “What does not make sense is to carry on with further development of new fossil fuel reserves on the assumption that CCS will be available to mop up all the additional emissions. While the costs of CCS will come down, it will make fossil fuel use even more expensive, and it will not eliminate all the risks resulting from the price volatility and energy insecurity of fossil fuels. A successful and competitive economy in the future will be powered by clean and affordable domestic energy, not unreliable and insecure fossil fuels,” he said.

“CCS is not required if the government moves to renewables as quickly as possible – especially as I am unaware of any CCS that works,” added Mark Maslin, professor of earth science at UCL.

Kevin Anderson, professor of energy and climate at Manchester, said: “When it comes to energy emissions, the claimed prospect of CCS continues its long-established role in supporting the development of the oil and gas industry and in further delaying real cuts in emissions. Given the huge cost, very high-life cycle emissions and appalling record of working as promised,

there is little, if any, merit in pursuing CCS as a major plank of UK energy strategy.”

Emily Shuckburgh, director of Cambridge Zero at Cambridge University, who organised the letter by scientists, said: “Advancing CCS is important because there are some sectors that are hard to decarbonise which will require it if we are to rapidly reach net zero. However, the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change is clear that the level of greenhouse gas emissions this decade will determine whether temperature rise can be limited to 1.5C [above pre-industrial levels]. In that context, the focus of our energy strategy must be on scaling up proven renewable technologies, developing energy storage, supporting energy efficiency and reducing demand.”

The government’s plans could also face legal challenge. The “powering up Britain” strategy is in large part a [response to a high court ruling last year](#), when a judge agreed with campaigners that government policies at the time were inadequate to meet the legally binding commitment to reach net zero greenhouse gas emissions by 2050. The court ordered a rethink, with a deadline of the end of this month.

Mike Childs, head of policy at [Friends of the Earth](#), which led the case, said lawyers would closely examine the documents and return to court if the proposals did not add up. “These plans look half-baked, half-hearted and dangerously lacking ambition,” he warned. “These announcements will do little to boost energy security, lower bills or put us on track to meet climate goals.”

Alok Sharma, Tory MP and former president of the 2021 United Nations Climate Change Conference, said: “The announcements made are a very welcome step in the right direction and rapid delivery is now vital. However, what we still need to see is that big bazooka moment, commensurate with the scale of the challenge. We cannot afford to wait for the government to set out the UK’s strategic response to green growth initiatives from other nations, like the US Inflation Reduction Act, which is helping to Hoover up billions in private-sector investment right now.”

- This article was amended on 30 March 2023: an earlier version said that carmakers would not be set a target for the proportion of electric vehicles they sell, but the government is currently consulting on this and has not reached a final conclusion.

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| [Section menu](#) | [Main menu](#) |



Shell's Quest carbon capture and storage facility in Fort Saskatchewan, Canada. Photograph: Todd Korol/Reuters

[Carbon capture and storage \(CCS\)](#)

[Explainer](#)

## What is carbon capture, usage and storage?

Is this method of preventing carbon emissions from entering the atmosphere a silver-bullet solution for the climate crisis?

[Jillian Ambrose](#) and [Fiona Harvey](#)

Wed 29 Mar 2023 19.01 EDT Last modified on Wed 29 Mar 2023 19.26 EDT

The UK government, along with many other governments around the world, is placing a lot of faith in carbon capture and storage, the technology that can keep carbon dioxide emissions from entering the atmosphere.

But does it work, and how can we afford it?

# **What is carbon capture and storage (CCS)?**

The components of CCS have been around [for decades](#) now: it's a group of technologies that can capture the carbon dioxide produced by major factories and power plants – preventing them from reaching the atmosphere and contributing to global heating – then transport them, bury them or reuse them. The key aim is to stop the CO<sub>2</sub> escaping into the atmosphere and exacerbating the climate crisis.

In most versions, the preliminary step involves fitting factory chimneys with solvent filters, which trap carbon emissions before they escape. The gas can then be piped to locations where it can be used or stored. Most carbon dioxide will be injected deep underground – where fossil fuel gas comes from in the first place – to be stored where it cannot contribute to the climate crisis. This can be part of a process called “enhanced oil recovery”, where CO<sub>2</sub> is pumped into an oilfield to force out the remaining pockets of oil that would otherwise prove difficult to extract.

But some of the CO<sub>2</sub> could be used to help make plastics, grow greenhouse plants or even carbonate fizzy drinks.

## **Why do we need carbon capture?**

According to the IEA, CCS projects could reduce global carbon dioxide emissions by almost a fifth and reduce the cost of tackling the climate crisis by 70%. One of the key reasons CCS is necessary is because heavy industry – fertiliser producers, steel mills and cement makers – would be difficult and expensive to adapt to run on cleaner energy.

## **Where is carbon capture technology being used?**

There are several CCS projects now operating commercially, but nowhere near enough to clean up the world's carbon emissions. The early forerunners are in the US, Canada, Norway (which aims to be [an international leader](#) in the field) and China.

The UK government [has committed](#) £20bn over the next 20 years to developing CCS. In Abu Dhabi, energy company Adnoc has begun a drilling campaign at Fujairah for a project that plans to turn [captured carbon dioxide](#) into rock.

According to the International Energy Agency, CCS facilities currently capture almost 45 megatonnes of CO<sub>2</sub> globally, but this [needs to increase](#). “CCS deployment has been behind expectations in the past, but momentum has grown substantially in recent years, with approximately 300 projects in various stages of development across the CCS value chain.”

## Is the process expensive?

Although carbon capture and storage technology is expensive at present, within a few decades it is likely to come down sharply in price, according to [a study published](#) earlier this year, which argues that the companies that profit from extracting fossil fuels – oil, gas and coal producers around the world – should be paying for an equivalent quantity of carbon dioxide to be stored geologically as a condition of being allowed to operate.

Under a “carbon takeback obligation”, all fossil fuels extracted or imported into a nation or group of nations would be offset by storing underground an amount of carbon dioxide equivalent to that generated by that fuel. Phased in over time, it could be used to store 100% of emissions by 2050, to help the world reach net zero.

In reality, this plan is pretty unlikely to go ahead. Instead, governments are crossing their fingers that the costs will come down as the technology evolves.

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The hydrogen village information centre in Whitby, Ellesmere Port.  
Photograph: Gary Calton/The Observer

[Energy industry.](#)

## Cheshire villagers will not be forced to join hydrogen energy trial

Backlash prompts companies to give residents option of keeping natural gas rather than joining pilot project

[\*Kalyeena Makortoff\*](#)

[@kalyeena](#)

Thu 30 Mar 2023 04.29 EDTLast modified on Thu 30 Mar 2023 05.29 EDT

Energy firms will no longer force people in a village in Cheshire to stop heating and cooking with natural gas and swap to lower-carbon hydrogen after a local backlash to a planned government-backed pilot.

British Gas and Cadent had been prepared to cut off gas supplies to nearly 2,000 homes in the village of Whitby, just outside Ellesmere Port on the



south bank of the Mersey, as part of [proposals to create the UK's first hydrogen-fuelled village](#).

However, the companies have since rowed back, telling people they will have the option of adopting hydrogen or keeping gas for their home energy needs, after vocal opposition over a 10-month consultation process.

While replacing natural gas with hydrogen in homes could help Britain hit its climate targets, residents have been concerned about the resulting costs, since hydrogen can be more expensive and repairs for specialised appliances could be costly if the technology is not widely adopted.

“It’s because we’ve heard and listened to what people in Whitby have to say that we’re making some changes to the way that we’re going to operate this project – should the government choose us to deliver it for them,” Cadent’s head of hydrogen consumer, Marc Clarke, [said in a recorded video statement](#).

“Our new proposal means that you will have a choice to participate or not, and there will be two options to choose from. You can either choose to get involved with the hydrogen village programme, and help pave the way to a greener future. Or you can choose to stay on natural gas if you do not wish to participate.”

The changes mean Cadent will have to lay parallel gas mains in Whitby to supply local homes if the trial goes ahead, since existing mains will be used to bring hydrogen to the properties that take part.

Those that opt in to the pilot [will also receive a £2,500 cash payment](#) and new hydrogen appliances that will be installed and maintained for free throughout the programme. Cadent also said that at the end of the pilot it would reconnect homes to their natural gas supply and install new natural gas-run appliances at no cost.

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Clarke said the company would make more information available over the next few weeks.

The government is set to confirm the site of the pilot later this year, with Redcar in Teesside also in the running.

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| [Section menu](#) | [Main menu](#) |

## 2023.03.30 - Spotlight

- [Singing to trees and Indigenous wisdom The UK festival aiming to prevent ecological collapse](#)
- [Putin, Trump, Ukraine How Timothy Snyder became the leading interpreter of our dark times](#)
- [Sadie Frost's forever fashion 'I bought this dress for the Oscars – I had no idea it was see-through'](#)
- [Television Unstable review – this Rob Lowe nepo-sitcom is staggeringly joke-free](#)

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At one with nature: participants in the first Primal Gathering ‘regenerative’ festival in Somerset. Photograph: Ana Torres

[The age of extinction](#)[Environment](#)

**Singing to trees and Indigenous wisdom:  
the UK festival aiming to prevent**

## ecological collapse

At the Primal Gathering retreat, attendees seek new – and sometimes surreal – ways to connect with nature and take meaningful action on environmental destruction

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[Phoebe Weston](#)

[@phoebo](#)

Thu 30 Mar 2023 02.45 EDT Last modified on Fri 31 Mar 2023 07.06 EDT

The explorer and documentary maker Bruce Parry pushed his penis inside his body on his 2005 BBC show [Tribe](#) in an effort to be accepted by the Kombai people in New Guinea, before turning white and having to lie down. He would do whatever it took to assimilate, including taking hallucinogenic drugs, drinking blood and running naked across the backs of a row of cattle.

Now he is focusing his energies closer to home. He is using the knowledge he gained from Indigenous societies around the world to encourage people in the UK to form stronger communities that can take meaningful action to halt ecological destruction.

“I’m not a romantic person about tribal people – I’ve seen dark shit going down,” says Parry, speaking to a crowd of 100 people at [Primal Gathering](#), a “regenerative” festival held at 42 Acres estate in Somerset earlier this month.



Explorer and documentary maker Bruce Parry speaking in a session at Primal Gathering. Photograph: Ana Torres/Courtesy of Primal Gathering

Primal Gathering has held five retreats in Portugal, and this is the first in the UK. As well as a temporary population of about 140 participants, the land is home to deer, otter, beavers and hares. With the first days of spring dawning, the birds are swooning at each other and frisky frogs are delighting in waterlogged paths. There's mud everywhere.

The idea is that people come on to the land, improve it and connect with it on a spiritual or emotional level. The organisation describes itself as “an environmentally, socially, and psychologically regenerative culture design consultancy”. People rationally understand the climate crisis, it argues, but they do not act on it – many no longer trust institutions and politics, and the retreat is an opportunity to create communities that can engender action.

We are planting 1,000 sea buckthorn trees and inoculating 120 logs with mushrooms in return for squatting on the land (although I am sleeping in a rather nice bijou houseboat). Parry is speaking in a converted barn full of fairy lights, plants, flags and soft places to sit. He is here to talk about the beauty of anarchism, and his experience of living with the Penan people in Borneo, whom he sees as a model for egalitarian society as they have no hierarchy. He went back after filming *Tribe* to [make his own show about them](#), and now promotes their lifestyle elsewhere.

“I’ve seen the destruction that has been caused by the way we live our lives. We have no fucking clue about that because it’s all over the hill. But I’ve been there, and I’ve seen it, and it’s real and it’s coming home to roost,” Parry says.





Dance and yoga sessions replace coffee as a means of waking up each morning. Photograph: Ana Torres/Courtesy of Primal Gathering

“For me, there’s no question that behaviour change is the only thing that is actually going to solve this ... We’re all hypocrites, just being British on a daily basis. Compared to my friends who are nomadic hunter gatherers in the forest, it’s untenable.”

I also meet a 14-year-old with three knives and a catapult in her pocket, a professional play fighter (flown in from Portugal to lead a class) and one of the UK’s most influential environment lawyers, Farhana Yamin. There are no narcotics or stimulants, not even coffee, because it interferes with how we feel our body, we’re told.

Someone gives me a couple of vials of a mushroom called lion’s mane, which is said to increase focus and concentration. Dance and yoga wake other people up each morning. The workshops include “authentic relating” and a flute circle.

The festival also makes use of local indigenous wisdom, in the form of a practising Druid, Chris Park, who with a folk musician, Sam Lee, leads walking in a figure of eight between two trees in silence. We then sing to an oak, which is called the “grandmother tree” (apparently 500 years old),



asking for guidance and inspiration. I look around and try to catch someone's eye, wondering if anyone else finds this a bit surreal. It appears I am surrounded by converts.

“Welcome, you benevolent beings,” we are told by the event organisers. There are breathing exercises and we hear from people who are “constantly learning from the Indigenous” (few of whom any of us have actually met, I presume). Cries of “we love you” randomly erupt from the crowd. Buzzwords are honesty, service, self-initiative, setting the intention, and authenticity.



Paul Powlesland, co-founder of Lawyers for Nature, during a workshop.  
Photograph: Ana Torres/Courtesy of Primal Gathering

Despite my cynicism, many people tell me how important this event is. The climate crisis is the “elephant in the room”, one tells me. “I can’t tell you how much this festival means to me,” says another. Many seem motivated out of grief and loss of a loved one. Mistrust stretches into other areas of life – many talk of their dislike of Covid vaccines and lockdowns.

[Paul Powlesland, a barrister and co-founder of Lawyers for Nature](#), has taken part in dozens of these events over the past decade, which he said

helped change him from being vice-chair of the Conservative Association at Cambridge University to a nature activist.

“I’m a fundamentally changed person, and not one event did that but all that osmosis of the different events over the past 15 years,” he says. “I’m pretty certain a lot of people at this event will have a transformation – maybe a subtle one – in how they live their life and how they relate to nature.”

He is here to encourage people to become guardians of their local nature, [as he is doing](#) on the River Roding, where he lives in London. His message is that individuals can do more than big organisations if they profoundly love their local area.

He talks to the audience about activism and leads a tree identification walk. “I think this event is more than the sum of its parts – there is something about being here for four or five days, all the different things one on top of the other, influencing you,” he says. “It works through you, and changes you.”

Powlesland says these events are necessary but not enough to bring people together to tackle ecological collapse because only people with free time and a certain amount of money are able to attend (most are here for six days, which if you are camping is normally £350, including all meals, though many qualify for a reduction in the price).



Sessions at the festival include play fighting, ‘authentic relating’, tree identification and a flute circle. Photograph: Ana Torres/Courtesy of Primal Gathering

Similarly, he says, the tree planting that happens today won’t make a big difference – it’s what they do after they leave the festival that counts: connection must lead to action. “If the spiritual element is not allied to actual restoration, it can sound really wanky,” he says.

If the spiritual element is not allied to actual restoration, it can sound really wanky

*Paul Powlesland*

Yamin is an international climate lawyer who worked on [the Paris agreement](#), advised world leaders for 30 years, coordinated the creation of Extinction Rebellion, and is pushing for more community engagement with the climate crisis. Yamin says we have created international agreements to address ecological collapse, but we need to get ordinary people onboard.

We need to create what she calls “communities of practice”, and she believes events like this festival are essential because they create new types of experimental community engagement. “They are tackling systemic injustice in ways that are compelling and unifying ... That’s a big paradigm shift. We

are moving away from the age of rock stars and individuals who create history, or big inventions, to recognising that actually a lot of collaborative work goes on before a breakthrough happens.”



Festival-goers sing to the ‘grandmother tree’. Photograph: Ana Torres/Courtesy of Primal Gathering

What is happening is a new experiment that could lead to behavioural spillover that does have positive impact, says Yamin. She describes new economies being based on “care, compassion and kindness”, as opposed to “production and extraction”.

Some of the language rolled out at the festival sounds like a trope – the word “authentic” is used too much. I struggle to take communicating with trees seriously. But countless communities will need to form to tackle the climate crisis, and this is one that will probably create ripples of action in its own way.

*Find more [age of extinction coverage here](#), and follow biodiversity reporters [Phoebe Weston](#) and [Patrick Greenfield](#) on Twitter for all the latest news and features*

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| [Section menu](#) | [Main menu](#) |

# Putin, Trump, Ukraine: how Timothy Snyder became the leading interpreter of our dark times

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‘It’s so delicate, beautiful and simple’ ... Sadie Frost wearing her favourite dress. Photograph: David Levene/The Guardian

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**Sadie Frost’s forever fashion: ‘I bought this dress for the Oscars – I had no idea**



## it was see-through'

The actor and fashion designer has worn this 1940s gown many times since buying it in 2000. These days, she pairs it with a striped T-shirt or wellies



*As told to [Emine Saner](#)  
[@eminesaner](#)*

Thu 30 Mar 2023 02.00 EDTLast modified on Thu 30 Mar 2023 04.06 EDT

I have always been low maintenance and would usually leave things until the last minute. When Jude [Law, whom Frost was married to at the time] was nominated for an Oscar in 2000, it was the same. I went to the vintage shop One of a Kind in Notting Hill and found this amazing dress that really does feel like a second skin. It's this lovely cream colour, with a beautiful jewelled high halterneck and a really low back. I think it would have cost a couple of hundred pounds, which I don't think is too bad for an [Oscars](#) dress.

I have friends who are in fashion and they laugh at me because I have always been kind of anti-fashion. I grew up working on the market at Camden Lock and my mum ran an old clothing store. It was always about just throwing clothes on; sometimes they looked good and sometimes they didn't.





Sadie Frost with Jude Law at the Vanity Fair Oscars afterparty in 2000.  
Photograph: Evan Agostini/Getty Images

The evening of the Oscars was one of those moments when I felt happy and beautiful. It was an exciting event, something that I thought I might never go to again, and it was a special moment. It's not often you feel that confident in yourself, inside and out.

I have worn the dress quite a few times over the years, on evenings out or when friends have come round for dinner and I have wanted to dress up. It's incredibly see-through, but I didn't realise quite how see-through until I saw pictures with my nipples showing. In those days, you didn't do things like that and I definitely didn't do it for attention – it was just a lovely dress. Now, I wear it with a layer underneath. There is something really luscious about it, but I also like wearing it over a striped T-shirt, really clashing two styles. Or with wellies, for a walk.

When I moved to the countryside, I brought all the things that I really cared about and I had to really think about what mattered. I want to give this dress to my daughter, Iris; I think she will look beautiful in it. There are a couple of stains and little holes, but it's so delicate, beautiful and simple. It's nice to have a dress that is very dear to me.

New clothes are often characterless, but when you buy something from a vintage store there is a character to it. I love wearing these faded dresses that have a few holes and the odd tea stain. They are still really beautiful and there is something interesting about the stories that they tell and where they have been. I think this dress was handmade, maybe in the 40s – it's gone to the Oscars and now it's hanging out in a field in Wiltshire.

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| [Section menu](#) | [Main menu](#) |



Rob Lowe as Ellis in *Unstable*. Photograph: John P Fleenor/Netflix

[TV review](#)[Television](#)

[Review](#)

## **Unstable review – this Rob Lowe nepo-sitcom is staggeringly joke-free**

The actor stars alongside his son (playing his son) in a nauseatingly schmaltzy, second-tier comedy. It's utterly unfunny, but at least its lead is as charming as ever



[Lucy Mangan](#)

[@LucyMangan](#)

Thu 30 Mar 2023 04.50 EDTLast modified on Thu 30 Mar 2023 05.29 EDT

That the name of the eccentric biotech-genius-entrepreneur protagonist of *Unstable* is Ellis Dragon tells you everything you need to know about this Netflix comedy series. It knows it is supposed to be funny – it is absolutely committed to being so – and yet every effort *just* misses.

Ellis is played by [Rob Lowe](#). Slightly more rumpled than he was in *The West Wing*, slightly less chiselled than he was in *St Elmo's Fire*, but still dependably Rob Lowe – quick, charming and accomplished at selling the hell out of anything he finds himself in, which is the most valuable of his assets here.

A natural chaos demon, Ellis has become ungovernable since the sudden death of his beloved wife of three decades. Deadlines on a carbon-capture project, upon which his survival as the head of the bioengineering company he founded depends, have come and gone. A pivotal board meeting is looming.

Therapy from the company shrink does not appear to have helped. His chief financial officer, Anna ([Fleabag's Sian Clifford](#), doing her best despite being miscast and stuck with weak material), has resorted to plain speaking to try to arrest his and the company's decline.

"You're getting crazier," she tells her boss.

"Or am I just letting the beauty of the world move me in a more profound way?" he says, winningly.

"That's literally the same thing," she replies.

In desperation she calls his son, Jackson, in New York. Get this: Jackson is the opposite of his father in every way! Quiet, unmaterialistic, focused and happy to have pursued life as a flute teacher after graduating in science stuff from Harvard. Also, he is played by Lowe's son, John Owen Lowe.

Jackson agrees to visit his dear old dad for 24 hours, to see what he can do. But when Jackson arrives, his dad can't help criticising his life choices and trying to change him into a version of himself. Oh, typical father-son dynamic, when will you learn?!

Because this is a second-tier US sitcom, the criticism is never severe or wounding – or, as you might put it, funny. Everything comes from a place of love. Every episode ends with some hugging, some learning and a piece of symbolism painfully set up over the preceding half an hour to tie everything together. Jackson *does* take part in his father's karaoke party – but on his own terms, by playing the flute! Ellis starts to recognise Jackson as his own man by bringing him a peanut butter and jelly sandwich without the peanut butter, just the way he likes it! But Jackson adds some of his late mom's homemade peanut butter anyway, to acknowledge that they have this loss in common. Or something. I was busy being sick in a bucket by this point.

Unstable gets by – just about – on two things. One is the Lowes' charm and the fact that Jr doesn't come off too badly in the inevitable comparisons between him and Sr in the acting or the comedy stakes. A crisis of nepotism-embarrassment is averted.

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The other is that the peripheral characters are a few degrees better than expected. There is a pair of female scientists nerds, Ruby (Emma Ferreira) and Luna (Rachel Marsh), who spark nicely and are given a little more to do than simply provide potential love interests for Jackson (although they are that too).

Aaron Branch delivers some extra goods as Malcolm, a childhood friend of Jackson who hero-worships and now works for Ellis. There is also Fred Armisen as the company psychiatrist, Leslie, who goes missing – in fact, he is being held hostage by Ellis after trying to blackmail the billionaire. The power of Ellis is such, however, that they end up friends; Leslie is soon another acolyte, playing pool and having dinner and movie nights with the boss before agreeing to be released. “Promise me you’ll watch Fargo,” says Ellis as they hug goodbye. “And also Osage County.”

That is one of the better lines, but overall the ratio of jokes to things that resemble jokes in structure and rhythm remains too low and the schmaltz factor too high. It’s a harmless way to spend half an hour, but Silicon Valley did the tech stuff much, much better and – along with most other sitcoms – the comedy stuff, too.

*Unstable is on Netflix now*

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| [Section menu](#) | [Main menu](#) |

## 2023.03.30 - Opinion

- For Hamburg, devastated by allied bombing, King Charles's visit is so much more than a photo-op
- Octopus farming turns my stomach – but are some species really more worthy than others?
- Local journalism made me what I am today. Without it, we'll all be the poorer
- Why are today's TV dramas so devastatingly difficult to follow?





‘The symbolic importance of this ceremony can hardly be overstated.’ King Charles III and Camilla arrive in Germany. Photograph: Ian Vogler/AFP/Getty Images

[OpinionGermany.](#)

**For Hamburg, devastated by allied bombing, King Charles’s visit is so much more than a photo-op**

[Helene von Bismarck](#)



UK-German relations are long and complicated, and not all symbolism is empty

Thu 30 Mar 2023 03.00 EDTLast modified on Thu 30 Mar 2023 14.10 EDT

King Charles III will not only travel to Berlin during his [state visit to Germany](#), this week, but also Hamburg, the country's second largest city and home to its biggest port. Hamburg is a trading hub known for its anglophilia, with close connections to Great Britain that go back centuries that were revived during the British occupation of the city after the second world war, when the former enemy quickly turned into a close partner.

When you take the long view at UK-German relations, this part of the king's trip is at least as important and meaningful as his appointments in the German capital. Those who criticise royal visits as constituting little more than expensive photo-ops fail to understand that not all symbolism is empty.

On Friday, the king will visit St Nikolai church in the centre of Hamburg and lay a wreath there with the German president, Frank-Walter Steinmeier. The symbolic importance of this ceremony can hardly be overstated. The church is a landmark of the city dating back to the middle ages. After a fire in 1842,

it was rebuilt by the English architect Sir George Gilbert Scott, who also built the Albert Memorial and the Foreign Office in London. In the otherwise very close, historic relationship between Hamburg and Great Britain, St Nikolai is a reminder of their darkest moment. During the devastating bombing of Hamburg in July 1943 by allied forces, the church was damaged beyond repair.

This attack, code-named Operation Gomorrah in reference to the biblical story of Genesis, when God decided to punish the sinners of Gomorrah by making it rain fire from the sky, is to this day etched into Hamburg's collective memory under a different name: "the fire storm".

Between 25 July and 3 August 1943, the Royal Air Force flew a series of four night raids against Hamburg as part of its wider strategy of "area bombing" German cities. The aim was to demoralise the working-class part of the population, to cripple the armaments industry that was central to the German war effort, and to bring civilian life to a halt. The US air force joined the attack with two daylight air raids mainly against targets in the harbour. The greatest damage was not done by the bombs themselves, but the conflagration they caused on the ground.

According to conservative estimates, at least 34,000 people died during this short series of attacks. Hamburg was largely reduced to rubble and nearly a million people fled the city. Among the victims of the attacks were thousands of forced labourers from central and eastern [Europe](#) who had been deported by the Nazis to Hamburg for work and who, like the remaining Jews in the city, were not allowed to take cover in the air raid shelters. After the attack, entire districts of Hamburg were walled off and declared as "death zones". The Nazis then forced inmates of the nearby Neuengamme concentration camp to find and defuse unexploded bombs, clear the rubble, and remove and bury the dead bodies. Hundreds of them died during this extremely dangerous and traumatic mission.



Hamburg in 1943, after Operation Gomorrah. Photograph: Galerie Bilderwelt/Getty Images

It is impossible to study the eyewitness reports from the summer of 1943 without feeling a sense of horror. But it would be deeply irresponsible to forget the context in which the attacks took place. This is why the ruin of St Nikolai is today a memorial not only to those who suffered in Hamburg in 1943, but to all victims of the war [Germany](#) started and fought with brutal disregard for civilian life, exterminating vast parts of the Jewish population in Europe and bombing cities such as Warsaw, London or Coventry without mercy.

The [exhibition](#) situated in the vault of St Nikolai explains this context, as well as the strategy of the Royal Air Force leadership under Air Marshal Arthur Harris, who hoped that area bombing would make a decisive difference towards winning the war – a victory that was anything but certain in 1943. It also includes testimonies from some of the British airmen on duty, many of whom feared for their own lives during the mission. The pilots and aircrew bombing German cities ran an extremely high risk of being shot down or crashing. More than 55,000 of them died during the war.

King Charles has been involved in furthering UK-German reconciliation for decades, as was his mother, the late Queen Elizabeth II. During his last visit

to Hamburg, as Prince of Wales in 1995, he visited the mass grave at Ohlsdorf cemetery, where thousands of the victims of Operation Gomorrah are buried.

This time, the King will come in his new role as head of state, in a year that marks the 80th anniversary of a specific allied attack against Hamburg. The visit shows that the war is now so firmly in the past, and the relationship between Britain and Germany so close, that the King and the German president can afford to rise above the political controversies that have complicated the remembrance of the bombing campaigns in both countries for decades.

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In the UK, the strategy of area bombing has been criticised from its inception, especially in church circles, while its supporters argued that it was necessary to weaken an exceedingly dangerous enemy. In Germany, the political far right has repeatedly tried to capture and weaponise the memory of the air war in a transparent and revolting attempt to weigh the suffering of civilians against Nazi Germany's guilt for the war and the Holocaust.

It takes courage to remember. Facing up to historic reality in all its painful complexity is not the same as attributing blame or seeking absolution. To explain and understand is not to excuse or condemn. When you enter St

Nikolai today, the first thing you see is a Cross of Nails, a gift from Coventry Cathedral, together with a plaque from the citizens of Hamburg, remembering the dead and emphasising that they “do not forget the harm caused by their own madness”. For the king to join in this remembrance is a very significant, and much appreciated thing to do. At a time when many politicians all over the world like to pick and choose from history with the sole aim of suiting their narratives, it matters.

This article was amended on 30 March 2023 to remove a reference to the bombing of Guernica which happened in 1937 before the start of the second world war.

- Helene von Bismarck is a historian specialised in UK-German relations. She lives in Hamburg.

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‘I am no longer sure that an animal being intelligent is a good reason not to eat it.’ Photograph: Tammy616/Getty Images

[Opinion](#)[Marine life](#)

## **Octopus farming turns my stomach – but are some species really more worthy than others?**

[Elle Hunt](#)



I haven't eaten octopus in years, yet being smart shouldn't make them exceptions. All animals need protection from unnecessary suffering

Thu 30 Mar 2023 05.02 EDTLast modified on Thu 30 Mar 2023 14.25 EDT

The collective noun for a group of octopuses, in case you were wondering, is a consortium – not, as some wags might tell you, a seafood buffet.

I myself don't eat octopus, and [have made a lot](#) of noise about why: they're as smart as parrots, their brain is spread over their arms, they are many millions of years older than we are – don't you know that, of all the species on Earth, only they and we share a high-resolution camera eye?

So it was with no pleasure that I read that plans for the world's first-ever commercial octopus farm appear to be progressing. A proposal has been submitted to authorities in the Canary Islands for a facility in Las Palmas that would [produce 3,000 tonnes of octopus](#) each year for export.

According to documents seen [by the BBC](#), the company Nueva Pescanova proposes raising 1 million animals in around 1,000 communal tanks – evening out to 10 to 15 octopuses per cubic metre, or 80-120 legs.



Personally, I don't see them going quietly. Past attempts to farm octopuses have failed because (along with challenges feeding the larvae) they have proved simply too unwieldy to contain. They can squeeze themselves through any hole that can fit their beak, which is about the width of a 50p coin. They are not only dextrous, but strong, capable of opening screw-top jars and lifting heavy tank lids. They can also survive up to half an hour out of water: long enough to make a dash for it through a drainpipe.

Scientists have struggled to keep even one or two individuals in captivity [without being outwitted](#). A proposal to house 1 million, then, reads more like one of Kafka's aphorisms than a real-life business plan ("A tank went in search of a cephalopod").

But even if it does prove possible to farm octopuses, the question is – should we?

There isn't an obvious need. Relative to many marine species, octopuses [are adapting](#) quickly to the changing oceans, and there seems no immediate risk of overfishing. Farming would be more of a toll on the environment, causing both toxic run-off into local waters and more fish to be caught for food – plus it is inevitably more cruel.

Fishers dispatch of their octopus catch with a club to the head or a knife to the central brain: instant, but not very scalable. Nueva Pescanova proposes killing its octopuses by immersing them in water kept at -3C. [A 2009 study](#) of this "live chilling" of farmed turbot found it to be "highly questionable", causing stress and potentially severe pain before death.

Even for fish, it's an undeniably grisly process – but, of course, the reason that people [are up in arms](#) over farming of octopus, and not turbot, is because of the creatures' intelligence. It's long been understood that [octopuses are among the smartest of animals](#), named alongside dolphins, crows and apes. In captivity, they have shown themselves capable of navigating mazes, completing complex tasks and even recognising individual humans. The Oscar-winning Netflix documentary [My Octopus Teacher](#) [further impressed on audiences](#) their exceptionalism.



A shot from the film *My Octopus Teacher* (2020), about a man's unlikely friendship with a common octopus. Photograph: Everett Collection Inc/Alamy

[Seven years after publicising](#) my own stance on the subject, I still don't eat cephalopods. But my thinking has expanded: I am no longer sure that an animal being intelligent is a good reason not to eat it.

Even in the past decade, we've come a long way in understanding what animals are capable of – including ones we have systematically underestimated. Every new Attenborough series captures some astonishing behaviour that has never been seen before, and not just in the usual suspects, the orcas and macaws – but among fish, birds and even insects.

It's [becoming increasingly obvious](#) that the very concept of “animal intelligence” is fraught, judged as it is by human standards. Tool use has been a historic measure, for example – but that favours animals with hands or beaks. Only [relatively recently](#) have scientists accepted that fish [invent tools](#), making them arguably more resourceful than animals of great dexterity.

Squid and cuttlefish may be as smart as octopuses, their close relations, but just lacking the arms to show it off. As one scientist [put it last year](#): “If

people studied mantis shrimps the way they study octopuses, they would be really blown away at how smart they are.” It just goes to show that we privilege those species we can see ourselves in, or care enough to study.

Even our definitions of sentience can be ridiculously arbitrary: octopuses are still not included under US animal welfare laws because they are invertebrates, meaning they [lack a backbone](#). The UK government [recognised octopuses, crabs and lobsters](#) as sentient beings in November 2021 – but with no change to fishing practices or in restaurant kitchens. The law recognises that lobsters can feel pain, but it’s still not a crime to boil them alive.

It just goes to show how self-congratulatory our thinking on animal intelligence can be: favouring those species that we find exceptional, or relatable, but rarely in a way that does them any good. There are real costs to this human superiority complex for us, too, as evinced by the recent pandemic and the existential threat of the climate crisis.

I’m convinced that the path forward is not making exceptions for octopuses, and other species that we deem worthy, but prioritising an inhabitable Earth for all of us. The arc of the moral universe is surely bending towards less exploitation of living beings, less net suffering – regardless of their intelligence.

That looks like multinational corporations such as Nueva Pescanova taking responsibility for what looks more and more like cruel and polluting factory farming; governments such as the authorities in the Canary Islands rejecting such farms in their jurisdictions; and individuals eating higher-quality meat, and less of it overall – and octopus only when it’s been locally caught.

A prerequisite to living sustainably is a sense of proportion; an understanding of ourselves as just another life form on the planet. We have been fortunate to enjoy a *Homo sapiens* supremacy for many millions of years – but, heaven forbid, should it ever be upended, I hope we know better than to look to proficiency with tools as the test of acceptable suffering.

- Elle Hunt is a freelance journalist

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| [Section menu](#) | [Main menu](#) |



‘After a lifetime in journalism, it remains the most hellish scene I have witnessed.’ The front page of the Western Mail on 22 October 1966, after the Aberfan disaster. Photograph: Chris Howes/Wild Places Photography/Alamy

[Opinion](#)[Regional & local newspapers](#)

**Local journalism made me what I am  
today. Without it, we'll all be the poorer**

[John Humphrys](#)



For budding journalists and citizens alike, the demise of local newspapers will leave a void that's impossible to fill

Thu 30 Mar 2023 02.00 EDTLast modified on Thu 30 Mar 2023 09.54 EDT

Had things turned out a little differently back in the late 1950s, it's just possible that the cast in the TV smash hit *Succession* might have featured a rather different set of characters. Instead of featuring a media mogul partly inspired by Rupert Murdoch, it could have been based on yours truly – an uppity young Taffy trying to transform his local rag, the Cardiff and District News.

It had started well for me. At 15 I had a regular column with the very successful Penarth Times. Almost every household in the posh seaside town bought a copy. Then the proprietor decided we could do the same with a new weekly in the great metropolis that was Cardiff. He called it the Cardiff and District News and not only made me the editor of the teenage page but the circulation manager, too. Sort of.

It was my responsibility to deliver it to the newsagents. Me and an elderly lady with an even older Austin 7. We had a sale-or-return policy. Big



mistake. I swear there were weeks when we collected more than we had delivered the week before. Lesson learned. The paper lasted about six months.

I moved to the Merthyr Express and learned another lesson: if a bright young councillor with ambitions to get rich and become the town's mayor offers a naive young reporter earning £7 a week the use of his expensive luxury saloon whenever he wants it, there will be a price to pay. My wise old news editor warned me off. People trust their local paper, he said. You betray that trust at your peril.

I left regional papers for regional television: Television Wales and the West. I was the first reporter at the Aberfan disaster in 1966. After a lifetime in journalism covering wars, famines and earthquakes, it remains the most hellish scene I have witnessed. I still remember the tears leaving white strips down the faces of dust-covered miners digging through the mountain of waste that had crushed the school with their children in it. Some children were rescued. Many were not.

The world's media descended on Aberfan. Some showed zero respect for a village in indescribable grief. They wanted a different story. Some were thrown out. Local journalists kept going back and ultimately helped expose the wicked mismanagement at the top of the National Coal Board that had led to the tragedy.

Local newspapers matter. So does all local journalism, including local radio and, yes, local websites. But especially local papers. Which is why it's so sad that in the past decade, about 300 local and regional newspapers in the UK have [gone out of business](#). And there's worse to come. Reach, the UK's biggest regional and local newspaper owner, whose titles include the Birmingham Mail, the Liverpool Echo and the Irish Star, is in the process of cutting jobs. More than 600 of them.

You need only open a newspaper, and then log on to Facebook or Google to see why. [Advertisers are deserting print for digital](#). About 20 years ago, the UK regional newspaper advertising market was worth £2.5bn. At the end of last year it was valued at less than a tenth of that. And a scary number of us

have stopped buying papers. Sales are probably down about 65% over the past 10 or 12 years.

The value of publishing behemoths has crashed in the wake of all this. From hundreds of millions in some cases to tens of millions. Or less.

But wasn't this inevitable? The world has changed. Even someone like me, who owns the finest pair of rose-tinted specs this side of Fleet Street (remember Fleet Street?), can see why many people find local papers anachronistic and old-fashioned in a digital world. Imagine spending, as I did, many hours in Penarth standing outside churches, noting down the names of mourners at funerals. The boss knew that if their name was in the paper, they would buy it.



‘We need to know if our council is planning to chop down our trees before we get woken up in the middle of the night by the chainsaws.’ The scene in Plymouth after trees were cut down earlier this month. Photograph: Courtesy of STRAW - Save the Trees Armada Way

But I spent many more boring hours in meetings of the council’s planning committee. Boring to me, maybe, but not to those affected by the committee’s decisions. We need to know if our council is planning to chop down our trees before we get woken up in the middle of the night by the



chainsaws. A decent local paper or radio station would warn us. It's sad that the [BBC](#) now looks at local radio and sees the chance to save a few quid by chopping jobs.

Tony Hall, a former director general of the BBC, was almost right when he wrote recently: "The BBC is both local and global. These are two enormous journalistic strengths that no other organisation can offer. Local radio is too often an underappreciated part of the BBC's output, and it may be an area where the market increasingly fails us."

Or maybe it's the BBC failing the market, with some services being cut to the bone and programmes effectively merged. Either do it properly or don't do it all.

Then there's the old controversy: how much has the ubiquity of BBC local news been to blame for so many local papers going out of business? As Hall acknowledges, in broadcasting the genuinely local commercial stations have for the most part been merged into larger entities. This has "important ramifications" for reporting on local councils, courts and so on.

A few years ago, the BBC set up the Local Democracy Reporting Service to head off charges that it was killing off local newspapers. The scheme pays for journalists who can work for any local news outlet. There are 165 of them and about 1,000 individual news outlets are signed up. They've syndicated more than 273,000 stories. It's important, but it's not enough. So what is enough?

Rhodri Talfan Davies, the director of BBC Nations, summed up the BBC's strategy like this: "Attracting a new younger audience by transforming the way we work and adopting a 'digital first' approach in everything that we do."

The cynical response interprets that as: more jobs online ... fewer jobs offline. For those of us who are no longer young, we will mourn the passing of our local papers for holding power to account and giving some of us a flying start in our careers.

- John Humphrys is a presenter on Classic FM after 51 years at the BBC.
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| [Section menu](#) | [Main menu](#) |



What just happened? Christopher Chung and Aimee Ffion-Edwards in *Slow Horses*. Photograph: Jack English/Apple TV+

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

## Why are today's TV dramas so devastatingly difficult to follow?

[Adrian Chiles](#)



I am constantly being told to simplify documentary scripts for television - but the same channels will air dramas that are wildly confusing

Thu 30 Mar 2023 02.00 EDTLast modified on Thu 30 Mar 2023 07.04 EDT

I can't remember the last time I watched a television documentary I couldn't follow. Some are more captivating than others, but I can generally fathom what's going on. The people who make them – and I've made a few myself – are at great pains to keep them comprehensible. This is good, although I must admit that when scripting my stuff, I've often been at loggerheads with producers imploring me to make things simpler. "Signpost better!" they say, the idea being to lead viewers gently through the story, reminding and recapping and explaining as you go. On occasion I have been known to throw a hissy fit, fulminating along the lines of: "How bloody stupid do we think the viewers are here? It's not Playschool we're doing!" I soon calm down, they get their way and they're probably right in the end. Much better to err on the side of spoon-feeding – or patronising, as I put it when I'm hissy-fitting – than risk confusing and losing the audience altogether. I get it.

However, here's the thing: on the same channel on the same evening as your typical, entirely comprehensible documentary, there will be a drama of quite devastating complexity, the twists and turns of which many can make neither

head nor tail. Episodes are paused or even rewound; family conferences are called to figure out what on earth is going on. Sometimes the internet is searched for clues; fan forums convene to thrash out the details. And so we go from programmes being ever so careful to assume nothing and explain everything to programmes requiring a mastermind's analysis.

I have kind of given up trying to follow what's happening – it's easier that way. I really enjoyed *Slow Horses*, for example, yet on reflection I realised I couldn't explain to anyone what had gone on. If I understood anything, it was only in flashes. I've recently developed a liking for *Beyond Paradise*, which, like its forebear *Death in Paradise*, troubles itself to explain at the end of each episode how and why the crime happened. Nice, although even here I sometimes get confused. Perhaps it's just me.

- Adrian Chiles is a broadcaster, writer and Guardian columnist

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## 2023.03.30 - Around the world

- [Refugees Council of Europe finds refugees subject to widespread physical ill-treatment](#)
- [Kentucky Two US army Black Hawk helicopters crash on training mission](#)
- [Live Spanish inflation almost halves; signs of 'green shoots' in UK economy](#)
- [Myanmar US, UK, Japan and Australia condemn junta's ban on 40 political parties](#)
- [Japan School stirs debate over hairstyle rules after boy with cornrows separated from class](#)



A pro-refugee rally in Athens, Greece, this month. Photograph: Louisa Gouliamaki/AFP/Getty Images

## [Refugees](#)

# Refugees subject to widespread physical ill-treatment, Council of Europe finds

Human rights body says European states are increasingly resorting to illegal pushbacks of asylum seekers

[Jennifer Rankin](#) in Brussels

Thu 30 Mar 2023 04.00 EDTLast modified on Thu 30 Mar 2023 04.29 EDT

European countries are increasingly resorting to illegal pushbacks of refugees and asylum seekers “with minimal accountability”, a report from the continent’s leading human rights body, the [Council of Europe](#), has found.

The Council of Europe’s anti-torture committee (CPT) said it had identified “clear patterns of physical ill-treatment” against [people trying to cross borders](#) all over Europe.

Refugees and asylum seekers were punched, slapped, beaten with truncheons, weapons, sticks or branches, by police or border guards who often removed their ID tags or badges, the committee said in its annual report. People on the move were subject to pushbacks, expulsion from European states, either by land or sea, without having asylum claims heard.

Victims were also subject to “inhuman and degrading treatment”, such as having bullets fired close to their bodies while they lay on the ground, being pushed into rivers, sometimes with hands tied, or being forced to walk barefoot or even naked across a border.

“One of the committee’s real concerns about pushbacks is often they are associated with a real risk of ill treatment,” said Alan Mitchell, the president of the CPT.

The Council of Europe’s 46 member countries have signed the European convention on human rights, which prohibits torture, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment.

“Pushbacks without regard to the individual circumstances of the migrants run a risk that persons who have a valid claim for international protection are being pushed back without being assessed,” Mitchell said.

The report does not name any states, but Mitchell said they had investigated “many hundreds” of cases of pushbacks in recent years on all migratory routes into Europe. The committee has recently visited Greece, Turkey, Hungary, Spain, Malta and Italy to assess migration policies. Last November it conducted a rare “rapid reaction” visit to the [Manston detention centre](#) in Kent after it emerged thousands of people were being detained for weeks in overcrowded and unsanitary conditions.

The committee’s findings contrast sharply with the official position of many European governments that no illegal pushbacks take place.

As well as interviews with hundreds of people reporting pushbacks, the committee sought to corroborate personal testimony by examining custody records, logbooks and CCTV footage. It also carried out medical exams on injured asylum seekers, finding “classic ‘tram line’ haematoma” – pools of



clotted blood inside the body – consistent with truncheon blows, as well as typical dog-bite wounds.

“The reports of the CPT are based on facts found during our visits,” Mitchell said. He said there were a number of occasions when the committee had interviewed people that had been pushed back without any effective investigation into what had happened. “An effective investigation process is in itself a procedural safeguard,” he said.

The report concluded there was an “increasing resort to pushbacks in recent years with minimal accountability by state actors”.

The committee is calling on states to ensure independent monitoring of borders – an idea floated by the EU’s home affairs commissioner, Ylva Johansson, [in 2020](#) that has never been realised.

It criticised EU plans to loosen asylum laws when states face large numbers of people arriving, triggered by a government seeking to destabilise its neighbour – a response to [Belarus’s efforts in 2021](#) to bring people from the Middle East and send them to Poland and Baltic states. The committee argues the proposals would “greatly increase the potential for informal pushback practices” and pose “a concrete risk” that states would violate the principle of *non-refoulement* ie returning a person to a place where they would be in danger.

The report comes as governments across Europe seek to tighten border controls. The EU has recently pledged to [fund more cameras, drones and watchtowers](#) at its external frontiers. The British government was [criticised by another senior official at the Council of Europe this week](#) for plans to detain and expel people arriving in the UK on small boats and in the back of lorries without hearing asylum claims.

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A security official stands near police cars at a site where two US army Black Hawk helicopters crashed in Kentucky. Photograph: WKDZ Radio/Reuters

[US military](#).

## Nine dead after two US army Black Hawk helicopters crash in Kentucky

No injuries on ground but nine service members killed in collision about 30 miles from Fort Campbell base near Tennessee border

*Reuters*

Thu 30 Mar 2023 11.22 EDTFirst published on Thu 30 Mar 2023 02.35 EDT

Nine people were killed in a crash involving two US army Black Hawk helicopters conducting a night-time training exercise in [Kentucky](#), a military spokesperson said.

Nondice Thurman, a spokesperson for Fort Campbell, said on Thursday morning the deaths happened the previous night in south-western Kentucky

during a routine training mission.

A statement from Fort Campbell said the two HH-60 Black Hawk helicopters, part of the 101st Airborne Division, crashed around 10pm on Wednesday in Trigg county, Kentucky. The 101st Airborne confirmed the crash about 30 miles north-west of Fort Campbell. The crash was under investigation.

The helicopters landed in a field near a residential area with no injuries on the ground, Brig Gen John Lubas, the 101st Airborne deputy commander, said. One helicopter had five people onboard and the other had four, Lubas said.

Speaking to reporters, the Kentucky governor, Andy Beshear, said the state would do everything it could to support the families of those killed.

“We’re going to do what we always do, we’re going to wrap our arms around these families, we’re going to be with them for the weeks and days to come,” Beshear said.

Fort Campbell is near the Tennessee border, about 60 miles north-west of Nashville, Tennessee. The crash occurred in Cadiz, in Trigg county, Kentucky.

Nick Tomaszewski, who lives about a mile from where the crash occurred, said he saw two helicopters flying over his house.

“For whatever reason last night my wife and I were sitting there looking out on the back deck and I said, ‘Wow, those two helicopters look low and they look kind of close to one another tonight,’” he said.

The helicopters flew over, looped back around and moments later the Tomaszewskis “saw what looked like a firework went off in the sky”.

“All of the lights in their helicopter went out. It was like they just poofed ... and then we saw a huge glow like a fireball,” Tomaszewski said.

Flyovers happen almost daily and the helicopters typically fly low but not so close, he said.

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“There were two, back to back. We typically see one and then see another one a few minutes later, and we just saw two of them flying together last night,” he said.

Members of the Kentucky senate stood for a moment of silence on Thursday morning in honor of the crash victims.

“We do not know the extent of what has gone on, but I understand it is bad and there has been a substantial loss of life of our military,” the Senate president, Robert Stivers, told the chamber.

Last month, two Tennessee national guard pilots were killed when their Black Hawk helicopter crashed along an Alabama highway during a training exercise.



## [Business live](#)Business

# Spanish inflation almost halves and German CPI falls as energy prices cool – as it happened

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Protesters demonstrate against the military coup in front of a National League for Democracy office in Myanmar in 2021. Photograph: AFP/Getty Images

## [Myanmar](#)

# US, UK, Japan and Australia condemn Myanmar for banning 40 political parties

Aung San Suu Kyi's National League for Democracy among those abolished by military regime

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

Thu 30 Mar 2023 01.51 EDTLast modified on Thu 30 Mar 2023 02.28 EDT

The US, UK, Japan and Australia have condemned the Myanmar military junta's decision to [dissolve the party of imprisoned former leader Aung San Suu Kyi](#), with Washington warning that the regime's push for elections will lead to increased instability.

State department deputy spokesperson Vedant Patel told reporters that the US strongly condemned the announcement by the Myanmar military abolishing 40 political parties, including Aung San Suu Kyi's National League for Democracy (NLD).

“Any election without the participation of all stakeholders in Burma would not be and cannot be considered free or fair,” Patel said, using the former name for [Myanmar](#).

Military-controlled media announced on Tuesday that the NLD and dozens of other political parties had been dissolved after they refused to comply with a tough new registration law.

The military, which seized power in a [coup in February 2021](#), imposed the law and began compiling voter lists in preparation for promised elections. Analysts say any vote held under the regime would be widely considered invalid.

The NLD, the country's most popular party, [won elections by a landslide in 2020](#), though the military refused to accept the results. The junta seized power in February 2021, detaining Aung San Suu Kyi and others, and alleging electoral fraud – a claim rejected by independent observers.

Aung San Suu Kyi has since been sentenced to a total of 33 years in prison.

The military has deployed brutal violence to try to suppress determined opposition from the public, and much of the country is engulfed in conflict as an armed resistance seeks to overthrow the generals. Military airstrikes are now an [almost daily occurrence](#) and more than 1.38 million people have been displaced by fighting since the coup, according to the UN.

Japan's foreign ministry said in a statement that it was “seriously concerned that the exclusion of the NLD from the political process will make it even more difficult to improve the situation”.

“Japan strongly urges Myanmar to immediately release NLD officials, including Suu Kyi, and to show a path toward a peaceful resolution of the



issue in a manner that includes all parties concerned.”

The UK also condemned the dissolution of the NLD and other parties, calling it an “assault on the rights and freedoms” of the Myanmar people.

“We condemn the military regime’s politically motivated actions and their use of increasingly brutal tactics to sow fear and repress opposition,” a UK Foreign Office spokesperson said.

The Australian government said it was concerned about the “further narrowing of political space in Myanmar” resulting from the imposition of the new political party registration law.

“The people of Myanmar continue to show their courage and commitment to a democratic country in the face of increasing repression and violence by the regime,” it added.

The registration law imposed by the junta set various tough requirements for national parties. They included recruiting 100,000 members within 90 days of registration – far more than the previous requirement of 1,000 members. Parties must also open offices in at least half of all 330 townships within 180 days, contest at least half of all constituencies and hold funds of 100m kyat (£40,000).

The NLD said it did not intend to register, calling the election bodies controlled by the military “illegitimate”.

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Japanese schools typically have strict rules governing hairstyles. Photograph: takasuu/Getty Images/iStockphoto

[Japan](#)

## Japan school stirs debate over hairstyle rules after boy with cornrows separated from class

‘I felt like I was being told, “This is not your special day”,’ says 18-year-old of graduation ceremony

[Justin McCurry](#) in Tokyo

Thu 30 Mar 2023 02.03 EDTLast modified on Thu 30 Mar 2023 10.03 EDT

Strict rules on hairstyles at schools in [Japan](#) have attracted criticism after a mixed-race teenager was separated from other students at their graduation ceremony because he had plaited his hair into cornrows to pay tribute to his Black heritage.

The student, who has not been named, was made to sit alone at the back of the hall during a graduation ceremony at his school in Himeji, western [Japan](#), and told not to stand and respond when his name was called out.

The 18-year-old, who has an African-American father and Japanese mother, said he had plaited his hair, which is naturally curly, to make it look neater for the ceremony, adding that he had learned about the cultural significance of cornrows online and from his father.

“I wasn’t able to create happy memories to mark the three years I spent at the school with my friends,” he told the Mainichi Shimbun. “I was frustrated because I felt like I was being told, ‘This is not your special day.’ The hairstyle represented my father’s roots and culture in the Black community.”

The school’s vice principal told the newspaper that the student had been segregated simply for failing to observe the rules on haircuts.

The boy reportedly left midway through the ceremony but returned later to collect his diploma. He was made to wait in an empty room, however, and was followed to the toilet by a teacher who later told him to leave the school premises as he waited for his friends.

The school’s regulations stipulate that hairstyles should not be “trendy” but should be “clean and appropriate for a high school student”. Students are not permitted to dye or bleach their hair, or style it with a hairdryer, but the rules make no mention of braiding.

The incident occurred as lawyers warned that teachers at an elite boys school in Osaka who regularly check and even trim students’ hair were violating their human rights, but stopped short of labelling the staff’s actions as unconstitutional.

The Osaka Bar Association’s letter, published this week, was prompted by complaints over the enforcement of hairstyle regulations at the school, which requires all 1,780 students to keep their hair short around the ears and neckline, and forbids fringes that are long enough to touch their eyebrows.

The rules, apparently inspired by a Buddhist teaching that people “see what they should see” and “hear what they should hear,” have been in place for around half a century, according to the Yomiuri Shimbun. A photograph of the desired hairstyle appears in the school’s student handbook, and teachers carry out checks every month, the newspaper said.

The bar association acted after several students from the school contacted it last year to complain about the way teachers were enforcing the rule, including pulling and cutting their hair.

The teachers’ actions “infringe on freedom of hairstyle by exceeding the scope of socially acceptable guidance, and are not based on justifiable reason,” the association said, according to the Yomiuri.

More Japanese schools reviewed their rules on uniforms and hairstyles after a female student [launched a lawsuit](#) in 2017, claiming that her high school had told her to dye her naturally brown hair black or face expulsion.

Other cases have centred on bans on regulations [requiring students to wear white underwear](#), in some cases enforced by teachers who pulled up female students’ bra straps or deliberately walked in on them while they changed for PE classes.

In response to the controversies, the education ministry told local education authorities in 2021 to regularly review their regulations and to adopt a “common sense” approach to “changing times”.

Last year almost 200 public high schools and other educational institutions in Tokyo said they would [drop five regulations](#), including one requiring students to have black hair, although some said they would continue to demand that students show proof that their hair was naturally curly or a colour other than black.

This year, a public high school in western Japan said it would introduce gender-neutral school rules from April, including allowing boys to grow ponytails, local media reported. Education authorities in Fukuoka in the country’s south-west said it would end requirements for gender-specific hairstyles at dozens of junior high schools in the prefecture.

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| [Section menu](#) | [Main menu](#) |

## Headlines monday 27 march 2023

- [Live Israeli PM Netanyahu urged to halt judicial changes after mass protests](#)
- [Israel Netanyahu expected to announce halt to plans to overhaul judiciary](#)
- [Explainer What are the Israeli protests about?](#)
- [Video Protests in Israel after Netanyahu sacks defence minister](#)

## [Israel](#)

# Israeli PM Netanyahu says he is ‘not ready to divide the nation in pieces’ after mass protests over judicial overhaul – as it happened

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Protests in Israel after Netanyahu sacks defence minister – video

[Israel](#)

## Israel: Netanyahu announces delay to judicial overhaul plan

Prime minister defers controversial proposals to next parliamentary session after mass protests

[Bethan McKernan](#) in Jerusalem

Mon 27 Mar 2023 14.12 EDTFirst published on Mon 27 Mar 2023 03.07 EDT

Israel's embattled prime minister, [Benjamin Netanyahu](#), has announced a delay to his far-right government's proposals to overhaul the judiciary after 12 weeks of escalating political crisis.

Netanyahu said on Monday he would delay his flagship judicial changes to the next parliamentary session, saying he wanted to give time to seek a compromise over the contentious package with his political opponents.

Speaking in a televised address on Monday evening, ten hours after he was originally scheduled to give a statement, Netanyahu – looking tired and striking an unusually flat tone – said he was “not willing to tear the nation in half ... When there's a possibility of avoiding fraternal war through dialogue, I, as prime minister, will take a time out for that dialogue.”

“We have the ability to pass the legislation with a strong majority,” he added, before praising the government's supporters. “No one will silence you,” he said.

The decision to delay only postpones the issue for several weeks, and it is not clear if the protests will end.

In exchange for agreeing to the delay, the far-right Jewish Power party said the prime minister had offered the formation of a civil “national guard”, causing concern about an armed group under the control of the far-right politician Itamar Ben-Gvir.

With corruption charges hanging over his head, Netanyahu has been forced to rely on unruly, extremist coalition partners. Although famous for his working his way out of tight spots in the past, “King Bibi” appears to be losing his touch, struggling to maintain control inside and outside the Knesset.



Protest in Jerusalem against Israel’s judicial overhaul and dismissing of the defence minister. Photograph: Ammar Awad/Reuters

Opposition to the bitterly contested judicial changes peaked on Monday as hospitals, universities and the country’s largest trade union announced a general strike in protest against the plans to limit the powers of the supreme court. Tel Aviv’s airport, Israel’s main international gateway, cancelled flights, and local municipalities, nurseries, civil servants and tech workers also joined the action. After Netanyahu’s evening address, the union called off the strike.

The strikes came after a [dramatic night of protests](#) sparked by Netanyahu's decision to sack his defence minister [for opposing](#) the judicial plans, and after significant pushback from the military, Israel's vital hi-tech sector, and allies in the US.

While members of Netanyahu's Likud party, as well as his ultra-Orthodox partners, appeared ready to support his decision to cave after months of public pressure, the far right proved hard to dissuade from threats to bring down the government if their demands were not met. Even as protests raged across the country overnight, a parliamentary committee continued to approve parts of the legislation, meaning the bills can go to the Knesset plenum for new readings.

The Likud member Yariv Levin, the justice minister, and the far-right MK Simcha Rothman, who chairs the Knesset's law and justice committee – the two men spearheading the judicial proposals – had repeatedly vowed to press ahead with passing the most important laws before the Knesset breaks up for the Passover holiday on 2 April. In a tweet on Monday, Rothman urged supporters of the overhaul to take to the streets and “not to give up on the people's choice”.

## [Map](#)

The extremist security minister, Ben-Gvir, and the finance minister, Bezalel Smotrich, also warned on social media throughout the day that the prime minister must not “surrender to anarchy”. By early evening, however, Netanyahu appeared to have reached a settlement with his coalition partners, and Jewish Power released a statement shortly before Netanyahu's address saying the legislation would be pushed to the next session of parliament.

In exchange, Jewish Power said the prime minister had agreed to the formation of a civil “national guard” under Ben-Gvir's control, although observers widely interpreted the move as an empty gesture on Netanyahu's part.

Another day of protests opposing the plans picked up across Israel by lunchtime, including outside the Knesset, where Israeli media estimated

100,000 people gathered before Netanyahu's remarks. Supporters of the overhaul mobilised by Monday evening after Likud called for a counter-demonstration.



Israeli police officers and protesters in Tel Aviv on Monday. Photograph: Anadolu Agency/Getty Images

Police numbers were reinforced to handle possible trouble after fears of violence were fuelled by social media posts calling for attacks on leftwing Israelis. [In a tweet](#), Netanyahu appealed to supporters on both sides to avoid violence.

Monday's events follow Netanyahu's decision to fire his defence minister, Yoav Galant, after he became the first senior governing coalition official to make a public call to scrap the proposals. The sacking appears to have crossed a red line, even as Israel was already grappling with unprecedented internal upheaval: in response to Galant's dismissal, tens of thousands of people blocked motorways and attempted to break through barriers outside Netanyahu's Jerusalem residence in the early hours of Monday.

### [Map of Israel protests](#)

Police used mounted officers, stun grenades and water cannon to disperse demonstrators overnight, while Israel's consul-general in New York and

Netanyahu's defence lawyer announced their intention to resign in opposition to the prime minister's policies.

Proponents of the changes, introduced almost immediately after the new government entered office in December, say they are needed to better balance the branches of government and combat a perceived leftwing bias in the court's rulings.

Critics say they will erase democratic norms, handing politicians too much power by allowing a simple majority in the Knesset to overrule almost all of the court's decisions, and giving politicians a decisive say on appointments to the bench. It has also been pointed out the move could help Netanyahu evade prosecution in his corruption trial, in which he denies all charges.

If the plans for the judiciary go ahead in their current form after the Knesset break, Israel is still likely to face a constitutional crisis in which the supreme court could strike down the legislation, and the coalition could choose not to comply.

Only one in four voters support the judicial overhaul, according to recent polling by Israel's Channel 12. Several previous attempts at delay, negotiation and compromise brokered by the figurehead president, Isaac Herzog, have been declared unworkable by the government.

The prime minister, taken aback by the scale of the protests, has reportedly been seeking to negotiate with the opposition for several weeks, but has been fearful of antagonising his far-right coalition partners and losing his parliamentary majority.

After five elections since 2019 in which voters were split over whether the scandal-plagued Netanyahu was fit to lead the country, a bloc of extremist and religious parties headed by the Likud won elections last November, going on to form the most rightwing administration in Israeli history.

If the judicial overhaul is abandoned and the government collapses, Israel could once again be headed for elections.

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Protests in Israel after Netanyahu sacks defence minister – video

[Israel](#)

[Explainer](#)

## What are the Israeli protests about and what happens next?

Hundreds of thousands of people have taken to the streets over plans to overhaul the judicial system

- [Netanyahu and Israeli protests – latest updates](#)

[Bethan McKernan](#) in Jerusalem

Mon 27 Mar 2023 03.40 EDTFirst published on Thu 16 Mar 2023 11.39 EDT

Tens of thousands of people [protested across Israel on Sunday night](#) in a spontaneous show of anger at the decision by the prime minister, Benjamin Netanyahu, to fire his defence minister after the minister [called for a pause](#) to the government's plans to overhaul the judiciary.

The plans have ignited months of demonstrations and been questioned by Israel's top allies including the US.

### What is the government proposing?

Among a raft of far-reaching proposals from Netanyahu's government are plans to allow a simple majority of 61 in the 120-seat Knesset to override almost any supreme court rulings, and to allow politicians to appoint most of the justices to the bench.

The changes are spearheaded not by the prime minister but by his Likud colleague Yariv Levin, the justice minister, and the Religious Zionist MK



Simcha Rothman, who chairs the Knesset's law and justice committee.

Both men have a longstanding hatred of Israel's supreme court, which they see as too powerful and as biased against the [settler movement](#), Israel's ultra-religious community, and the Mizrahi population, Jewish people of Middle Eastern origin. In particular, many on the Israeli right have never forgiven the court for decisions related to Israel's unilateral withdraw from the Gaza Strip in 2005.

It is not lost on anyone that the measures could help Netanyahu evade prosecution in his [corruption trial](#). He denies all charges.

[Map of Israel protests](#)

## **Why is this happening now?**

Netanyahu's trial triggered four years of political crisis in which Israel was split over whether he was fit to lead the country. After five elections since 2019, in which politicians on both sides failed to form stable governments, a bloc of extremist and religious parties headed by Netanyahu's Likud won a clear majority in elections last November, and went on to form the [most rightwing administration](#) in Israeli history.

Full annexation of the occupied West Bank, a rollback of pro-LGBTQ+ legislation, axing laws protecting women's rights and minority rights, and a loosening of the rules of engagement for Israeli police and soldiers, are all on the coalition's agenda.

## **What do critics of the measures say?**

Israel's supreme court plays an outsized checks-and-balances role as the country does not have a formal constitution or second legislative chamber.

Worries that the proposals will result in an erosion of democratic norms and the rule of law have sparked the [biggest protest movement](#) in Israeli history, with hundreds of thousands of people taking to the streets in various cities, demonstrations held outside the Knesset in Jerusalem, and several "days of disruption" in which protesters have blocked highways and Tel Aviv airport.

In recent weeks, the protests have become more violent, and dozens of arrests have been made.

The movement is largely leaderless, but significant and unexpected pressure is coming from [military reservists](#) and Israel's vitally important [tech sector](#). Internationally, many of Israel's allies have expressed alarm over the direction in which the country is heading.

## What happens next?

[Attempts at compromise](#) brokered by the president, Isaac Herzog, have been shot down by the government as not workable, but a high-profile call for a freeze to the legislation on 26 March by the defence minister, Yoav Galant, appears to have changed the equation. Netanyahu quickly fired Galant over his opposition to the proposals, sparking one of the most dramatic nights in Israeli history as people took to the streets all over the country.

Although Israeli media have reported that Netanyahu would be willing to cut a deal, until now the prime minister has appeared to be a hostage to his far-right partners, who could bring down the government if their demands are not met. Netanyahu could instead try to form a coalition with opposition parties, but most are wary of trusting him.

Other members of the coalition have reiterated their determination to pass the most important parts of the legislation before the Knesset breaks up for the Passover holiday on 2 April.

If the plans for the judiciary go ahead in their current form, Israel is likely to face an unprecedented constitutional crisis in which the supreme court could strike down all or parts of the legislation designed to curb its powers, and the government could choose not to comply.

For Palestinians, the prospect of a bolder and more hostile Israeli government has added to fears of a [return to full-blown conflict](#), while Iran and other enemies are closely following what they see as internal weakness.

| [Section menu](#) | [Main menu](#) |

## [Israel](#)

# Protests in Israel after Netanyahu sacks defence minister – video

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## 2023.03.27 - Spotlight

- [Broke and disabled in Tory Britain The reality of life on one meal a day](#)
- ['People think I'm an aristocrat' Charles Dance on class, Game of Thrones – and avoiding James Bond](#)
- ['People will be disturbed' Steve McQueen on airing his Grenfell film](#)
- [A new start after 60 My divorce felt mortally wounding – then I walked the Camino de Santiago](#)

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‘It’s a lot of caring for £69 a week’ ... Mike in his kitchen. Photograph: Joel Goodman

[UK cost of living crisis](#)

**Broke and disabled in Tory Britain: the reality of life on one meal a day**

Welfare reforms have left many disabled people effectively destitute. For them, this isn't a cost-of-living crisis – it's a cost-of-staying-alive crisis



[Frances Ryan](#)

[@drfrancesryan](#)

Mon 27 Mar 2023 05.00 EDT

In his Buckinghamshire front room, Mike is working out how many meals he has to skip this week to make sure his wife can afford to eat.

Sandra, 38, has bipolar disorder, on top of multiple physical health problems, and has long been too sick to work. Mike – himself slowly recovering from agoraphobia – is needed at home as her full-time carer. A large turntable setup fills one side of the room. “I was a DJ in another life,” Mike, 40, explains wistfully.

Heavy steroids for severe asthma have damaged Sandra's bones and she struggles to walk to the bottom of the garden, let alone do a nine to five. Like many disabled families in houses across Britain, the couple have no choice but to rely solely on benefits – or, to put it another way, the kind of income that leaves your kitchen cupboards empty.



The front room is filled with sci-fi film memorabilia, collected at a time when there was still a little money for hobbies; stormtroopers stand in a display case, topped with a lifesize metallic red helmet and large model spacecraft. But these days, Mike can't escape more earthly concerns.

As well as caring for Sandra full-time, he helps her disabled son, Andy, in nearby supported living and has also started caring for Sandra's nan, cooking her dinners, keeping her house clean and doing her shopping. "It feels like a lot of caring for £69 [carer's allowance] a week," he admits. To get through it all, and make everything add up, Mike typically has just one meal a day, "whatever is yellow-stickered at Morrisons". Sandra's pain and breathing would only worsen if she became malnourished, so he prioritises her meals. Some of the few meals they can count on come from a local food pantry – a charitable scheme that sells donated food close to its sell-by date.

Mike and Sandra are not their real names; they speak to me anonymously, for painful reasons that go back a few years. As the 2010 coalition government brought in a wave of welfare reforms in the aftermath of the financial crash, disabled people like Mike and Sandra were recast as "scroungers" by prominent politicians and the rightwing press. The then chancellor, George Osborne, stoked a division between "workers and shirkers", famously referring in a set-piece party conference speech to shift workers "leaving home in the dark hours of the early morning" while glancing resentfully back "at the closed blinds of their nextdoor neighbour sleeping off a life on benefits". TV programmes, from Channel 4's [Benefits Street](#) to Channel 5's Gypsies on Benefits & Proud, played to this mood, normalising the myth that disabled benefits claimants were not people in need but fakers trying their luck. In this climate, suspicion over people's disabilities and illnesses became the new normal.



Sandra and Mike in their home. Photograph: Joel Goodman

Charities warned at the time that this rhetoric fuelled an increase in abuse levelled at disabled people, and Mike and Sandra were two of the many victims. After they were featured in their local paper in a story about the impact of benefit cuts, the couple received abusive comments online, with keyboard warriors declaring them “scroungers” leeching off the state.

Propped up in a chair with her ginger cat sat protectively on the armrest, Sandra admits it has left her with an intense fear that she will be maliciously reported to the Department for Work and Pensions and lose her benefits. “It worries me every day,” she says.

There are plenty of other worries, too, not least mounting energy bills. [Disability](#) has always been expensive – whether that’s care bills, specialist food, unavoidable taxi costs or extra heating. Just before the pandemic, the extra costs of being disabled were totted up to an estimated average of £583 a month. The record rise in energy costs in 2022 only added to this weight. Sandra needs extra electricity for her health: a nebuliser, a mobility scooter, air conditioning, a walk-in shower and a soon-to-be-installed stairlift.

The couple are going out less and less, because they can’t pay the electric bill for their Motability car. Sandra rarely uses her scooter now – they

haven't got the money to charge it. With her brown hair cropped short, she admits to me she has also started showering less. "The cost is just too much."

I speak to her again the day after a June heatwave and she has been struggling to breathe. The air conditioning would normally ease her asthma in the heat, but it is now too expensive to put on. Nowadays, she says, breathing "is just a luxury we can't afford".

Spend an hour with Mike and Sandra and phrases like "the squeeze on living standards" and "cost of living" that have dominated politics in recent years sound increasingly like dodgy euphemisms, a muted Westminster-built terminology that can't come close to describing what is actually happening in Britain today. As rising energy and food bills put the greatest pressure on Britons in decades, this couple have found themselves without enough income to meet the most basic human needs: keeping warm, properly fed and with medical equipment running. For people like Mike and Sandra, this isn't a cost-of-living crisis; this is a cost-of-staying-alive crisis.

It would be easy to hear a story like theirs and dismiss it as a one-off – a sad but ultimately rare example of extreme situations. And yet the truth is that this is what is happening to millions of disabled people in Britain today: grinding penury is being normalised. The scale of hardship is astonishing. More than 40% of those below the official poverty line – 6.1 million people in all – are either disabled or living with a disabled person.

To make matters worse, disability benefits such as personal independence payments (PIP) are counted as "spare income" when in practice, such cash has to pay for the extra costs of disability (anything from care costs to wheelchair parts) and rarely fully covers them. Stripping these benefits out, the [Joseph Rowntree Foundation](#) has shown that as of 2019-20, the risk of being in poverty for disabled working-age adults is more than twice as high (at 38%) as the risk for their non-disabled counterparts (17%).

Disabled people aren't just more likely to be below the headline – they're more likely to be far below it. Analysing data from just before the pandemic, [the JRF found that 15% of those in families with a disabled member were in](#)

“deep poverty”, compared with 9% of those in families without one. For single-adult disabled families, without the cushion of a partner’s income, this deep poverty figure rises to more than 20%. The impact of this is brutal: among this “single disabled” group, nearly a fifth reported being severely food insecure, or unable to heat their home, or falling behind with basic household bills due to lack of money. Compared with those in homes where no one is disabled, that means they are four times as likely to be falling into arrears, six times as likely to be living in a cold home and nine times as likely to be going hungry.



Sandra’s ginger cat. Photograph: Joel Goodman

It’s worth summing up what this really means: in one of the richest societies that has ever lived, a fifth of single disabled people are effectively destitute. And this was before the 2021 energy shock, which seems bound to worsen the figures. Survey after survey confirms this. The Office for National Statistics reported that as of September 2022, more than half (55%) of disabled people were finding it difficult to afford their energy bills, while more than a third (36%) were struggling to pay their rent or mortgage, in both cases far higher proportions than for non-disabled people. A large Savanta survey of working-age disabled people, carried out in February 2022, suggested that about 600,000 disabled people had just £10 or less per

week left after taxes and housing to pay for food, heating and everything else.

In a civilised society, this is where the welfare state would step in – but in recent years, Britain has reduced its safety net to a set of gaping holes. Through a mixture of cuts, squeezes and Kafkaesque tests, it has refashioned a system created to help people in need into an instrument of punishment. Even those with severe disability or serious illness are frequently threatened with having their benefits cut if they don't comply with work-related "requirements". In 2019, Prof Philip Alston, then the UN's special rapporteur on extreme poverty and human rights, concluded in his [damning report](#) on the UK that disabled people were "some of the hardest hit by austerity measures".

For Mike and Sandra, it was due to a series of welfare reforms during these years that their real financial problems started. In 2017, like hundreds of thousands of other disabled people, Mike was reassessed for his out-of-work sickness benefit, employment and support allowance, and declared "fit for work". Notably, most of the similar decisions that have been appealed – and they are many – have been overturned. Like many others, though, Mike didn't feel able to take on the DWP. Scared that the system dismissed mental health problems and aware that backlogs meant it could take a year to even get a hearing, he chose not to appeal.

Mike had slowly been making gains with his agoraphobia – on a good day, he could go to the supermarket without a panic attack – but holding down a job was a herculean task. "Being trapped behind a till or something would have been impossible for me." He couldn't even use public transport to get there, he explains. "A bit of support might have helped me into work at that time, but they just decided I was fine and that was that."

Back then, Sandra had limited disability benefits of her own and the two of them relied almost solely on Mike's social security to get by. With his benefits stopped, the couple had very little – just Sandra's low-rate PIP – to survive on for six months. "Food banks were a godsend," Mike says of that time, "but it's never enough food to actually live on. We would have three pies and a few tins of veg for a week."

Once again, Mike's experience – in this case, resorting to charity to keep himself and his wife fed – is all too typical. The records of the country's largest network of food banks show that more than six in 10 of the working-age people referred to them in early 2020 had a disability. The Trussell Trust adds that this is more than three times the rate of food bank use in the general working population.

When the state stopped supporting him, Mike's mental health plummeted, along with their finances. Things he had painstakingly learned to cope with became hard again: going out shopping, dealing with Sandra's hospital appointments, even opening letters. "I hit rock bottom," he says. "I struggled to get out of my room and slept almost constantly. I barely ate. It took me months to get back to where I was before being found 'fit for work'."

It was only a few years earlier that the bedroom tax had forced the couple out of the three-bed home that Sandra had lived in for four years. Officially a charge for "underoccupancy", this was yet another austerity cutback that disproportionately hit disabled people – and yet another case where Mike and Sandra's story is only too typical. In the past, I have interviewed dozens of disabled families who have relied on extra space for anything from oxygen cylinders and specialist beds to a room for carers to sleep in, but who nonetheless had their benefits cut due to having a supposedly spare bedroom.

Mike and Sandra soon got into rent arrears. In the end, the council cleared the debt, but it was not enough: the couple were forced to downsize to a one-bed house. When Sandra's eldest son, Sam, then 13, moved back there from his dad's less than a year later, the family found themselves crammed in with a teenage boy, medical equipment and one bed to sleep in. Eventually, the council moved them back up the social housing list for a two-bed house, but this required more upheaval – and a painful wait. For three years, Mike and Sandra slept on the living room floor. That would be hard for anyone, but when you have breathing problems and chronic pain, it's agony.

These are the sort of deprivations we have been asking ever more disabled Britons to live with over the past decade. Much of non-disabled Britain is disturbed and shocked by the unprecedented hardships of the current

squeeze. But for the likes of Mike and Sandra, the terrors of the latest “cost-of-living crisis” are nothing new. They are more of the same.

Sandra tells me that the housing saga led to her health significantly deteriorating. At one point, she had an asthma attack that made her heart stop. “I was in intensive care for a few days after that,” she says. “Luckily,” she adds with a learned stoicism, “there was no lasting damage to my brain.”

This is an edited extract from *Broke*, edited by Tom Clark, which will be published by Biteback on 30 March (£14.99). To support the Guardian and the Observer buy a copy at [guardianbookshop.com](https://guardianbookshop.com). Delivery charges may apply

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# ‘People think I’m an aristocrat’: Charles Dance on class, Game of Thrones – and avoiding James Bond

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McQueen shot the film in December 2017, shortly before the tower was covered with plastic sheeting. Photograph: © Photo James Stopforth

[Grenfell Tower fire](#)

## **‘People will be disturbed’: Steve McQueen on airing his Grenfell film**

Exclusive: Director says it is finally time to screen haunting footage as community awaits inquiry findings



[Robert Booth](#) *Social affairs correspondent*

Mon 27 Mar 2023 01.00 EDTLast modified on Mon 27 Mar 2023 07.27 EDT

The Oscar-winning film director [Steve McQueen](#) is to finally show his unflinching film of the burnt-out ruin of Grenfell Tower, which he hopes will help the push for justice before the sixth anniversary of the disaster.

The 24-minute film, [Grenfell](#), was shot from a helicopter in December 2017, shortly before the charred tower in west London was wrapped in white plastic. Without words or music, McQueen's camera relentlessly circles the council block, often at close quarters, allowing viewers to see into rooms where people died and white-suited forensic investigators sifting evidence.

The project, which has involved extensive consultation with the bereaved, survivors and neighbours, comes as the community waits for the findings of the public inquiry – which started almost five years ago – and to hear whether police will recommend criminal prosecutions that may bring about the jail terms many want.

“You must understand that the violence that was inflicted on that community was no joke,” McQueen said in an exclusive Guardian interview before the film is [exhibited](#) at the Serpentine Gallery, London, from 7 April to 10 May.

“I didn’t want to let people off the hook. There are going to be people who are going to be a little bit disturbed. When you make art, anything half decent ... there are certain people you will possibly offend. But that is how it is.”



A still from Grenfell (2019). Footage for the 24-minute film was shot from a helicopter. Photograph: Steve McQueen

The film can be harrowing. Its repetitive contemplation of the burnt-out block simmers with unspoken rage. It is also a politically charged reminder of the extreme destruction that still sits within the shrouded block while no person, nor company, has been punished for their role in the 72 deaths.

The film begins high above suburban fields, woodlands, sports pitches and avenues of interwar housing.

“I wanted to put the building in perspective of our everyday [life],” McQueen said. “It’s not isolated. That is important because you [the viewer] put it in the perspective of yourself.”

McQueen “sat on” the film after it was shot because “it couldn’t have been shown within three or four years [of the disaster].” But still not everyone will want to see it. One person whose relative died on an upper floor said they would not watch the whole film but supported its public display.

“It’s more for them to see [Grenfell] standing there, the way it is with the world going on around it,” they said.

Ed Daffarn, who escaped from his 16th-floor flat, said: “Sitting there looking at [the tower] captured the pure violence of what was meted out to us by the perpetrators. It has come at a good time. We need Grenfell in the public consciousness.”

McQueen grew up in his early years on the nearby White City estate and said he felt compelled to make the film as soon as he heard that officials planned to wrap the tower in the months after the 14 June 2017 blaze.

“It was almost like a race against time,” he said. “Once things are covered up, they are forgotten about, or it can be more convenient for people who want it to be forgotten about.”

He engaged community groups, including Grenfell United, and dropped leaflets through letterboxes. Some people were not yet ready to back his proposal, but they kept talking.

Eventually he took off in a helicopter from the north-west and flew towards the tower, directing the whole piece in a single shot.

Only birdsong, wind, cars and an aeroplane are heard. An emergency services siren breaks the peace, before the central [London](#) skyline appears. It is like poring over a map – a satisfying survey of an impressive civilisation. Then the charcoal black lattice of Grenfell appears and the soundtrack cuts to silence and the camera circles the tower for minute after minute. It is haunting and upsetting.

“It’s about the building and suspending it in time,” McQueen said. “And looking. Holding, holding, holding.”

Scraps of the cladding panels that burned like petrol are visible. Beams of sunlight hit the internal floors. In one flat sits a bathtub. Stacked in many flats are pink sacks filled with unidentified material. Absolute destruction fills the frame.

It is not a direct comparison, but McQueen brings up the decision made by Emmett Till's mother that her 14-year-old son's body should be displayed in an open casket, after he was lynched by racists in Mississippi in 1955. Mamie Till said "everybody needed to know what had happened".

McQueen is certain of the causes of the Grenfell disaster.

"It was deliberate neglect," he said. "It was no accident. There were so many people, so many companies, so many factors ... It was all a deliberate act of neglect and, to a certain extent, greed."

And the racial dynamic of what had happened to the majority ethnic minority people in the tower was immediately obvious him.

"You know the lay of the land, you know what the authorities are," he said. "They are in the Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea. People talk about what happened in [1959] when Kelso Cochrane, from Antigua, was murdered by the teddy boys [in the borough]."

The film comes as negotiations continue about what to do with the tower. Parts of the community are keen to keep at least some of the building as a reminder of the disaster and because it is effectively a burial ground. Others would prefer it to be demolished and replaced with a memorial such as a garden or museum. The film may prompt fresh appraisals of that dilemma.

Grenfell is just the latest of McQueen's projects exploring festering injustices, from his Oscar-winning film *12 Years a Slave* (2013) through to his *Small Axe* films (2020) for the BBC about the experience of London's Caribbean immigrants. And he's not going to get tired and stop.

"Tired? Oh my God no. It's the reverse. It gives me energy. Justice gives me energy. Truth gives me energy ... It needs to be shouted from the highest rooftops."



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‘When you get into nature, you get in touch with another world’ ... Belinda Isley on the Camino de Santiago.

[A new start after 60](#)[Life and style](#)

**A new start after 60: my divorce felt mortally wounding – then I walked the**



# Camino de Santiago

Belinda Isley was devastated when her husband left, but it was the start of an excellent second act: fostering newborn kittens, travelling with friends and becoming a 'house mom' for a sorority



[Emma Beddington](#)

Mon 27 Mar 2023 02.00 EDT

“What I thought was going to be the best year of my life turned out to really suck,” says Belinda Isley.

It had started so promisingly: she and her husband had retired early (Isley worked in marketing for the state of Idaho, where they lived, and for the local university; she also worked as an artist and had a sideline in property development). Their son was at college and they had downsized, giving them more financial freedom. The couple travelled to Costa Rica and celebrated her 60th birthday with a wine-tasting trip. Then Isley’s mother died.

“It wasn’t unexpected, but it was sudden,” she says. Grieving for her mother and dealing with probate were emotionally gruelling. Then, three months later, she faced another shock. “One morning, I’d made a latte for my husband. I gave it to him and he just kind of casually said he thought we should be divorced. I thought he was joking, because he was my best friend and we just had life by the tail.”

Isley was “mortally wounded” – angry, sad and shocked. Eventually, though, she rallied. “I got to the point where I said: OK, you have two choices here. You can be really bitter and angry and live the rest of your life like that, or you can look really hard and, difficult as it may be, find whatever gift there is in this scenario.”



‘There’s always a way to work through any problem’ ... Isley’s advice to her young charges. Photograph: no credit

That marked the start of a second act full of adventure. Isley began by fostering newborn kittens that needed to be fed every three hours, which she found to be a positive way to avoid the introspection inherent in relationship breakdown. “If you focus your light outward to help people, it’s a really healing experience.”

She reconnected with two old friends and went on walking adventures with one of them; they walked the [Camino de Santiago](#) and crossed England coast to coast, from [St Bees to Robin Hood's Bay](#). The walks were far from easy, but the experience was transformative – spiritual, even. “When you get into nature, you get in touch with another world. It resets your body compass and your mindset,” she says.

Back in the US, on the lookout for financial security, Isley learned from a friend of a friend about her experience working as a house director, or “house mom”, in a college sorority. She decided to apply for such a role, taking up her first position at 64. She is now based at the University of California, Santa Barbara. Anything from 32 to 86 girls live in the “fairly grand” sorority house; there are chefs, gardeners and handymen to oversee. Her property-developing experience was invaluable. “I’m not afraid of houses; I know when something goes wrong and what you have to do.”

House mom is a full-on, live-in role in term time. “I pretty much manage everything and make sure that the girls are happy and safe and that the house runs and doesn’t fall apart. I always tell people it’s a lot of fun until it isn’t.

“As happy as you think college-aged girls should be, there’s a lot going on in the world they can’t get away from,” she says. Campuses have become a target for violent attacks. Last year, Isley had to deal with a man convicted of violent crimes against women breaking into the sorority house: “That was pretty scary.” Life was easier, she thinks, when she was their age. “When I was in college, being shot in the student union was not on the list of things to worry about.”

It’s important to work hard, but also to make time for fun ... a party is always a good idea

Inevitably, there are personal crises and tragedies. “We have had really incredibly sad things happen,” she says. “I find myself absorbing this, which is not healthy.”

What is it like, at nearly 69, to live with women on the verge of adulthood? “They’re fun to be around; they keep you young,” Isley says. “Their energy

is just great.” They offer on-tap IT support and dared her to dye her hair (“I said: ‘You give me that dye, I’ll do it’ – I dyed my hair pink!”). She marvels at how clever yet lacking in common sense the students can be. She recalls a letter returned as undeliverable that was addressed using only the recipient’s Instagram handle (“You’ve gotten all the way to college and you don’t know how to address a letter?!”).

Mainly, though, she admires their resilience. “For everything they’re experiencing, these girls are brave, they’re optimistic, they’re up for the challenge,” she says.

Isley’s unflappable openness and warmth shine through on our video call; I am not surprised by a tribute that she forwards from one of her earliest charges, saying what a huge impact Isley had and how thankful she is for Isley’s influence on her life.

What can they learn from each other at such different life stages? Isley says the girls show her that “it’s important to work hard, but also to make time for fun. Be kind, be of service, don’t take yourself so seriously – and a party is always a good idea.”

In return, she teaches them tenacity: “There’s always a way to work through any problem.” Plus, as someone who can turn her hand to most DIY, Isley shows them: “A woman is perfectly capable of anything.”

[Tell us: has your life taken a new direction after the age of 60?](#)

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## 2023.03.27 - Opinion

- In a sceptical era, understand this: vaccines do work - and our children need them
- We thought we'd won the fight to stop child detention in the UK. We need to win it again
- Putin and his allies love buying art. To help us win the war in Ukraine, we should confiscate it
- The Finns hold the secret of happiness – and it is not what you might expect



A Covid-19 vaccination clinic in Glasgow, Scotland is one country where childhood vaccine uptake has increased recently. Photograph: Jane Barlow/PA

[Opinion](#)**Vaccines and immunisation**

**In a sceptical era, understand this:  
vaccines do work - and our children  
need them**

[Devi Sridhar](#)



Covid accelerated a decline in vaccinations in England. We have to make a stronger case for them, and ensure everyone can get them

Mon 27 Mar 2023 01.00 EDTLast modified on Mon 27 Mar 2023 02.08 EDT

In 1959, at the age of 29, the promising [England footballer Jeff Hall](#) died of polio. His death sent shock waves across Britain, and caused an immediate change in attitudes towards vaccination, from complacency to a sudden rush to clinics. A polio vaccine had been available for three years, but takeup was low. After Hall's death, the demand was so high that vaccines had to be flown in from the US. As the Daily Express [put it](#): "In the past 10 years over 3,000 people have died of polio in England and Wales. But it took the death of one footballer to get [people] pouring into the clinics." More than half a century later, we may be returning to complacency when it comes to getting children vaccinated.

The past decade has seen a [decline in the uptake](#) of almost all routine vaccinations for children in England. Currently, no childhood vaccinations meet the 95% target set by the World Health Organization. [The US has](#) a similar shortfall, and the WHO warns that the long-term decline in childhood vaccination rates is a [global phenomenon](#). Here, the consequences



have been increased cases of vaccine-preventable diseases such as whooping cough in nurseries and schools, as well as a rising number of polio samples found in sewage in London.

The Covid-19 pandemic years (2020-22) only accentuated this decline in England, as well as in countries such as Mozambique and Myanmar. However, some countries, such as Uganda and Pakistan, managed to maintain their childhood vaccination programmes. And in Scotland childhood vaccination rates [significantly increased](#) during the first lockdown, compared with the year before the pandemic.

But it would be myopic to look only at Covid-19's impact on vaccination levels: overall decline has been happening since the early 1990s. To increase the uptake among children requires looking at what could be driving these relatively lower figures. And it defies one simple explanation – instead it's a combination of supply and demand challenges.

In terms of supply, with health services increasingly strained and under-resourced, access to vaccination clinics for parents and caregivers can be challenging. Limited services (with hours mirroring many parents' workdays) and long distances (requiring a car journey or long travel) can mean parents struggle to get their child vaccinated, even when they understand the value of it. And a certain level of parental complacency sets in, given that the general risk of diseases such as measles or rubella is considered low (because of the public health success of their near elimination).

[Scotland's boost in vaccination rates](#) during lockdown is probably linked to flexible working for parents (which enable them to attend vaccination appointments) and mobile vaccination centres. A real push to make vaccination clinics [easily accessible](#) to parents is also how Pakistan and Uganda have maintained their levels over the past few years.

Concerns over the safety and efficacy of vaccines is also a factor, linked to the rise of the anti-vax movement. Vaccine hesitancy increased dramatically – not only in England but globally, after the now discredited study by



Andrew Wakefield [linking MMR vaccination to autism](#). The published findings have subsequently been retracted; however, the impact on parental trust in vaccination has been massive. Despite being struck off the General Medical Council register, Wakefield has attracted a large and dedicated following, and continues to speak and lecture against vaccines around the world. And since Wakefield, we have seen an increasing number of celebrities such as [Russell Brand](#) moving towards anti-vax positions in the Covid-19 era, recognising the followers, [fame and fortune](#) that this stance brings.

Those leading anti-vax movements often don't even seem to believe what they are saying to their followers, based on their personal actions on vaccines. Robert F Kennedy Jr has become famous as an activist against vaccines, including those for Covid-19. His anti-vaccine organisation, Children's Health Defense, increased its revenue six-fold between 2018 and 2020, and his book linking Anthony Fauci, Bill Gates and big pharma spent weeks as a top bestseller on Amazon. Yet guests invited to a holiday party at his home in December 2021 were urged to be [vaccinated or tested for Covid-19](#). Donald Trump spent months as president of the United States downplaying the risks of Covid-19, [hosting large rallies](#) during the height of the pandemic and [calling it "kung flu"](#). Yet he (and his wife) [secretly received](#) the first two doses of Pfizer/BioNTech's Covid-19 vaccine before leaving office in January. There are plenty of other examples of "do as I say, not as I do."

The problem for medical doctors and scientists is that pushing back against this misinformation, or even talking about the importance of vaccination, results in an onslaught of abuse. There are not many positive incentives for talking about how vaccines work, or why they're important: the only incentive is in trying to protect children (and adults) from serious illness and death. Possible solutions include medical organisations such as the Royal College of Paediatrics and Child [Health](#) running social media and outreach campaigns that bring together dozens of established voices, rather than single individuals – as well as working with social media platforms to better regulate the information being circulated.

To increase childhood uptake of vaccines, we need a targeted push by health authorities to make vaccination easily available to parents and caregivers who are juggling a number of different responsibilities, as well as continued messaging to parents about why vaccination matters. Hopefully this happens without having another young person die unnecessarily, like Jeff Hall, from a vaccine-preventable disease.

- Prof Devi Sridhar is chair of global public health at the University of Edinburgh
- ***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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‘Public opinion on migration is more nuanced than Westminster often understands.’ Photograph: Anadolu Agency/Getty Images

[OpinionImmigration and asylum](#)

**We thought we’d won the fight to stop  
child detention in the UK. We need to  
win it again**

[Anna Rowlands](#)



The illegal migration bill would change the status of children and family groups in the UK asylum system. Surely we're better than this

Mon 27 Mar 2023 03.00 EDTLast modified on Tue 28 Mar 2023 05.04 EDT

Earlier this month, a four-hour parliamentary debate on the illegal migration bill [produced the expected majority](#) (63) to secure a second reading. But during that debate there was a potentially misleading clarification from the home secretary. Claiming that the opposition had mischaracterised the bill's proposals, Suella Braverman carefully noted that the government would not be detaining children. Or rather, for those who listened carefully, it would not be detaining *unaccompanied* children.

Good. But although unaccompanied children may not be detained, other children will be. The government is proposing to change the status of children and family groups in the UK asylum system. And in doing so it will overturn 12 years of established cross-party consensus in the UK that we are not a country that detains children and families for solely administrative immigration purposes. This policy was agreed by senior [Conservatives](#) still sitting in parliament. To overturn it would be a deeply, deeply regressive act.

I am particularly sensitive to this detail because in 2010-11 I was part of a large campaign, and then a small policy team working closely with the government, that helped negotiate the change of policy, and eventually law. Much is rightly being written about the impact of this bill, which, as the UN states, “[would amount to an asylum ban](#)”. But my focus is on what will happen to that single agreement that has lasted just 12 years. I am left feeling that campaigning on just and dignified refugee and asylum provision is a gruelling process that *can* achieve real breakthroughs, but it requires a near-permanent vigilance and readiness to fight over and over again for the small things you thought you had already won. All progress is fragile.

The commitment to end the detention of children and families was [formalised in policy in 2010](#), and [quadruple-locked into primary legislation in 2014](#). Prior to 2010, the UK had been gradually increasing the number of children and families it routinely detained. Yarl's Wood detention centre had held [more than 1,000 children and families](#) in 2009; one child was held for [more than 150 days](#). Britain compared poorly with its European neighbours, which had moved to alternatives to detention for children and families just as we were insisting it was a necessary part of creating a hostile environment.

But what is remarkable in the case of the detention of children and families is that an organised group of civil society actors managed to change this, and it is worth noting how.

In the lead-up to the 2010 general election, campaigners for immigration reform knew that public opinion on the question of adults seeking asylum was tricky (but not impossible) to shift. But they also knew that public opinion on the treatment of children and families was different, that the government could not claim to represent public opinion in ratcheting up the use of child detention, and so refugee sector and community organising groups went out and tested that theory. They built grassroots coalitions in constituencies across the country. Local constituents asked politicians to sign a sanctuary pledge promising that they would end the practice if elected. Hundreds of parliamentary candidates across parties signed. In Cambridge, even the Ukip candidate signed.

Initially, David Cameron refused to sign and instructed his frontbench to do the same. However, Cameron crumbled when placed on a stage in Westminster Central Hall in front of 2,500 members of Citizens UK. A brave young Syrian woman (a refugee from a previous round of Assad repression) stood on stage and told Cameron what it had been like to be detained as a child, woken through the night each night by security staff charged with shining torches into her eyes. She told him that the effects of detention do not wear off, they are lasting. Telling her personal story, she told Cameron what every researcher, myself included, who has worked with those who have been detained knows. Detention is a form of imprisonment that causes a unique kind of trauma that endures. For this reason, it is almost always a disproportionate act by a liberal state, if any other alternative exists. In a completely unexpected move, Cameron relented on stage and pledged that he would work with community groups to find a solution.

When that solution came, more than a year later, it was hard won. It required long and complex negotiations with the coalition government and with Home Office civil servants (I know, because I was the vice-chair of the group making recommendations). The legal provision that emerged was imperfect: a small number of family groups might be detained for a few hours if they arrived without any claim made at ports; and, with permission of a specially formulated group of experts, family groups who were being deported or removed after legal processes had been exhausted could be held in pre-departure accommodation in transit to an airport.

But there could be no routine detention of children in large adult centres or prison facilities for reasons of administrative convenience or as part of a hostile environment policy messaging. Theresa May, David Cameron and Nick Clegg [celebrated this achievement](#). This is what we are about to reverse.

This proposed policy shift is happening at a moment when those who work on advocacy within the refugee sector are already under huge strain: responding to the trafficking of children from hotels, and the impact of huge delays in processing asylum claims and increasing levels of asylum destitution.

So far, the proposed bill has drawn fierce words from Christian and Jewish leaders, from refugee groups and from human rights organisations. The archbishop of York described the bill as “[cruelty without purpose](#)”.

I doubt that this will trouble the government at all. With the prospect of a general election in the offing, it will be used to argue for their no-nonsense approach to bleeding heart liberals, and to make Labour squirm.

But public opinion on migration is more nuanced than Westminster often understands. The [Gary Lineker controversy](#) proved that. In 2010, it turned out that public opinion was more complex than imagined; that the British public did not especially desire the detention of children in their name. This was a point they were willing to make to their MPs and to ministers. If that view still holds, it is a point they will need to make again.

- Anna Rowlands holds the St Hilda chair in Catholic social thought and practice at Durham University and has advised ministers on detention policy

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René Magritte's *La Poitrine*, which was bought in 2014 with the help of shell companies linked to oligarch Arkady Rotenberg, just after sanctions were imposed on him. Photograph: Magritte Museum

[OpinionRussia](#)

**Putin and his allies love buying art. To help us win the war in Ukraine, confiscate it**

[Vladyslav Vlasiuk](#)





Paintings and sculptures are easier to transport and hide than yachts and private jets. Don't let them slip through the net

Mon 27 Mar 2023 05.00 EDTLast modified on Tue 28 Mar 2023 07.37 EDT

René Magritte, one of Belgium's most famous artists, was a leading member of the 1920s movement called surrealism, which sought revolution against the constraints of the rational mind. When describing his paintings, Magritte said they “evoke mystery” and strived to ask beholders: “What does that mean? It does not mean anything, because mystery means nothing, it is unknowable.” I sometimes feel as if I am looking at a Magritte painting when examining Russians' ability – in plain sight and [amid much detailed reporting](#) – to evade western sanctions policies.

Arkady Rotenberg, worth a reported \$3.5bn (£2.9bn), is a childhood friend of Vladimir Putin. He used to be the Russian president's judo sparring partner, before progressing to become a rich businessman. Rotenberg has publicly claimed to own the \$1bn so-called “[Putin's Palace](#)”, a huge Italianate complex on the Black Sea coast said to be secretly owned by the Russian president.

In March 2014, Rotenberg was one of the first Russians to be hit with sanctions after Russia unlawfully invaded Ukraine and annexed Crimea. Yet two months after the restrictions were imposed, a complex web of shell companies linked to Rotenberg and his family was used to buy [Magritte's La Poitrine for \\$7.5m](#) at a Sotheby's auction in New York.

According to a US Senate investigation, the painting was shipped to a storage facility in Germany called Hasenkamp where it rested for five years. In August 2019, when the committee started investigating the purchase, the artwork was whisked off to Moscow. In its report, the congressional committee said the lack of banking regulations over art transactions was “shocking” and created an “environment ripe for laundering money and evading sanctions”. It directed sharp criticism at auction houses and art dealers for doing little to screen or stop sanctioned people from trading art.

Since the full-scale invasion of Ukraine last year, some additional measures have been taken. The auction houses Christie's, Sotheby's and Bonhams [cancelled sales of Russian art in London](#) in response to western sanctions on the Kremlin and its wealthy cronies. But so much more could be done to tackle a notoriously opaque market which has been long favoured by Russian oligarchs looking to shift money around. After all, paintings and sculptures are easier to transport and hide than yachts and private jets, many of which have been seized over the last year. Art also provides oligarchs with a mechanism to launder their reputations – weaving themselves into such a gilded world provides cultural, social and political standing.

Leonid Mikhelson is the major shareholder in Novatek, a Russian gas company, and has done business with Gennady Timchenko, an oligarch who has been close to the Russian president for decades. He has been sanctioned since 2014. Yet during the same time period, Mikhelson's foundation has also [staged four shows](#) between 2014 and 2018 at the Whitechapel Gallery.

Western allies of [Ukraine](#) seeking to put pressure on the Kremlin over the war crimes extravaganza unleashed on Ukraine could ban sanctioned Russians from their prestigious art markets, including auction houses. More stringent regulations about beneficial ownership could be introduced, which would help to clean up the real estate market as well as the art world. An

international taskforce should be established to recover priceless works of art looted from Ukrainian galleries and museums by Russian occupiers. And western authorities should confiscate pieces bought by sanctioned individuals and their proxies. The money should go towards the reconstruction of Ukraine.

The UK will not have to look far for such items. Two months after the war started last year, its authorities could have made a real statement. The Victoria and Albert Museum hosted a blockbuster Fabergé in London: Romance to Revolution exhibition displaying objet d'arts that the Russian jeweller sold to the British royal family and aristocracy at the beginning of the last century. In prized place was the Rothschild Fabergé clock egg from 1902. The Rothschild egg had been bought at Christie's in London in 2007 for £9m by Russian businessman Alexander Ivanov. It was transferred to the V&A exhibition by Ivanov's Hermitage Museum in St Petersburg after receiving assurances from the UK that it would be exempt from seizure by the courts.

The egg was eventually returned to Russia months after Putin ordered his troops into a conflict in Ukraine that is increasingly defined by the deliberate targeting of civilians – in complete breach of all international laws.

Last week, the international criminal court in The Hague indicted Putin for the mass abduction of Ukrainian children and [issued a warrant for his arrest](#). Given the current situation, it is unlikely that Putin will ever risk visiting a country that would honour the arrest warrant.

But another measure might have been taken to show the Russian president that the west means business. It is documented that some time after Ivanov bought the Rothschild Fabergé clock egg, he surprisingly decided to give it away. The ownership was [transferred in 2015 to a Russian individual](#) who was hit by UK, EU and US sanctions last year as Russian tanks rolled into Ukraine. His name is Vladimir Putin.

This article was amended on 28 March 2023 to better reflect some attribution.

- Vladyslav Vlasiuk is a sanctions expert working in the Ukrainian presidential office
- ***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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| [Section menu](#) | [Main menu](#) |



A happy Finn ... Photograph: Cavan Images/Getty Images

[OpinionFinland](#)

## **The Finns hold the secret of happiness – and it is not what you might expect**

[Emma Beddington](#)



Finland's tourist board is running a competition to win a happiness masterclass. Sadly, the prize doesn't involve drinking in your underwear

Mon 27 Mar 2023 01.00 EDTLast modified on Mon 27 Mar 2023 15.51 EDT

I'm loth to share this, because I want to win myself, but Visit Finland is running a [competition](#) to take part in a "happiness masterclass". It's not as good as last year's Icelandic tourist board [initiative](#) where you could get their shaggy little horses to write you an out-of-office email by walking on a giant keyboard, but having recently described myself as having "no talent for happiness", I'm keen.

Confirmed this month as the [happiest place in the world](#) for the sixth year running, Finland, the country with a word for getting drunk alone in your underwear (päätsdrunk, or *kalsarikännit*), is offering the rest of us a chance to learn the secrets of highly contented Finns.

What will the winners get, exactly? Well-funded healthcare and functional public services thanks to progressive taxation? A relatively equal society with low rates of deprivation and crime? Unspoiled natural beauty accessible

to all? A chance to turn back time and not start school until age seven, leading to excellent educational outcomes?

Sadly not. You get an introduction to Finnish culture (food, nature and design), which sounds fine, but more importantly, four nights at a luxury forest resort (the blurb includes the phrase: “The villas introduce you to an entirely new standard of sleep.”) If anything would make me happy, it is indeed an entirely new standard of sleep.

All I have to do is create a social media post. The brief is “What makes you secretly believe you may be a Finn”, so I’ve been brainstorming. To stand out from the crowd of sauna-takers and pants-drunkards, I’m considering crafting a homage to Aki Kaurismäki’s wonderfully deadpan film, [Leningrad Cowboys Go America](#), about an extravagantly quiffed, winklepicker-wearing, awful rock band.

Alternatively, [according to](#) a Finnish sociology professor bemused by his country’s reputation for relentless positivity, Finns are all about low expectations: “A cultural orientation that sets realistic limits to one’s expectations for a good life.” Low expectations are definitely in my wheelhouse, but I have no idea how to make enticingly Instagrammable content about them. I bet Kaurismäki would know.

Emma Beddington is a Guardian columnist

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## 2023.03.27 - Around the world

- [Germany Millions face transport disruption in cost of living ‘mega-strike’](#)
- [Jack Ma Alibaba founder seen in China after months of absence](#)
- [Silicon Valley Bank Most of failed lender bought by First Citizens](#)
- [Live Markets calmer despite fears over risks to financial stability from bank turmoil](#)
- [US Pennsylvania chocolate factory explodes, killing seven in run up to Easter](#)





Travellers look at the departure board at Nuremberg airport on Monday.  
Photograph: Daniel Löb/AP

[Germany](#)

## Millions of Germans face transport disruption in cost of living ‘mega-strike’

Monday’s transport stoppages include workers at airports, railways, buses and metro lines

[Philip Oltermann](#) in Berlin

[@philipoltermann](#)

Mon 27 Mar 2023 05.43 EDTFirst published on Mon 27 Mar 2023 00.04 EDT

German commuters face serious disruption on Monday as transport staff across the country staged a strike to push for wage rises in the face of brisk inflation.

Workers at airports, ports, railways, buses and metro lines throughout much of Europe's biggest economy heeded a call from the Verdi and EVG unions to take part in the 24-hour stoppage.

"A labour struggle that has no impact is toothless," the Verdi leader, Frank Werneke, told the public broadcaster Phoenix.

He acknowledged it would inflict pain on many commuters and holidaymakers, "but better one day of strain with the prospect of reaching a wage agreement than weeks of industrial action".

To prevent supply gaps, the transport minister, Volker Wissing, ordered states to lift restrictions on truck deliveries on Sunday, while asking airports to allow late-night takeoffs and landings "so stranded passengers can reach their destinations".

Verdi represents about 2.5 million public sector employees, while EVG represents 230,000 workers on the railways and at bus companies.

The rare joint call for a strike in [Germany](#) marks an escalation of an increasingly ill-tempered pay dispute that comes at a time of surging inflation. Verdi is demanding a 10.5% rise in monthly salaries and EVG is seeking a 12% rise for its members.

Employers – mostly the state and public sector companies – have so far refused the demands, instead offering a 5% rise with two one-off payments of €1,000 (£880) and €1,500, this year and next.

In anticipation of Monday's strike, the state-owned rail company Deutsche Bahn (DB) suspended all long-distance trains for the day. Regional and local connections in seven out of Germany's 16 federal states also came to a standstill.



Members of the EVG union protest outside the main train station in Bremen on Monday. Photograph: Sina Schuldt/AP

A DB representative described the nationwide strike as “groundless and unnecessary” and urged the unions to return to the negotiating table “immediately”.

The company expects the strike to have a “massive impact” on its entire rail network and said it would inform its customers “as quickly and comprehensively as possible” about cancellations and delays.

Planes remained grounded at every big German international airport except for Berlin’s Brandenburg airport, where inner-European flights took off with minor delays on Monday morning.

The German airport association said the strike “went beyond any imaginable and justifiable measure”, estimating about 380,000 air travellers would be affected.

The standstill on German railways led to an increase in traffic on roads and motorways, though according to the ADAC, Germany’s roadside assistance association, many commuters had chosen to work from home. “We are not seeing a complete [traffic] breakdown or gigantic chaos,” a spokesperson told the dpa news agency.

Like many other countries, Germany is struggling with high inflation after Russia's invasion of Ukraine sent food and energy costs soaring.

With inflation hitting 8.7% in February, employers have accused labour representatives of contributing to the problem through their demands for increased wages that they say will feed inflation. [Unions](#) dispute this and say their members have been asked to bear the burden of the soaring cost of living.

The “mega-strike”, as local media have called it, follows industrial action in recent months in several German sectors including the postal service, airports and local transport.

As a third round of salary negotiations for public sector workers began on Monday, there were few signs of an imminent solution to the dispute. The VKA, a body representing employers across various public services sectors, said on Monday it was not planning to submit an improved offer to the unions.

Some unions have recently succeeded in winning big pay increases. Postal workers secured average monthly increases of 11.5% earlier in March, and in November IG Metall, Germany's biggest union, achieved rises totalling 8.5% for almost 4 million employees it represents.

*Agence France-Presse contributed to this report*

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Jack Ma arrives at the Tech for Good summit in Paris in 2019. The billionaire had been one of China's most prominent business figures. Photograph: Charles Platiau/Reuters

[Jack Ma](#)

## Alibaba founder Jack Ma seen in China after months of absence

Billionaire is thought to have remained outside country after state crackdown on tech sector

[Jasper Jolly](#)

[@jjpjolly](#)

Mon 27 Mar 2023 05.40 EDTLast modified on Mon 27 Mar 2023 16.32 EDT

The [Alibaba](#) founder, Jack Ma, has visited a school in mainland China after months during which he made no public appearances in the country because of a government crackdown on the powerful tech sector.



He is thought to have remained outside [China](#) for more than a year from late 2021 after regulators in the country tightened oversight of his businesses due to outspoken criticism from the tech entrepreneur.

Ma visited Yungu school in the eastern Chinese city of Hangzhou, where Alibaba is headquartered. A social media post contained pictures and video of Ma touring the school, which is funded by Alibaba.

The billionaire had been one of China's most prominent business figures, but he faced a stern rebuke from China's authoritarian rulers after criticising regulators and the banking industry shortly before the planned blockbuster stock market flotation of the fintech group Ant Financial. [China blocked the float shortly after the speech](#), in a move that was widely interpreted by analysts as retaliation for his comments.

Since then, Ma, whose net worth is \$33bn (£27bn) according to the Bloomberg Billionaires Index, has kept a low profile. The Financial Times in November reported that [he was living in Tokyo](#), while he has also been photographed in Australia and Thailand.

However, the extended absence of one of the country's most prominent business people had been seen by the business community as a sign of the continued dominance of China's Communist party over industry.

In recent months, the [billionaire tech banker Bao Fan](#) became the latest high-profile businessperson to disappear from public life. His bank, China Renaissance Holdings, last month said he was cooperating with an investigation by Chinese authorities.

A return to China for Ma could herald an easing of government pressure on private companies and promote a more business-friendly attitude. Bloomberg News on Monday reported that Chinese authorities had tried to persuade Ma to return.

Ma was an English teacher before founding Alibaba. He discussed the potential effects of the artificial intelligence chatbot ChatGPT, and expressed

a desire to return to teaching one day, according to a translation of an [article](#) posted on Monday by the school on its WeChat social media channel.

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Alibaba is one of China's largest private companies and one of the few businesses that can rival the US tech sector for size. Ma started the Alibaba website to link Chinese exporters to small businesses around the world, and later expanded it to other areas such as payments, consumer retail and cloud technology. The [Chinese government in January acquired “golden shares”](#) in Alibaba and its rival Tencent that will allow it to exert control over the groups.

The future of Ant Group, which started as part of Alibaba, remains uncertain. The company in January [said Ma would cede control of it](#), potentially opening the way to a renewed effort at a public listing.

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The collapse of Silicon Valley Bank has triggered turmoil in the global financial sector. Photograph: Damian Dovarganes/AP

[Silicon Valley Bank](#)

## **Silicon Valley Bank: most of failed lender bought by First Citizens**

Collapse of tech sector lender will cost about \$20bn in deposit insurance payouts, say US regulators

[Jasper Jolly](#)

[@jjpjolly](#)

Mon 27 Mar 2023 03.29 EDTLast modified on Mon 27 Mar 2023 16.33 EDT

The failed [Silicon Valley Bank](#) (SVB) will be mostly taken over by First Citizens, a North Carolina lender, and its collapse will cost \$20bn (£16bn) in deposit insurance payouts, US regulators have said.



First Citizens will take on all \$119bn in deposits and loans from the entity set up after SVB's collapse earlier this month.

The collapse of SVB has triggered turmoil in the global banking sector, as investors query whether new systemic problems have built up in the years since the global financial crisis of 2008. [Credit Suisse was forced into a takeover](#) by Swiss rival UBS last week after its share price tumbled.

The failure of SVB will cost about \$20bn, according to the Federal Deposit Insurance Corporation (FDIC), a US government agency that insures bank deposits up to a certain amount. Those costs will be borne by the deposit insurance fund, which is paid for by banks whose deposits are insured, it said on Monday.

SVB had grown into a big lender by targeting startups and fast-growing companies in the Silicon Valley tech sector, with operations in other countries [including the UK](#). However, its customers started [withdrawing their deposits en masse](#) as it emerged that the value of SVB's bonds had fallen because of rising interest rates. The Biden administration stepped in and said it would [cover all deposits at the bank](#) – including those not federally insured – fearing that contagion would spread across the sector.

The SVB entity had about \$167bn in total assets and about \$119bn in total deposits on 10 March, the FDIC said. First Citizens bought about \$72bn of the assets of the failed bank at a discount of \$16.5bn. First Citizens – whose shares jumped 43% when Wall Street opened on Monday - will also take over and run the 17 SVB branches.

The UK government brokered a deal for [HSBC to buy Silicon Valley Bank's UK operations](#) for £1 in a rescue deal two weeks ago.

First Citizens was founded in 1898 to serve North Carolina's farmers. In 1935, RP Holding took over the leadership of the bank, and since then it has been run by his descendants. It survived the financial crisis of 2008 intact and since then, under the leadership of Frank B Holding Jr and his sister Hope Holding Bryant, it has grown through acquisitions. A \$2bn deal last

year to take over the business lender CIT Group pushed it into the top 20 US banks by assets, according to the company.

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About \$90bn in SVB's securities and other assets will remain under the control of the FDIC as it tries to minimise losses for depositors and investors.

The regulator has also entered into an agreement with First Citizens to cover some of the losses on loans held by SVB.

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## [Business live](#)Business

# Markets rally despite banking fears; UK retailers turn optimistic after bleak winter – as it happened

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A general view shows smoke coming out from a chocolate factory after fire broke out, in West Reading, Pennsylvania, on Friday. Photograph: TWITTER @Based\_In410/Reuters

[US news](#)

## Pennsylvania chocolate factory explodes, killing seven in run up to Easter

More people injured in blast at West Reading plant known for manufacturing chocolate bunnies

[Edward Helmore](#) and agencies

Sun 26 Mar 2023 23.58 EDTFirst published on Sat 25 Mar 2023 10.09 EDT

A powerful explosion at a [Pennsylvania](#) chocolate factory known for making chocolate Easter bunnies killed a total of seven people, authorities said, as emergency workers retrieved the last of the bodies.

The deadly blast obliterated the facility 60 miles north-west of Philadelphia a little more than two weeks before Easter. The cause of the explosion remained under investigation on Saturday morning, but officials said they believed it may have resulted from a gas leak, [WPVI reported](#).

Video posted on social media showed how the RM Palmer Company building in West Reading, Pennsylvania, exploded about 5pm on Friday.

Early on Saturday, rescuers found a factory worker who had survived but was trapped, [according to the Reading Eagle newspaper](#). West Reading's police chief, Wayne Holben, initially expressed hope of finding more survivors.

Rescue crews were using heavy equipment to pull away debris while scanning the site with thermal imaging equipment and using sniffer dogs. The borough fire chief, Chad Moyer, said on Saturday night that the chance of finding survivors was "decreasing rapidly" but the local mayor, Samantha Kaag, called it "a hold out for hope" to get answers for people.

On Sunday though, more bodies were steadily being recovered.

West Reading Mayor Samantha Kaag said: "Please understand that this is a devastating loss, but we are truly grateful to bring closure to the families involved in the upcoming days."

A number were injured in the blast as well. Reading hospital said it received 10 patients and transferred two to other facilities, while two others were admitted in good and fair condition respectively and the others had been discharged.

The history of chocolate factories is littered with disasters. [Some explosions have occurred](#) when combustible starch dust used for shaping candies and bonbon centers has ignited.

Last month, the confectionery company Mars Wrigley was fined more than \$14,500 over a mishap in June at its M&M/Mars plant in Elizabethtown, Pennsylvania, in which two workers fell into a vat of chocolate.

Emergency responders were able to free the pair by cutting a hole in the bottom of the tank, [according to reports](#).

According to RM Palmer's website, the company has specialized in Valentine's Day, Easter, Christmas and Halloween chocolates since it was founded in 1948. "What began as one man's dream has grown into a collection of holiday novelties loved by millions of people ... making it one of America's largest and most innovative confectioners", [the website says](#).

Three buildings around the site were being condemned as a precaution, Kaag said.

"This does not mean they are slated for demolition or uninhabitable. Simply that there will still be work happening around them as we proceed and they will need to be looked at further by structural engineers."

*With Associated Press*

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| [Section menu](#) | [Main menu](#) |

## Headlines tuesday 28 march 2023

- [Nashville School shooter carefully plotted attack that killed six, say police](#)
- ['Hits very close to home' Nashville shooting reporter recounts attack at her own school](#)
- [Food UK supermarket inflation hits record high, making shoppers hunt for bargains](#)
- [Refugees UK to evict thousands of Afghan people from hotels](#)

Six people killed by shooter at school in Nashville – video

[Tennessee](#)

## Nashville school shooter carefully plotted attack that killed six, say police

- Three children and three adults killed in attack
- Police killed attacker, 28, a former student
- [Biden repeats his call for meaningful gun control reform](#)

[Martin Pengelly](#) and agencies

Tue 28 Mar 2023 02.30 EDTFirst published on Mon 27 Mar 2023 12.48 EDT

A former student killed three children and three adults at a Christian elementary school in [Nashville](#) on Monday, armed with two “assault-style” weapons and a handgun after elaborately planning the massacre by drawing a detailed map and conducting surveillance of the building, police said.

Nashville’s chief of police, John Drake, told NBC Nightly News with Lester Holt that the shooter had planned to attack several different places, saying a manifesto belonging to the suspect “indicates that there was going to be shootings at multiple locations, and the school was one of them”.

Drake said investigators believed the shooting stemmed from “some resentment” the suspect harbored “for having to go to that school” as a younger person.

The shooting at the Covenant school in Nashville was the latest in a series of mass shootings in a country that has grown increasingly unnerved by [bloodshed in schools](#).



Officers shot and killed the attacker at the Covenant school, which is attached to the Covenant Presbyterian church in the [Tennessee](#) state capital.

Nashville police identified the victims as Evelyn Dieckhaus, Hallie Scruggs and William Kinney, all nine years old; Cynthia Peak, a substitute teacher, aged 61; Katherine Koonce, aged 60; and Mike Hill, a custodian, aged 61.

The website of school, a Presbyterian establishment founded in 2001, lists a Katherine Koonce as the head of the school. Her LinkedIn online profile says she has led the school since July 2016.

For Megan Hill, the day's agony unfolded over six long hours, marked by posts on Facebook in which she identified herself as the niece of one of the victims.



People gather at a makeshift memorial for victims outside the Covenant school building. Photograph: Brendan Smialowski/AFP/Getty Images

“Shooting at the school where my Dad, my uncle and my stepmom work please pray right now,” she wrote at about noon local time.

Six hours later, she posted an update.

“I’m just in shock and disbelief,” wrote Hill. “My heart is broken I do not understand why someone would shoot up a school with precious babies inside.

“My uncle lost his life in this shooting today,” she wrote. “My mom’s brother Lord help me and my family please pray for all my cousins.”

### [Nashville map](#)

Lamenting the “heartbreaking” attack, Joe Biden [repeated](#) his call for Congress to pass meaningful gun control reform including an [assault weapons ban](#).

“We have to do more to stop gun violence ripping our communities apart,” the president said at the White House. “It’s ripping the soul from this nation.”

Drake said: “I was literally moved to tears to see this and the kids as they were being ushered out of the building.” Police later released security footage of the shooter firing at a glass school door to gain access before moving through the corridors, carrying what appeared to be a rifle. The shooter wore a black vest over a white T-shirt, camouflage pants and a backwards red baseball cap.

In 2020, guns overtook auto accidents as the [leading cause of death](#) among children and teens.

'Aren't you tired of this?': mother pleads for action after Nashville school shooting – video

Rachel Dibble, who was at the church as families found their children, described the scene as everyone being in “complete shock”.

“People were involuntarily trembling,” said Dibble, whose children attend a different private school in Nashville. “The children ... started their morning in their cute little uniforms, they probably had some Froot Loops and now their whole lives changed today.”

### [mass shootings chart](#)

Dr Shamendar Talwar, a social psychologist from the United Kingdom who is working on an unrelated mental health project in Nashville, raced to the church as soon as he heard news of the shooting to offer help. He said he was one of several chaplains, psychologists, life coaches and clergy inside supporting the families.



A member of the kitchen staff at the Covenant school reacts after the shooting. Photograph: Kevin Wurm/Reuters

“All you can show is that basically that we are all here together ... and hold their hand more than anything else,” he said.

Jozen Reodica heard the police sirens and fire trucks blaring from outside her office building nearby. As her building was placed under lockdown, she took out her phone and recorded the chaos.

“I thought I would just see this on TV,” she said. “And right now, it’s real.” From her office nearby, Kelly Stooksberry could see parents rushing to park their cars on the side of the road before sprinting to locate their children. She saw one woman fall to her knees and grab her chest.

“It was gut-wrenching,” she said.

The shooter was named as Audrey Elizabeth Hale, 28, and from Nashville.

Drake said Hale was a former student at the school. He also said Hale identified as transgender.

Entry was gained by shooting through a door, Drake said, adding that maps had been drawn of the school, including entry points, and he said, “We have a manifesto, some writings that we’re going over.”

Hale had “no [criminal] history at all”, Drake said, adding that one AR-style weapon in the attack was a rifle and one a pistol while the other gun was a handgun. Police believed two of the guns were obtained legally, Drake said.

Authorities were speaking to the shooter’s father, he added.

Don Aaron, a police spokesperson, said the first call about the shooting came at 10.13am. The shooter, Aaron said “entered on the lower floor. There were shots all over the floor before [the shooter] went to the upper level. And it was on the upper level where [the shooter] was confronted by police and killed.”

The shooting happened in a “lobby-type area” and “not in a classroom per se”, Aaron said. The shooter was dead by 10.27am.

### [shooting deaths in the US chart](#)

Drake said the school had an active shooter protocol. He said some children “evacuated to a wood line” behind the school, while some went to a fire hall. After the shooting, children were seen walking, holding hands and surrounded by police cars, to the nearby Woodmont Baptist church, to be reunited with parents.

Aaron said there were no police personnel assigned to the school.

The shooting was just the latest such horrific event. Last May, [in Uvalde, Texas](#), 19 children and two teachers were killed at an elementary school. More recently, a six-year-old [shot his teacher in Virginia](#) and a high-school student [in Colorado](#) shot two administrators.

According to [the K-12 School Shooting Database resource](#), there have been at least 89 instances of gun violence at kindergarten through 12th-grade

schools or during school activities in the US this year.



A group prays with a child outside the reunification center at the Woodmont Baptist church. Photograph: John Bazemore/AP

The Nashville shooting was the 128th US mass shooting this year, according to the [Gun Violence Archive](#), which defines a mass shooting as one where at least four people are wounded or killed, not counting the attacker.

The Covenant school has about 209 students from pre-school through sixth grade and 42 staff members, Aaron said. A woman whose mother teaches at the school told reporters they texted as the attack took place.

Avery Myrick said: “She said she was hiding in the closet and that they were shooting all over, and that they were potentially trying to get into a room. It was really scary, really sad.”

Hannah McDonald, a reporter for News Channel 5, [told viewers](#) her mother-in-law worked at the school but was on a break when the shooting happened.

“My mother-in-law is the front-desk angel,” McDonald said. “The school is kind of situated sideways, if you will. So the front door is actually on the side of the building. And that’s where she sits, and so you walk down a long

exterior pathway to the front door, and then you see her smiling face in the morning there. She was outside the school and she heard gunshots.”

Drake said: “It could have been far, far worse.”

David Rausch, director of the Tennessee Bureau of Investigation, said authorities sent “heartfelt prayers to the families ... of these victims”.

He added: “Now I know there’ll be people who want to criticise us for prayers. That’s the way we do that in the south. We believe in prayer and we believe in the power of prayer. So our prayers go out to these families.”

- *Ramon Antonio Vargas and the Associated Press contributed reporting*
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A man brings flowers to a makeshift memorial outside the Covenant School at the Covenant Presbyterian Church, in Nashville, Tennessee, in the wake of Monday's shooting. Photograph: Brendan Smialowski/AFP/Getty Images

[Nashville](#)

## ‘Hits very close to home’: Nashville shooting reporter recounts story of attack at her own school

A US reporter covering the shooting in Tennessee has told viewers how she is a school shooting survivor

[Royce Kurlmels](#)

[@RoyceRk2](#)

Mon 27 Mar 2023 22.20 EDTLast modified on Tue 28 Mar 2023 07.04 EDT

A television reporter covering the school shooting in [Nashville](#) elementary school has described how she is herself a school shooting survivor and offered advice for the parents of children who “witness the unthinkable”.

Joylyn Bukovac, a reporter for WSM4 in Nashville, Tennessee, disclosed the detail during her live cross from outside Covenant School, where [three adults and three children were killed on Monday.](#)

The shooter – a 28-year-old local resident named as Audrey Elizabeth Hale who was armed with two assault rifles and a handgun – was killed by police.

Bukovac described how she had been in eighth grade and standing in a hallway when a shooter had opened fire at her school in 2010. “I can’t even describe the shock. I wasn’t really ready to talk about it for two years, really,” she said. “This is something that hits very close to home for me. A lot of this is really bringing out tough memories for me.”

### [Nashville map](#)

Bukovac went on to explain: “My biggest advice for all the families is really ... just be very gentle with them [the children] and let them talk when they’re ready because the shock they’re going to be feeling on coming home is going to be unfathomable.

“Just give them some time. If they’re not ready to talk, don’t be overly concerned. Everyone copes in their own way. So just really, just be there for them now, open up that line of communication.”

I appreciate all the support I’ve received after sharing my story. I don’t talk about it much, but I think about what happened on February 5, 2010 often. I just want people to know they aren’t alone.

I also want to discuss solutions. As a mom, I am worried for the future <https://t.co/Fbd0fEpZyt>

— Joylyn Bukovac (@joylynrbukovac) [March 27, 2023](#)

Bukovac said she had checked the statistics and found there had been over 380 school shootings since [Columbine](#), including her own. There have been [288](#) in the US since January 2009.



Social media users noted that it was a sign of how normalised these incidents had become when a survivor of an earlier school shooting was now old enough to report on an active school shooting happening to others.

Later, on social media, Bukovac thanked users who sent messages of support after sharing her story.

“I don’t talk about it much, but I think what happened on February 5, 2010 often. I just want people to know they aren’t alone,” she said. “I also want to discuss solutions. As a mom, I am worried for the future.”

Bukovac was not the only shooting survivor nearby.

'Aren't you tired of this?': mother pleads for action after Nashville school shooting – video

Ashbey Beasley from Illinois was visiting her sister-in-law in Nashville at the time of Monday’s attack and stood in front of the cameras at the end of a police press conference to reveal she and her son had survived a mass shooting in July where a gunman opened fire on a 4 July parade, killing seven people.

“Aren’t you guys tired of covering this? Aren’t you tired of having to cover all of these mass shootings?” she told the media. “How is this still happening?”

Beasley, who has since joined a gun violence prevention group, was planning to have lunch with a friend when she heard about the Covenant School shooting.

“My heart broke. This is where we’re at, we have children living through multiple mass shooting incidences, what are we doing?” she said.

Bukovac’s experience was reminiscent of the moment in 2019 when Jess Arnold, a television reporter for WUSA9, stopped a family with an eight-year-old girl, Faris Nunn, to ask [their thoughts about a shooting](#) that had taken place during a baseball match at Nationals Park the night before.

“It was my second shooting, so I was kind of prepared,” Nunn said.

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| [Section menu](#) | [Main menu](#) |



A shopper at a supermarket in London. Footfall has been up in every British grocer so far in March. Photograph: Andy Rain/EPA

### Supermarkets

## UK supermarket inflation hits record high, making shoppers hunt for bargains

Prices rise fastest for eggs, milk and cheese amid shortages of salad and other items

[Julia Kollewe](#)

Tue 28 Mar 2023 10.22 EDTFirst published on Tue 28 Mar 2023 04.15 EDT

Supermarket price inflation in the UK has hit another record high, raising the increase in average annual household bills to £837, as shoppers increasingly turn to multiple supermarkets to hunt for bargains.

Year-on-year price increases for groceries hit an all-time high of 17.5% in the four weeks to 19 March compared with a year earlier, according to the

latest figures from the data firm Kantar. The prices of eggs, milk and cheese are rising at the fastest pace. The latest price rises mean an average annual household bill for groceries is £5,617, Kantar said.

Consumers are choosing to shop around to get the best deals, visiting three or more of the top 10 food retailers each month.

“Unfortunately, it’s more bad news for the British public, who are experiencing the ninth month of double-digit grocery price inflation,” said Fraser McKevitt, the head of retail and consumer insight at Kantar.

“However, shoppers are taking action and clearly hunting around for the best value. Footfall was up in every single grocer this month, with households going to the shops just over four times a week in March. Apart from Christmas, that’s the highest frequency we’ve seen since the start of the pandemic.”

“The supermarkets are also tackling grocery price inflation, battling it out to demonstrate value and get customers through their doors. This is a fiercely competitive sector and if people don’t like the prices in one store they will go elsewhere.”

### [Supermarket inflation chart](#)

Overall, grocery sales grew by 8.6% in the 12 weeks to 19 March.

The amounts of tomatoes, peppers and cucumbers bought at independent shops rose 32%, 26% and 21% respectively last month, amid [concerns about product shortages](#) caused by high energy prices, Brexit and the climate crisis. Some supermarkets including Asda and Morrisons rationed certain salad items.

People have started shopping for Easter, with chocolate egg sales up 6% in volume terms on last year and hot cross buns 5% ahead, Kantar said.

The German discounter Lidl was the fastest-growing supermarket, while its rival Aldi reached a new record market share of 9.9%. Morrisons eked out

growth of 0.1% but only because of rising food prices, meaning the amount of goods it sold plunged. Similarly, Waitrose, owned by John Lewis, grew sales 2.1%, but saw its market share slide to 4.5% as the volume of goods it sold also fell.

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Sue Davies, the head of food policy at the consumer group Which?, said: “Month after month we’ve seen a dramatic increase in food prices, but our monthly supermarket price analysis shows that some supermarkets are much cheaper than others, so it’s unsurprising that people are choosing to shop where prices tend to be the lowest.

“Supermarkets must ensure everyone has access to basic affordable food with clear unit pricing to help shoppers to compare items and find the best value option for them. Budget ranges also need to be more widely available across stores, so consumers are not forced to pay over the odds to put healthy food on the table.”

Separately, Ocado’s retail joint venture with Marks & Spencer reported a better-than-expected increase in first-quarter sales to £584m as shopper numbers went up. The average basket value was flat in the 13 weeks to 26 February: the average basket size declined to 45 items, but this was offset by

an 8.3% increase in the average sales price. The frequency at which customers placed orders is back to pre-Covid levels.

The Ocado Retail chief executive, Hannah Gibson, said customers were spending less on fresh food to avoid any waste, and buying more chilled and frozen products.

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| [Section menu](#) | [Main menu](#) |



Demonstrators in London hold placards in support of Afghan refugees in August 2021. Photograph: Guy Smallman/Getty Images

[Immigration and asylum](#)

## Afghan refugees face homelessness under UK plans, say rights groups

Ministers announce refugees in hotels will be offered move to a home on condition they accept first offer

- [Politics live – latest updates](#)

[Jamie Grierson](#) and [Rajeev Syal](#)

Tue 28 Mar 2023 09.53 EDTFirst published on Tue 28 Mar 2023 03.02 EDT

People who fled the Taliban in [Afghanistan](#) are at risk of homelessness in the UK, humanitarian groups have warned, after ministers announced plans to move the refugees out of hotels and into homes on the condition they accept the first offer made to them.



Afghans living in “temporary bridging accommodation” in the UK under the UK’s two resettlement schemes would be given additional support to find settled accommodation after 18 months in hotels, the [Home Office](#) said.

The veterans’ affairs minister, Johnny Mercer, told MPs any refugee who turned down an offer of accommodation would not be offered a second alternative. Concerns have been raised that refugees could face homelessness if they are unable to secure accommodation before leaving a hotel amid reports the government intends to set a deadline for the shift.

Enver Solomon, the chief executive of the Refugee Council, said: “We are deeply concerned about many elements of these plans, in particular the risk that they could lead to people who fled the Taliban in Afghanistan being left homeless and destitute on the streets of Britain.

“This is not how those who were promised a warm welcome in the UK should be treated. Hotels are not the right place for refugees to live but the fact that thousands of Afghans have been left in them for months on end is a consequence of government mismanagement and a failure to work successfully in partnership with local councils and other agencies to find suitable housing.”

The government was providing £35m in new cash for local authorities that would go towards increasing the level of support available and overcoming barriers in accessing the housing system and employment, the Home Office said.

Announcing the move in the House of Commons, Mercer confirmed refugees in hotels who turned down a move would not receive a second offer.

“These measures represent a generous offer. And in return for this, we do expect families to help themselves,” he said. “Whilst this government realises our significant responsibilities to this cohort, there is a responsibility upon this group to take the opportunities that are offered under these schemes and integrate into UK society.



“Where an offer of accommodation can be made and is turned down, another will now not be forthcoming. At a time when there are many pressures on the taxpayer and the housing market, it is not right that people can choose to stay in hotels when other perfectly suitable accommodation is available.”

Afghans who arrived under two resettlement schemes, the Afghan citizens resettlement scheme (ACRS) and the Afghan relocations and assistance policy (Arap), make up a fifth of people living in bridging hotels.

A government source told the Guardian the plan was to move all Afghan families out of hotels by the end of this year.

There are [almost 9,000 Afghans living in hotels](#) in the UK after fleeing the Taliban in August 2021.

Peymana Assad, a Labour councillor of Afghan origin from Harrow in north-west London, who has worked closely with Afghan refugees in hotels, said the government was to blame for people being stuck in hotels, not the refugees.

“For the past year, the Conservative government has put the blame at the feet of Afghan refugees for continuing to be in hotels nearly two years on since evacuation. Yet the Conservative government are the ones who’ve failed on the promises they made to these families,” she said.

“With no proper plan in place to house Afghans, they have wasted taxpayers’ money on hotels, held Afghan refugee lives in limbo, caused untold damage to the mental wellbeing of individuals who stood side by side with British troops in Afghanistan, to then in the end throw these Afghan families out into the wilderness of homelessness, in the country they were brought to, not out of choice but necessity.”

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Farzaneh, 27, a former translator with British government personnel who escaped Kabul with her father, a high ranking army officer, in August 2021, is currently living in hotel accommodation in Leeds. She said the decision is “sickening” for people who sacrificed families and professions in Afghanistan to work with the UK.

She said that since moving to the UK, she and her two siblings and father have been moved to four different hotels, creating difficulties in settling as well as making it hard to settle at schools and colleges.

Noorzai, who is in his 30s, was moved by the Home Office from a hotel in Kensington last month to a cheaper hotel in Yorkshire. He worked in the department for security affairs in Kabul and was evacuated in August 2021 with his parents, two brothers and a sister. He said he had to give up a job in London to move to Yorkshire and has been angered by today’s announcement. “If what the minister says happens, then in a matter of a few months we will be made to start from scratch again for the third time in three years. There were so many promises of how we were going to be helped by the government. But there has been little help,” he said.

Polly Neate, chief executive of Shelter, said: “Most families have not been made an offer of a suitable home, and now are being blamed for being stuck in hotels they don’t want to be in. Even if they get an offer, it could be anywhere in the country, forcing them to give up their jobs, take their children out of school and leave their support networks behind.

“We urge the government to make good on its promises to support traumatised Afghan families who have fled persecution. The government must make sure that every homeless family is supported to move into a suitable settled home, where they can get on with rebuilding their lives.”

Downing Street denied Afghan refugees would be kicked out of hotels and said the new package was about finding them “settled accommodation”.

Sunak’s official spokesperson said: “This is about how we’re accelerating support for Afghans who have been forced to remain in hotel accommodation for sometimes more than a year. We’ve made a large commitment to them to support them in the UK to make a new life here and this will be the next stage of that.

“We do think it is right to help them into settled accommodation, there will be a significant package of support that sits behind them to both help them to find accommodation and to help them fully integrate into their new community.”

The announcement is related to but separate from the issue of asylum seekers held in hotels as they await the outcome of their application for refugee status in the UK, of which there are approximately 50,000. It has been reported that two military bases, RAF Scampton in Lincolnshire and MDP Wethersfield in Essex, have been pencilled as potential sites to house them.

Figures provided to the Commons home affairs committee last year showed that £5.6m a day was being spent on hotels for people who have arrived in the UK and submitted asylum claims, with £1.2m paid to house Afghan refugees who fled the Taliban.

The reports come as the UK government pushes its [deeply controversial illegal migration bill](#) through parliament.

| [Section menu](#) | [Main menu](#) |

## 2023.03.28 - Spotlight

- [The long read Three abandoned children, two missing parents and a 40-year mystery](#)
- [The healthspan revolution How to live a long, strong and happy life](#)
- ['I've had so many death threats' David Lammy on regrets, Rwanda flights and racism](#)
- ['Legacy, what legacy?' Fight goes on for migrant workers in Qatar 100 days after World Cup](#)

# Three abandoned children, two missing parents and a 40-year mystery

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## The healthspan revolution: how to live a long, strong and happy life

Dr Peter Attia is an expert on longevity and preventative medicine. He explains how sleep, weight training and other incremental changes can make us much more resilient



[John Harris](#)  
[@johnharris1969](#)

Tue 28 Mar 2023 01.00 EDT

Twenty years ago, Peter Attia was working as a trainee surgeon at Johns Hopkins hospital in Baltimore, where he saved countless people facing what he calls “fast death”. “I trained in a very, very violent city,” he tells me. “We were probably averaging 15 or 16 people a day getting shot or stabbed. And, you know, that’s when surgeons can save your life. We’re really good at that.”

What got to him, he says, were the people he treated who were in the midst of dying much more slowly. “All the people with cardiovascular disease, all the people with cancer: we were far less effective at saving those people. We could delay death a little bit, but we weren’t bending the arc of their lives.”

Attia and his colleagues often worked 24-hour shifts, leaving him starved of sleep. When he managed to get some rest, he had an endlessly recurring



dream, in which he found himself in the middle of the city, holding a padded basket and staring up at a nearby building. Eggs rained down on him, and though he tried to catch as many as he could, most of them inevitably smashed on the pavement.

The symbolism did not take much decoding: here was all his unease and anxiety about trying to save people who were inexorably moving towards death, but never getting to the source of the problem – the way they lived. “Trying to catch the eggs before they hit the ground seemed far less effective than going up to the roof and taking the basket of eggs away from the guy who was throwing them,” he says. But in the dream, as in life, that part of the story never happened.

In the US, chronic disease is rampant, and recent figures have shown life expectancy is falling; in the UK, there is a similarly depressing picture. But Attia believes it is possible to turn this around. The day we speak, he is at home in Austin, Texas, where it is 11am. Beyond a cup of coffee, he has yet to have any breakfast, but that does not stop him talking for well over an hour about his key vision: increasing people’s “healthspan”, so that they maximise their chances of avoiding disease, and cut down the share of their lives they spend being frail and infirm, perhaps to as little as six months.



Dr Peter Attia walking near Austin, Texas. He practises archery and walks three miles every day. Photograph: Katie Hayes Luke/The Guardian

Attia, who was born in Toronto, has just turned 50. He is the founder of an Austin-based setup called Early Medical, which introduces its patients to the kind of treatments and lifestyle changes he advocates. He also hosts a weekly podcast called [The Peter Attia Drive](#), whose recent subjects have included the dangers of poor sleep, the history of the cell and the gravity of the US opioid crisis. Last year, he was one of the stars of *Limitless*, a Disney+ series in which the Australian actor Chris Hemsworth – best known for playing the Marvel superhero Thor – set out on a quest to “combat ageing and discover the full potential of the human body”.

And now there is a book. *Outlive*, subtitled “the science and art of longevity” is an exhaustive, lucid exploration of Attia’s ideas, created with the help of veteran journalist Bill Gifford. Even if the life changes it describes often seem onerous and complicated, its basic pitch is brazenly simple. We can, Attia says, strike big blows against the “four horsemen” of diabetes, cancer, heart disease and dementia by improving our lives in five “tactical domains”: exercise; “nutritional biochemistry” (ie what and how much we eat); sleep; emotional health; and “exogenous molecules” – or, as they are otherwise known, drugs and supplements.

While what Attia sets out is mostly about how individuals can transform their chances of extending wellness and resilience into old age, it inevitably strays into big questions about how systems of healthcare are organised, and the thinking that drives them.

He divides the historical evolution of illness and treatment into three. What he calls [Medicine](#) 1.0 was the shaky way of doing things that humanity relied on for thousands of years: a system based on “direct observation and abetted more or less by pure guesswork”. From the mid-19th century, that model began to give way to Medicine 2.0, which was centred on such innovations as the microscope, the discovery of antibiotics and thorough scientific experiments and research. This is the model we still use, but Attia wants us to move to Medicine 3.0, which “places a far greater emphasis on prevention than treatment”.

Longer lifespan with no improvement in healthspan is a curse, not a blessing

*Peter Attia*

What he is proposing has slightly less to do with living longer than people's quality of existence. "Longevity is such a ... I want to say *dirty*, but it's such a bastardised term," he says. "And it just has such a negative connotation. It sort of smells of snake oil and elixirs and, you know, false promises. And what I don't think gets enough attention is healthspan. Longer lifespan with no improvement in healthspan is a curse, not a blessing."

Attia is not selling "biological reprogramming technology" – the kind of [emerging science](#) that aims at extending life via such techniques as flushing out worn (or "senescent") cells from the body, or inserting genes into adult cells that convert them into stem cells. In the US, this is attracting no end of private funding, from such enthusiasts as the Amazon founder Jeff Bezos and the tech investor Peter Thiel, who claims to be planning to live to 120. While Attia is "involved with scientists who are doing that type of work", he says, "it's amazing to me how many people that I encounter choose to live a relatively unhealthy life today in the belief that that will be their salvation."

He has really met people like that? "Oh my God: spend more time in Silicon Valley. You know, it's like these people are spending all of this time and money on these endeavours, and yet they're not exercising. They're not sleeping well, and they're not taking care of their stress, and all these other things that are killing them anyway. But they have this belief: 'Well, it's OK, because this thing is going to rescue me.'

"And I say: 'Look, I'm not going to be the judge of whether that will or won't rescue you. But let's incorporate risk management. Let's think about hedging.'" In other words, rather than placing all your faith in the future of cutting-edge science, it might be a safer bet, if you want to avoid the most trying kind of later-life, to do things that are possible in the here and now.



What if ... Peter Attia and Chris Hemsworth talk during the making of *Limitless*. Photograph: Craig Parry/National Geographic for Disney+

In the book, Attia writes enthusiastically about Rapamycin, an antifungal agent produced by a soil bacterium first discovered on Easter Island in the south-eastern Pacific. It is commonly used as an immunosuppressant after organ transplant operations, but experiments on animals suggest it may enhance a biological process that slows with age known as autophagy, or cellular recycling – on the face of it, a much simpler potential means of arresting ageing than the kind being funded by Bezos et al. Attia uses it himself at low doses, and has prescribed it to some of his patients. “The most notable side-effect at the doses and frequencies for that purpose are mouth ulcers called aphthous ulcers,” he says. “And they occur in about 10% of people. I’m one of the 10%. So I do get them from time to time, but quite infrequently and usually only in the context of trauma – like if I bite my lip.”

One of his big themes is the kind of genetic screening that can alert people to their susceptibility to life-limiting conditions, so they can take risk-reducing action – something seen in the Hemsworth series, when the actor is confronted with the fact that he is carrying two copies of a gene that make him up to 10 times more likely than most other people to develop

Alzheimer's disease. Hemsworth later hinted that it had played some part in his [recent decision to take a break](#) from his profession.

“It comes down to a philosophy of: ‘Do you or do you not believe that you have some agency over prevention of this disease?’” Attia says. “I think the evidence is quite clear that we have enormous agency over our risk of Alzheimer's disease and other forms of dementia, including vascular dementia and small vessel dementia. We understand the things that increase risk.”

We try to encourage our patients not to be very extreme out of the gate. What we're interested in is sustainable change

*Peter Attia*

One good way of pushing that risk down is exercise – and in particular, Attia insists, the activity that even ardent gym-goers often leave to the grunting meat-heads: lifting weights.

“Strength is such an important part of ageing,” he says. “I mean, if you look at the majority of people over the age of 75 and 80, you'll be so struck by how many activities they can't do because they lack strength. It can be as simple as: ‘Why can't most people at a certain age not even get up off the floor?’ They simply don't have the strength in their hip muscles ... The data is unambiguous on this. And when you compare strong with not-strong, the survival difference and the mortality difference is in the order of 200%.”

When it comes to questions about food and eating, Attia's book is surprisingly noncommittal (“I once believed that diet and nutrition could cure almost all ills, but I no longer feel that strongly about it,” he writes). His key advice is that people should avoid being “overnourished”, which in most cases means reducing their overall energy intake, via a mixture of calorie-watching, restricting certain types of food (eg carbs) and intermittent fasting. The latter comes with a clear warning: that it may be one of the easiest ways to cut calories, but it risks damaging his treasured muscle mass. This leads on to his belief in maximising protein intake, and the benefits of an omnivorous diet.



But what, I wonder, about vegans? “You’re just going to have to work a lot harder and pay attention to amino acid quality,” he says.

Which means? “You’re going to have to go through nutrition labels and say: ‘Am I getting enough lysine and methionine [both amino acids, with a range of health benefits]?’ That’s basically what we do with our patients who don’t eat meat – make sure they’re hitting certain gram targets for each of those.”

Finally, what of sleep? In the book, Attia writes about the long years he spent neglecting it. “Until 10 years ago, yeah,” he says. “Of all the things I write about, that one is probably the one where people are closest to understanding the [correct] point of view. I think that there’s a growing consensus over the past five years that to not sleep is not just a drain on your performance, but also a drain on your health.

“It really makes sense when you consider what an evolutionary sacrifice it was for us to sleep. Think about evolution, and how ruthless it is in optimising your ability to procreate, forage for food and protect yourself – three things you can’t do when you’re sleeping. And yet, somehow, we didn’t out-evolve a way to spend eight hours in an unconscious state. It’s a very compelling evolutionary argument for why this thing must matter.”

When I ask Attia how much it costs to sign up for treatment at Early Medical, he sounds rather coy. “It varies – it’s not a fixed fee. It’s a little more in the first year and then the cost sort of ratchets down because we’re doing more work early on.”

Whatever the wonders of his prescriptions, cynics might picture his clients spending half their lives necking supplements, monitoring their sleep, watching their calorific intake and lifting weights, and conclude that even if you have the time, money and inclination, doesn’t the kind of life he advocates require an impossible amount of work?

“We try to encourage our patients not to go all in and be very extreme out of the gate because what we’re interested in is implementing sustainable changes,” he says. “I always tell them: ‘Look, I don’t want you to be 10 out of 10 for a month and then two out of 10. I’d rather we find out what seven out of 10 is, if you think that that’s what could be maintained indefinitely.’”

The point, he says, is to “slowly alter habits one at a time in ways that are somewhat incremental, but that over time compound into significant changes.”

And then there are big social questions. Attia says he believes in the kind of two-tier medical systems whereby everyone has access to a basic level of care, but there are ample opportunities for people with enough money to access the kind of techniques and treatments he offers. But I wonder: as the science advances, won't that mean those wealthy enough to embrace his kind of thinking running around into their 80s and 90s, while less moneyed people are left to decay – like the kind of society we have now, only more so?

“Your base system has to be preventive and it has to be preventive early,” he says. “And by the way, the most beneficial things that you're going to do to extend lifespan and healthspan don't actually cost much money.”

A pause. “Go exercise! How much does it cost to really educate people to exercise? That doesn't matter how much money you have. Now, I'm not so naive as to think that a single mom who's working three jobs won't have less time to exercise. Clearly, there will be gaps in outcomes, but I don't think those gaps have to be enormous.”

This last thought is left hanging in the air, as he prepares for his first solids of the day. When I ask what he's having, we return to where we started, with eggs, though this time Attia is in control, and seeking a simple but effective dose of his beloved protein. “An omelette,” he says. “Plain. I don't put anything in it.”

- Outlive: The Science and Art of Longevity is published by Vermillion (£22). To support the Guardian, buy your copy from [bookshop.theguardian.com](https://bookshop.theguardian.com). Delivery charges may apply

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‘Of course it’s morally wrong to take the view that anyone making their way across the Channel is illegal’ ... David Lammy. Photograph: Sarah Lee/The Guardian

[David Lammy](#)

[Interview](#)

# David Lammy on regrets, Rwanda flights and racism: ‘I’ve had so many death threats’

[Gaby Hinsliff](#)

The working-class son of Guyanese immigrants could soon be the foreign secretary. He discusses antisemitism, Suella Braverman – and his experience of being stopped and searched at 12



Tue 28 Mar 2023 05.00 EDT

Last September, the son of a single mother raised in the shadow of the Broadwater Farm estate in north London attended the official proclamation of the king. It was only as [David Lammy](#) was dressing for the privy council ceremony at St James’s Palace that the experience started to feel faintly surreal.

“I got the bus back home just to feel normal,” the shadow foreign secretary says. “I get a bit emotional about this, but I can’t tell you – I’ve travelled a long, long way from where my parents started, and my upbringing, a long,

long way. And that's, in a way, the miracle of this country." His Guyana-born parents, ardent monarchists, would doubtless have been proud, but didn't live to see the day; as he notes, his parents, and those of his childhood friends, led hard lives and mostly died relatively young, while his posher university mates' parents are still busy "running the world".

Lammy is one of British politics' great survivors. A rising star and junior minister under Tony Blair, he made his name in opposition as a campaigner against social and racial injustice before rejoining the frontbench a decade later under [Keir Starmer](#), on whose leadership campaign he served as a vice-chair. As a black teenager growing up in what is now his constituency of Tottenham, he felt "marginalised, demonised sometimes", but went on to study at Soas University of London and Harvard law school, through which he later forged a friendship with Barack Obama. Asked whether he has finally become part of the establishment, he laughs ruefully and volunteers the King Charles story. Easy company, but hard to pigeonhole, he is a natural diplomat.

We meet in a parliamentary office with a sweeping view of the Thames – not his, he says, but borrowed for entertaining foreign dignitaries – to discuss Labour's plan for reconnecting Britain to the world. In a new pamphlet for the Fabian Society, he proposes a post-Brexit rebuilding of alliances with Europe and the US, countering what he sees as an emerging threat from autocratic regimes.



Lammy on Labour's frontbench in November. Photograph: UK Parliament/Jessica Taylor/PA

He is just back from Washington DC, where he spoke to the liberal thinktank the Center for American Progress about his hope for [a “progressive moment”](#) in which Labour might govern Britain while allied to like-minded administrations in the US, Germany, France, Canada and Australia. But he has seen, as he describes in the pamphlet, how last year's political turmoil has shaken Britain's reputation in the US as a steady, constant ally.

“Liz Truss and Kwasi Kwarteng and their reckless, boneheaded experiment with the economy – I think people couldn't really believe it,” he says of Truss's radical tax-cutting strategy, which culminated in a mini-budget that [triggered a domestic financial crisis](#). “People had been saying to her: ‘You can't really do that, we're living in an interdependent world, there will be a run on the pound and it will affect our economy,’ but she still did it. That was terribly un-British; just not the way we behave.”

Lammy's big idea for rebuilding bridges is a new EU-UK security pact, cooperating on Ukraine and counter-terrorism, but also the climate crisis, energy security and the emerging implications of biotech and AI.

It is based on an offer from the EU that Boris Johnson rejected during Brexit negotiations, he says, but Russian aggression and the nascent power struggle between the US and China now make the case for Britain to be closer to its EU allies. “It’s one thing to get divorced; it’s another thing not to put in arrangements for how you manage the children. Really, in these serious times, we need to be deadly, deadly serious about the battle between freedom [within] a rules-based order and autocrats and their order, and how this 21st century could turn out.”

I’ve travelled a long, long way from where my parents started ... in a way, that’s the miracle of this country

He insists it is about reconnecting, not rejoining, saying he merely wants to “normalise” relationships with the EU. But does the man who campaigned unsuccessfully for remain and then for [a second referendum](#) think we will be back in the EU again in 30 years’ time? “What you’ve suggested is a reimagining of the relationship and I do not foresee that in the near time,” he says. “You cannot have a messy divorce and then go back to your partner and say: ‘Can we get married again?’ without even having a first date.” All he will concede is that he “can’t imagine a scenario in which we are not really, truly engaged with our European allies” a generation hence.

He is more forthcoming on the European convention on human rights, another foundational treaty from which [some Tory MPs want to withdraw](#), in pursuit of their ambition [to deport asylum seekers to Rwanda](#). Again, he says, that is interpreted abroad as undermining rules-based order. In Washington, he heard concerns that leaving the convention would threaten the Good Friday agreement, which is based on human rights law. “I can’t tell you how dangerous and populist – but in the end thin and not in our national interests – this narrative is.”

What did he make of home secretary [Suella Braverman’s trip to Rwanda](#), designed to portray it as a safe haven? “I’ve been to Rwanda,” he says, slowly. “I’ve sat with victims of the genocide who were limbless or had lost loved ones ... There’s something about Suella Braverman and her politics that I think would traditionally sit at the fringe of the Conservative party, certainly the Conservative party when I came into parliament.”

While Labour politicians often criticise the [Rwanda](#) plan as unworkable or expensive, Lammy doesn't shrink from attacking its morality. "Of *course* it's morally wrong to take the view that anyone making their way across the Channel is illegal and they should be shipped up and sent across the waters, of *course* it is. I have no problem calling it out for what it is."

His constituency has, he says, been enriched by successive generations of immigrants, including Huguenots, West Indians, Asians, Jews fleeing the Nazis and Kurds. Although Lammy regrets voting for the Iraq war in 2003, he says that Iraqi Kurdish constituents implored him to back it, having sought asylum in the UK after Saddam Hussein gassed their families.

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Lammy draws his politics from his patch, and perhaps this was never more true than in the summer of 2011, in the febrile days after the fatal shooting by police in Tottenham of Mark Duggan. [With riots erupting across British cities](#), he offered confident leadership and authority in what felt like a political vacuum. The incumbent Tory prime minister, David Cameron, subsequently asked him to lead [a review of racial disparities in the justice system](#), which exposed what he calls a "liberal conceit" about equality by showing how the same offence has different consequences for different offenders. A teenager caught smoking cannabis on an inner-city estate will probably get a criminal record, he argues, but not "a 15-year-old who looks more like a young Boris Johnson, doing the same thing in his parents' gated estate".

His decade off the frontbench, he says, helped him to find his authentic political voice: "Whether it was the riots, Windrush, Grenfell Tower, Brexit – I just had a freedom to speak."

[The Casey review](#), which last week deemed the Metropolitan police institutionally racist, sexist and homophobic, suggests depressingly little has changed since his review in 2017. Discrimination in the Met is "the sort of singular public policy issue that has dogged this country throughout my entire lifetime", he says. But still, he summons optimism: "I think that the [Sarah Everard murder](#) and the [David Carrick abuse of power](#) has brought this issue into real time for half the country, for women and girls. So this is – put alongside that homophobia – a very, very significant moment."





On a march against antisemitism in the Labour party in March 2018.  
Photograph: Tolga Akmen/AFP/Getty Images

We pause briefly for the photographer to get to work. I check my phone for updates on the afternoon's parliamentary votes. But the first thing I see is [a shocking video](#) posted by a former government aide of her 15-year-old black son apparently being forcibly restrained on the floor by security guards while shopping for shampoo, before being arrested. When I show Lammy, who has two sons, aged 17 and 15, and a nine-year-old daughter, he takes a long breath. Given all his professional experience of the justice system, does he worry for his children?

“There’s a hypervigilance that parents of black children can have, that if you are not in that situation ...” He pauses, then says: “But, actually, it’s the same phenomenon as women carrying their keys between their fingers when they’re going home after work. It’s a stress, a tension, a fear – it’s actually incredibly difficult for teenagers.”

Lammy was first stopped and searched at the age of 12. Does he think his sons will have better experiences of policing? “Sadly, both of them have had their own encounters, one of them relatively recently. He’d done nothing wrong, except take care of a young woman who had fallen and been hurt. He was taking care of her and others scarpered, and he was questioned as if he

might be the perpetrator when he was only trying to help,” he says. “I don’t know what to say except that it’s still my job as a parent to give my kids the confidence to recognise there are issues, but that there are good people trying to also be police officers – it’s a worthy thing to do, something they should consider doing.”

There’s a hypervigilance that parents of black children can have ... it’s the same as women carrying their keys between their fingers

Lammy considered it himself: he so enjoyed joining officers on patrol as part of a parliamentary scheme, he says, that he tried to become a special constable, only to be vetoed by the then home secretary, Theresa May, and the then Met chief, Bernard Hogan-Howe, for fear of politicising the police. “I have to say, I didn’t buy the argument, because I thought at the time they could really do with something like me.” It is too late now, he says – “I’m 50, I don’t think anyone wants me running down Tottenham High Road” – but there is something quintessentially Lammy about wanting to change things from the inside.

But if his antiracism work made him a hero on the left, his equally staunch opposition to antisemitism proved more painful. Some [Jeremy Corbyn](#) supporters called for his deselection after he joined Jewish friends and constituents (his patch includes the orthodox Jewish community in Stamford Hill) on a protest against antisemitism within Labour.

“I remember feeling quite emotional, quite sort of close to tears, really,” he says of that protest outside parliament. “I also remember being in the Labour party conference and having people heckling and shouting down Jewish colleagues, and I felt very, very uncomfortable.” He says standing in solidarity with black and Jewish communities felt completely natural – Jewish activists stood prominently with Nelson Mandela and the US civil rights movement, he points out – but he endured a backlash, some of it laced with antisemitic tropes. “I got people who perceived that I was in someone’s pocket and it was just awful, absolutely awful.”

Lammy praises Starmer for being “forensically focused” on [tackling antisemitism](#), which he thinks has helped to turn the page. (He also concedes



that Labour is “not without its issues” in the treatment of black members, noting that decades ago his father was turned away from local party meetings and told they were “full”.)



With Keir Starmer at the Reichstag in Berlin in July. Photograph: Stefan Rousseau/PA

The irony of all this, however, is that he nominated Corbyn for party leader in 2015. Why?

He was originally drawn to Labour, he explains, by Michael Foot in 1983 and had some “great socialist teachers” in Tottenham. But, with each crushing election loss, “I began to realise that the teachers – many of whom I admired, that encouraged me and supported me – their lives didn’t change when Labour lost, because they were, on the whole, middle class. My life, on the other hand, my parents’ lives, really were affected.”

He now takes the pragmatist’s view that elections aren’t won in north London, but in places such as Peterborough, where he attended a state boarding school on a choral scholarship and still has good friends. All this is a roundabout way of saying that he nominated (but didn’t vote for) Corbyn, not expecting him to win, but because part of him “believed in the underdog,

in having a diverse race. I didn't want just candidates that had done PPE at Oxbridge. I'm afraid what then happened I do regret."

Lammy [considered running for leader in 2019](#) but ultimately backed Starmer because "he was the right man and what we needed at that time". But perhaps there were other considerations; as a high-profile, black, pro-remain politician, he and his family had been viciously targeted. "I'd had so many death threats, and this was in the [time of] [the murder of \[the MP\] Jo Cox](#) ..." he tails off. "The reality of this stuff is sometimes hard to talk about."

Even he is surprised, he admits, at how far Labour has come in only three years. While Starmer always reckoned Johnson's majority could be overturned within one term, privately Lammy worried it might take longer: "I remember saying: 'Look, I think we should maybe stress that it's a decade-long project.' And, bless him, he took a different view – and here we are."

Canvassing in Tory-held Milton Keynes recently, Lammy was thrilled to find plenty of Labour voters, but struck by how disorienting many have found the past year. "It's like: 'My God, what's going on, all these prime ministers and the war?' There's a lot of anxiety, noise, apprehension." If what Britain craves now is a period of soothing calm, then this pillar of a reimagined establishment seems happy to offer it.

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# ‘Legacy, what legacy?’ Fight goes on for migrant workers in Qatar 100 days after World Cup

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## 2023.03.28 - Opinion

- It's the great TikTok panic – and it could accelerate the end of the internet as we know it
- A tragic accident should not have landed Auriol Grey in prison. Our justice system is stuck in the dark ages
- After Impressionism: why has the National Gallery left female artists out of the picture?
- My sister has become a great gardener – and I have never felt so betrayed



‘As TikTok’s popularity among young people only grows, the high politics of the current debate marginalises genuine concerns – about addiction, the impact on mental health and body image.’ Photograph: Dado Ruvic/Reuters

[OpinionTikTok](#)

**It’s the great TikTok panic – and it  
could accelerate the end of the internet  
as we know it**

[Emily Taylor](#)



Democracies should be maturely debating online safety and data, not making kneejerk responses that risk an idea we all cherish

Tue 28 Mar 2023 03.00 EDTLast modified on Wed 29 Mar 2023 05.30 EDT

TikTok's chief executive, Shou Zi Chew, discovered during his five-hour [grilling by US Congress](#) what Huawei could have told him all along: being owned by a Chinese company is bad for business.

In fact, [the panic over TikTok](#) is a lot like like Huawei and 5G all over again. The security and privacy risks are plausible, but largely without evidence. What this is really about is trust, trade and geopolitics.

The US hearings took place as the [UK extended its ban](#) of TikTok to the parliamentary estate, after initially banning the app from central government officials' work phones. Canada, the EU and several member states have implemented partial bans.

Yet rather than taking this moment as an opportunity to revisit why democratic societies have allowed tech companies to make pervasive data collection and monitoring the norm, policymakers are rushing through bans

that sit uncomfortably with the liberal democratic tradition, and are likely to accelerate the fragmentation of the internet.

TikTok makes money by collecting data on its users and feeding them exactly what they've been profiled to respond to, including the goods and services of advertisers. That's the business model of every free-to-use social media platform, and TikTok is particularly good at it. Nearly 70% of American teenagers [use the app](#), while only 30% of the same age group use Facebook. By some estimates, young people open the app up to 19 times a day.

The company's [5,000-word privacy policy](#) sets out in grim detail just how much data is collected: essentially, it's everything. The terms are also clear about the use of that data to personalise and customise your feed, fulfil purchases, personalise ads and measure their effectiveness.

But the business model that [TikTok](#) shares with its US rivals does not seem to bother policymakers that much. Their anxieties are about whom that data is shared with. TikTok's parent company, ByteDance, is Chinese – and the security concerns are real. There is China's weak rule of law, human rights concerns regarding the oppression of Uighur Muslims, and the use of technology to enforce social and political conformity to think about. There are also worries about its national security laws, which compel companies to share data with the government. Put together all the data, including device, location, IP address, content viewed, duration and frequency of use, engagement with other users and an authoritarian state, and you have a combustible mix.

We also can't forget the lessons learned from the 2016 US presidential elections and the Brexit referendum onward, which indicate that hostile actors can and do manipulate algorithms designed for advertising, and subvert them for political ends. With TikTok, where the user population is young and vulnerable to exploitation and manipulation (whether towards terrorism, political radicalisation or harmful body-image anxiety), those risks are acute.

As the bans mount up, TikTok has been rushing to implement confidence-building measures. The detail of its initiatives, [Project Clover in the EU](#) and

[Project Texas in the US](#), seems compelling. User data will be kept onshore in the EU or US, data practices will be vetted by trusted third parties – such as Oracle in the US – and there will be a default 60-minute screen time limit for young people.

But, as with Huawei, this is not going to be enough because this was never about the details. As was clear from Congress's aggressive questioning of TikTok's CEO, in which he was often interrupted and talked over, US policymakers don't think they need more information. They want to communicate their distrust of [China](#) in the context of worsening geopolitical and economic tensions.

This is bad news for the internet. In its early years, shared physical infrastructure and lightweight interoperable digital architecture were felt to be a shared public good. Everyone, no matter what their political differences, had an interest in getting online.

Today, the tendrils of geopolitics extend into the deepest layers of the technical architecture, from undersea cables to semiconductors, to emerging technical standards. China, and Chinese companies including Huawei, have even put forward proposals at technical standards bodies that would fundamentally change the architecture of the internet, [fragmenting its common structure](#).

This might not be surprising given China's attitude towards the free flow of data; what is more concerning is seeing advanced democracies – which were supposed to fly the flag for a single, global internet – contribute to the same fragmentary tendency. A ban on TikTok would be a relief for some of its US rivals, providing them with a precious window in which to up their game with younger generations. But it's the constitutional impact of a ban that should be troubling in the land of the first amendment.

As TikTok's popularity among young people only grows, the high politics of the current debate marginalises the genuine concerns – about addiction, [the impact on mental health](#) and [body image](#) – of that most vulnerable segment of our societies.



Advanced democracies have an opportunity to have a grown-up debate on how to hold a global internet together while respecting political differences, protecting free expression and supporting the most vulnerable. Instead, the incredible benefits of our shared digital architecture are being washed away in thoughtless, kneejerk responses to the economic and political rise of China.

- Emily Taylor is an associate fellow in the International Security Programme, Chatham House, CEO of Oxford Information Labs and editor of the Journal of Cyber Policy

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‘Britain’s judicial system is obsessed with prison to a degree unlike any country in western Europe.’ An inmate at HMP Portland, Dorset. Photograph: Andrew Aitchison/Corbis/Getty Images

[OpinionPrisons and probation](#)

**A tragic accident should not have  
landed Auriol Grey in prison. The UK  
justice system is stuck in the dark ages**

[Simon Jenkins](#)



The UK's obsession with jail time is counterproductive and cruel. There are better ways to deal with wrongdoing

Tue 28 Mar 2023 01.00 EDTLast modified on Thu 30 Mar 2023 07.05 EDT

Auriol Grey, who has cerebral palsy and lives in specially adapted accommodation, was walking along a footpath in Huntingdon, Cambridgeshire, and was infuriated to see a bicycle coming towards her. She waved her arm at it, making the 77-year-old rider swerve, lose her balance and fall into the road, where she was hit by a passing car and died. An act of what might be called antisocial behaviour was followed by a terrible accident. Grey is now [serving three years](#) in prison for manslaughter.

Britain's judicial system is obsessed with prison to a degree that is unlike any other country in western Europe. The number of prisoners has [roughly doubled](#) since the 1990s. Prison conditions are so bad that a Dutch court refused to extradite a convict to Britain on grounds of its "[inhumane](#)" jails.

Rishi Sunak is this week unveiling new [community punishments](#) for those who break the law, but he might first inquire into why these have failed in the past. In 1998 the Blair government replaced the informal discipline of

“bobbies on the beat” with court-imposed [antisocial behaviour orders](#) (asbos). Their effectiveness was much contested. They were breached in almost [half of all cases](#), rendering perpetrators liable to five years’ imprisonment. Meanwhile, the government ignored the most likely cause of a rise in antisocial incidents: police station closures and the collapse of neighbourhood policing.

Opposition to asbos led the Cameron government in 2014 to replace them with a bureaucracy of community and criminal behaviour orders. These measures were virtually identical to those now promised by Sunak in his headline-hungry campaign against fly-tipping, graffiti, noise, vandalism and drug-taking – including a newly banned drug, [laughing gas](#). Like Boris Johnson, he wants offenders conspicuous and cleaning graffiti. Added to a flurry of measures against hate speech and sexual harassment, the burden on police forces has been increased to a degree that enforcement has in some areas become nonexistent.

Always in the background has been the threat of prison. Records show jailings for, among other things, stealing two penguins from a zoo, disrupting the Boat Race, overloading a light aircraft, plundering a war wreck, and driving the wrong way down an M6 slip road. An expert in European law tells me none of this would have led to prison on the continent. It is now an imprisonable offence to [illegally fell a tree](#), use a phone when driving or photograph a woman breastfeeding without her permission. These actions may be deplorable; but no conceivable good can be served by spending tens of thousands of pounds a year locking up the offenders.

[Over half](#) of British prisoners on short sentences now reoffend soon after release; in Norway’s modernised penal regime, the figure is [about 20%](#). One reason is that, for many people, any prison sentence renders them unemployable. It is effectively for life. Jails should be for rehabilitation or public protection. They are no deterrent or they would not be full.

It is impossible to see what public good is served by imprisoning Grey. Deterrents cannot prevent accidents; we can only see what lessons can be drawn when one occurs. As for punishment, modern penal theory is built round fines, parole, tagging, community service and restorative processes.

Other regimes have found such ways forward. British justice is still in the dark ages.

This article was amended on 28 March 2023. An earlier version included an example of a person who was jailed for being “offensive” in a cathedral; that misrepresented the case in question, and the reference has been removed.

- Simon Jenkins 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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Impressionist collaborator ... Reading by Berthe Morisot. Photograph: Alamy

[Art and design](#)

## After Impressionism: why has the National Gallery left female artists out of the picture?

[Eliza Goodpasture](#)

The gallery predictably frames its new exhibition about modern art around Cézanne, Gauguin and Van Gogh. But there were women painting at the time – so where are their contributions?

Tue 28 Mar 2023 05.13 EDTLast modified on Tue 28 Mar 2023 17.12 EDT

For a 1936 exhibition at MoMA in New York, Alfred H Bar Jr created a [flow chart](#) depicting the evolution of modern art in Europe from impressionism through a series of other “-isms”, culminating in abstraction. The chart has become widely derided for its easy-to-follow depiction of art

movements evolving in a fixed progression, with no consideration of any artists working outside the Parisian avant garde. The National Gallery's new exhibition, [After Impressionism: Inventing Modern Art](#), feels like walking through this defunct diagram.

When the gallery announced the exhibition last year, Twitter users criticised its framing around the three “pivotal figures” of Paul Cézanne, Paul Gauguin, and Vincent van Gogh, and its lack of work by women. The gallery [responded](#) with a claim that more “major” works by women would be announced in due course. In the final exhibition, there are a total of five works made by women: paintings by [Paula Modersohn-Becker](#), [Sonia Delaunay](#), and [Broncia Koller-Pinell](#), and sculptures by [Camille Claudel](#) and [Käthe Kollwitz](#). The show includes a total of 94 paintings and sculptures, meaning that 5% of the exhibition is by women – actually a five-fold improvement on the National Gallery's permanent collection, of which [1% of the objects are made by women](#).

Including work by female artists just to tick boxes is not enough of a reason to do it; in fact, it's a bad reason. But this show is about the period 1886-1914, in which women outnumbered men in art schools across Europe and Britain and in which they increasingly participated in exhibitions, both avant garde and state-sponsored. The National Gallery's exhibition is incomplete without representing these artists. By framing it around three male geniuses, including one child molester (Gauguin), the curators have perpetuated the traditional and patriarchal narrative of art history that sees it as a story of individual artists working in brilliant isolation, churning out completely original visual languages that suddenly disrupt the way art was made. The impressionists themselves, in whose outsize influence this show, and modern art generally, is consistently located, worked collaboratively and collectively – and their exhibitions included work by three women: [Berthe Morisot](#), [Marie Bracquemond](#) and [Mary Cassatt](#).

If it feels tiresome to keep being told that women are left out, consider how tiresome it feels to keep going to exhibitions about modern art with the exact same works on the walls. At the simplest level, European “modern art” is defined as art made between approximately 1860 and 1960 that is concerned with the conditions of modern life: urbanisation, industrialisation,



globalisation, the decline of traditional belief systems and governments, and all the other kinds of change that swept through the Western world in the decades on either side of 1900. It's a fraught term that is entangled with "modernism" and "modernity", which are also constantly being redefined. This exhibition attempts to "broaden" the narrative by including work not made in Paris, with a focus on the centres of modernist work in Barcelona, Berlin, and Vienna. These works are fascinating and make it obvious that there is no singular strand of art making "After Impressionism". Yet the exhibition creates one – most of the art from Barcelona and central and eastern Europe is located in smaller rooms off the main galleries, literally outside the linear progression from Cézanne to Picasso.

The unquestioning focus on the avant garde in exhibitions of modern art like this one is, in itself, patriarchal. Artists who sought to work outside institutional boundaries or to disrupt norms could only do so if they had the option to be part of the mainstream. The disruption exists because they left on purpose. [Women](#) artists did not usually begin from a place at the centre of the establishment. Those who wished to pursue a career as artists sought acceptance as serious professionals and a recognition of their skills. They did not generally have the luxury of breaking the rules – and they were also frequently barred from joining organised avant garde groups. That means that a lot of art made by women in the 19th and early 20th centuries is not avant garde, but that does not make it less modern.

This observation is not new – feminist and social art historians have been making it since the 1970s. Lately, female artists are often framed as pioneers or innovators just because they existed, and it is true that they had to overcome more obstacles than their male peers. But their work was less likely to be aesthetically radical or disruptive, which does not mean it is less interesting or beautiful. The narrative we are fed by this exhibition, and by traditional art history textbooks, is that the avant garde is the only thing worth remembering when studying modern art. But it was only a fraction of the art being made around the turn of the century. It is fascinating, radical and sometimes gorgeous, but it is only part of the story.

That is not to say that female artists were never radical – those included in this exhibition and others who are not, such as [Gwen John](#), [Hilma af Klint](#), [Marie Laurencin](#), [Suzanne Valadon](#), [Gabriele Münter](#), and many others, not



to mention North American artists and women working outside the traditions of western art, all created incredibly creative and groundbreaking visual languages. But an old-fashioned art history that continues to demand that we only remember the famous men who broke the rules, and that we structure the stories we tell about the history of art around a linear narrative with no space for ambiguity or regression, is a false one.

[After Impressionism: Inventing Modern Art is at the National Gallery, London, until 13 August](#)

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| [Section menu](#) | [Main menu](#) |



‘I assumed plants were like rabbits: whether you called them indoor or outdoor, they always prefer to be in the garden.’ Photograph: Visualspace/Getty Images

[OpinionHouseplants](#)

## **My sister has become a great gardener – and I have never felt so betrayed**

[Zoe Williams](#)



I thought we had figured out years ago what kind of family we are: sowers of chaos. So when did she develop the patience for plants?

Tue 28 Mar 2023 02.00 EDTLast modified on Tue 28 Mar 2023 02.18 EDT

I left a houseplant outside, not because I didn't know it was a houseplant – I had been told: “This will look nice in your kitchen” – but because I assumed plants were like rabbits: whether you called them indoor or outdoor, they always prefer to be in the garden. It sickened over time without my noticing, to the point where I had to send a picture of it to my sister. She said: “Yes, this is a houseplant, which you are killing,” then sent me an instructional video about how to rescue it.

As I was watching it, I couldn't help noticing the timbre of her voice – Prue Leith levels of certainty and expertise with a Gregg Wallace can-do attitude – and the jungle of succulents on her table; tiny, creepy verdure bursting out of terraria – with the garden vying for attention through the window, full of ... well, full of damn plants.

When did that happen? When did she become someone with the patience for gardening? It's not as if I never go to her house – I was there a week ago. I

just didn't register that the junk on her surfaces wasn't junk any more – it was alive. It was like discovering she could speak German. I felt simultaneously impressed and betrayed.

I thought we had figured out what kind of family we were years ago: sowers of chaos; bringers of entropy; people who are afraid of slugs. “Don't you remember when she came over to plant the red hot poker?” Mr Z asked. “It was only a month ago.” No, I don't think I even knew she was doing that. I thought she was just getting some fresh air.

In the time between me receiving the houseplant and spurring its demise, the person that it originally belonged to also died and it became a matter of primary importance that it be saved. My treacherous, green-fingered sister sent me another video, then some suggestions on compost. The plant started to look less forlorn. It wants to live, I realised. How obscurely satisfying. But no way, gardening world: you don't turn me that easily.

- Zoe Williams is a Guardian columnist

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## 2023.03.28 - Around the world

- [Global development Disabled people are 'lost and excluded' when disasters hit, says UN advocate](#)
- [France Hundreds of thousands to continue strikes and protests](#)
- [Environment Meatball from long-extinct mammoth created by food firm](#)
- [Afghanistan Founder of girls' school project arrested in Kabul](#)
- [Republicans Trump builds national lead over DeSantis but early-voting states closer, polls show](#)



Rescue workers help evacuate a woman in a wheelchair in a canoe at after the Cauca River overflowed due to heavy rains, in Cali, Colombia, November 2022. Photograph: Edwin Rodriguez Pipicano/Reuters

[Global development](#)

## **Disabled people are ‘lost and excluded’ when disasters hit, says UN advocate**

Lack of data and fallout from Covid both hamper equal rights, and women suffer worst, says new chair of UN disability rights committee

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[Sarah Johnson](#)

Tue 28 Mar 2023 01.30 EDT Last modified on Tue 28 Mar 2023 02.20 EDT

People with disabilities are most at risk and last to be looked for in disasters like earthquakes and floods, a UN official has said.

A lack of available data means they remain “lost and excluded” from rescue operations, said Gertrude Fefoame, the new chair of the UN committee on the rights of persons with disabilities.

“Covid exposed us to devastation. As if that is not enough, there are more and more issues around disasters, conflicts, health, the environment. People with disabilities, especially women and girls, [end up being the most deprived],” said Fefoame, a longtime disability rights advocate who became the first African woman to lead [the committee](#) when she was elected earlier this month.



Gertrude Oforiwa Fefoame, new UN chair of the committee on the rights of persons with disabilities. Photograph: Courtesy of Gertrude Oforiwa Fefoame

People with disabilities, and the organisations representing them, are not consulted in programmes dealing with disaster management and assessing risks, she added. In many places, there is no data available on who is living with which disability.

“If you don’t have data [on people with disabilities], why are you going to look for them? You don’t know who is missing. When you’re not counted, you’re already excluded. That is the situation we experience in most cases.”

Fefoame said that progress on achieving equal rights was lagging behind, especially after the pandemic, which highlighted “the gaps and taken persons with disabilities many steps backwards in all areas”.

“The gaps caused when schools had to close and many countries [switched to remote learning] have never been bridged. When you come to employment, the story is not better. Many people lost their jobs and income, and have never recovered.”

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Women and girls with disabilities are [more likely to face sexual violence](#), and rates of [domestic violence rose](#) during lockdowns around the world. “Not everybody has been able to come out of that pain and trauma they went through. There are still issues,” said Fefoame.

People who lose jobs and a steady income are more vulnerable and dependent on others, who may abuse them. Many women with disabilities are likely to be either begging on the street or dependent on someone doing them a favour, Fefoame explained.

“If someone is abusing her, she will not speak out because she doesn’t know where her next meal is coming from,” Fefoame said. “This is the reality people are experiencing.”

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Protesters set fires on streets of Nantes over French pension changes – video report

[France](#)

## Hundreds of thousands of people take to French streets amid fears of violence

Minister says 13,000 police deployed as Macron vows not to waver on unpopular pensions policy

[Angelique Chrisafis](#) in Paris

[@achrisafis](#)

Tue 28 Mar 2023 10.37 EDTFirst published on Tue 28 Mar 2023 00.00 EDT

Hundreds of thousands of people have taken part in street protests and strikes across France amid fears of violent clashes with police, as demonstrations continue over Emmanuel Macron's use of constitutional executive powers to push through an unpopular raise of the pension age.

The interior minister, Gérald Darmanin, said 13,000 police had been deployed, 5,500 of them in [Paris](#) alone. He said the record number was justified by “a major risk to public order”.

The protest movement against [raising the pension age from 62 to 64](#) is the biggest domestic crisis of Macron's second term, with the strikes on Tuesday affecting refineries, bin collections, rail transport, air travel and schools. Authorities in Paris and several other cities were braced for clashes between police and protesters.

“The social state and the social safety net is disappearing,” said Françoise, a social worker, who was due to retire in three months at 63, and was demonstrating in Paris.

Yves, a former teacher and factory worker, who retired at 59, said: “People are demonstrating on the street because citizens aren’t being listened to. We’re afraid of being teargassed but the police should be protecting us.”

Inès, 25, from Seine Saint Denis, who had worked as a supermarket cashier and in fast-food chains, said: “This is about workers on the streets fighting for their rights.”

The crisis has intensified because of controversy over [policing tactics](#), with lawyers complaining of arbitrary arrests, injuries and heavy handedness during crowd control.



Protesters outside the Louvre on 27 March. Photograph: Horaci Garcia/Reuters

A 30-year-old man was fighting for his life in a coma on Monday after anti-government feeling spread in the west of [France](#) beyond the issue of pensions to environmental demonstrations, spurred by the impact of new water storage facilities for crop irrigation.

The man suffered head trauma during clashes between protesters and police. An investigation is under way to determine the circumstances.

The IGP, the internal affairs unit of the French police, said it had launched 17 investigations into incidents and allegations against police across France in recent weeks.

More than 30 lawyers wrote an open letter to [Le Monde](#) on Monday stating their “great concern” over what they called arbitrary arrests of hundreds of people, accusing the police of using the judicial system and arrests as a tactic to put people off protesting.

The head of Paris police has said all the arrests were justified.

Darmanin said many police officers had been injured during the protests.

The Council of [Europe](#) said on Friday that peaceful protesters and journalists had to be protected from police violence and arbitrary arrest.

What began as two months of regular, peaceful [trade union-organised strike days](#) has shifted to more impromptu protest gatherings over the past 10 days. There have been pockets of unrest in many cities and towns after dark, with fires lit on streets and property vandalised.

Attacks on politicians’ constituency offices have increased since Macron’s decision to push through the pensions changes, bypassing the lower-house of parliament.

A preparatory note by French intelligence services before Tuesday’s trade union-led day of strike and protests said many more young people were likely to take part, perhaps twice or three times as many as on the last big day of strike action last Thursday, French media reported.



Protesters march during a rally in Paris on 23 March. Photograph: Christophe Ena/AP

According to the daily [Le Parisien](#), the note said “the topic of repression and police violence ... could focus young people’s anger”.

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Many young people at first “didn’t feel affected” by the pensions changes, but joined the movement last week, “indignant” at the use of executive powers contained in article 49.3 of the constitution to [bypass parliament](#), after the government feared it would not get enough votes.

Authorities are expecting clashes and violence similar to last Thursday’s coordinated strike day, when bus stops, newspaper kiosks and traffic lights were smashed in Paris and hundreds of fires lit on pavements amid running clashes with police.

Public buildings have been targeted, including [Bordeaux city hall](#) and a police station in Lorient. The interior ministry blamed “far-left” groups.

On Monday, the Louvre museum in Paris was blocked by striking museum workers and could not open.

Pickets continued at petrol depots and waste incinerators, particularly surrounding Paris, where 8,000 tonnes of rubbish were still piling up in streets across half of the city after weeks of bin strikes. Paris city hall said it would clear piles of refuse from the route of Tuesday’s street march to try to avoid fires being lit.

France’s civil aviation authority has told airlines at Orly airport in Paris, as well as at airports in Bordeaux, Marseille and Toulouse, to cancel 20% of flights for Tuesday and Wednesday. High school unions said that up to 200 schools were blockaded by pupils.

Macron summoned the prime minister, Élisabeth Borne, as well as government ministers and senior politicians for crisis meetings on Monday as tensions ran high.

The French president was supposed to have been hosting King Charles for a day of pomp and ceremony on Monday, but had to [cancel the state visit](#) because of the demonstrations. French opposition politicians on the left and right said France’s image and diplomacy had been damaged by the last-minute cancellation.

“We have to find the right path ... we need to calm down,” Borne told AFP, saying the government would not drop the pension changes. She said she was ready for dialogue with unions on other labour issues, including demanding jobs, conditions for older workers and retraining.

But Laurent Berger, the head of the moderate CFDT union, who has taken an unexpectedly hard line against the pension reform, said he would accept the offer of talks but only if the reform was first “put to one side”.

The government has vowed to hold firm, uncertain of how many more days of strike action would be called. Berger said the prime minister must come up with a “very big move on pensions”.

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Vow created the mammoth meatball to demonstrate the potential of meat grown from cells, without the slaughter of animals. Photograph: Aico Lind/Studio Aico

[Meat industry](#).

## Meatball from long-extinct mammoth created by food firm

**Exclusive:** Australian company resurrects flesh of lost species to demonstrate potential of meat grown from cells

[Damian Carrington](#) *Environment editor*

[@dpcarrington](#)

Tue 28 Mar 2023 01.00 EDTLast modified on Tue 28 Mar 2023 03.57 EDT

A mammoth meatball has been created by a cultivated meat company, resurrecting the flesh of the long-extinct animals.

The project aims to demonstrate the potential of meat grown from cells, without the slaughter of animals, and to highlight the link between large-



scale livestock production and the destruction of wildlife and the climate crisis.

The mammoth meatball was produced by Vow, an Australian company, which is taking a different approach to cultured meat.

There are scores of companies working on replacements for conventional meat, such as [chicken](#), [pork](#) and [beef](#). But Vow is aiming to mix and match cells from unconventional species to create new kinds of meat.

The company has already investigated the potential of more than 50 species, including alpaca, buffalo, crocodile, kangaroo, peacocks and different types of fish.

The first cultivated meat to be sold to diners will be Japanese quail, which the company expects will be in restaurants in Singapore this year.

“We have a behaviour change problem when it comes to meat consumption,” said George Peppou, CEO of [Vow](#).

“The goal is to transition a few billion meat eaters away from eating [conventional] animal protein to eating things that can be produced in electrified systems.

“And we believe the best way to do that is to invent meat. We look for cells that are easy to grow, really tasty and nutritious, and then mix and match those cells to create really tasty meat.”

Tim Noakesmith, who cofounded Vow with Peppou, said: “We chose the [woolly mammoth](#) because it’s a symbol of [diversity loss](#) and a symbol of climate change.” The creature is thought to have been driven to extinction by hunting by humans and the warming of the world after the last ice age.

The initial idea was from Bas Korsten at creative agency Wunderman Thompson: “Our aim is to start a conversation about how we eat, and what the future alternatives can look and taste like. Cultured meat is meat, but not as we know it.”

Plant-based alternatives to meat are now common but cultured meat replicates the taste of conventional meat. Cultivated meat – chicken from Good Meat – is currently only sold to consumers in Singapore, but [two companies](#) have now [passed an approval process](#) in the US.

In 2018, another company used DNA from an extinct animal to create [gummy bears made from gelatine](#) from a [mastodon](#), another elephant-like animal.



The cells producing the mammoth meat protein were created at the Australian Institute for Bioengineering at the University of Queensland. Photograph: Wunderman Thompson

Vow worked with Prof Ernst Wolvetang, at the Australian Institute for Bioengineering at the University of Queensland, to create the mammoth muscle protein. His team took the DNA sequence for mammoth myoglobin, a key muscle protein in giving meat its flavour, and filled in the few gaps using elephant DNA.

This sequence was placed in myoblast stem cells from a sheep, which replicated to grow to the 20bn cells subsequently used by the company to grow the mammoth meat.

“It was ridiculously easy and fast,” said Wolvetang. “We did this in a couple of weeks.” Initially, the idea was to produce dodo meat, he said, but the DNA sequences needed do not exist.

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No one has yet tasted the mammoth meatball. “We haven’t seen this protein for thousands of years,” said Wolvetang. “So we have no idea how our immune system would react when we eat it. But if we did it again, we could certainly do it in a way that would make it more palatable to regulatory bodies.”

Wolvetang said he could understand people initially being wary of such meat: “It’s a little bit strange and new – it’s always like that at first. But from an environmental and ethical point of view, I personally think [cultivated meat] makes a lot of sense.”

The large-scale production of meat, particularly beef, causes [huge damage to the environment](#), with many studies finding there must be a [big reduction in meat-eating](#) in rich nations in order to [end the climate crisis](#).

Cultivated meat uses much less land and water than livestock, and produces no methane emissions. Vow said the energy it uses is all from renewable sources and that foetal bovine serum, a growth medium produced from cattle

foetuses, is not used in any of its commercial products. The company has raised US\$56m (£46m) in investment to date.

Wolvetang thinks there will be increasing crossover between the technologies used in medical and human stem cell research and the production of cultured meats.

For example, cells can be programmed to develop in response to their immediate environment, meaning cuts of meat containing muscle, fat and connective tissue could be grown.

Seren Kell, at the [Good Food Institute Europe](#), said: “I hope this fascinating project will open up new conversations about cultivated meat’s extraordinary potential to produce more sustainable food.

“However, as the most common sources of meat are farm animals such as cattle, pigs, and poultry, most of the sustainable protein sector is focused on realistically replicating meat from these species.

“By cultivating beef, pork, chicken and seafood we can have the most impact in terms of reducing emissions from conventional animal agriculture.”

The mammoth meatball will be unveiled on Tuesday evening at Nemo, a science museum in the Netherlands.

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Matiullah Wesa, the president of Pen Path, teaching girls in Afghanistan.  
Photograph: Matiullah Wesa/Pen Path/PA

[Rights and freedomAfghanistan](#)

## Founder of Afghan girls' school project arrested in Kabul

UN calls on Taliban to reveal whereabouts of Matiullah Wesa, head of Pen Path, taken into detention by gunmen from outside a mosque after prayers

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[Ruchi Kumar](#) and [Emma Graham-Harrison](#)

Tue 28 Mar 2023 03.50 EDT Last modified on Tue 28 Mar 2023 09.10 EDT

A prominent activist for girls' education has been arrested in [Afghanistan](#), in the latest sign that hardline Taliban authorities are determined to stamp out all opposition to their ban on girls and women attending school or universities.

Matiullah Wesa, founder and leader of the Pen Path charity, had been fighting for education for Afghan children who were out of school – both boys and girls – for more than a decade, with a focus on rural areas of southern Afghanistan.

Top diplomats and human rights groups, including a senior UN envoy and Amnesty International, called for his immediate release.

“He could have left Afghanistan, but he stayed despite the risks to work for his people, advocating for education rights for girls,” said Samira Hamidi, Amnesty International’s South Asia campaigner.

Wesa was detained after attending prayers at his local mosque on Friday, his brother, Attaullah Wesa, told the Guardian: “Matiullah was at the mosque in



Kabul, offering his prayers. When he stepped out, there were gunmen in two vehicles who ran towards him to arrest him.”

“Our elder brother was with Matiullah and they tried to question the men, asked them to show ID, but they showed him their weapons instead and took him away,” he said, adding that the family was very concerned about Matiullah’s safety.



Matiullah Wesa looks over books used by volunteers in the Pen Path programme. Photograph: Mohammad Noori/Anadolu Agency/Getty Images

Wesa set up Pen Path with his brother in 2009. At first, they worked with religious scholars and tribal elders to build community support for educating all children, set up schools in villages where there was no government education, and sent mobile classrooms to the most remote areas.

After the Taliban took control of Afghanistan and barred [female students from high school](#), and then from primary school and university, he led high-profile calls for classes to restart, sharing photos and videos of protests – usually in private buildings, after harsh crackdowns on public demonstrations.

His message focused on public demand for girls’ schools, and their right to an education under Islamic law. “Men, women, elderly, young, everyone

from every corner of the country is asking for the Islamic rights to education for their daughters,” he wrote in one of his last tweets before his arrest.

On 21 March, the Persian new year which normally marks the start of the school year in Afghanistan, Pen Path launched a new campaign that angered [Taliban](#) authorities, Attaullah said.

“It is our basic right – education for all – and they are not happy about it,” he said. The family had been warned that intelligence services were investigating them.

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“We were informed last month by some of the tribal elders that the Taliban’s intelligence wanted to arrest Matiullah. We talked to them ... to help negotiate with the Taliban government to solve this problem they had with our group,” he said.

Attaullah says he is determined to keep Pen Path’s work going, despite Taliban pressure and the threat to their safety. “In our campaigns, we are only asking for the basic rights of our people, what they want. We will not stop our work. They will not stop us,” he said.



The UN [called on the Taliban](#) “to clarify (Wesa’s) whereabouts, the reasons for his arrest and to ensure his access to legal representation and contact with family”. The deputy head of the EU mission in Kabul called his detention “shocking” and also demanded his release.



Afghan children attend an educational event organised by Pen Path.  
Photograph: EPA

Afghanistan is the only country in the world to bar girls and young women from education because of their sex, with the ban thought to be a personal order from the Taliban’s reclusive and ultra-conservative supreme leader, Hibatullah Akhundzada. The group claims it is only a temporary bar, until “Islamic” conditions are met, but critics say that is simply an excuse for a decision which has no religious justification.

The Taliban have refused to detail what the conditions are, or when schools might reopen. A similar de facto ban brought in when they took control of much of Afghanistan in 1996 lasted until they were ousted from power in 2001.

However, there has been criticism of the ruling from within the group’s own ranks. Many senior Taliban have [been educating their own daughters](#)

[secretly](#), in Afghanistan or abroad, and a few have even publicly criticised the ban.

The Taliban did not respond to requests for comment.

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| [Section menu](#) | [Main menu](#) |



Trump speaks during a rally at the Waco regional airport on 25 March 2023 in Waco, Texas. Photograph: Brandon Bell/Getty Images

[Donald Trump](#)

## Trump builds national lead over DeSantis but faces closer race in early-voting states

New polls show DeSantis eight points up on Trump in Iowa, which will kick off the primary, and level in New Hampshire, the second state to vote

[Martin Pengelly](#) in New York

[@MartinPengelly](#)

Tue 28 Mar 2023 01.00 EDTLast modified on Tue 28 Mar 2023 08.06 EDT

Donald Trump has increased his national lead in the Republican presidential primary but seems set to face a closer tussle with his chief rival, [Ron DeSantis](#), in the crucial first two states to vote, new polls show.

On Monday, a [new survey](#) from the Center for American Political Studies at Harvard and the Harris Poll gave the former president a 26-point national lead over the Florida governor, by 50% to 24%, a four-point gain since February.

Former vice-president Mike Pence, who like DeSantis has not announced a run, was third, with 7%. Nikki Haley, the former South Carolina governor who declared in February, was fourth, with 5% support.

The poll followed the trend in a race which on Saturday saw Trump stage his first full campaign rally in Waco, Texas, beginning with images of the January 6 attack on Congress and a song portraying those convicted as political prisoners.

Trump has also focused on a reportedly imminent indictment in New York City, over a hush money payment to the adult film star Stormy Daniels, as he looks to whip up his base.

DeSantis is widely seen to be running a shadow campaign, promoting a book in key states. He also seems to be in a difficult position, needing to support Trump in the New York case while seeking to catch up in the polls via political attacks.

In return, Trump has begun to attack DeSantis in familiar, slashing terms.

As the Harvard poll indicated, DeSantis continues to struggle to make an impact on a national scale.

However, there was apparent good news for the governor from the website Axios, which [published](#) the results of two polls carried out by a Republican firm.

In head-to-head matches, Public Opinion Strategies put DeSantis eight points up on Trump in Iowa, which will kick off the primary in February 2024, and level in New Hampshire, the second state to vote.

Axios [said](#): “National polling has shown Trump significantly ahead of DeSantis, but these polls suggest DeSantis is performing better in the early

states where voters pay closer attention.”

However, there was better news for Trump when respondents were asked to choose from the whole field of declared and potential contenders. Then, Trump and DeSantis were tied in Iowa while Trump led by 12 points in New Hampshire.

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Other surveys have shown similar potential for anti-Trump candidates to split the vote and give the former US president the nomination without majority support.

That was what happened in 2016. Then, the Texas senator Ted Cruz [won Iowa](#) before Trump swept to victory [in New Hampshire](#). Trump was not seriously challenged thereafter.

The MSNBC host Mehdi Hasan was among observers to seize on the Axios report, which he [called](#) “a reality check for those of us LOL-ing at DeSantis’s poor performance this past week and poor polling at a national level”, adding: “State polls matter way more than national polls. Especially in early primary states.”

But Simon Rosenberg, a Democratic strategist and pollster, warned “DeSantis world” not to get carried away by the Axios report.

Pointing to the “GOP red wave poll BS last year” – in which polling suggested big Republican midterm gains but the GOP only took the House by a small margin – Rosenberg [said](#) the Public Opinion Strategies surveys were “not nearly as good for DeSantis as Axios portrayed”.

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| [Section menu](#) | [Main menu](#) |

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Rise in energy bills will be ‘especially brutal’ for companies locked into fixed-rate bills amid the energy market’s peak last year. Photograph: Maureen McLean/REX/Shutterstock

[Small business](#)

## ‘We won’t be here for long’: UK firms fear the worst as energy bill support ends

Bills could rise by as much as 133% when new cap is introduced this weekend, say analysts

[Jillian Ambrose](#) *Energy correspondent*

Sat 1 Apr 2023 02.00 EDT Last modified on Sat 1 Apr 2023 03.09 EDT

Thousands of small businesses risk going bust as “brutal” energy bills are to double with the end of a government support scheme from this weekend.

Companies are braced for an increase in energy costs as the government’s support for non-household energy bills falls away, and many fixed rate deals



come to an end. The combined impact could drive energy bills for many companies up by as much as 133% , according to analysts at the consultancy Cornwall Insight.

Craig Lowrey, a principal analyst at Cornwall Insight, said the “worst-case scenario” would be “especially brutal” for companies that locked in to their fixed bills during the energy market peak last year and who would “no longer be able to count on the safety net of government support”.

Julian Pariera, the owner of Beauchamp Laundry Services in Birmingham, said: “It will dramatically affect our business.” Pariera [told the Guardian in late 2021](#) that the energy cost crisis was likely to drive the company’s energy bills up fourfold. Since then, his gas bills have climbed almost five times higher, he said.

“We’ve already had to put our prices up by 25%, which means some customers who would come in to do laundry every two weeks are now waiting to wash once a month. We can’t put our prices up any more. We know that many of our customers are vulnerable and are feeling squeezed, and we just can’t squeeze them any more,” he said.

Energy costs are also a big burden for the hospitality industry, which was already hit hard by the Covid-19 pandemic, leading to [a rash of pub closures](#) across the UK.

“This is the end of the independent village pub,” one publican said. The pub owner asked not to be named because he expects the financial toll of the energy crisis will force him to sell his pub to a developer interested in converting the building into a block of flats.

“We won’t be here for long. At the moment we’re putting our own money into the pub to keep it going, but it will fail. It’s a matter of how long we’re willing to go on. There are pubs going under every day. Soon we’ll be back to the 90s when tenants were just leaving their keys behind,” he said.

The government stepped in to protect businesses from the soaring cost of energy after Russia’s invasion of Ukraine last year but the scheme will be

replaced from Saturday.

The scheme, which launched in October, was described by chancellor Jeremy Hunt as “[unsustainably expensive](#)” because it capped the cost of electricity and gas at an estimated £18bn for six months. Under the new scheme, companies will receive up to £5.5bn of support over the next year.

The government on Saturday launched a campaign to help struggling small and medium-sized businesses manage their energy costs, which will offer guidance on how to save energy such as installing light and heating timers, or turning down boiler flow temperature and changing lightbulbs.

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The campaign was described as “bullshit” by one indignant business owner, who declined to be named.

“The government seems to be showing parental concern, but it’s a red herring,” Pariera said. “I sat in a restaurant the other day and realised it was more cold and dim than usual – then I realised they were trying to save energy. Everyone who can do these things has already started.”

The hospitality sector is facing a £7.3bn hike in energy bills as the government’s support comes to an end, according to UK Hospitality, which

could drive thousands of venues out of business. The group's analysis shows that the sector's energy costs are £12bn a year higher than before the crisis.

Kate Nicholls, chief executive of UKHospitality, said: "The energy crisis has suffocated businesses over the past year, causing thousands to fail and forcing many more to take drastic measures to afford extortionate energy bills."

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| [Section menu](#) | [Main menu](#) |

## [Ukraine war live](#)[Ukraine](#)

# Outrage as Moscow takes presidency of UN security council – as it happened

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A letter called for a six-month pause on development of systems more powerful than GPT-4, developed by OpenAI, a company co-founded by Elon Musk. Photograph: Michael Dwyer/AP

[Artificial intelligence \(AI\)](#)

## Letter signed by Elon Musk demanding AI research pause sparks controversy

The statement has been revealed to have false signatures and researchers have condemned its use of their work

[Kari Paul](#) and agencies

Sat 1 Apr 2023 01.00 EDT Last modified on Sat 1 Apr 2023 08.27 EDT

A [letter co-signed by Elon Musk](#) and thousands of others demanding a pause in artificial intelligence research has created a firestorm, after the researchers cited in the letter condemned its use of their work, some signatories were revealed to be fake, and others backed out on their support.

On 22 March more than 1,800 signatories – including Musk, the cognitive scientist Gary Marcus and Apple co-founder Steve Wozniak – called for a six-month pause on the development of systems “more powerful” than that of [GPT-4](#). Engineers from Amazon, DeepMind, Google, Meta and Microsoft also lent their support.

Developed by [OpenAI](#), a company co-founded by Musk and now backed by Microsoft, GPT-4 has developed the ability to hold human-like conversation, compose songs and summarise lengthy documents. Such AI systems with “human-competitive intelligence” pose profound risks to humanity, the letter claimed.

“AI labs and independent experts should use this pause to jointly develop and implement a set of shared safety protocols for advanced AI design and development that are rigorously audited and overseen by independent outside experts,” the letter said.

The Future of Life institute, the thinktank that coordinated the effort, cited 12 pieces of research from experts including university academics as well as current and former employees of OpenAI, Google and its subsidiary DeepMind. But four experts cited in the letter have expressed concern that their research was used to make such claims.

When initially launched, the letter [lacked](#) verification protocols for signing and racked up signatures from people who did not actually sign it, [including](#) Xi Jinping and Meta’s chief AI scientist Yann LeCun, who [clarified](#) on Twitter he did not support it.

Critics have accused the Future of Life Institute (FLI), which is primarily [funded](#) by the Musk Foundation, of prioritising imagined apocalyptic scenarios over more immediate concerns about AI – such as racist or sexist biases being programmed into the machines.

Among the research cited was “On the Dangers of Stochastic Parrots”, a well-known [paper](#) co-authored by Margaret Mitchell, who previously oversaw ethical AI research at Google. Mitchell, now chief ethical scientist

at AI firm Hugging Face, criticised the letter, telling Reuters it was unclear what counted as “more powerful than GPT4”.

“By treating a lot of questionable ideas as a given, the letter asserts a set of priorities and a narrative on AI that benefits the supporters of FLI,” she said. “Ignoring active harms right now is a privilege that some of us don’t have.”

Her co-authors Timnit Gebru and Emily M Bender criticised the letter on Twitter, with the latter branding some of its claims as “unhinged”. Shiri Dori-Hacohen, an assistant professor at the University of Connecticut, also took issue with her work being mentioned in the letter. She last year co-authored [a research paper](#) arguing the widespread use of AI already posed serious risks.

Her research argued the present-day use of AI systems could influence decision-making in relation to climate change, nuclear war, and other existential threats.

She told Reuters: “AI does not need to reach human-level intelligence to exacerbate those risks.”

“There are non-existential risks that are really, really important, but don’t receive the same kind of Hollywood-level attention.”

Asked to comment on the criticism, FLI’s president, Max Tegmark, said both short-term and long-term risks of AI should be taken seriously. “If we cite someone, it just means we claim they’re endorsing that sentence. It doesn’t mean they’re endorsing the letter, or we endorse everything they think,” he told Reuters.

- *Reuters contributed to this report*



The Italian watchdog cited concerns about ChatGPT’s ‘massive collection and processing of personal data to “train” the algorithms on which the platform relies’. Photograph: Lionel Bonaventure/AFP/Getty

[Artificial intelligence \(AI\)](#)

## Italy’s privacy watchdog bans ChatGPT over data breach concerns

Measure is in place ‘until ChatGPT respects privacy’, says Italian Data Protection Authority

[Dan Milmo](#) and agencies

Sat 1 Apr 2023 03.43 EDTFirst published on Fri 31 Mar 2023 13.11 EDT

Italy’s privacy watchdog has banned [ChatGPT](#), after raising concerns about a recent data breach and the legal basis for using personal data to train the popular chatbot.

The Italian Data Protection Authority described the move as atemporary measure “until ChatGPT respects privacy”. The watchdog said it was



[imposing an “immediate temporary limitation on the processing of Italian users’ data”](#) by ChatGPT’s owner, the San Francisco-based OpenAI.

OpenAI said on Friday it had disabled ChatGPT in [Italy](#) and that it complies with the EU’s General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR).

“We are committed to protecting people’s privacy and we believe we comply with GDPR and other privacy laws,” said an OpenAI spokesperson, who added that the company limits the use of personal data in systems such as ChatGPT.

“We actively work to reduce personal data in training our AI systems like ChatGPT because we want our AI to learn about the world, not about private individuals.”

ChatGPT has been a sensation since its launch last November due to its ability to generate plausible-sounding responses to questions, as well as creating an array of content including poems, academic essays and summaries of lengthy documents when prompted by users.

It is powered by a groundbreaking [artificial intelligence system](#) that is trained on a vast amount of information culled from the internet.

The Italian watchdog cited concerns about how the chatbot processed information in its statement.

It referred to “the lack of a notice to users and to all those involved whose data is gathered by OpenAI” and said there appears to be “no legal basis underpinning the massive collection and processing of personal data in order to ‘train’ the algorithms on which the platform relies”.

The ban came days after more than 1,000 artificial intelligence experts, researchers and backers – including the Tesla CEO, Elon Musk – [called for an immediate pause](#) in the creation of “giant” AIs for at least six months amid concerns that companies such as OpenAI are creating “ever more powerful digital minds that no one ... can understand, predict, or reliably control”.

The Italian watchdog also referred to a data breach suffered by OpenAI on 20 March, which partly exposed conversations and some users' personal details including email addresses and the last four digits of their credit cards.

The regulator said ChatGPT faced a loss of data “regarding the conversations of users and information related to the payment of the subscribers for the service”. At the time [OpenAI apologised](#) and said it would “work diligently to rebuild trust”.

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The regulator also appeared to refer to ChatGPT's propensity for inaccurate answers, stating that “the information made available by ChatGPT does not always match factual circumstances, so that inaccurate personal data are processed”.

Finally, it noted that “a lack of age verification exposes children to receiving responses that are absolutely inappropriate to their age and awareness, even though the service is allegedly addressed to users aged above 13 according to OpenAI's terms of service”.

The Italian watchdog said OpenAI must report to it within 20 days on what measures it has taken on ensuring the privacy of users' data or face a fine of up to either €20m (£17.5m) or 4% of annual global revenue. OpenAI has been contacted for comment.

OpenAI, which developed ChatGPT, did not immediately return a request for comment on Friday.

The move is unlikely to affect applications from companies that already have licences with OpenAI to use the same technology driving the chatbot, such as [Microsoft's Bing search engine](#).

The CEO of OpenAI, Sam Altman, announced this week that he is embarking on a six-continent trip in May to talk about the technology with users and developers.

That will include a stop planned for Brussels, where European Union lawmakers have been negotiating sweeping new rules to limit high-risk AI tools.

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## 2023.04.01 - Spotlight

- [Our sleeping secrets caught on camera Nine beds and the people in them reveal everything – from farting to threesomes](#)
- [The secret to good hair, beating jetlag and great photos Plus 13 other ways to do the little things better](#)
- [Budget airlines Which is the best – and what about the worst?](#)
- [‘It feels like a scandal’ Wizz Air passengers claim website bug cost them extra](#)
- [Blind date I wasn’t expecting a full-on kiss on each cheek. It felt a bit forward](#)

# Our sleeping secrets caught on camera: nine beds and the people in them reveal everything – from farting to threesomes

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How to get energised in the morning – we asked Zoe Ball for advice.  
*Illustrations: James Round/The Guardian*

[Life and style](#)

**The secret to good hair, beating jetlag  
and great photos – plus 13 other ways to**

# do the little things better

From parallel parking to defusing a tantrum to getting a good night's sleep, we ask the experts for their top tips



*Interviews by [Sarah Phillips](#)*

Sat 1 Apr 2023 05.00 EDT Last modified on Sat 1 Apr 2023 06.06 EDT

## How to get energised in the morning

I leap out of bed the minute the alarm goes off at 4am and have my clothes ready, so I don't have to scrabble around in the dark. I neck a mouthful of a probiotic and have just one black coffee – otherwise I'm way too excitable. The minute I get into work, I whack on the tunes really loud: Steely Dan, Toto or some disco. Sing along to the bangers and then you're off!

**Zoe Ball, DJ and presenter**

## How to project your voice

Before you start, massage the hinges of your jaw so it can relax and drop open. Stand with your feet hip-width apart to give you a stable stance and



## Lisa Åkesson, vocal coach

Drink loads of water and avoid junk food on the flight. Maximise sleep: take an eye mask, earplugs and comfy clothes so you can remove or add layers. When heading west, take a nap when you get to your hotel, and set an alarm. This will help you through to that later bedtime and slowly shift your body clock.

It is important to remember the three basic principles of rest, hydration and addressing symptoms. I also try to programme in some sleep to aid a quicker recovery. Regular warm drinks with honey and lemon can help alleviate a cough and throat pain – and are as effective as cough suppressants. Over-the-counter sachets contain pain relief as well as a decongestant. I take

regular and staggered pain relief tablets and salty water nasal spray which really helps with fever, aches and nasal congestion.

**Joanna Kennedy, GP**

## **How to look fresh after a big night**

Avoid late-night munchies, and drink water or herbal tea before bed. Next day, have a Diet Coke or milky coffee. Jump in the shower and then get moving: walk or cycle it off. Have sunglasses at the ready and eat some fat and protein: hello tahini and chickpeas.

**Jessica Cole, model**

## **How to parallel park**

Remember: “Lions Roar Really Loudly.” It stands for left, right, right, left. Pull alongside the car in front of the space, leaving one door-width of space. Check it is safe then do one turn of the wheel to the left. When your car is at about the 1 o’clock position, do one turn to the right. Wait until the kerb in your left mirror is just beneath your passenger door handle, then do one turn right and finally, when parallel to the kerb, one turn left. Make whatever minor adjustments are required, and don’t forget to make effective observations throughout.

**Craig Preedy, driving instructor**

## **How to make someone smile**

Tell someone about something that went wrong for you – with a smile on your face. It will always make the other person feel better about themselves if they know you’ve had it worse. For example, if someone says “I’ve had a really bad day, my car broke down”, say, “The same thing happened to me! My car broke down on the M1 and I was wearing Hello Kitty pyjamas with a tomato sauce stain on the crotch.”

**Shazia Mirza, comedian**

## **How to have a good hair day**

Brush your hair with a soft bristle brush before shampooing to break down any product build up. Choose sulphate-free products to avoid drying the hair. If hair is greasy, and you don't have time to wash it, try refreshing it with a blast of cool air. If it's beyond help, go for a topknot on long hair, a half-up half-down style on mid-length, or a side part/tuck behind ears for short hair. The trick is to make it look intentional. Use a finishing spray and big earrings to make it a look.

## Deb Dominic, hairdresser

## How to take care of your hands

I limit myself to four hours' practice a day, and I use a [paraffin hand bath](#), when they ache. It is a small container in which you heat blocks of paraffin. Then you dip your hands a few times into what feels like hot candle wax, and leave for 25 minutes. The heat relaxes all the muscles and tendons. It's amazing.

**James Rhodes, pianist**



# How to take a good photo of someone

Try to make your subject relax and forget they are having their picture taken. I tell people to make a funny noise, do an impression of a cat, or scream at

the camera. This makes them laugh very naturally. I also tell them to imagine the camera lens is a window and they are talking to somebody through it. It is amazing how well this works: when you see the picture, you see them looking back at you.

**Rankin, photographer**

## **How to get a good night's rest**

Morning exercise in daylight helps set the body clock. Try to go to bed and get up at the same time every day. Stop using electronic devices 30 minutes before bed and avoid stressful situations at this time. If you wake, don't worry about it, and don't look to see what time it is. If I wake in the night I listen to Radio 4 Extra, which I find comforting. It usually sends me back to sleep within 10 minutes.

[Russell Foster](#), sleep scientist. His book, **Life Time: The New Science of the Body Clock**, is published by Penguin Life (£14.95, [Guardian Bookshop](#))

## **How to look after your gut**

I always recommend fermented food: kefir has done wonders for my gut and mood, supporting a healthy microbiome. Kefir introduces live bacteria, which are good not only for gut health but, research shows, reduce the risk of anxiety, depression and diabetes, lower cholesterol and support the immune system.

**Daniel O'Shaughnessy, nutritionist**

## **How to strengthen your glutes**

Strong glutes are key to athletic performance and everyday movement. If you suffer lower back pain or your knees are giving you trouble, stronger glutes will support and ease this. Lie on your back, with knees bent, feet flat on the ground and shoulder-width apart. Squeezing the glutes, lift your hips off the ground. Keep your core tight and don't over-arch your back. Squeeze for a couple of seconds before lowering. Three sets of 10 reps a day is a great start.

**Rose Mac, personal trainer**

## How to defuse a tantrum

If I see a child becoming emotional, I distract them with a sweet. If it turns into a tantrum, I always ask parents to remove the child. If they are just livid, no matter what you do, leave them alone as long as they are somewhere safe. Give the parents a reassuring look. We all go through it.

**Gilbert Giggles, children's entertainer**

## How to have flawless skin

Apply sunscreen daily, even in winter – UVA comes through clouds and rain. Some suncreams don't go on easily with other creams. To avoid this, leave a good 15 minutes between moisturiser and SPF. Also: always wash your face before applying night cream.

**Emma Craythorne, dermatologist**

## How to brush your teeth

Use an electric toothbrush – they are superior in every way to a manual brush. I don't rinse after brushing: a thin film of toothpaste will soon dissipate. In the evening, I use an interdental brush with a long handle to reach back teeth, making circular movements to ensure food and plaque have no hope of surviving.

**Jaz Gulati, dentist**

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A Jet2.com plane. Each airline has its own rules, paid-for extras and small-print fees. Photograph: Anna Gowthorpe/PA

[Budget travel](#)

## Budget airlines: which is the best – and what about the worst?

After Jet2 topped a Which? poll, we ask UK travel experts for their views and take a close look at the rules and extras

[Rupert Jones](#) and [Jess Clark](#)

Sat 1 Apr 2023 04.00 EDT

So which budget airlines offer the best customer experience, and which ones will have you muttering “never again” as you stagger out of the airport?

There is of course no one-size-fits-all answer – there are so many variables at play, from cost, customer service and the number of cancellations to

legroom and luggage policy. Each airline has its own (often byzantine) rules, paid-for extras and small-print fees to navigate.

However, to try to come up with some answers, Guardian Money took a deep dive into the recent findings of a detailed [survey of short-haul airlines](#) by the consumer body Which?, and also asked travel experts for their views.

## The Which? survey findings

The consumer organisation quizzed more than 8,000 travellers about their experiences of flying in the past two years, with passengers invited to rate their carriers across a range of criteria.

Jet2.com – which flies from 10 UK airports to more than 65 destinations – came out top with an overall customer score of 80%. It was one of only two short-haul carriers – the other being the airline Norwegian, which scored 74% – to achieve “recommended provider” status.

Propping up the bottom of the table were Wizz Air (customer score: 48%) and Ryanair (52%). [British Airways](#) was fourth from bottom with 56%, while easyJet and Tui Airways scored 59%.





Which? quizzed more than 8,000 travellers about their experiences of flying in the past two years. Photograph: Sascha Steinbach/EPA

## What do travel experts say?

We asked four people who really know about this stuff for their views, including on which airline they think offers the best experience.

**Paul Charles**, the chief executive of the travel consultancy [the PC Agency](#) and a former director at Virgin Atlantic, told us: “I still think easyJet have one of the best products available for the price. It often gives the feel of being on a full-service airline but obviously without the frills ... The crew are well trained at customer service in my view.”

Is it worth paying extra for the extras? “It depends on the airline and the destination,” Charles says. “If you’re on a four-hour flight to Athens, it’s worth paying extra for more legroom. If you’re only on a 90-minute flight, or have a small bag, then just pay the basic fare.”

He adds: “I travel a lot and am finding that passengers are bringing on board more and more luggage rather than checking it into the hold. People are paying for the ease of having their small bags with them at all times rather than risk luggage being mislaid behind the scenes. I think that’s wise as it means you can get off the plane and out of the airport as quickly as possible, which is a good thing!”



Jet2.com came top in the Which? survey. Photograph: Clara Margais/Getty Images

**Chelsea Dickenson**, who runs the website [Cheap Holiday Expert](#), says that of the main three – Ryanair, easyJet and Wizz Air – she likes the “laissez-faire” attitude of Ryanair and Wizz Air, “since I’m often travelling with a bag that’s ever so slightly too big! Whereas I find easyJet is a bit more ‘on it’.”

That said, she adds: “If I was really pressed, I would have to opt for [easyJet](#). This is in large part thanks to the fact that they don’t deliberately split up travellers booking together who have skipped the option to pay for a seat.”



Chelsea Dickenson likes the ‘laissez-faire’ attitude of Wizz Air and Ryanair. Photograph: Gareth Dewar/Alamy

Dickenson says her followers on Instagram agreed, too. “With over 3,000 responses on a recent poll I posted, 77% said that easyJet had the best customer service, followed by [Ryanair](#) at 15% and Wizz Air at a mere 9%. However, by adding Tui and Jet2 into the mix, easyJet slipped down to third place after Jet2 – who stormed ahead – followed by Tui.”

**Oli Townsend**, a deals expert at [MoneySavingExpert.com](#), points out that with Ryanair, “if you don’t pay for a seat, you will almost certainly be split up, as it ‘randomly’ allocates seats for those who don’t cough up for guaranteed seats. Not paying for a Ryanair seat also means you can only check in for free 24 hours before departure – for comparison, easyJet is 30 days. It also means many will have to check in for their flight home while overseas.”

He adds: “Never leave checking in until you’re at the airport as Ryanair will charge you £55 a person for each journey for airport check-in ... Some other airlines do it, too, such as Wizz Air, which charges £36.50 per person per flight for airport check-in, while easyJet is one that doesn’t charge extra for this.”

**Rory Boland**, the editor of [Which? Travel](#), says Jet2.com “distinguished itself as the pick of the pack, with passengers not only praising its excellent customer service and value for money but also rating the boarding experience and cabin cleanliness highly. Proof that it is possible to have great customer service at a good price.”

He says passengers planning to take luggage should always price up the total cost of their ticket rather than just the headline fare. “You may find airlines with more generous free baggage allowance, like Jet2 and British Airways, work out cheaper than Ryanair and easyJet once you have added on the cost of a bag or two.”

Boland reckons that paying for priority boarding or to make seat selections “will usually be a waste of money for most people. In the past, our research has found that as long as you check in early, you’ll usually be seated together. The only exception to this rule is if you’re flying with Ryanair.”



Rory Boland says airlines with a more generous free baggage allowance may be cheaper than Ryanair and easyJet ‘once you have added on the cost of a bag or two’. Photograph: N Carson/PA

## **Legroom**

This is a big deal for a lot of people. The Which? survey includes details on each airline's "seat pitch": the distance between two rows in standard economy.

Seats with more legroom are often available, although you will usually have to pay extra

Wizz Air is one of the least generous on this front, with a seat pitch of 28in (71.12cm), although to be fair, at Jet2, the range is between 28in and 31in, so you may not fare much better on one of its flights. Some may be surprised to learn that, at 30in, Ryanair is very slightly more generous than easyJet (29in). Flying BA will often give you more legroom: its seat pitch figure is 29in to 34in. At Tui Airways, it is 28in to 34in.

Seats with more legroom are often available, although you will usually have to pay extra. For example, Ryanair's extra legroom seats cost from £14 upwards. These are located in rows one, two, 16 and 17 and typically boast 40 inches of legroom.

EasyJet charges a fee for customers to choose their seats. A seat in the first row with extra legroom starts at £12.99. For an extra legroom seat towards the front or over the wing, it's "from £7.99".

At Wizz Air, if you buy the Wizz Plus bundle, this includes free seat selection, including front row and extra legroom seats.

## **Bags and luggage**

Many of the airlines offer a bewildering array of options. At Ryanair, passengers can bring one small bag – up to 40cm x 20cm x 25cm (15.7in x 7.8in x 9.8in) – on board free of charge, and it must fit under the seat in front. Priority boarding, which also allows travellers to skip the main queue, allows customers to bring a second cabin bag (up to 10kg and 55cm x 40cm x 20cm) and costs between £6 and £35.99.

In terms of Ryanair, Which? advises people to "do your maths first before booking to see if better rivals, like Jet2, which includes a much larger free



luggage allowance, are cheaper for your trip”.

Jet2 lets you carry on board one piece of hand luggage for free, as long as it weighs no more than 10kg and is a maximum of 56cm x 45cm x 25cm.

At easyJet, passengers can bring a small cabin bag (45cm x 36cm x 20cm) on board for free, which must fit under the seat in front, while the price for a large cabin bag (maximum 56cm x 45cm x 25cm) starts at £5.99. It is worth knowing that booking an extra legroom seat also gets you a large cabin bag plus speedy boarding.



Do you prefer to have a small bag on board with you rather than checking one into the hold? Photograph: David Gee/Alamy

Like Ryanair, Wizz Air lets people bring on board one carry-on bag for free, although the maximum size is slightly bigger: 40cm x 30cm x 20cm.

Norwegian has three ticket levels – LowFare, LowFare+ and Flex – each of which comes with its own baggage allowance. Everyone can bring one under-seat bag – up to 30cm x 20cm x 38cm – to be stored under the seat in front.

If you are just booking a Tui Airways flight you can carry one piece of hand luggage of up to 10kg for free. It can be up to 55cm x 40cm x 20cm in size

and can go into the overhead storage compartments.

## Customer service and complaints

Which? says that this year, with strikes and staff shortages, “it pays to pay attention to those airlines that look after customers when something goes wrong”.

Jet2 was one of only two airlines out of more than 20 (the other was Finnair) that received the full five stars for customer service. This rated the quality of the service provided by on-ground and onboard staff. Meanwhile, Wizz Air was the only one that was given only two stars. Ryanair, easyJet, BA and Tui received three stars.



British Airways, Ryanair, easyJet and Tui received three stars for customer service. Photograph: Gareth Fuller/PA

A look at last-minute cancellation rates (within 24 hours of departure) suggests Ryanair is a fair bit more reliable than easyJet. At Ryanair the rate was 0.5% – a lot lower than easyJet’s 1.3%. BA lost a lot of marks for this – its last-minute cancellation rate was put at 2.3%. By contrast, at Tui Airways, Jet2 and Norwegian, the figure was 0.3%, 0.5% and 0.6% respectively.

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Wizz Air says: ‘There has been no technical issue affecting online check-in but we are sorry that these customers have found it difficult to check in online.’ Photograph: Bernadett Szabó/Reuters

### Flights

## **‘It feels like a scandal’: Wizz Air passengers claim website bug cost them extra**

Travellers reportedly forced to pay at airport to board plane after technical hitch stopped them checking in online



[Zoe Wood](#)

[@zoewoodguardian](#)

Sat 1 Apr 2023 02.00 EDT

It was recently named “[the UK’s worst airline](#)” by the consumer body Which?, and has been hauled over the coals by the industry regulator. Now Wizz Air is facing criticism over yet another issue. Passengers have contacted Guardian Money after being forced to cough up substantial sums at the airport or face being turned away from their flight after apparently encountering technical problems with the airline’s website that prevented them checking in online as planned.

In December, Grace Connolly says she had to hand over £170 at Prague airport for her party of four after they were unable to check in online for their return flight to Luton.

“I had no issue checking in online on the way out but when returning, there was a technical glitch that wouldn’t allow me to,” she says. “I think the majority of people on our flight had the same problem. I had to pay £170 for myself and the three others I was travelling with otherwise we wouldn’t be permitted to fly home.

There were no Wizz Air representatives at the airport and the customer service hotline didn't even ring when I tried it

*Grace Connolly*

“There were no Wizz Air representatives at the airport and the customer service hotline didn't even ring when I tried it. I just got immediately cut off, which I'm actually relieved about because, at £1.45 a minute, the charge is astronomical.”

Guardian Money first [reported on this problem last summer](#) and since then we have received a steady stream of similar complaints, with more than 20 since November.

Andrey Lenkov says that he, along with at least 20 others, could not check in online for a flight from Warsaw to Paris in October.

“On our way back from Poland, where we visited our family that escaped from Ukraine, we tried to check in online,” he says. “Unfortunately, I kept getting a message that the type of aircraft had changed and our seats were no longer available.”

In an attempt to overcome the problem, Lenkov resorted to buying new seats on the flight for himself and his wife, Daria, but could not check in for those either. He had to pay the £76 fee or they “wouldn't be allowed on the plane”.

He says: “We had no choice but to pay. There were at least 20 more people with the same problem.”

When he sought a refund, Wizz Air rejected it. The carrier claimed that after “thoroughly investigating” his case, no compensation was due because the flight had been “delayed/cancelled due to unexpected circumstances”, leading him to suspect it was an automated reply.

In January, London-based Ryan Shoesmith and his partner, Lily Wilkinson, were charged 1,020 Norwegian kroner (£84.81) to board their flight home from Tromsø to Luton despite their best efforts to check in via the Wizz Air website.



Guardian Money has been contacted by passengers encountering problems checking in online with Wizz Air. Photograph: Salarko/Alamy

“We made multiple attempts to check in the day before our flight but there was a technical issue with the website,” Shoesmith says. On the site he was met with a warning that “seat selection is not currently available” and “you can finalise your booking now and come back to select a seat before check-in”. However, the only link that worked was “check in later”, which aborted the process.

“I expected that Wizz Air would fix the bug but it never got repaired,” he says. “We went to Tromsø airport with plenty of time to sort out the issue; however, no Wizz Air representatives were present. Airport staff advised us to try checking in on the machines but they returned an error message.

“This meant our only option was to check in at the airport desk. Airport staff then advised us that we couldn’t check in and board our flight unless we paid an upfront airport check in fee of 1,020 kroner. There were several people in our queue experiencing the same issue. It was daylight robbery.”

After he got back, Shoesmith contacted Wizz Air but his refund claim was turned down, with the carrier stating that its IT department had “not noticed

anomalies on our website or mobile application at the time of your flight as well as before it”.

After Shoesmith pursued the matter again, the airline said he could take the matter up with an alternative dispute resolution (ADR) service.

“The level of customer service I have received so far from Wizz Air has been the worst of my entire life,” he claims. “The whole thing feels like a total scandal.”

After Connolly got home, she contacted Wizz Air and provided screenshots of its website showing the error message “seat selection not available”, and on 2 January she received an email confirming the airline would refund the check-in fee and asking for her bank details. However, two months later, the money still had not arrived.

“They have admitted fault and said that I am entitled to a refund, asked for my bank details, and ... nothing,” she says. “They’re now completely ignoring my emails.”

Rory Boland, the editor of Which? Travel, believes it is unacceptable for Wizz Air passengers to be left out of pocket as a result of problems outside their control. “Any customers unable to use the airline’s free online check-in service due to technical errors must be permitted to check in at the airport without a fee,” he says.

“Travellers affected should take screenshots of any error message they receive when attempting to check in online, and if they are charged at the airport, this can be used as supporting evidence to claim the money back from the airline at a later date,” he says. “Any passengers dissatisfied with the airline’s response to their claim should escalate their complaint to the alternative dispute resolution scheme.”

But even if passengers complain, they may face a long wait for their cash. A recent Which? investigation found that Wizz Air owes millions of pounds to passengers from [unpaid refunds and expenses](#).

At the end of last year, the Civil Aviation Authority said it had “significant concerns” about Wizz Air’s “unacceptable” behaviour, as its passengers were far more likely to make escalated complaints than those of other carriers. The regulator also found that the airline was delaying paying money owed to passengers.

The regulator’s data for the [third quarter of 2022](#), published in December, revealed Wizz Air had the highest number of complaints escalated to either ADR schemes or its in-house complaints team.

The figures showed Wizz Air had 811 complaints per million passengers. Other airlines had less than half as many complaints, and many significantly less. There were also a large number of unpaid county court judgments made against it (passengers can seek redress from an airline via a small claim).

Complaints about shoddy service from Wizz Air were a common theme in Which?’s recent annual passenger survey, in which it was named the [“worst short-haul airline”](#).

“Its poor record on customer care means travellers are at risk of being left high and dry when things go wrong,” Boland says.

If screenshot evidence proving online check-in was impossible can be provided, Wizz is able to refund in-person check-in costs

### *Wizz Air*

Wizz Air says that hundreds of thousands of passengers across the UK and Europe use its online check-in each month, adding that “as an ultra-low-cost airline, online check-in is vital to minimise costs and enable smooth travel”.

It says: “There has been no technical issue affecting online check-in but we are sorry that these individual customers have found it difficult to check in online.”

The carrier suggests that if a passenger is having difficulty checking in online, they should try using a different browser, clearing caches and cookies from their phone or tablet, or switch to a different device.

“If screenshot evidence proving that online check-in was impossible can be provided, Wizz is able to refund in-person check-in costs, though this may take some time to process,” it says. “Refund requests should be submitted online at wizzair.com.”

After Guardian Money asked Wizz Air to look into the cases highlighted here, the passengers were all issued with refunds.

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Composite: Andrian Sherratt/Joshua Bright

[Blind date](#)[Life and style](#)

**Blind date: ‘I wasn’t expecting a full-on kiss on each cheek. It felt a bit forward’**



Yvette, 64, an archaeologist and curator, meets Ian, 72, a retired firefighter

Sat 1 Apr 2023 01.00 EDT



## **Yvette on Ian**

### **What were you hoping for?**

To meet a nice chap and maybe find a walking/running buddy.

### **First impressions?**

He stood up and immediately gave me a bar of chocolate from Costa Rica. Nice gesture. However, I felt no instant spark and our age gap felt apparent.

### **What did you talk about?**

Running. Long-distance walking. Sport competitiveness. His visit to Antarctica. Families. Ancestry. The fire service. Places we had lived. Campervans.

### **Most awkward moment?**

Probably the greeting. I wasn't expecting a full-on cheek kiss on each side. It felt a bit forward.

**Good table manners?**

Yes.

**Best thing about Ian?**

He looks after himself.

**Would you introduce Ian to your friends?**

He'd definitely get along with my running friends.

**Q&A****Fancy a blind date?**

Show

Blind date is Saturday's dating column: every week, two strangers are paired up for dinner and drinks, and then spill the beans to us, answering a set of questions. This runs, with a photograph we take of each dater before the date, in Saturday magazine (in the UK) and online at [theguardian.com](http://theguardian.com) every Saturday. It's been running since 2009 – you can [read all about how we put it together here](#).

**What questions will I be asked?**

We ask about age, location, occupation, hobbies, interests and the type of person you are looking to meet. If you do not think these questions cover everything you would like to know, tell us what's on your mind.

**Can I choose who I match with?**

No, it's a blind date! But we do ask you a bit about your interests, preferences, etc – the more you tell us, the better the match is likely to be.

**Can I pick the photograph?**

No, but don't worry: we'll choose the nicest ones.

**What personal details will appear?**

Your first name, job and age.

**How should I answer?**

Honestly but respectfully. Be mindful of how it will read to your date, and

that Blind date reaches a large audience, in print and online.

**Will I see the other person's answers?**

No. We may edit yours and theirs for a range of reasons, including length, and we may ask you for more details.

**Will you find me The One?**

We'll try! Marriage! Babies!

**Can I do it in my home town?**

Only if it's in the UK. Many of our applicants live in London, but we would love to hear from people living elsewhere.

**How to apply**

Email [blind.date@theguardian.com](mailto:blind.date@theguardian.com)

Was this helpful?

Thank you for your feedback.

**Describe Ian in three words**

Polite, adventurer, good storyteller.

**What do you think Ian made of you?**

Probably a bit OTT. I tend to gush when I meet new people. He told me twice that he liked my "punky" hair!

**Did you go on somewhere?**

No. I had a train to catch and I think we'd had enough of each other by then.

**And ... did you kiss?**

Well, he did greet me and say goodbye to me with cheek pecks.

**If you could change one thing about the evening what would it be?**

The gourmet food was absolutely divine but when I got back to Bristol I found myself hungry again and had to visit my local chip shop.

**Marks out of 10?**

7.

**Would you meet again?**

No.

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Yvette and Ian on their date



## **Ian on Yvette**

### **What were you hoping for?**

A lovely meal with great company. I met my wife of 41 years on a blind date, so I thought it unlikely lightning would strike twice!

### **First impressions?**

Funky hair and a great smile.

### **What did you talk about?**

Our families. Politics. I loved the story about her hiding in a tent to avoid the Romanian “sheepdogs”.

### **Most awkward moment?**

There wasn’t one as I recall.

### **Good table manners?**

Impeccable.

### **Best thing about Yvette?**

Easy to chat to, with a lovely West Country burr to her voice.

**Would you introduce Yvette to your friends?**

Yes, she'd love them, and vice versa.

**Describe Yvette in three words**

Attractive, intelligent, smiley.

**What do you think Yvette made of you?**

I hope she thought me good company.

**Did you go on somewhere?**

No, she had a train to catch. I hope she caught it!

**And ... did you kiss?**

On meeting and parting, on the cheek.

**If you could change one thing about the evening what would it be?**

That she didn't have to rush for the train, as I'd have liked to have heard more about her singing.

**Marks out of 10?**

You'll insist on this, so 9½. (I never give anything 10.)

**Would you meet again?**

As we are separated by 240 or so miles and didn't swap numbers, so it would be unlikely ... but I would like to continue the conversation.

*Yvette and Ian ate at [The Reading Room](#) in Reading. Fancy a blind date?*

*Email [blind.date@theguardian.com](mailto:blind.date@theguardian.com)*

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## 2023.04.01 - Opinion

- University Challenge was biased towards Oxbridge when I worked on it, and it still is. But there's a fix
- You can keep your nostalgic club nights – in my 50s, I've discovered the magic of the rave
- Now we know: in Trump's fantasy comeback, he'll be wearing handcuffs
- 'Take back control'? With this Pacific trade deal, Brexit Britain has just signed it away.



‘In 2022, Imperial were victorious over Reading, the first final not to feature Oxbridge since 2013.’ Photograph: BBC

### [OpinionUniversity Challenge](#)

## University Challenge was biased towards Oxbridge when I worked on it, and it still is. But there’s a fix

[Lillian Crawford](#)

A third of the teams competing come from just two universities. How can that not be elitist?

Sat 1 Apr 2023 04.00 EDTLast modified on Sat 1 Apr 2023 11.04 EDT

It’s hard to argue that University Challenge *isn’t* elitist. The quizshow relies upon the assumption that Oxford and Cambridge will be the favourites to win, aided not only by virtue of historical reputation, but by the fact that individual colleges are invited to enter thanks to an archaic entrance process devised in 1962. This creates a programme premised on class divides,



illustrated weekly by social media users who post the satirical image of Scumbag College sitting atop Footlights College, Oxbridge in a [1984 episode of The Young Ones](#).

[Professor of education Frank Coffield](#) is calling for the programme to address this bias, and has [complained to the BBC](#) regarding the weighted screen time given to Oxbridge students – given that these two universities constitute about a third of the teams competing.

Full disclosure – I am an alumna of Trinity College, Cambridge and a former University Challenge contestant. I also worked on the current series as a questions researcher and casting assistant. But I agree with Coffield that there are too many Oxbridge teams. I applied for the job to try to [diversify the question subjects](#), in the hope that this in turn would begin to change who applies to compete. I no longer work on the programme, but if University Challenge wants to remain relevant and representative of the UK's student body, diversification must continue. Limiting Oxford and Cambridge to one team each should be a part of that process.

The argument in favour of keeping the historic casting rules seems to be that having one team apiece for Oxford and Cambridge will render the competition a two-horse race of “superteams”. Both would no doubt submit strong entries to the competition, but in the pressure of the studio and under the fire of a changing set of questions, no team is infallible. While Oxbridge colleges have won 27 out of 51 series to date, they have not taken the trophy since 2018, with Edinburgh, Imperial College London and Warwick each defeating an Oxbridge team in the final since. In 2022, Imperial were victorious over Reading, the first final not to feature Oxbridge since 2013. The tide is turning.

This has been stimulated by the establishment of quizzing cultures in more non-Oxbridge higher education institutions, partly thanks to the outreach work of the University Challenge producers. Yet this work is undermined by retaining the old application process whereby every Oxbridge college is invited to apply individually. The result is that out of about 120 annual applications, 70 come from Oxbridge; these are then whittled down to 28 for the competition proper.



Jeremy Paxman with the 2013 University Of Manchester team. Photograph: BBC/Granada Media/PA

University Challenge was formulated six decades ago as a battle of wits along the lines of the Oxford-Cambridge boat race: the nation's best universities pitted head to head with a smattering of redbricks thrown in to shake things up. But given that the mandate of University Challenge is to show a cross-section of the higher education system, it is an absurdity to say that roughly a third of the UK's university makeup is represented by Oxbridge students.

The programme is produced by ITV's Lifted Entertainment owing to the ownership of format rights, but since the programme's 1994 revival on BBC Two with Jeremy Paxman, major decisions such as who hosts the show are the prerogative of the BBC, as are the institutions they elect to feature. We don't know if the rule allowing multiple Oxbridge colleges to apply was reconsidered by the production team after Paxman's exit from the series [in favour of Amol Rajan this year](#). But Oxbridge teams were invited to apply by college yet again. The message that University Challenge continues to disseminate is that attending Oxbridge is the key to success. It's notable, too, that all three hosts have been Cambridge alumni.

There are a multitude of factors that favour Oxbridge at this stage. The invitation documentation landing on the desk of an administrator at an Oxford college of 700 students is far more likely to be taken further than in a university of 45,000. Applying for the series is demanding, involving self-organised tests and practice sessions, which are far easier to manage in a small institution. This is acknowledged by the producers, and the initial stages are seeded such that Oxbridge colleges knock each other out early on.

Looking at the current series, it's worth observing that Oxford and Cambridge had four colleges each this year, the lowest number to date, only two of which – Newnham College and Jesus College, Cambridge – have made it to the quarter-finals. Ultimately, it's not an institution with its collective brainpower competing in University Challenge – it's four students, each with a buzzer and a microphone. The [BBC](#) can argue that every student in the country has the opportunity to sit at the table, but right now, some are being given more opportunity than others.

- Lillian Crawford is a freelance writer

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‘For me, today’s techno is the sound of my body breaking free.’ Photograph: Gianni Muratore/Alamy

[OpinionClubbing](#)

## **You can keep your nostalgic club nights – in my 50s, I’ve discovered the magic of the rave**

[McKenzie Wark](#)



Techno has no time for the past. Since coming out as trans, it has felt like the sound of my body breaking free

Sat 1 Apr 2023 05.00 EDT

What greets me as I step through the portal is fog so thick I can't see anything but shimmering blue. Welcome to the rave. We're at an "undisclosed location" somewhere in Brooklyn. Or is it Queens? Somewhere in here is the source of the noise, this delightfully dense, hard techno, punctuating the blue. When my eyes adjust, I might be able to find it.

I came out as a trans woman in my 50s, about five years ago. I needed a way to shake the most stubborn and obtuse residues of gender dysphoria out of my body. I found raves. I'd been around this world in the 1990s. I knew what to expect, there in the blue fog. I knew how to pack a rave bag. What substances pair well with what sounds.

Nobody knows where the meaning of the word rave came from. Music critic [Simon Reynolds](#) believes it might have been a gift of immigrants from the

Caribbean to postwar Britain. It was popularised in the north of England in the [Thatcher years](#) – the years of industrial decline – as a name for all-night, all-morning warehouse parties usually fuelled by techno and ecstasy.

In New York, techno is the soundtrack to a lot of nightlife cultures. The ones that interest me are pocket havens for queer and trans people. There are clubs where we're not anomalies. But it's the raves I like best. Legal clubs mostly shut by 4am – I'd rather get an early night, and then go dance as the sun rises over the light industrial junkspace that fringes the city.

I make my way through the writhing, sweating bodies, to my favourite spot up front, near the DJ, close to the sub-bass bin. In this New York scene, my fellow ravers are not from the industrial economy. We do service work, emotional labour, so-called “cognitive labor.” There's nightlife workers who have knocked off work in legal clubs. There's sex workers on their down time. In our different ways, we need the rave to shake work out of our bodies.

In some ways the raves I go to now are better than back in the day. The sub bass has become bigger, fuller. You feel it shiver your bones. DJs have more tracks to select from. You can make a pretty good dance track on a laptop, which removes music production from the tyranny of expensive gear and gatekeepers' tastes. There's no money in it, but then there never was.

The more interesting raves are publicity-shy. It's not an exclusive world, but it's not for everyone. It is wary of tourists, of those who would come as if it's a show put on for them to consume. It is wary of gawkers treating it like their walk on the wild side. It's for those who come to share their energy, their moves, who know how to handle themselves. At a good rave everyone puts their phone away. Taking photos for Insta is considered very bad form.

Most of my generation prefer to go dancing to the music of their youth. I'm not one for nostalgia. I've only been myself as this gender for a few years. Techno doesn't really invite nostalgia anyway. It began as the sound of history breaking. For me, today's techno is the sound of my body breaking free.

Techno started as [Black music from Detroit](#); a soundtrack from the poster city for the collapse of western industrial capitalism. Its first exposure to the nightlife world was via Black gay clubs in Chicago. There's a resonance between British and American histories here, the echo of the violence of race and the exploitation of class. The slave system in the American south grew the cotton for the mills of the English north. By the 1980s, the factories on both sides of the Atlantic were disappearing, taking their mass consumer future with them. It was necessary to imagine, in sound, in dance, a different future.

In Berlin, too, the rave scene was born out of the collapse of an industrial system: the Eastern bloc. When the Berlin Wall came down in 1989 the euphoria was short lived. Young Berliners were left to invent a culture from the ruins. They found techno, and the dance of abandon in the spaces of the former East Germany.

These days the Berlin techno clubs are a global tourist attraction. The legendary British raves fell to police repression. [Black producers in Detroit saw their innovation stolen](#), as techno became a global dance music business where a bunch of seemingly identical bald, white dudes gather all the money and fame. Maybe today's raves are to the late information age what the previous ones were to the end of the industrial age.

In my book *Raving*, I wanted to leave behind the language habitually applied to this world. The rave is not liberation, resistance, transcendence, utopia or therapy. It evades those cliches. It's a collective, aesthetic experiment that chimes with our times. It calls for a different language for a different life. It is also part of a wider art of constructing situations where we can reduce surveillance, consumption, the hustle. Find forms of collective joy. Or if not joy, ways to endure the pain of this dying world.

McKenzie Wark is the author of [Raving](#), published by Duke University Press. She teaches at the New School in New York City

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| [Section menu](#) | [Main menu](#) |





‘Even with Trump facing criminal charges, it is difficult to shake the sense that it is still his world, and that we just live in it.’ Photograph: Chandan Khanna/AFP/Getty Images

[OpinionDonald Trump](#)

## Now we know: in Trump’s fantasy comeback, he’ll be wearing handcuffs

[Marina Hyde](#)



In the topsy-turvy world he has created, criminal charges against the former president may be just the boost he needs

Fri 31 Mar 2023 19.40 EDTFirst published on Fri 31 Mar 2023 05.56 EDT

“I actually don’t even know why I did it,” porn star [Stormy Daniels once reflected](#) of the “textbook generic” sex she claimed to have had with Donald Trump after some cursed-sounding Nevada golf tournament. “But I do remember while we were having sex I was like: ‘Please don’t try to pay me.’”

Well, quite. If ONLY Trump had stuck to the non-payment he presumably agreed in the heat of passion in that Lake Tahoe hotel room in 2006, instead of allegedly getting his lawyer to [hand hush money](#) to Daniels when he was running for president a decade later. He is now facing an estimated 34 charges of falsification of business records, believed to relate to payments to both Stormy and the former [Playboy model Karen McDougal](#). As the former president once observed, vaginas are “potential landmines ... There’s some real danger there.”

By way of clarity, the specific former president to whom I just referred is Trump, and not, say, Abraham Lincoln or Calvin Coolidge, whose views on the deadly peril of female genitalia are not recorded. But it's remarkable that after all the hardcore and extreme political and financial stuff Trump pulled in office and beyond, it's the fallout from an alleged textbook generic shag that's left him most exposed. To adapt the calcified cliché about Al Capone, they're trying to get him on sex evasion. It remains highly unclear that they'll succeed, and even less likely that jail time would be served – though Donald can hardly claim [orange isn't his colour](#).

For many, of course, it will be very exciting to see Trump winning votes again, albeit from the majority of a Manhattan grand jury. According to reports, his surrender to the authorities is expected on Tuesday. Once in custody, Trump will get the chance to pucker his anus-like mouth for the cameras taking his mugshot, then to offer his tiny fingers for prints. This process will be followed by a court appearance for his arraignment.

But that's next week. Yesterday, the squire of Mar-a-Lago barrelled off the golf course, where he had been accompanied by a young female aide who apparently drives a golf cart specially equipped with a computer so she can show him positive stories about himself even on the course. That wasn't possible during Thursday's nine holes, alas, and Trump swerved the clubhouse to post on his Truth Social network. "These Thugs and Radical Left Monsters have just INDICATED the 45<sup>th</sup> President of the United States of America", ran this statement, which you should obviously take with a cup of cold [sic]. He becomes the first president to be indicted and face criminal charges, an accolade to take its place in his trophy cabinet alongside being the first US president [to be impeached twice](#), and indeed the first president to [incite an insurrection](#) against the US government. Firstwise, he's the [GOAT](#). Lincoln and Coolidge could never.

I think this is the point at which I am supposed to type that Trump has always denied having sex with [Stormy Daniels](#), despite the matter of this six-figure payment to her. He also denies any wrongdoing in relation to the charges. Taking him at his word (!), you have to wonder how far he'd go to bury something he did actually do, if that's what he'd pay for something he didn't.

As so often with Trump, the details are terrible and shameful and another nail in the coffin of American democracy – but unfortunately also funny. Take his alleged post-coital activities with Stormy, which should have consisted of Trump writing his future self a note – “very Important that I remember not to pay the person I have just given the best sex of her life to, or I will be INDICATED”.

Instead, according to her account, he made her watch some Shark Week content on Discovery, about which Trump became extremely exercised. He wished all sharks would die, he told her, adding definitively that he would “never donate to any charity that helps sharks”. I guess we have to observe that sharks come in many forms. Sharks are landmines.

Meanwhile, Daniels herself is serially funny. “He told me once that I was someone to be reckoned with,” she once recalled drily. “Beautiful, smart, just like his daughter.” Oooooof. Stormy says her thought on exiting the bathroom just before sex with Trump was, “Ugh, here we go.” And here we are still going, a full 17 years later.

Even so, and even with Trump finally facing criminal charges, it is unfortunately difficult to shake the sense that it is still his world, and that we just live in it. He may not have finished the wall, but he certainly fashioned the rabbit hole down which we all plunged a few years ago, with no obviously imminent prospect of escape. We still live in that looking-glass place where we can regrettably see why Trump actually [wants to be handcuffed](#) for his now-pending court appearance, and to get a proper perp walk in front of the cameras.

We know from experience that up can be down, bad can be good, and that a president being indicted is going to require a mass mobilisation of the Manhattan police force, lest countless other crimes be committed by his incensed supporters. If objective truth is recoverable, we are not a whole lot closer to working out how than we were when Trump left office. Until we do, for a still very significant number of people, “indicated” is closer to “vindicated” than “indicted”.

- Marina Hyde is a Guardian columnist

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| [Section menu](#) | [Main menu](#) |



The UK is understood to have agreed to scrap anti-deforestation tariffs on Malaysian palm oil as a condition for entry into the Pacific deal. Photograph: Bazuki Muhammad/Reuters

[Opinion](#)[International trade](#)

## **‘Take back control’? With this Pacific trade deal, Brexit Britain has just signed it away**

[Nick Dearden](#)



Goodbye, food standards. Hello, corporate lobbyists. Why are we doing this, for no real economic benefit?

Fri 31 Mar 2023 07.43 EDT Last modified on Fri 31 Mar 2023 12.08 EDT

Last night, the government announced that Britain has [joined a trade deal](#) so contentious that it united Donald Trump, Hillary Clinton and Bernie Sanders in opposition to US membership.

While [hardcore Brexiters](#) would like to pretend this is the ultimate payoff of our decision to leave the EU and write our own rules, the reality is somewhat different. In signing the [Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership \(CPTPP\)](#), Britain has ditched environmental standards, signed up to terms that will undermine British farmers, and left us open to being sued by multinational corporations in secretive courts. And all for no real economic benefit.

The deal began life as the Trans-Pacific Partnership or TPP, a last gasp of hyper-globalisation. Alongside its ill-fated sister deal, TTIP (Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership), it aims to lock participating countries into rules that prioritise pro-market, corporate interests. The corporate power



grab was then sold to a sceptical public as a way of containing China's economic power, by surrounding that country in a sea of neoliberal trade.

But, like TTIP, the deal sailed into strong anti-globalisation headwinds. In the US, the last thing the public wanted was more outsourced jobs, longer and more fragile supply chains, and further power vested in the hands of big business. The 2016 presidential election was the death knell for US membership.

When the US withdrew, a few contentious parts of the deal were placed on ice – including rules that would have handed even more power to pharmaceutical monopolies to set medicine prices. But there is much to dislike in what remains of what became known as the CPTPP.

The most pressing issue reported from the talks is that [Britain has been forced to lower](#) environmental standards as a condition for entry to the deal. [Palm oil plantations](#) in Malaysia are a driver of deforestation, threatening biodiversity including the survival of [orangutan populations](#). European tariffs on palm oil aim to stop deforestation, but the UK is understood to have agreed to scrap the tariffs as a condition for entry into the Pacific deal, in effect reneging on deforestation pledges made at the UN climate conference in Glasgow.

But it gets worse, because the Pacific trade deal isn't a one-time set of rules, but rather gives corporate lobbyists permanent power to force governments to lower standards over time. The whole point of the CPTPP is to get countries to recognise standards as equivalent to each other – and to accept imports even where there are real differences in standards.

Britain still endorses the precautionary principle, which places the burden of proof on the producer of a product to demonstrate that it is safe. Most signatories to the Pacific trade deal do not, and there will be inevitable pressure to accept food containing [pesticides](#) that have been outlawed here, [antibiotics in livestock farming](#) or hormone-treated beef.

But nothing better displays the heavy bias towards big business interests than the corporate court system at the heart of the CPTPP – an international



arbitration system that will allow corporations to sue the British government for treating them “unfairly”.

Fairness, here, is highly subjective. Corporate courts are increasingly used to challenge all manner of climate action, and Canadian companies are particularly aggressive users of the system, having brought [64 cases against governments](#). One such ongoing case sees Colombia being sued for \$700m for daring to [restrict gold mining operations](#) on environmental grounds, by a Canadian company that [didn't even have](#) all the permits needed to mine, and had had its environmental impact assessment rejected.

In another, more famous, case, a [Canadian corporation is suing Biden's administration](#) for \$15bn for cancelling the Keystone XL pipeline, which would have carried environmentally devastating tar sands oil from Alberta to the US. Canada is a signatory to the CPTPP.

And all of this in the absence of evidence that the deal will boost jobs or growth. By the government's own estimates, the deal will add a mere [0.08% of GDP](#) after running for about 10 years – a number so small as to be meaningless in the uncertain world of economic predictions.

So what is the point? For the government, in true Liz Truss style, it is “proof” that they can do things, however detrimental those things might be to the people they are governing. For some, there's an additional benefit [to joining](#) the Pacific deal: the rules being foisted on us diverge from EU rules, providing an added impediment to a future government negotiating closer relations with our neighbours.

All of this is a far cry from the idea that we would, through these trade deals, have a chance to set our own rules. Trade journalists [reported](#) that another Pacific trade deal member, Japan, had worked tirelessly to ensure Britain accepted “all existing CPTPP rules without any exception”.

In order to prove we've taken back control, we are, in reality, relinquishing it as quickly as possible. And a last thought for those who hoped parliamentary sovereignty was a cornerstone of British democracy: the [parliamentary](#).

[committee](#) able to properly scrutinise treaties like the CPTPP was abolished last week.

- Nick Dearden is director of Global Justice Now (formerly World Development Movement)

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| [Section menu](#) | [Main menu](#) |

## 2023.04.01 - Around the world

- ['Absolute chaos' Theatre roof collapses as deadly storms tear through southern and midwest US](#)
- [Finland election Tight race has Marin's SDP polling behind far right](#)
- [Andrew Tate Influencer released from detention and moved to house arrest in Romania](#)
- ['Heartbreaking' Eight bodies recovered from waters at US-Canada border](#)
- [Donald Trump Will indictment make white evangelicals ditch 'imperfect vessel'?](#)



A home is damaged and trees are downed after a tornado swept through Little Rock, Arkansas. Photograph: Andrew DeMillo/AP

[The ObserverUS weather](#)

## Monster storm system leaves at least 26 dead through US south and midwest

Tornadoes leave devastation across Arkansas, Illinois, Iowa and Oklahoma, including theatre roof that collapsed during concert

[Edward Helmore](#) and the Associated Press

Sun 2 Apr 2023 00.24 EDTFirst published on Fri 31 Mar 2023 17.41 EDT

At least 26 people died and as many as 900,000 places were without power after a monster storm system tore through the southern and midwest US, spawning deadly tornadoes that shredded homes and shopping centers, and collapsed a theatre roof during a heavy metal concert in Illinois.

More than 50 preliminary reports of tornadoes were recorded across eight states in storms that hit Friday night, with twister-producing conditions

continuing into Saturday as the storm system threatened a broad US swath which is home to 85 million people.

Nine weather-related deaths were reported in [Tennessee](#) county. Other deaths were reported in Alabama, Illinois and Mississippi, along with one near Little Rock, Arkansas, where the mayor said more than 2,000 buildings were in a tornado's path.

The National Weather Service said that tornado was a high-end EF3 twister with wind speeds up to 165 mph (265 km/h) and a path as long as 25 miles (40 kms).

Three of those who died in Indiana were in an area near Sullivan, a city that is about a 95-mile drive south-west of Indianapolis. In Madison county, Alabama, one person died and five were injured overnight, officials said.

Some of the latest deaths, bringing the total number of fatalities to 26, were confirmed in McNairy county, Tennessee.

The power outage figures, from the resource site [poweroutage.us](http://poweroutage.us), fluctuated throughout Saturday.

One of the worst-hit areas was [Arkansas](#), where four died in the small city of Wynne, as the storm destroyed homes and people trapped in the debris. The state's governor, Sarah Huckabee Sanders, said that the town – about 50 miles west of Memphis, Tennessee – saw “widespread damage” from a tornado.

City council member Lisa Powell Carter said Wynne was without power and roads were full of debris. The debris consisted of clothing, insulation, roofing paper, toys, splintered furniture and a pickup truck with its windows shattered – scenes of devastation that are becoming more common as intense weather events become more frequent, probably due to climate change.

“I’m sad that my town has been hit so hard,” said Heidi Jenkins, a salon owner. “Our school is gone, my church is gone. I’m sad for all the people who lost their homes.”

In Mississippi's Pontotoc county, one person died and four others were injured, according to the Mississippi emergency management agency.

In Illinois, almost the entire Chicago area was under some type of severe weather warning or watch on Friday night, hours after the National Weather Service warned of a "particularly dangerous situation" in the face of an unusually large outbreak of thunderstorms with the potential to cause hail, damaging wind gusts and strong tornadoes that could move for long distances over the ground.

Meteorologists said conditions on Friday were similar to those a week ago that unleashed the devastating twister that killed at least 21 people and damaged about 2,000 homes in Mississippi.



People sift through debris after the roof of the Apollo Theater in Belvidere, Illinois, collapsed. Photograph: Jessica Bahena Hernandez/Reuters

Late Friday in the town of Belvidere, about 70 miles (113km) north-west of Chicago, one person was killed and were 40 hurt, including two with life-threatening injuries, after the roof of the Apollo Theatre collapsed during a tornado there.

The Belvidere fire department chief, Shawn Schadle, said 260 people were in the venue at the time. He said first responders also rescued someone from

an elevator and had to grapple with downed power lines outside the theatre.

The town's police chief, Shane Woody, described the scene after the collapse as "chaos, absolute chaos".

There were more confirmed twisters in Iowa and grass fires blazed in Oklahoma, where wind gusts of up to 60mph were recorded. In Oklahoma City, people were urged to evacuate their homes and troopers shut down portions of Interstate 35.

The destructive weather came as Joe Biden toured the aftermath of a deadly tornado that struck in Mississippi one week ago. The president had promised the government would help the area recover.

The Little Rock tornado tore first through neighbourhoods in the western part of the city and shredded a small shopping centre. It then crossed the Arkansas river into northern Little Rock and surrounding cities, where widespread damage was reported to homes, businesses and vehicles.

Baptist Health Medical Center-Little Rock officials told KATV in the afternoon that 21 people had checked in there with tornado-caused injuries, including five in critical condition.

The mayor, Frank Scott Jr, who announced that he was requesting assistance from the national guard, tweeted in the evening that property damage was extensive and "we are still responding".

"I'm in a panic trying to get home, but we can't get home," she said. "Wynne is so demolished ... There's houses destroyed, trees down on streets."

Tornadoes continued spawning and touching down in the area into the night.





Tornado damage seen in Sherwood, Arkansas, on Friday. Photograph: Colin Murphey/AP

The police department in the western Tennessee city of Covington said on Facebook that the city was impassable after power lines and trees fell on roads when the storm passed through Friday evening. Authorities in Tipton county, north of Memphis, said a tornado appeared to have touched down near the middle school in Covington and in other locations in the rural county.

Tornados moved through parts of eastern Iowa, with sporadic damage to buildings. Images showed at least one flattened barn and some houses with roofing and siding ripped off.

One tornado veered just west of Iowa City, home to the University of Iowa, which cancelled a watch party at an on-campus arena for the women's basketball Final Four game. Video from KCRG-TV showed toppled power poles and roofs ripped off an apartment building in the suburb of Coralville and significantly damaged homes in the city of Hills.







The prime minister, Sanna Marin, participates in a televised debate with Petteri Orpo, leader of the conservative NCP. Photograph: Lehtikuva/Reuters

[Finland](#)

## Finland election: tight race has Marin's SDP polling behind far right

Long coalition talks may follow Sunday, with conservative NCP not ruling out deal with populist Finns

[Jon Henley](#) *Europe correspondent*  
[@jonhenley](#)

Sat 1 Apr 2023 03.00 EDT

Four years after she became the world's youngest prime minister, Finland's [Sanna Marin](#) faces a battle to keep her job on Sunday in an unpredictable election so tight that it could be won by any of the country's three main parties.

Marin, now 37, took the reins of the Social Democratic party (SDP) – and the Finnish premiership – in 2019 and has since piloted the traditionally non-aligned Nordic country through the Covid pandemic and to the brink of Nato membership.

Along the way her determination to enjoy her private social life has made global headlines, earning her fans who see her as a role model for a new generation of young female leaders, and critics who believe she has behaved inappropriately and irresponsibly.

Amid a looming recession and surging inflation, however, her rightwing opponents have accused her of borrowing excessively and failing to rein in public spending, and a final poll before voting day showed the SDP narrowly trailing its two main rivals.

The poll for the public broadcaster Yle, with a margin of error of two percentage points, put the conservative National Coalition party (NCP) on 19.8%, the far-right, nationalist Finns party on 19.5%, and Marin's Social Democrats on 18.7%.



Riikka Purra, leader of the far-right Finns party, with which several other parties have ruled out forming a coalition. Photograph: Reuters

“At this stage, nobody can know what order the three leading parties will finish in on Sunday,” said Jenni Karimäki, a political historian at the University of Helsinki. “There’s barely a percentage point between them. It could be any of them.”

Karimäki said Marin – who [apologised and took a drug test](#) last year, but also defended her right to party, after photos and video emerged of her drinking and dancing with friends – remained more popular than other leaders and her party.

“It is unusual for the party of the outgoing prime minister to still be doing so well this close to an election and that is at least partly because of her popularity,” Karimäki said. “She’s an asset to the SDP. The prime minister’s party usually suffers more.”

A survey for the Helsingin Sanomat newspaper in December found that 64% of respondents felt Marin had done a “very” or “fairly” good job as prime minister. The approval rating even higher among women, at 69%.

But in a campaign focused on the economy and the cost of living crisis, claims of fiscal irresponsibility and calls for deep cuts to restore the state finances from the opposition leaders Petteri Orpo of the NCP and Riikka Purra of the Finns have hit home.

Marin argues spending on education and public health services is key to economic growth, which she says is what will help [Finland](#) avoid further borrowing. She would prefer to raise taxes than cut spending. The NCP has proposed painful welfare cuts.

The Finns party, which was in government for the first time from 2015 to 2017, says its priorities are to cut immigration from non-EU developing countries, which Purra has described as “harmful”, and postpone carbon neutrality past 2035.

“It’s doing well under a relatively new leader,” said Emilia Palonen, a populism expert at the University of Helsinki. “An ethno-nationalist, anti-migrant, radical right party that has streamlined its ideological line and draws an anti-establishment vote.”

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The leader of the winning party has the first shot at forming a new government and normally becomes prime minister, but coalition talks this time are expected to be long and tortuous with several parties having ruled out options, especially with the Finns.

“A lot looks like it will depend on the scores of the medium and smaller parties,” Palonen said. “Which of them do well enough to make up the numbers for a majority, and whether or not those that do are prepared to strike a deal with the winners.”

Marin’s SDP and two of her current five-party coalition, the Greens and the Left Alliance, have said they will not go into government with the Finns, which Marin earlier this year described as “openly racist”.

Of Marin’s two other partners, the Swedish People’s party has said it is “very unlikely” to partner with the far-right party, while the once-powerful, agrarian Centre party, whose vote has plunged in recent years, will not join any coalition resembling the current one.

The NCP, for its part, has not excluded any combination, saying it will wait to see the results. If it finishes first, it could put together a right-leaning

“blue-black” coalition with the Finns or choose to pursue a broad “blue-red” alliance with the SDP.

As many as 10 parties could win seats in the 200-seat parliament. Polls open at 9am local time on Sunday, and early results from the 31% of voters who cast their ballots in advance will be released at 8pm when polling stations close. Final results should be clear by midnight.

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Police officers escort Andrew Tate – handcuffed to his brother Tristan, right – from the court of appeal after the decision. Photograph: Vadim Ghirdă/AP

[Andrew Tate](#)

## Andrew Tate released from detention and moved to house arrest in Romania

Bucharest court of appeal rules in favour of divisive social media influencer who has spent months in a Romanian jail

[Nadeem Badshah](#) and agencies

Fri 31 Mar 2023 17.42 EDTFirst published on Fri 31 Mar 2023 15.43 EDT

Andrew Tate, the divisive social media influencer who has spent three months in a Romanian jail on suspicion of organised crime and human trafficking, has won an appeal along with his brother to be moved from detention to house arrest.

The Bucharest court of appeal ruled in favour of their appeal, which challenged a judge's decision last week to extend his arrest a fourth time for



30 days.

Tate, 36, a British-US citizen who has 5.4 million Twitter followers, was initially detained in December in Bucharest along with his brother Tristan and two Romanian women, Naghel Georgiana Manuela and Radu Alexandra Luana. They have denied all the accusations.

All four won an appeal on Friday and will remain under house arrest until 29 April, Ramona Bolla, a spokesperson for Romania's anti-organised crime agency, DIICOT, said. None of the four have yet been formally indicted.

Tate's communications director, Mateea Petrescu, told Sky News: "They are not a flight risk and they are not a danger to public safety, therefore [the authorities] have decided to release them under house arrest.

"[It's] just a small step – they are still under investigation

"They are absolutely ecstatic. They kept their spirits [in jail], they are really thrilled and looking forward to being at home – they have kept their optimism throughout."

The former professional kickboxer and self-proclaimed misogynist, who has lived in Romania since 2017, is banned from having an account on Instagram, Facebook and YouTube for violating rules on "dangerous individuals" and breaching hate speech rules. He was suspended from Twitter in 2017 but allowed back in November 2022.

He has repeatedly claimed Romanian prosecutors have no evidence and alleged their case is a political conspiracy designed to silence him.

DIICOT said in a statement after the December arrests that it had identified six victims in the human trafficking case who were allegedly subjected to "acts of physical violence and mental coercion" and sexually exploited by members of the alleged crime group.

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The agency said victims were lured with pretences of love and later intimidated, placed under surveillance and subjected to other control tactics while being coerced into engaging in pornographic acts for the financial gain of the crime group.

In January, Romanian authorities said they had seized goods and money worth almost £3.25m from the influencer's compound including a fleet of luxury cars.

*Associated Press has contributed to this report*

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Searchers look for victims in Akwesasne, Quebec, after the bodies of eight migrants were pulled from a river that straddles the Canada-US border. Photograph: Ryan Remiorz/AP

[Canada](#)

## ‘Heartbreaking’: eight bodies recovered from waters at US-Canada border

Two more people found on Friday as authorities says dozens of Indian and Romanian migrants have been crossing through Mohawk territory

*Guardian staff and agencies*

Fri 31 Mar 2023 22.08 EDTLast modified on Sat 1 Apr 2023 08.50 EDT

The bodies of eight people believed to have died trying to cross from [Canada](#) into the United States have been found in the past two days, authorities said on Friday, including two children.

Six people, described as members of two families of Romanian and Indian descent, were found on Thursday in a marshy area of the St Lawrence River,

which forms part of the Canada-US border. And on Friday, the bodies of two more migrants were found, bringing the death toll to eight, according to police in the Mohawk territory of Akwesasne.

Shawn Dulude, the Mohawk police chief, said authorities were still looking for a man, identified as Casey Oakes, 30, who was last seen on Wednesday operating a boat that was found next to the bodies.

A child discovered on Friday was a Canadian citizen and a member of the Romanian family, Dulude said. The body of an adult woman believed to be an Indian national was also recovered.

“A total of eight bodies have now been recovered from the waters. All are believed to have been attempting illegal entry into the United States from Canada,” Dulude said.

The territory is known for being a transit point for the trafficking of humans and contraband because of its location. And in February, police in Akwesasne reported an increase in human smuggling into the Mohawk territory.

“Our community has been exploited by this,” said Abram Benedict, grand chief of the Mohawk Council of Akwesasne. “This is not the first time that tragedy has happened in our community like this. We’ve had other losses.”

Weather conditions in the area were rough on Wednesday night, said Lee-Ann O’Brien, deputy chief of the Akwesasne Mohawk police service.

“This is a heartbreaking situation,” the Canadian prime minister, Justin Trudeau, said. “We need to understand properly what happened, how it happened and do whatever we can to minimize the chances of this ever happening again.”

Akwesasne police say there have been about 80 people trying to cross illegally into Canada or into the United States through the Mohawk territory since January, and most of them have been of Indian or Romanian descent. In April 2022, six Indian nationals were rescued from a sinking boat in the St Regis River, which runs through Akwesasne Mohawk territory.

Akwesasne straddles the Canada-United States border, and has territory in Quebec, Ontario and New York state.

Tony Jackson, an Akwesasne resident, said the weather on Wednesday, when Oakes was last seen, was calm during the day but later turned rough.

“The east wind around here creates a lot of waves, 5ft tall, maybe taller,” Jackson said. He said he believed Oakes’s boat was less than 6m (20ft) long.

Crossing the river on a little boat with many people on board, “that called for disaster”, he said.

He said he had never heard Oakes talk about transporting migrants. But Jackson said he had personally witnessed groups of migrants crossing through fields with bags in hand and also occasionally seen boats carrying large groups of people across the river.

“A couple of times in one month, you’ll see a couple of them walking down the road with all their bags,” he said.

- *Associated Press contributed to this report*

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Faith leaders pray with President Donald Trump during a rally for evangelical supporters at the King Jesus International Ministry church in Miami on 3 January 2020. Photograph: Lynne Sladky/AP

[Donald Trump](#)

# Will Trump indictment make white evangelicals ditch ‘imperfect vessel’?

White conservative Christians drawn to the ‘Make America Great Again’ slogan have long accepted that the former president is not an ethical paragon



[Adam Gabbatt](#)

[@adamgabbatt](#)

Sat 1 Apr 2023 05.00 EDTLast modified on Sat 1 Apr 2023 12.29 EDT

As Donald Trump blustered his way through his one-term presidency, dogged by [accusations](#) of sexual assault, tainted by [a fascination](#) with authoritarian leaders, and widely reviled for his apparent [fondness](#) for racists, America’s white evangelical Christians largely stood firmly by his side.

Evangelical leaders justified their support for Trump by [comparing him to King Cyrus](#), who in the biblical telling liberated the Jews from Babylonian captivity, despite himself being a Persian ruler who did not believe in the god of Israel.

Trump, like Cyrus, was seen as an “imperfect vessel”, according to evangelicals. That meant God was using him for the greater good – in this case to hand political and cultural power back to white conservative Christians, who had watched in horror as the United States became more diverse and less religious.

But King Cyrus had never been formally indicted in relation to hush money payments to an adult film star. As of Thursday, [Trump has](#), becoming the first former US president to be criminally indicted.

With Trump, who was also the first president to be impeached twice, now expected to be formally charged in the sordid saga, will these white evangelicals finally turn away from their man?

No, said Robert Jones, the president and founder of [Public Religion Research Institute](#) and author of [White Too Long: The Legacy of White Supremacy in American Christianity](#).

“The evidence from the public opinion data suggests that it will not make much difference,” Jones said.

“When we look back at his favorability over time over time, you know, I think there have been any number of these bright lines, where people thought: ‘Oh, this will be the thing that causes white evangelicals to abandon this candidate.’ But we just don’t see that much movement.”

Trump’s favorability with white evangelicals has [hovered at around 70%](#) since 2016, according to PRRI polling, even as an Access Hollywood tape emerged showing Trump [bragging](#) about sexually assaulting women, even as he [failed to denounce](#) white supremacists who had rallied in Charlottesville, and even when the story of [hush money payments to Stormy Daniels first broke](#), in 2018.



Donald Trump examines a Bible during a photo opportunity outside St John's church in Washington on 1 June 2020. Photograph: Patrick Semansky/AP

None of it made any difference. In the 2020 presidential election, 75% of white evangelicals [voted](#) for Trump – hardly a huge drop-off from the 81% who pledged for him in 2016.

A common interpretation of that support has been that evangelicals were making a calculated decision – they “held their nose” and voted for Trump, and in return got conservative supreme court justices who could, [and did](#), overturn the Roe v Wade decision, removing women’s constitutional right to abortion in the US.

But that’s not right, Jones said.

“It was never really about abortion. I think that that line is, frankly, a propaganda line for evangelical leaders to try to justify their support for Trump,” he said. “It was a more palatable reason for them to support Trump than what the data indicate the reasons actually were.”

The data showed that, actually, evangelicals really liked “the whole world view” Trump brought, Jones said. The slogan “Make America Great Again”, found a particular appeal.



“The most powerful word in that mantra was the last one,” Jones said. “What it did is it evoked this powerful sense of nostalgia for an America that many white conservative Christians saw slipping away.”

Jones pointed out that in Trump’s 2016 election campaign, “he was railing against Muslims and immigrants much more than he was railing against abortion”.

“At every rally he was talking about ‘build the wall’ to keep Mexican immigrants out of the US. He was going to ban travel from Muslim-majority countries. I think it was those kinds of appeals that communicated this worldview that the country was rightfully owned by white Christians, and he was going to protect that view of the country.”

John Fea, author of [Believe Me: The Evangelical Road to Donald Trump](#) and a professor of American history at Messiah College, said there was already evidence that Trump’s legal woes will have little impact on his popularity.

“You would think you know that paying hush money to a porn star might rile some white evangelicals,” Fea said. “I would say it will have little impact at all on white evangelicals. We’re already seeing that through their social media feeds and through their statements on Facebook,” Fea said.

“They clearly see this as a witch-hunt. They see this as a politically motivated prosecution. Almost to a man and a woman that’s how they’re interpreting this.”

For decades, white Christians made up a majority of Americans, enjoying the influence that majority allowed – politicians were nearly always white and Christian, as were most top business leaders.

But their numbers began to decline through the 1990s, and by 2017, when PRRI conducted a survey on [“America’s changing religious identity”](#), only 43% of the population identified as non-Hispanic white and Christian, and only 30% as non-Hispanic white and Protestant.

That sense of decline and of waning control over the country, as white evangelicals watched a [black man elected president](#) and same-sex marriage be [legalized](#), continues to contribute to Trump's support among white evangelicals, Jones said.

“Make America Great Again, to white evangelicals means: ‘Make America Christian Again’. Up until this point the Christian right's agenda has always been tied to a candidate that they see as a ‘candidate of character’,” Fea said.

“What happens with Trump is you've got a guy who's going to deliver on all his promises, who's going to fight for you, but he's not a man of integrity. So do you side with integrity of character or do you side with the policies? And we learned in 2016 that the policies are much more important.”

There is some evidence that the abandonment of integrity has gone beyond just the choice of political candidate.

A 2021 [survey](#) by PRRI found that white evangelical Protestants were the religious group most likely to agree with the sentiment: “Because things have gotten so far off track, true American patriots may have to resort to violence in order to save our country.”



People turn to make their feelings known toward the media covering Donald Trump during a ‘Evangelicals for Trump’ campaign event on 3 January 2020

in Miami, Florida. Photograph: Joe Raedle/Getty Images

White evangelicals were also the only religious group to majority oppose undocumented immigrants becoming citizens, while a majority of white evangelicals also believed the 2020 election was stolen from Trump.

The apparently unbreakable bond between evangelicals and Trump is an affinity that has been brewing for a long time, said Kristin Kobes Du Mez, author of [Jesus and John Wayne](#): How White Evangelicals Corrupted a Faith and Fractured a Nation, and a professor of history at Calvin University.

Conservative evangelicals gained power through the 1950s and in the early cold war era, when their views on “traditional” families and cultural behaviors was largely matched by the rest of the country.

But in the 1960s the civil rights movement, the feminist movement and the anti-war movement began to change how Americans thought about each other and about politics. Rather than change with their countrymen and women, evangelicals instead “doubled down” on their Christian conservatism, Du Mez said:

“In a way that is oppositional, against fellow Americans and feeling like they have this special duty, this obligation as a faithful remnant, to restore America, to restore American greatness and to restore kind of traditional morals. That resentment mobilizes evangelicalism for generations.”

The election of Obama, and the changes that happened under his watch, created a “perfect storm”, Du Mez said, and proved a real trigger, as white evangelicals felt they were under threat and in crisis.

“This is where they’ve really started talking about religious liberty, and how they are embattled and they need a champion.

“So it actually works in Trump’s favor that he is not the kind of Sunday school poster boy. He’s not a man who exemplifies traditional Christian moral values. The fact that he doesn’t: his ruthlessness, his crassness, the fact that he will ‘do what needs to be done’. That makes him perfect for the moment.”

The rank and file seem to be on board with Trump, then, but some high-profile evangelical leaders have so far been less enthusiastic about Trump than they were in 2016 and 2020.



Jorge Alfonso, 56, waits in line outside the King Jesus International Ministry church before a Trump campaign event in Miami in 2020. Photograph: Lynne Sladky/AP

Robert Jeffress, the pastor of a Dallas megachurch who campaigned with Trump in 2016 and 2020, has [said](#) he will “stay out” of the Republican primary. Bob Vander Plaats, president and CEO of the Family Leader, [tweeted](#) in November that it was “time to turn the page” on Trump. Everett Piper, a conservative commentator and the former dean of the Christian Oklahoma Wesleyan University, wrote “Trump has to go” in a [2022 column](#).

That has prompted anger from Trump, who in January [said](#) it was “a sign of disloyalty” that faith leaders had yet to publicly back his 2024 campaign, and claimed anti-abortion messaging was responsible for Republicans’ poor performance in the 2022 midterms.

But the support of evangelical bigwigs might not matter, Du Mez said. In 2015 and 2016 key Christian figures were originally horrified by Trump,

before coming round when it became apparent he would win the Republican nomination.

“The leaders were supporting people like Rubio and Cruz. And it didn’t matter. Because Trump’s appeal is a populist appeal,” Du Mez said.

“If the leaders try to redirect that support, they are the ones who are going to be on the outs.”

As Trump prepares to appear in court in New York, and as his legal woes elsewhere [grow](#), one thing can make him rest easy. Whatever he says, and apparently whatever he does, white evangelicals will always have his back.

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Opposition politicians say the private jet trips raise questions over Rishi Sunak's green credentials. Photograph: Stefan Rousseau/AP

[Rishi Sunak](#)

## Sunak took £500,000 worth of private jet trips in less than a fortnight

Lib Dems criticise 'shocking waste of taxpayers' money' as Cabinet Office document reveals PM's flight costs

- [Politics live - latest updates](#)

[Peter Walker](#) *Political correspondent*

[@peterwalker99](#)

Fri 31 Mar 2023 05.54 EDT Last modified on Fri 31 Mar 2023 16.13 EDT

Rishi Sunak took private jet trips costing almost £500,000 in just over a week last year, government data has shown, prompting opposition claims that he is out of touch and unable to lead on green issues.

A [Cabinet Office document](#) detailing overseas prime ministerial travel in the third quarter of 2022 showed No 10 spent just under £108,000 on private jet travel to and from the Cop27 summit in Egypt, flying in on 6 November and returning the next day.

A week after, he set off to the G20 summit in Bali, Indonesia, coming back on 17 November, a round trip that cost more than £340,000.

In December, a day trip to Latvia and Estonia to visit troops cost more than £62,000. The period also covers an official overseas trip during Liz Truss's brief tenure, during which she took a private jet to and from a meeting in Prague that cost almost £40,000.

While Downing Street sometimes has access to an RAF Voyager plane, a mid-air refuelling craft that has had its interior fitted out to carry passengers, all the flights listed involved an Airbus A-321 operated by the charter carrier Titan Airways on behalf of the UK government.

The plane is painted with a union flag tail fin, and is a de facto equivalent to the official aircraft used by some other world leaders.

Wera Hobhouse, the Liberal Democrats' energy and climate spokesperson, said: "This is a shocking waste of taxpayers' money at a time when people are struggling to pay their bills. Yet again this Conservative government is completely out of touch.

"The government can pretend to care about a greener future with their so-called 'green day' but the reality is they are trashing their own promises."

The Cabinet Office costings document shows nearly another £20,000 was spent on other costs for the prime ministers, including accommodation, meals and visas.

This does not include the costs for officials who also went on the trips. The delegations varied in size from the 19 who accompanied Truss to Prague to the 35 who joined Sunak in Bali.

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Some prime ministerial flights, for example those to and from Bali, also carry members of the travelling UK press, who pay for the flights.

A Downing Street spokesperson defended the flights. They said: “The role of the prime minister includes holding vital meetings with world leaders during bilateral visits and summits to discuss issues of international importance – including security, defence and trade.”

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## [Politics live with Andrew Sparrow](#)Politics

# Rishi Sunak sidesteps question about whether having private swimming pool means he's out of touch – as it happened

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## [Business live](#)Business

# UK house price correction ‘has some way to go’ after March falls; eurozone and US inflation falls – as it happened

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UK house prices also fell on a month-on-month basis, dropping 0.8% since February. Photograph: Photimageon/Alamy

[Housing market](#)

## UK house prices fall at fastest annual rate since 2009

Average property drops 3.1% to £257,122 over year to March, says Nationwide

- [Business live updates: UK house prices in biggest fall since 2009](#)

[Kalyeena Makortoff](#)

[@kalyeena](#)

Fri 31 Mar 2023 04.33 EDT Last modified on Fri 31 Mar 2023 13.59 EDT

UK house prices have fallen at their fastest annual rate since the aftermath of the financial crisis in 2009, with experts at [Nationwide](#) warning that the squeeze on household budgets will make it hard to regain momentum soon.

The price of an average property [dropped 3.1% to £257,122 over the year to March](#), according to Nationwide Building Society's house price index. That is compared with a 1.1% annual decline in February.

Prices also fell on a month-on-month basis, dropping 0.8% since February. It marked the seventh monthly decline in a row and leaves prices 4.6% below their most recent peak in August, before [the housing market was rocked](#) by Liz Truss's disastrous mini-budget.

"Since then, activity has remained subdued – the number of mortgages approved for house purchase remained weak at 43,500 cases in February, almost 40% below the level prevailing a year ago," Robert Gardner, Nationwide's chief economist, said.

He said it could take some time before prices rebound, as household finances come under pressure from [rising bills](#) and higher mortgage rates.

"It will be hard for the market to regain much momentum in the near term since consumer confidence remains weak and household budgets remain under pressure from high inflation," Gardner said. "Housing affordability also remains stretched, where mortgage rates remain well above the lows prevailing at this point last year."

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However, there could be some hope on the horizon, as fresh data released on Friday morning showed the [UK avoided a recession at the end of last year](#), with national output rising 0.1% in the final three months of 2022. That is compared with initial estimates of no growth in GDP over the period, according to the Office for National Statistics data.

Nationwide said all regions across the UK still experienced a slowdown in house prices in the first three months of the year, with most recording small annual declines. Scotland remained hardest hit by widespread house price weakness, with prices falling 3.1% in the first quarter compared with a year earlier. The West Midlands, meanwhile, was the strongest-performing region, experiencing a 1.4% increase in the first quarter.

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However, a wider north-south divide has emerged. While prices in northern England were flat, prices in southern England experienced a 1.1% decline. That decline was seen in areas including the south-west, outer south-east, outer metropolitan, London and East Anglia.

Some estate agents are predicting an uptick by Easter, saying lower prices could entice buyers. “March’s fall in house prices is not unexpected but all signs point to this motivating buyers as the housing market starts gearing up for the traditionally busy Easter period,” said Nicky Stevenson, the managing director at the national estate agent group Fine & Country.

“An early indication came from the Bank of England this week as mortgage approvals in February rose for the first time in six months. There is no reason to think this is a blip either, as despite the latest base rate rise from the Bank of England, mortgage lenders are still cutting their rates – and this will only provide further encouragement that now is a good time to move home.”

| [Section menu](#) | [Main menu](#) |



The UK construction sector grew by 1.3% in the final quarter of 2022.  
Photograph: Deborah Vernon/Alamy

[Economic growth \(GDP\)](#)

## UK firms report surge in orders amid signs of economic recovery

After UK narrowly misses recession IoD reports rise in business demand, confidence, hiring and investment in March

[Larry Elliott](#) *Economics editor*

Fri 31 Mar 2023 19.02 EDT First published on Fri 31 Mar 2023 03.36 EDT

Britain's businesses are reporting a spring surge in order books, boosting hopes that the economy may finally be recovering after flirting with recession late last year.

After official figures showing the UK performed slightly more strongly than originally thought towards the end of 2022, the Institute of Directors said



there had been an improvement in demand, confidence, hiring and investment intentions in March.

The IoD said its survey of more than 900 firms – which showed a pick up in growth across all sectors – suggested the economy would confound predictions in the budget two weeks ago that output would fall in the first three months of 2023.

Kitty Ussher, chief economist at the Institute of Directors, said: “The data coming from our members is strongly suggestive of growth across all sectors in recent weeks. In particular, the strengthening of order books since the end of last year points to an economy performing better in the first quarter than was anticipated as recently as the March budget.”

Half of all firms (50%) reported in March that their order books were healthier than at the end of 2022, with 22% saying they were weaker. The balance of +28 was up from +8 in November 2022 and -2 in September 2022. The IoD said net positive scores are recorded in all parts of the economy, including consumer-facing sectors and manufacturing.

Ussher said: “While this is undoubtedly good news, strong demand also means that it may take longer than many forecasters currently expect for inflation to come within sight of the Bank of England’s target any time soon.” Britain’s annual inflation rate rose from 10.1% to 10.4% in February, while figures for the 20-country eurozone for March released on Friday showed [a fall from 8.5% to 6.9%](#).

The [Office for National Statistics](#) confirmed on Friday the economy narrowly avoided being in technical recession – two successive quarters of negative growth – in the second half of 2022.

The ONS said it now thought the economy shrank by 0.1% rather than 0.2% between July and September and grew by 0.1% in the final quarter rather than remaining flat.

Despite fears that a combination of high inflation, strikes and financial turmoil would lead to falling output, builders, manufacturers and the

telecoms sector all recorded faster growth than initially estimated.

Government help with energy bills underpinned consumer spending in the fourth quarter but business investment – which had previously been estimated to have grown by almost 5% – fell slightly.

Despite the revisions, ONS data shows the economy has been broadly flat since early 2022, growing by 0.1% in each of the second and fourth quarters and contracting by 0.1% in the third quarter. The economy remains smaller than it was in late 2019 before the onset of the Covid-19 pandemic, although by 0.6% rather than the 0.8% previously estimated.

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Darren Morgan, an ONS director of economic statistics, said: “The economy performed a little more strongly in the latter half of last year than previously estimated, with later data showing telecommunications, construction and manufacturing all faring better than initially thought in the latest quarter.

“Households saved more in the last quarter, with their finances boosted by the government’s energy bill support scheme.”

Analysts said the economy would continue to struggle in the months ahead against a backdrop of rising borrowing costs and the end of government

support for energy bills.

Ruth Gregory, of Capital [Economics](#), said: “The upward revision to real GDP growth in Q3 and Q4 of last year suggests that high inflation took a slightly smaller toll on the economy than we previously thought. But with around two-thirds of the drag on real activity from higher rates yet to be felt, we still think the economy will slip into a recession this year.”

Gabriella Dickens, of Pantheon Macroeconomics, said she was pencilling in declines of 0.1% in both of the first two quarters of 2023. “The economy likely will continue to flatline in the first half of this year,” she said.

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People protest over rising energy bills in February last year. Photograph: Chris J Ratcliffe/Getty Images

### Household bills

## Rising bills and tax hikes to make UK families hundreds of pounds worse off

Study commissioned by Guardian details scale of hit to household finances from April

- [‘UK national price hike day’: what to expect](#)
- [‘We live from month to month’: people brace for April bill rises](#)

[Phillip Inman](#) and [Rupert Jones](#)

Fri 31 Mar 2023 01.00 EDT Last modified on Fri 31 Mar 2023 01.43 EDT

A wave of rising bills and tax hikes coming into effect in April will leave a family on a £50,000 annual income almost £700 a year worse off, according to a study of the damaging effects of the cost of living crisis.

Unions have warned that an increase in the minimum wage will not be enough to offset the pressure on hard-pressed families. Households at the bottom of the income scale will face the hardest squeeze relatively, according a study by the CEBR economic consultancy undertaken for the Guardian.

It details how bills for dental work, prescriptions, water, broadband and car tax will jump as government departments and regulated companies are allowed to impose inflation-busting rises. Average council tax bills will increase by £99 from 1 April, topping £2,000 for the first time.

The hikes come as households face an unprecedented squeeze on their finances, as wage growth in the UK lags behind headline inflation of 10.4%.

It emerged this week that supermarket price inflation in the UK had [hit another record high](#) of 17.5%, lifting the average annual household grocery bill by £837 to £5,617.

Broadband and mobile phone customers face big “mid-contract” increases – in many cases of between 14% and 17% – in their monthly bills from April.

BT, TalkTalk, Three and Vodafone are among the big telecoms suppliers that are contractually allowed to increase their bills in line with one of the December, January or February official inflation rates, plus a further 3% to 3.9% on top.

For millions of O2 and Virgin Mobile customers, it means an [inflation-busting increase of up to 17.3%](#) in their bills for making calls, sending texts and using data.

“Millions of people will now have to stomach inflation-busting price hikes on their mobile and broadband contracts, totalling an average of almost £90 more a year,” said Matthew Upton, the director of policy at Citizens Advice. “We called on these firms to support their customers during this uniquely challenging time, but they didn’t listen. Instead, they’re pushing ahead.”

The scale of the cut in disposable incomes is magnified by a freeze on income tax thresholds, which will drag hundreds of thousands of people into

higher tax bands over the next year.

Tax bands usually rise in line with inflation, but the chancellor, Jeremy Hunt, imposed a five-year moratorium in his March budget on further increases from April.

The analysis by the CEBR examined the extra costs faced by three typical households with incomes at the tax thresholds – £12,570, £50,270 and £125,140.

Those with incomes of £12,570 a year will see their tax and bills increase by a minimum of £29 a month, or £348 a year. Households with an income of £50,270 are facing a £684 rise, while those with a £125,140 income will be in for higher annual costs of £936.

Meanwhile, the £400 energy bills discount that households enjoyed over the winter ends in April – so they will in effect lose out on up to £67 a month.

However, households will be spared a separate £500 increase to annual energy bills that was originally planned from 1 April – from 2,500 to £3,000 a year – after the government [scrapped plans](#) to increase the energy price guarantee.

“Our estimates suggest that monthly disposable incomes are expected to drop by £29, £57 and £78 respectively for each of the three households from March 2023 to April 2023,” said Pushpin Singh, a CEBR economist.

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“These are due to the following: fiscal drag from fixed income tax thresholds, higher spending on essentials including food and water, an uptick in council tax, along with the withdrawal of household energy support in the form of the energy bills support scheme.”

Singh said there would be some respite for households later this year and into next year from “an expected easing in inflation, not least due to a purported reduction in energy bills come July”.

The national minimum wage will rise by nearly 10% to £10.42 for workers aged 23 and over in April, but the TUC said the £67-a-month cut in energy bills support combined with soaring food prices meant families would not feel better off.

“Tomorrow’s below-inflation increase to the minimum wage is not going to lift the pressure on hard-pressed families,” said Paul Nowak, the TUC general secretary. “Inflation may fall over the next year. But make no mistake, the cost of living nightmare is far from over. Millions are still living wage packet to wage packet.”

He said the minimum wage should be lifted to £15 an hour “as soon as possible”.

As well as the April bill increases, households are coming under further pressure from higher rental and mortgage costs. Higher mortgage rates are expected to hit about 1.5m households this year, adding an extra £250 a month, or £3,000 a year, to their payments on a typical mortgage.

Labour has calculated separately that the cost of everyday essentials has gone up by nearly £3,500 over the last three years, citing data from the Office for National Statistics.

The shadow chancellor, Rachel Reeves, said the figures were “a mark of 13 years of Tory failure that have left families worse off, public services on their knees and brilliant British businesses on the brink”.

Labour said that since December 2019, housing, fuel and power costs had gone up by £1,480, while food and non-alcoholic drinks had increased by £700. Transport costs were up £800, household goods and services had risen by £360, and clothing and footwear costs had gone up by £140.

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| [Section menu](#) | [Main menu](#) |



## 2023.03.31 - Spotlight

- ['We live from month to month' People in UK brace for bill rises](#)
- [Explainer What to expect from 'UK national price hike day'](#)
- [Experience I have the biggest mouth in the world](#)
- ['We used to chat as we walked our dogs' Readers on the Paul O'Grady they knew and adored](#)



A model poses as someone working how to play a series of household bills.  
Photograph: Andrew Aitchison/Corbis/Getty Images

### Household bills

## **‘We live from month to month’: people in UK brace for April’s bill rises**

Five readers tell of how they will be affected by jump in council tax, energy, water and telecoms costs

- [Rising bills and tax hikes to make UK families hundreds of pounds worse off](#)
- [‘UK national price hike day’: what to expect and how to lessen blow](#)

[Clea Skopeliti](#) and [Jedidajah Otte](#)

Fri 31 Mar 2023 01.00 EDTLast modified on Fri 31 Mar 2023 01.48 EDT

Households will be hit with a spate of bill hikes from April, with councils, water suppliers and telecoms companies among those raising their prices.

While the government's energy price guarantee (EPG) will remain fixed until the end of June, the start of April also means the conclusion of the £400 energy bills support scheme (EBSS). Businesses will also no longer receive a discounted rate, leaving many in a financially perilous position.

Here, five people tell us how they will be affected by rising bills.

## **Rising council tax: 'Where does it end?'**

Brigitte Taylor, 45, a supermarket worker from Horsham, West Sussex, is facing a council tax rise on 1 April of 5%, the maximum a local authority is allowed to increase the charges by without consulting residents.

"It'll be £207 per month, a monthly rise of £10. Our household budget is already tight. What happens next year if it goes up again? Where does it end?" she says.

"We do meal planning, we try to be energy efficient, but finding extra money in our budget is getting harder and harder. We live from month to month. Eventually, people have to start taking money out of their food and general living allowance, which is what we're doing now. My husband works full-time, I already work 16 hours overtime a week so we can live, taking me to 32 in total. I can't work more than that as we have school age children. I get minimum wage."

Like many people across the country, Taylor feels the higher council tax charges are not justified, given various local public services are being scaled back.

"Despite the rise of our council tax, services here have been cut, especially for children and young people. I just don't feel that we are getting our money's worth."

## **Water bills: 'There's not much wriggle room'**



Laura's Thames Water bill has risen from £382 to £427 a year. Photograph: Laura

Laura, a performance analyst, was prepared for the rises to her energy and council tax bills. But the increase to her water bill came as a shock. "I don't understand why this bill has increased by so much compared with other years," says the 39-year-old from Surrey. "I don't understand the justification behind it."

Her annual Thames Water bill has risen from £382 to £427. She says the rise comes against a backdrop of bill hikes and rising costs across the board, which have also led her to rely more on her credit card.

Laura pays her water bill annually after receiving her yearly work bonus, and is considering whether to prioritise reducing her credit card balance, paying the water bill in full or putting money into her depleted savings. "There's not much wriggle room, and I'm afraid any decision I take will impact my monthly ability to reach the next payday," she says. "I haven't experienced [this] since I was on minimum wage in my twenties."

"What scares me is if I have an extra expense or lose my job I no longer have savings for that. I [would] have problems paying my mortgage and

bills from literally a month or two. Every time something increases, it adds to that.”

## **Energy bills: ‘It’s a postcode lottery’**



Bill Barnes’s annual energy costs are projected to rise from £1,324 to £2,309. Photograph: Bill Barnes

Despite the continuation of the EPG, Bill Barnes, 67, is facing a significant rise in bills. He was “shocked” by how much his bill was expected to increase: his home in Derbyshire is all-electric, and from 1 April his annual energy costs are projected to rise from £1,324 to £2,309, his provider EDF informed him.

This is due to a rise in daily standing charges, and what Barnes terms the “postcode lottery” surrounding rates, as unit prices vary by region. While the unit day rate for his area is falling, his household, which is on the Economy 7 tariff, will see the night rate rise from 5.88p to 16.93p per kilowatt hour. As his home uses storage heaters, which make the most of off-peak electricity, the rise in his bill is significant.

Barnes says the end of the EBSS has been “well trailed” but that he is “alarmed” by the price rise from EDF. “I’ve tried to complain about the

principle,” he says. “They don’t understand that it’s a lot on top of losing the £400.”

## **Telecoms rises: ‘It’s a ridiculous level of increase’**



Grahame Sturges’ broadband bill has risen from £26 a month to £33.  
Photograph: Grahame Sturges

Grahame Sturges lives in the Vale of Glamorgan, south Wales, and recently cancelled his broadband contract with Virgin Media after it announced his bill would be rising from £26 a month to £33.

“I thought they were just jumping on the bandwagon – I don’t see why they’re bumping the price up so much, other than that others are doing it too. It’s just an opportunistic rise, I think,” says the 75-year-old.

Sturges was able to quit the contract before the price rise was to come into force (1 May), and has switched to BT for broadband. He will be paying £30 a month on this contract, fixed for two years. “I’ll review the situation then,” he adds.

The rise also prompted Sturges to ditch his BT landline, which was setting him back £45 a month, and rely on his mobile phone instead.

He believes Ofcom should do more to shield customers. “I don’t know how the regulator can sit there and allow companies to charge RPI +3.9%. They’re there to protect consumers – it’s a ridiculous level of increase.”

## **Business energy bills: ‘These astronomical prices are not sustainable’**



Ash Ali says: ‘I hear the government wants more businesses to invest. Unfortunately, it does not seem this way.’ Photograph: Ash Ali

Ash Ali, the managing director of a health club in Rustington, West Sussex, is worried the end of the government’s energy support could bankrupt the club. “These astronomical prices are not sustainable,” says the 51-year-old. “Business is stronger than before the pandemic, but it’s just not enough [with] the energy rises..”

He says the end of the scheme will take the business “into negative territory again”.

The club’s energy costs have spiralled. Ali was paying about £4,000 to £5,000 a month for gas to Crown Gas & Power until his contract ended last October. At a time of high prices, he then agreed to a short-term contract

until March with Sefe Energy. His latest monthly bill was about £23,000, and he is in hefty arrears.

“Survival depends on what contract I can get after this,” he says. “We need time to settle but are getting penalised for not paying on time, and our credit is being affected.”

After the government support ends, he expects his electricity bill from British Gas to jump from the discounted rate of about £20,560 this month, to more than £30,000 in April.

“I hear the government wants more businesses to invest. Unfortunately, it does not seem this way; if we fail, we’ll have 70 plus staff out of jobs and 2,500 members without a health club.”

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With water bills, now may be the time to find out if you could save money by getting a meter. Photograph: Jacob King/PA

[Household bills](#)

[Explainer](#)

## ‘UK national price hike day’: what to expect and how to lessen blow

From phone and broadband contracts to council tax to energy bills, a raft of increases come into effect in April

- [Rising bills and tax hikes to make UK families hundreds of pounds worse off](#)
- [‘We live from month to month’: people brace for April bill rises](#)

[Rupert Jones](#), [Miles Brignall](#) and [Jess Clark](#)

Fri 31 Mar 2023 01.00 EDT Last modified on Fri 31 Mar 2023 10.08 EDT

The squeeze on household budgets will increase from this weekend when a raft of price and bill hikes take effect. These concern everything from mobile phone contracts and council tax to the cost of stamps, NHS prescriptions and going to the dentist.

Saturday, when many of the increases come into effect, has been described as “national price hike day”, while the fact that some of the increases come in over the next few weeks has led to some commentators labelling next month “awful April”.

## **What’s happening?**

UK consumers always face a wave of higher costs on or around 1 April, as that is the month when many official bodies and private firms increase their fees and annual bills. But this year things are different for two reasons.

Some of these latest increases are the biggest for decades, or ever: some mobile phone customers are being hit with increases of up to 17.3%. The problem is that many of these bills and costs are linked to the official inflation rate, which has been running at [10%-plus in recent months](#). Some firms such as telecoms companies use consumer price inflation or retail price inflation, and then add a further amount on top – often 3.9%.

And of course, people’s finances have already taken a battering as a result of much higher energy, mortgage/rent, food and other bills, so these hikes are arguably going to cause even more pain than usual.

## **Can I avoid some of these rises?**

In some cases, yes. When it comes to broadband and mobile deals, if you are “in contract” – perhaps you signed up to a new tariff within the last year or two – the price rise is likely to be part of that, and in most cases this will mean you are not able to cancel penalty-free, according to Martin Lewis’s [MoneySavingExpert](#) website. It says the two main exceptions are Sky broadband and home phone packages, and Virgin Media broadband, home phone and TV.

If you are not tied into a contract or are with a supplier that allows you to leave penalty-free – and that applies to millions of people – now could be a good time to switch to a new provider or renegotiate a new deal. Do not be afraid to haggle with your existing provider, as they will often pull out a better deal if you say you are leaving.

It is possible that the regulator Ofcom will intervene at some point to give people [greater certainty and clarity](#) from the outset about the prices they will pay, but don't hold your breath.

## **What about some of the other costs?**

NHS dental charges do not increase until 24 April, so if you need to visit the dentist, you may want to try to get an appointment very soon. Meanwhile, if you send a lot of letters, you may want to bulk-buy stamps now before the 3 April price hike.

On council tax, it is worth looking at whether you are entitled to a discount. Households where everyone is a full-time student do not have to pay, and people who live on their own can pay a lower amount. You can also double-check whether your property is in the correct band. If it should be lower, you will get a reduced bill.

With water bills, now may be the time to find out if you could save money by getting a meter.

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## **What sort of help is available?**

There is some help available for some of the big costs that people are facing. On energy bills, the [government has announced](#) a £900 cash boost for more than 8 million eligible means-tested benefits claimants, including people on universal credit, pension credit and tax credits. This will be paid into bank accounts in three instalments. There will also be a separate £150 for more than 6 million disabled people, which is to be paid in the summer, and £300 for more than 8 million pensioners during next winter.

Council tax is – along with energy bills and a mortgage – a “priority debt”, where the consequences of falling behind can be worse than with other debts. However, every council has a scheme to help people manage their payments. Get in touch and see if it is possible to work out a new payment plan before you fall behind. Some people on certain benefits or a low income may be able to get their bill reduced to zero, says the government’s [MoneyHelper](#) website.

With water bills, the industry body Water UK said recently that support for low-income households was being [increased to its highest level ever](#). More than 1m households receive help, and this is being increased to 1.2m over the coming months.

## **Is there any good news?**

It could have been worse. Average annual energy bills are not going up by £500 – from £2,500 to £3,000 a year – as originally planned from 1 April, after a [recent government U-turn](#). And energy costs look likely to come down from the summer.

Also, high inflation does at least mean that payments and benefits linked to one of the official rates are going up by more than usual, too. There are 5.9

million people on universal credit, and their payments will go up by 10.1% from April.

The 12.6 million people who receive the basic or new state pension are also getting 10.1%. That lifts the new full amounts to £156.20 a week (up from £141.85) and £203.85 (up from £185.15) respectively.

Meanwhile, about 2.5 million workers receive the national living wage or the national minimum wage, and these are typically going up by 9.7%.

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| [Section menu](#) | [Main menu](#) |



Samantha Ramsdell: ‘I like to embrace my weirdness.’ Photograph: Ben Zucker/The Guardian

[ExperienceLife and style](#)

## Experience: I have the biggest mouth in the world

If you’re wondering whether I can fit a whole apple in my mouth – yes, I can

*Samantha Ramsdell*

Fri 31 Mar 2023 05.00 EDTLast modified on Fri 31 Mar 2023 11.44 EDT

As a little girl, I used to pore over the Guinness Book of Records every Christmas. My family and I would spend Christmas Day looking at all the brilliant people who were using their unusual quirks and talents for good – whether that involved raising awareness, making people laugh or spreading the idea that “you are enough as you are”. I was in awe.

Flicking through pages of people with special skills and talents was very inspiring to me. I loved seeing so many people celebrated for their gifts and was hopeful that, one day, I would be too. I grew up wanting to become an entertainer. Before the pandemic, I had a day job in medical sales and spent my evenings showing up to acting and singing auditions or comedy open-mic nights. I was also in a band and sang at weddings.

Many other creatives will understand the hustle. While I have always admired people who love their day jobs, I knew that performing, not medical sales, was my dream job. Though in-person opportunities stalled during the Covid-19 lockdowns, [TikTok](#) started to really blow up. I thought it offered a good opportunity to showcase my comedy skills. I started filming and sharing sketches.

A lot of people found my facial expressions and my big mouth really funny, and I was happy I could offer them light relief in a difficult time. My account grew pretty quickly – my videos were short and silly. They seemed to be the fun, easy watch that people were craving.

I made something I always considered odd and ugly about myself into one of the best things about me

I had a lot of time to post during lockdown, and I began getting thousands more followers. People started asking me what my mouth measurements were, tagging the Guinness World Records account. By winter that year, Guinness had got in touch with me and confirmed that I was, in fact, the woman with the [biggest mouth in the world](#) – it stretches to 6.52cm tall.

My mouth used to make me feel very self-conscious and insecure growing up. “Pitbull” or “frog” were the kind of names I was called when I was younger. When I was trying to find work as an entertainer, people would always tell me I was “too much” or tell me to show “less mouth”. It really hurt.

The title helped me accept and embrace my mouth. I started making more videos of me doing silly things like trying to fit supersized sandwiches in my

mouth. I tried it with a huge bean burrito – it just exploded when I tried to cram it all in. From then on, I stuck to foods that weren't going to fall apart. Pastries are good.

And if you're wondering whether I can fit a whole apple in my mouth – yes, I can. I don't think I'd be winning any competitive eating matches anytime soon, though. That takes a different skill.

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The popularity of my online videos has surpassed all my expectations. Some of my videos now reach up to 75m views. I was over the moon when I was able to quit my day job to follow my passion for comedy full-time. That was always my dream and it's now a reality. My family were constantly saying “this is insane” when I started, but I don't think anyone was surprised that I stuck at it. They are hugely supportive.

Embracing my big mouth has helped me to be true to myself and to care less about what other people think. People are mainly really supportive and I get lots of messages from people about how I inspire them to be their true selves. I think that when you learn to truly accept yourself, others gravitate towards your confidence. I always think: why live life as a smaller version of yourself?



I like to embrace my weirdness. Your insecurity can also be your superpower. I made something I always considered odd and ugly about myself into one of the best things about me, and I hope others can see that in themselves too. If I can help people escape the craziness of the world, then I'm happy to do that, one large bite of a sandwich at a time.

As told to Elizabeth McCafferty

Do you have an experience to share? Email [experience@theguardian.com](mailto:experience@theguardian.com)

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| [Section menu](#) | [Main menu](#) |

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Paul O'Grady as Lily Savage as Widow Twankey in 2012. Photograph: Graham Whitby Boot/Allstar

[Paul O'Grady](#)

**‘We used to chat as we walked our dogs.  
He was lovely!’ Readers on the Paul**

# O'Grady they knew and adored

Friendly and fiery, compassionate and uncompromising, O'Grady and his alter ego Lily Savage made friends wherever they went. Readers remember the groundbreaking, down-to-earth comedian

[\*Guardian readers\*](#)

Fri 31 Mar 2023 01.00 EDTLast modified on Fri 31 Mar 2023 01.34 EDT

When Paul O'Grady died [on Wednesday at the age of 67](#), tributes poured in from everywhere, from [writers](#), [entertainers](#), [politicians](#) and anyone affected by his life and work.

Born to a working-class Irish family in Wirral, O'Grady was a care worker before making a name for himself on the London gay scene in the 1980s with his drag persona, Lily Savage. In the years after, O'Grady became a household name, known for his political and animal rights activism as well as his warmth and quick wit.

Here, five readers share their memories and tributes.

**‘He gave my mum this tip for bags under her eyes: use Preparation H’**



Jeff and his mum. Photograph: Jeff Davies

My mum was very supportive of me. It was 1987 and I said: “You need to come and see what I get up to on a Sunday afternoon.” I took her to the Royal Vauxhall Tavern. She was a diminutive lady, so when we went in she hung on to me – this was new territory to her – and all she could see was 500 gay men crammed in to a very small place to see Lily Savage. She had no idea what was going on.

She absolutely loved it. When Paul finished he came to the front and started talking to her. They got on so well. He gave my mum this tip for bags under her eyes: use Preparation H. My mum used it for the rest of her life. We came back to the tavern to see Lily a few more times. My mum became a massive fan.

The impact he had on me was: be you. Don’t take any crap from people that tell you that you can’t be you. **Jeff Davies, 62, education charity worker**

## **‘He was a thoroughly decent man’**

I met him once while working on a comedy talent show that was recording in Edinburgh. After the show, Paul, the compere, ushered me and my brother into the post-show drinks, whether we were entitled to be there or not. I’ve

not had that experience with any other celebrity. He was a thoroughly decent man. **Peter Wrench, London, freelance TV camera operator**

**‘There is no way I would have done drag if Lily Savage hadn’t existed’**



‘She was fierce, fearless and brave’ ... Marilyn on Lily Savage.

I grew up in Buxton, a small, conservative market town. The first time I saw drag, I was four or five and Lily Savage was hosting The Big Breakfast. I’ve gone on to do drag myself for the past 12 years.

There is no way I would have done it if Lily Savage hadn’t existed. She was fierce, fearless and brave in a way that I don’t think I could be at the time.

Out of drag, Paul influenced me, too. When the student riots occurred, I saw lots of really good friends who had got swept up in it having their lives ruined. I’ll always remember that the one voice who was basically saying “what they did was great” was Paul O’Grady.

I think there’s a real sanitisation in the way Paul’s legacy has been described. His legacy was being a drag queen socialist on television. I think it’s really important that we memorialise him accurately.

I struggle to find the words to explain how much Lily did for us drag queens. She changed this country. She changed the world. **Marilyn, 30, drag queen**

Looking back at the life and career of Paul O'Grady – video obituary

**‘He could have easily made a career being a serious actor’**

Not only was Paul an incredibly kind, funny and generous man, he was also a very fine actor. I first met him when he appeared alongside me on *The Bill* and I just loved him. I thought he was a great guy; everyone did. He could have easily made a career being a serious actor if he wanted to.

He was playing Roxanne, a [character described as a] transvestite prostitute, which back in the late 1980s was pretty groundbreaking on a fairly serious drama. His performance was brave and touching. It was a breakthrough moment for him.

I met him lots of times after that and he just always made you feel better. **Trudie Goodwin, 71, actor who played June Ackland in The Bill**

**‘He seemed a lovely person with no airs and graces’**

In the early 00s, I regularly took an early morning walk with my dog. I used to occasionally meet another walker with his two dogs. We’d chat about this and that.

I’m not a telly watcher, so I did not have a clue that the dog walker was Paul O’Grady, although he seemed vaguely familiar to me. After one of our pleasant encounters, I described him to my son who was visiting. “Lily Savage!” he said. “Oh yes, of course I’ve heard of her!” I said. He seemed like a lovely person with no airs and graces. **Teresa Bergin, 67, Cheshire**

| [Section menu](#) | [Main menu](#) |

## 2023.03.31 - Opinion

- It's tempting for Starmer to fall back on the Blair playbook – what are the risks?
- This gung-ho government says we have nothing to fear from AI. Are you scared yet?
- The war in Ukraine reminds us what the EU is for. But even bigger challenges lie ahead
- Trump's indictment will probably hurt him with the electorate. But how much?





Keir Starmer launches Labour's local election campaign in Swindon on Thursday. Photograph: Leon Neal/Getty Images

[Opinion](#)[Keir Starmer](#)

# It's tempting for Starmer to fall back on the Blair playbook – what are the risks?

[Andy Beckett](#)



The former Labour leader's appeal was his personality, but with the country on the rocks voters may overlook Starmer's lack of charisma

Fri 31 Mar 2023 03.00 EDTLast modified on Fri 31 Mar 2023 23.20 EDT

Tony Blair's triumphant time as opposition leader was more than 25 years and several political eras ago. But it still casts a huge shadow over our politics. Tories fear a repeat of the 1997 election. Pollsters try to work out whether such a rare and pivotal event could soon happen again. Centre-left voters of a certain age remember the mid-90s as a time of steadily growing hope and then pure elation, before Labour politics gradually went back to its usual divisions and disappointments.

But perhaps the people most fixated by Blair are [Keir Starmer](#) and his inner circle. In his use of former Blair speechwriters such as Philip Collins and Peter Hyman; of old Blair lines such as "Labour is on your side"; former

New Labour ministers as advisers, including Blair himself; New Labour-style focus groups and charm offensives towards business; revived Blairite policies such as the asbo; and former New Labour strategists, spin doctors, party bureaucrats, fundraisers and donors. In all these ways, Starmer's leadership often feels like a tribute to a form of politics many voters under 40 won't even remember.

Despite the passing of so much time, there are arguments in favour of this approach. New [Labour](#) in the 90s remains one of the best examples of a British opposition harrying a tired government, then converting handsome opinion poll leads into actual power. And given how few new tactical or policy ideas the Labour right has come up with since Blair's leadership began to stall in the early 00s, perhaps Starmer has little option but to rummage around in the rusty New Labour toolbox. Judging by the unspectacular but steady improvement in his and Labour's popularity and performance over the past 18 months, the old tools still work.

Yet there are also risks in this return to Blairism. One is that it provides Starmer's critics on both the left and the right with further evidence of what they see as his inauthenticity. In his eight-year Commons career, he has already been a shadow minister under Jeremy Corbyn, a leadership candidate who promised to unite the party, and a leader who effectively expelled his predecessor from Labour in parliament despite Corbyn's 40 years of dedication to his constituency and 10 consecutive large local majorities.

Starmer's defenders say he has been on a journey. His critics say he has made a career, as a lawyer as well as a politician, by regularly discarding his principles. In that context, being so transparently influenced by Blair – who started out as a member of the Labour Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament (CND) and ended up palling around with macho rightwingers such as George W Bush and Silvio Berlusconi – feels an appropriate choice, but possibly an unwise one.



‘Tony Blair was a compelling speaker, especially in opposition.’  
Photograph: Daniel Leal/AFP/Getty Images

Another potential problem with Starmer borrowing from Blair is that it highlights their different styles and abilities. Blair was a compelling speaker, especially in opposition, even when saying very little, with a youthful intensity, well-timed jokes and a command of rhythm, volume and dramatic repetition. Despite having been a successful barrister, as a politician Starmer does not make you listen, not even when he is saying something significant. He is 60 – almost 20 years older than Blair when he became leader – and there is a heaviness about him, from decades of absorbing crucial facts for court and holding big responsibilities such as leading the Crown Prosecution Service, an experience about which he regularly reminds us. Unlike Blair in his early years as leader, with his seductive zest and confidence, Starmer rarely makes being a politician look like much fun.

Then again, these are less fun times. In the 90s, Blair was offering to rule a country that had increased poverty and run down public services but also a rapidly growing economy, a popular culture in an expansive phase, with a boom in clubbing and British pop, and with few foreign enemies, thanks to the lull after the cold war. Today, Starmer faces a state and society with wider and deeper problems and a Tory government that will leave him with very little to build on, if he wins power. It’s striking that while Blair admired

Thatcher – Britain “needed” her “industrial and economic reforms”, he writes in his memoirs – Starmer has almost nothing good to say about the past 13 years of Conservative rule. Brexit is the one Tory achievement he accepts, and then only for quite cynical electoral reasons.

In his speeches, Starmer sometimes uses language and arguments that, back in the 90s, New Labour would have regarded as too divisive, even faintly Marxist. “Britain won’t be better off just because we make the rich richer,” he said at last year’s Labour conference. In February, he called for “a [new model for economic growth](#) ... where wealth is created everywhere, by everyone, for everyone”. The thought of his centrist speechwriters and other former New Labour operatives having to come up with, or at least accept and promote, these leftwing passages is quite gratifying. So is all Starmer’s talk about “working people” – a phrase Blair rarely used. In a typically cautious, half-disguised way, class and anti-elitism have become important in Starmer’s plan for the country, as they were more openly in Corbyn’s. Given a government that, even by Tory standards, is blatantly being run by and for the wealthy, it’s about time.

Will Starmer’s stern, semi-egalitarian politics resonate enough at the election and afterwards? The electorate’s mood is particularly hard to predict now, with inflation still high but likely to fall, some strikes called off but others continuing, and a winter of crisis giving way to an unsettled spring of optimistic Rishi Sunak solutions and erratic economic trends.

One danger for Starmer may be seeming too downbeat, just as the Tory voters he needs – often middle-aged or retired homeowners who are not that exposed to Britain’s long-term problems – become convinced by the government that things can only get better. [New Labour’s slogan](#) could be put to Conservative uses.

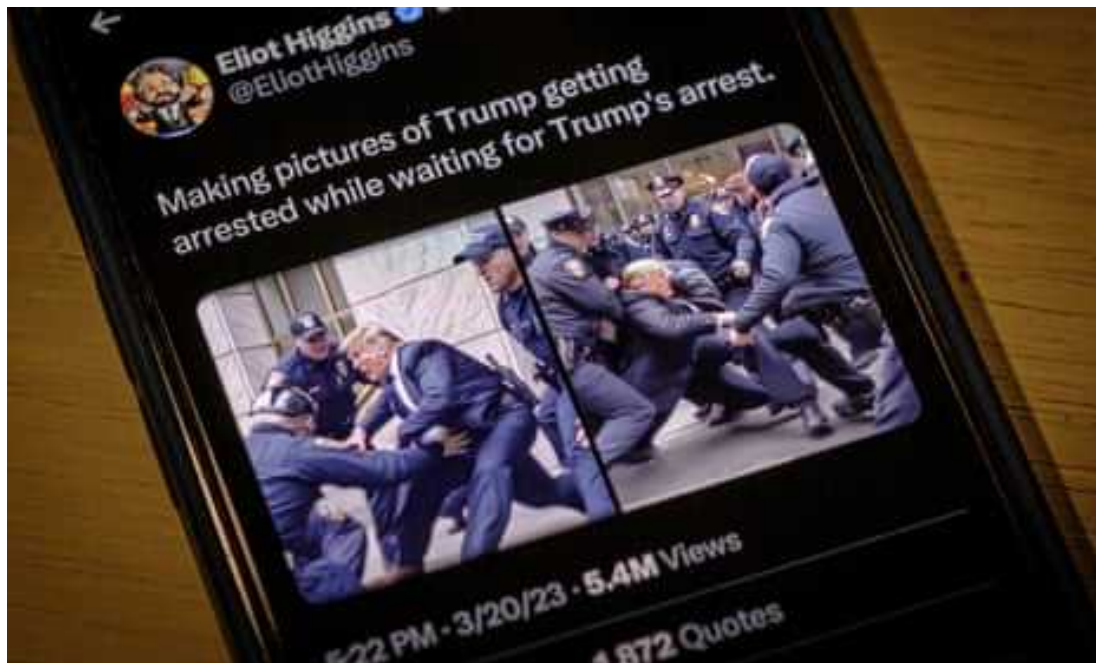
However, Starmer may not have to inspire as Blair once did in order to win. Since Labour overtook the Tories in the polls 18 months ago, its ratings have consistently been much higher than his. With or without a compelling Labour leader, Britain may have had enough of the Tories. At least for now.

- Andy Beckett is a Guardian columnist

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| [Section menu](#) | [Main menu](#) |



Images created by Eliot Higgins with the use of artificial intelligence show a fictitious skirmish between Donald Trump and New York City police. Photograph: J David Ake/AP

[OpinionArtificial intelligence \(AI\)](#)

**This gung-ho government says we have nothing to fear from AI. Are you scared yet?**

[Gaby Hinsliff](#)





A new white paper emphasises innovation over regulation. Unlike ChatGPT, we have learned nothing from our mistakes

Fri 31 Mar 2023 04.00 EDTLast modified on Fri 31 Mar 2023 04.01 EDT

It's almost 20 years now since a socially awkward young computer science student set up a website for rating "hot" women.

[Facemash](#), as Mark Zuckerberg called his creation, was shut down within days. But this crass teenage experiment was still, in retrospect, the first faltering step down a road to something even he couldn't possibly have foreseen at the time: a social media phenomenon [now accused](#) of unwittingly helping to polarise society, destabilise the democratic process, fuel hate speech and disseminate dangerous conspiracy theories around the globe, despite what providers insist have been their best attempts to stamp out the fire.

We couldn't have predicted then, and arguably still don't properly understand now, what impact Facebook or Twitter or Instagram or TikTok have had on [teenage mental health](#). We couldn't have anticipated how life online would change our sense of self, blurring the line between private life



and public content; didn't grasp until too late how algorithms developed to drive social media consumption would shape what we read or hear, and consequently how we think or feel. But if we couldn't have accurately predicted that from the start, with hindsight, there were surely moments along the road when the penny should have dropped.

Had governments not allowed the tech giants to race so far ahead of regulation, they might have saved themselves years of clearing up the resulting mess. But blinded by the riches the industry generated, and diverted by the pleasure its products have undoubtedly given along the way, we all missed the moment. The fear is that we're about to do the same with something infinitely more powerful and unpredictable.

Artificial intelligence is arguably both the most exciting thing that has happened to humankind in generations – key to magical, transformative breakthroughs in everything from medicine to productivity – and the most frightening, given its potential to upend the existing social and economic order at breakneck speed.

This week some of the world's leading AI experts called for [a six-month pause](#) on training the next wave of systems more powerful than the now famous ChatGPT-4 chatbot – which has demonstrated an uncanny ability to communicate like a human – in order to better understand the implications for humanity. They warn of an “out-of-control race to develop and deploy ever more powerful digital minds that no one – not even their creators – can understand, predict or reliably control”.

Shortly afterwards the British government published a [white paper](#) arguing that, on the contrary, Britain has only a brief window of around a year to get ahead in that race, and should adopt only the lightest of regulatory touches for fear of strangling the golden goose.

Is artificial intelligence coming for your job? - video

The UK won't have a new expert regulator governing what some think could become an extinction-level threat to humanity; instead, ministers will “empower” a bunch of overworked existing regulators to do what you might have hoped they were already doing, and scrutinise AI's impact on their

sectors using a set of guiding principles that may be backed up at some unspecified point by legislation.

The whole thing smacks of a government desperate for economic growth at all costs and perhaps also for something resembling a Brexit bonus; if the EU treads its usual cautious regulatory path, Britain will position itself as the comparatively unfettered, gung-ho home of the AI pioneer.

The white paper mentions the jobs AI will undoubtedly create but skates over the ones it will eliminate and the social unrest that could follow. (Think of what the decline of coal, steel and manufacturing did to rust belt towns across Europe and the US, and how that fuelled the rise of populism; now imagine AI replacing a quarter of all work tasks worldwide, as predicted in [a report](#) by Rishi Sunak's old employer Goldman Sachs this week.)

Ministers stress the extraordinary breakthroughs possible in healthcare. But they have less to say about new forms of [fraud](#) or mass disinformation that could be perpetrated using AI tools capable of communicating convincingly like a human, or about how autonomous weaponry could be exploited by terrorists or rogue states. They don't talk nearly enough about what new rights humans might need to live alongside AI, including perhaps the legal right to know when an algorithm rather than a person was employed to sift our job application, refuse us a mortgage, fake what looks like an entirely authentic image or craft a flirty response on a dating app (yes, there's an AI application for that).

The risk of AI becoming sentient, or developing human feelings, remains relatively distant. But anyone who has ever got enraged by Twitter knows we're already way past the point of algorithmic systems affecting humans' feelings towards each other. Michelle Donelan, the new cabinet secretary responsible for tech, breezily [assured the Sun](#) this week that nonetheless AI wasn't "something we should fear"; the government had it all in hand. Feeling reassured? Me neither.

A global moratorium on AI development sadly seems unlikely, given we haven't managed that kind of worldwide cooperation even against the existential threat from the climate crisis. But there has to be some way of

avoiding what happened with social media: an initial free-for-all that made billions, followed eventually by an angry backlash and a doomed attempt to stuff genies back into bottles. Artificial intelligence develops, in part, by learning from its mistakes. Is it too much to ask that humans do the same?

- Gaby Hinsliff is a Guardian columnist

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| [Section menu](#) | [Main menu](#) |



Illustration: Nate Kitch/The Guardian

[Opinion](#)[European Union](#)

## **The war in Ukraine reminds us what the EU is for. But even bigger challenges lie ahead**

[Timothy Garton Ash](#)



Support for the European Union is strong – even in post-Brexit Britain. Can it come through its external battles, too?

Fri 31 Mar 2023 01.00 EDTLast modified on Fri 31 Mar 2023 06.50 EDT

It's springtime in Brussels and the [European Union](#) has a spring in its step. Its leaders and institutions have been galvanised by the war in Ukraine. "The war has reminded us what Europe is really about," people kept telling me on a recent visit to the EU's capital.

There's a popular theory that says European integration advances through crises. The truth is that sometimes it does and sometimes it doesn't. You'd have to be a starry-eyed Euro-optimist, for example, to claim that European unity was really advanced by the 2015-16 refugee crisis. But in its last two big ones, the Covid pandemic and the war in [Ukraine](#), we have seen the "challenge and response" mechanism that the historian Arnold Toynbee identified as one of the patterns of history.

After a slow start, and an initial sharp reversion to unilateral national actions, the EU responded to the economic consequences of the Covid pandemic with a bold leap forward: €800bn (£700bn) of recovery funding

for member states, branded [NextGenerationEU](#). Two longstanding north European taboos were felled at once. There was now shared European debt and much of the money would be distributed in the form of grants, not just loans, to hard-hit countries such as Italy. European leaders finally did what they should have done a decade before, reacting to the eurozone crisis that first became acute in 2010.

Even more remarkable has been the response to the war in Ukraine. Despite the best efforts of rogue nationalists such as Hungary's Viktor Orbán, European solidarity has been maintained through 10 rounds of tightening economic sanctions on Russia. Ukrainian refugees have been made welcome across the bloc, putting to shame Britain's niggardly, obstructionist visa procedures. After another slow start – slow starts are what you get with a still substantially intergovernmental community of 27 different states – the EU is giving [€18bn of economic support](#) to Ukraine this year. Not only have many individual member states offered impressive levels of military support to Ukraine, in a move that would have been unthinkable before Vladimir Putin's full-scale invasion on 24 February 2022, something called the European Peace Facility is being used to commission large-scale purchases of arms and ammunition for the Ukrainian armed forces, whose major counteroffensive is to be expected in the next few weeks.

What is more, we have seen strategic leadership coming from the European institutions. The European Commission president, Ursula von der Leyen, has found the great cause of her presidency in supporting Ukraine. Josep Borrell, the EU's foreign policy supremo, has argued forcefully for extending the scope of the European Peace Facility. The European parliament has been instrumental in pushing forward the agenda of eastward enlargement. The EU now has a major geostrategic project in a new round of enlargement, to include Ukraine, Moldova and possibly Georgia, as well as the western Balkans, and another in the interlinked fields of energy security and green transition.

The EU also enjoys substantial support. The latest [Eurobarometer](#) opinion poll suggests that, taking an average across the 27 member states, most European citizens “tend to trust” the institutions of the EU more than their own national governments and parliaments (47% to 32% and 33% respectively); 45% have a generally positive image of the EU, against 18%

negative; 62% say they are optimistic about the future of the EU, against 35% pessimistic. To cap it all, another recent [poll](#) shows that since Brexit, even the British have come to have more confidence in the EU than in their own government and parliament.



‘Despite the best efforts of rogue nationalists such as Hungary’s Viktor Orbán, European solidarity has been maintained.’ Photograph: Olivier Matthys/EPA

Now for the bad news. The politics of many individual member states tell a far less pretty story than these headline figures, and the external challenges that this union faces are larger than at any time before. If you dig a little deeper into that Eurobarometer data, you find a regular [question](#) that has always intrigued me. It asks people to agree or disagree with the statement “(our country) could better face the future outside the EU”. When this was asked before the 2016 Brexit referendum, an average of 34% across the EU of 28 agreed. This year, in an EU without those bloody-minded Brits, it’s still 27%. In Slovenia, the figure is 42%, Croatia, 41%, Poland, 40%, and Austria, 38%. In Belgium, which graciously shares its capital with the EU, it’s 33%.

This doesn’t mean anyone’s going to follow the British example any time soon. What’s happened to Britain since 2016 would put most people off that.



But it does mean that there are a lot of Europeans who are unhappy with the EU, and their populist nationalist leaders want to transform the union from within, rather than leave it. Fascinatingly, fewer Hungarians (27%) than French (28%) say they'd be better off outside the EU. After all, Orbán is the leader who is actually living Boris Johnson's dream. He is having his European cake and eating it.

Hungary, a full member state of the EU, is no longer a democracy. Poland's current leaders are bent on winning this autumn's crucial election by hook or by crook, and continuing Orbánisation à la polonaise. In the Netherlands, where I just spent a delightful day for the publication of the Dutch edition of my personal history of Europe, a rural populist party threatens to upset the apple cart of Dutch politics after doing extremely well in provincial elections.

In Austria, the hard-right, anti-immigrant Freedom party is leading in opinion polls. Italy has a post-neofascist prime minister, even if she's behaving rather responsibly on key European issues such as Ukraine and the eurozone. The mass protests in France do not bode well for the future of Emmanuel Macron's liberal centre. Seasoned observers of French politics already suggest the most likely winner of the 2027 presidential election is Marine le Pen. While the overall EU27 average figures for trust in the EU are high, 57% of French respondents say they "tend not to trust" the EU.

And that's before we get to the unprecedented external threats. The largest war in Europe since 1945. A dictators' bromance between Xi Jinping and Putin. Other non-western powers such as India, Turkey, South Africa and Brazil maintaining good relations with Putin's Russia, even though it is prosecuting a neocolonial war against Ukraine, with clear genocidal elements. A US that might go Trumpian again in next year's presidential election, with or without Donald Trump. Global heating still heading up beyond 1.5C above pre-industrial levels, with consequences already playing out in extreme weather events; world population now exceeding 8 billion; huge inequalities between richer and poorer countries; all of the above contributing to migratory pressures which are then exploited by xenophobic populists in Europe. Oh yes, and a significant risk of an armed conflict



between the US and China over Taiwan sometime this decade. Need I go on?

The state of this union is strong. But it will need to be a whole lot stronger to master these huge internal and external challenges.

*The author's [Homelands: A Personal History of Europe](#) is currently due to be published in at least 18 European languages*

- Timothy Garton Ash is a historian, political writer and Guardian columnist

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| [Section menu](#) | [Main menu](#) |



‘Congressional Republicans have steadfastly refused to address the substance of the latest charges.’ Photograph: Jonathan Ernst/Reuters

[OpinionUS politics](#)

## Trump’s indictment will probably hurt him with the electorate. But how much?

[Lloyd Green](#)

The indictment adds to a convoluted mess of legal problems for Trump and his allies, with more soon to come

Thu 30 Mar 2023 18.26 EDTLast modified on Fri 31 Mar 2023 09.16 EDT

On Thursday, Manhattan prosecutors indicted Donald Trump. The charges against him stem from \$130,000 in hush-money paid to an adult film star, [Stormy Daniels](#).

The question now looms whether the nation will face Trump-incited violence as a result. The former president [threatened](#) “death and destruction” if charged. In a now infamous social media post targeting the Black district

attorney Alvin Bragg, Trump depicted himself brandishing a baseball bat at the DA, and called him as an “animal” and “degenerate psychopath”.

Some critics have characterized the indictment as an aggregation of record-keeping infractions, the “zombie case” that Bragg initially [declined](#) to bring. In his book [People vs Donald Trump](#), Mark Pomerantz, a one-time lawyer in Bragg’s office, previously argued that this particular set of charges was legally wanting.

Regardless, the latest fireworks will [likely damage](#) Trump with the broader electorate even as Joe Biden struggles with a banking crisis and persistent inflation. “Trump won’t change, and that shows he can’t win,” [intones the Murdoch-controlled New York Post](#). Still, don’t bet that Fox News changes its tune.

Faced with a court order, a passel of senior Trump advisors and administration officials [may soon be witnesses](#), including Mark Meadows, Trump’s last chief of staff.

The drumbeat continues. Next month, Trump stands trial for defamation and sexual assault. He faces a civil suit brought in New York by E Jean Carroll. Unlike his purported relationship with Daniels, this case centers on rape and degradation.

Carroll contends that a quarter of a century ago Trump [attacked her](#) in the dressing room of a Manhattan department store. He parried that she was not his “type”. But at a recent deposition, he [mistook her](#) for Marla Maples, his second wife, raising questions about his credibility and mental acuity.

The Trump-Carroll case will also provide the country with another opportunity to revisit history. Her lawyers will probably play the infamous Access Hollywood tape. “When you’re a star, they let you do it,” Trump said on a hot mic. “You can do anything.”

Separately, a New York judge has refused to delay a \$250m civil fraud action commenced by the state against Trump, his three older children and

the Trump Organization, the family business. The October 2023 trial date is “written in stone”, Judge Arthur Engoron [said](#) last week.

More than two decades have lapsed since a Republican-controlled House of Representatives impeached Bill Clinton over the Lewinsky affair.

Lindsey Graham, then a congressman, [acted as a manager](#) at Clinton’s impeachment trial. These days, the South Carolina senator prattles about dire consequences for Democrats – anything to golf with Trump.

Senator Rand Paul, the self-styled libertarian, calls for Bragg’s arrest. Marjorie Taylor Greene demands that George Soros, foreign-born and a Bragg backer, be stripped of his US citizenship.

Meanwhile, McCarthy, the speaker of the House, ordered [Republicans](#) to “immediately investigate if federal funds are being used to subvert our democracy by interfering in elections with politically motivated prosecutions”. Faced with a letter from congressional Republicans demanding documents and testimony, Bragg refused to yield.

Their missive “only came after Donald Trump created a false expectation that he would be arrested,” the district attorney [shot back](#). Such circumstances, [he wrote](#), did not represent “a legitimate basis for congressional inquiry”. [Jim Jordan and the rest of the crew refused to take no for an answer](#). On Saturday night, [Bragg told them to pound sand](#).

Congressional Republicans now [mull legislation to immunize](#) past and current presidents from “politically motivated prosecution”. Conveniently, the Republican party has forgotten those chants of “lock her up”. The law-and-order party meddles with a live criminal investigation.

The ex-reality show host closed the week with a campaign rally in Waco, Texas, [site of the fatal 1993 Branch Davidian standoff](#). The siege left more than 80 cult members and four law enforcement officials dead.

[Personal grievance pocked Trump’s remarks](#). The investigations surrounding him were “something straight out of the Stalinist Russia horror show,” he declared. [Trump tore into Bragg](#) for “prosecutorial misconduct”.

After the rally, [Trump reportedly suggested](#) that Bragg had dropped the Daniels case. That couldn't be farther from the truth.

- Lloyd Green is an attorney in New York and served in the US Department of Justice from 1990 to 1992

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| [Section menu](#) | [Main menu](#) |

## 2023.03.31 - Around the world

- [Exclusive 'Vulkan files' leak reveals Putin's global and domestic cyberwarfare tactics](#)
- [India Thirty-five dead after floor of temple collapses](#)
- [Spain Abusive working conditions endemic in strawberry farms, report claims](#)
- [Mansion madness Los Angeles realtors in sell-off frenzy as wealth tax looms](#)
- [Free Whaley Tokitae, the oldest orca in captivity, has path to freedom after 50 years](#)

# ‘Vulkan files’ leak reveals Putin’s global and domestic cyberwarfare tactics

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People stand around a structure built over an old temple well that collapsed on Thursday. Photograph: AP

[India](#)

## Thirty-six dead after floor of Indian temple collapses

Worshippers in Indore fell into communal water source as they gathered to mark Ram Navami

[Amrit Dhillon](#) in Delhi

Fri 31 Mar 2023 06.31 EDTFirst published on Thu 30 Mar 2023 06.08 EDT

At least 36 people have died after the floor of a Hindu temple collapsed in Indore, central [India](#), plunging them into a well.

It has emerged that the floor which covered the stepwell – a stair-lined communal water source – consisted only of tiles laid over a metal grille.



An investigation had been launched into the tragedy and the families of the dead people would be compensated, Narottam Mishra, the home minister of Madhya Pradesh state said.

Police told news agencies on Friday that 36 bodies had been recovered and 17 people were rescued on Thursday.

A large number of devotees, mainly women and children, were present at the temple on Thursday for the Hindu festival of Ram Navami. Police said the flimsy floor gave way under their weight. The well had about 25 feet (7.6 metres) of water in it when they fell.

Television footage showed emergency workers using ropes and ladders to reach those trapped. Other videos showed the caved-in floor and mangled steel bars, and police using ropes to seal the area.

“I saw some people falling with their hands still folded in prayer, looking bewildered,” said an eyewitness who survived because she was standing in a corner.

Officials say rescue operations are continuing. “We have a large team of rescuers, supplemented by army personnel,” Indore commissioner Pawan Sharma said.

The Times of India has reported seeing documents showing that the Indore municipal authority ordered the removal of the makeshift floor in January because it was dangerous but backed down when local Hindus protested.

A similar tragedy occurred last November in Gujarat, western India, when 135 people – mostly women and children – fell to their deaths in the Morbi River below.

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Seasonal workers of Moroccan origin pick strawberries in a greenhouse in the area between Palos de la Frontera and Moguer. Photograph: Susana Girón/The Guardian

[Rights and freedom](#)[Global development](#)

# Abusive working conditions endemic in Spain's strawberry farms, report claims

UK supermarkets heavily reliant on strawberries from southern Spain, where workers allege they are regularly underpaid, have passports withheld and are forced to live in unsanitary shacks

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[Ashifa Kassam](#) and Brenda Chavez in Huelva

Fri 31 Mar 2023 00.00 EDT Last modified on Fri 31 Mar 2023 01.50 EDT

Abusive conditions are endemic in parts of Spain's fruit sector, a new report alleges, with workers telling the Guardian they have been regularly underpaid and forced to live in dilapidated shacks.

During the winter, at least 60% of strawberries eaten in the UK are likely to be from vast farms across the south-west Spanish province of Huelva. In 2020, the UK imported €310m (£272m) worth of the fruit from the Andalusia region, of which 91% is believed to be grown in Huelva.

But the fruit-picking workforce in the region – dominated by migrants from Morocco and sub-Saharan Africa – are frequently paid less than the minimum wage and required to work overtime without pay, according to a [new report from the organisation Ethical Consumer](#).

Some workers also allege that they are docked up to three days' pay if they do not meet employers' demands, are prevented from using the toilet, and have their passports or wages withheld to keep them working.

“It's not the one-off farm, it's not the occasional supplier – it's widespread across the major exporting areas,” said Jasmine Owens, one of the authors of the report.



Polytunnels for strawberries stretch across the Moguer area of Huelva, with the Gulf of Cádiz in the background. Photograph: Susana Girón/The Guardian

In a recent visit to the Huelva region, the Guardian spoke to 10 workers and two former farm workers. Nine of the workers claimed they were being paid less than the legal minimum daily, which now stands at €51.15 (£45).

Each morning Aziza, a 53-year-old undocumented worker from Morocco, walks from farm to farm, in hopes of landing a day's work. Last year she did

find work, earning about €40 a day – under the legal daily wage. “Since I don’t have any papers, I don’t have the right to file a complaint,” she said.



A shanty settlement for the immigrant workers getting in the strawberry harvest. The shacks lack electricity, sanitation and running water. Photograph: Susana Girón/The Guardian

Thousands of workers live next to the polytunnels in which the strawberries are grown, in shacks cobbled together out of scrap and plastic sheets foraged from greenhouses, with no sanitation, running water or electricity.

The workforce in Huelva also includes those who are part of a bilateral programme, launched by Spain and Morocco in 2001, which brings thousands of Moroccans to Huelva for up to nine months a year to work on the strawberry harvest.

Despite [reports linking](#) the scheme to sexual violence and reports of employers withholding identity documents or wages, Spanish officials [announced in September](#) that the programme would be expanded to bring as many as 15,350 temporary workers to Huelva this year – an increase of 5,000 people over last year.

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‘You would work the entire month and they might pay you for 16 days,’ said Soumia, a seasonal worker at strawberry farms in the Moguer area. Photograph: Susana Girón/The Guardian

“You would work the entire month and they might pay you for 16 days,” said Soumia, a Moroccan who spent 14 years working in the bilateral programme. Her evenings were limited by her employer’s 10pm curfew, enforced by docking one day’s work for anyone who showed up late, she claimed. Still, she returned year after year, leaving her two daughters behind in Morocco.

“We need these jobs in order to put food on the table. Everyone takes advantage of our situation,” she said.

Trade unions and rights organisations have long documented the programme’s preference for mothers between 25 and 45 years of age, as they are considered more likely to return to their home country after their contract ends.

As the government scheme contractually ties the worker to an employer, and requires officials’ authorisation to change jobs, the organisations allege that it creates the conditions for forced labour.



Women harvesting strawberries in Palos de la Frontera, Huelva. The Spanish-Moroccan work scheme prioritises hiring mothers aged 25 to 45. Photograph: Susana Girón/The Guardian

The result is that the women were highly vulnerable to exploitation and less likely to report abusive situations, said Silvina Gorsky, a sociologist who works with a group of lawyers in Andalusia that provides legal assistance to workers. “It’s not that they happen to be vulnerable,” she said. “It’s that they are specifically chosen that way.”

While there were companies in Huelva's strawberry fields that paid their workers fairly, these companies were a minority, said José Antonio Brazo, of Soc-Sat, a local farmworkers' union that [filed more than 1,000 complaints](#) in Huelva related to exploitation and working conditions in 2019.

In a statement to the Guardian, Spain's labour ministry said it was "fully committed" to resolving the issue, adding that it was in constant contact with workers' unions and other "affected groups" in the sector.

Last year the ministry carried out 4,245 inspections on farms in Huelva, it added. A total of 189 violations were detected – involving more than 2,800 people – resulting in fines of €1.6m.



Polytunnels for strawberries in Palos de la Frontera. At least 60% of the winter strawberries eaten in the UK come from Huelva. Photograph: Susana Girón/The Guardian

Interfresa, a trade association representing 1,300 producers in Andalusia's strawberry industry, said that it "had not seen any evidence of inappropriate practices by employers". Companies were required to comply with the law, it added, and no workers could be paid below the minimum wage.

Regarding contracting temporary workers from Morocco, it said: "Farm



work requires labourers of a certain fitness level for tasks involved in harvesting. This is precisely why women between the ages of 25 and 45 are a commonly found profile.”

The British Retail Consortium, which represents the UK’s major supermarkets, said that retailers were committed to upholding the rights of all workers in the supply chain.

“Retailers are concerned by these reports and take these allegations very seriously,” said Sophie De Salis, a policy adviser with the BRC. “Once those behind the original report share the evidence, retailers will be in a position to thoroughly investigate and take any necessary action.”

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This Bel Air mansion, which sold for \$141m, has roughly twice as much square footage as the White House. Photograph: Marc Angeles/courtesy of Concierge Auctions

[Los Angeles](#)

## Mansion madness: Los Angeles realtors in sell-off frenzy as wealth tax looms

A new law will impose extra tax on sales of more than \$5m starting 1 April – and sellers are desperate to unload before the deadline

[Lois Beckett](#) in Los Angeles

[@loisbeckett](#)

Fri 31 Mar 2023 01.00 EDTLast modified on Fri 31 Mar 2023 14.43 EDT

As the clock ticks down to the start of Los Angeles’ new “mansion tax”, the city’s real estate market is offering some deadline deals.

On Instagram, two high-end realtors touted a \$1m bonus to any agent who helped sell a [\\$28m Bel Air mansion](#) by 1 April. Another 260-acre Bel Air

property which went up for auction this month (starting price \$39m) [offered buyers a \\$2m credit](#) if they were able to close the deal by 31 March.

In Beverly Hills, a listing for a \$16.5m mansion offered buyers [“a brand new” luxury car](#) – Aston Martin, Bentley or McLaren – if they purchased the property before the deadline.

The new tax, designed to raise public funds to prevent homelessness in one of the most expensive housing markets in the country, imposes a 4% tax on property sales between \$5m and \$10m, and a 5.5% tax on sales over \$10m.



The sale of this Bel Air mansion would have raised nearly \$8m in taxes under the new tax scheme. Photograph: Marc Angeles/Courtesy of Concierge Auctions

Voters [approved](#) the tax in November, amid a growing humanitarian crisis that has left [more than 28,000 people](#) unhoused and living outside in Los Angeles. Real estate interests are now [fighting the new law in court](#), arguing that it violates California’s constitution.

With the outcome of the legal challenge unknown, the real estate market is adjusting to the expected tax, with buyers and sellers exploring new

workarounds.

Some properties that might have been priced in the low \$5m range are now being marketed at \$4.9m, just under the tax cutoff, with buyers agreeing to pay a property's closing costs instead of the sellers, said Ken Fields, a Los Angeles real estate attorney.

With pricier properties, "There has definitely been a push to sell before the deadline to avoid the tax," he said. "I can think of several deals where the sellers have termination rights if the transaction doesn't close by the deadline."

Proponents of the new wealth tax are not impressed. "Multimillionaires are giving away luxury cars to get out of a tax that helps people sleeping in their cars," Peter Dreier, an urban policy expert, [told the LA Times](#).

Within the industry, the marketing of the new measure as a "mansion tax" is contested, both because it also applies to commercial real estate deals and because many believe that a \$5m house in Los Angeles may no longer qualify as a mansion. Over the past year, the median sale price for a house in the city has [hovered close to \\$1m](#).



The Palazzo Beverly Hills, one of the many ostentatious mansions in Los Angeles. Photograph: Robyn Beck/AFP/Getty Images

True luxury properties in the Los Angeles area now start at around \$10m, according to real estate agent Scott Tamkin.

“Five million dollars is certainly not luxury. It’s a nice house, in a nice area. It’s not what most people would consider a luxury house in a prime area,” Tamkin said.

“It’s really quite shocking, honestly, the fact that \$5m is not a luxury home,” he added. In many places in the US, he said, not a single house on the market costs as much as \$5m.

Since last year, California’s fiercely competitive housing market has seen [prices decrease slightly and sales slow](#). Some of the most extravagant residential properties have seen their listing prices drop, and drop again. An infamous Bel Air mansion, a property larger than the White House with an [original price point of \\$500m](#), sold last year at auction for only \$141m.

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Senderos Canyon, the 260-acre Bel Air property which represents “6% of BelAir’s total land area”, saw its [asking price drop from \\$125m](#) to an initial



bid of only \$39m, a nearly 70% discount. (The owner of Senderos Canyon was still reviewing bids after a mid-March auction, and it was not clear if any deal would close before 1 April, Tamkin, one of the property's real estate agents, said.)

While the “mansion tax” was initially projected to bring Los Angeles revenue of [nearly \\$1bn each year](#), the city's financial analysts recently lowered that projection to [only \\$672m a year](#) as the market has cooled slightly, the real estate website the Real Deal reported.

That's still substantially more public revenue than Los Angeles' current transfer tax on properties generates, which has brought in [only about \\$200m annually](#) in recent years, according to a report by researchers at the University of California, Los Angeles.



Homelessness in Los Angeles has soared in recent years. Photograph: Anadolu Agency/Getty Images

Proponents of the “mansion tax” estimated that, over the next decade, the new revenue could help fund [26,000 affordable housing units](#) and provide tens of thousands of residents with emergency rental assistance, income support and legal assistance to fight evictions.

Fields, the real estate attorney, said he expected to see a “chilling effect on transactions” while buyers and sellers wait to see if the lawsuit against the “mansion tax” succeeds. “This tax has nothing to do with your profit,” Fields said. “You could be selling at a loss and still have to pay the tax.”

But if the tax survives the litigation against it, developers of affordable housing can expect to benefit from the greater public investment in building lower-cost homes, he added.

The rise of Los Angeles as a [global financial center](#), not just a film and entertainment hub, has fundamentally transformed the city’s real estate market and its prices, Tamkin, the real estate agent, said.

He argued that some of the attention to the 1 April deadline was being “overhyped”, and noted that the tax was most likely to have an impact on people buying lower-end mansions or those “nice” \$5m homes.

“In the ultra-luxury market, it’s not really going to have much of an impact, to be honest,” Tamkin said. “A \$4.4m tax on an \$80m sale is less of a sting than a \$200,000 tax on a \$5m sale.”

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Tokitae is the oldest killer whale in captivity – and could now be released.  
Photograph: Nuri Vallbona/AP

[US news](#)

## Tokitae, the oldest orca in captivity, has path to freedom after 50 years

Miami Seaquarium, where the whale performed, announced a ‘binding’ agreement to relocate her to her home – Puget Sound

[Katharine Gammon](#) in Los Angeles

Thu 30 Mar 2023 17.22 EDTLast modified on Fri 31 Mar 2023 14.46 EDT

More [than five decades](#) after being captured in the waters off the Pacific north-west, Tokitae the orca has a plan to return home, delivering a victory to animal rights advocates and Indigenous leaders who have long fought for her release.



On Thursday, the owners of the Miami Seaquarium where Tokitae lives announced a “formal and binding agreement” with a group called the Friends of Lolita to begin the process of returning Tokitae to Puget Sound. A [news release](#) indicates that the joint effort is “working toward and hope the relocation will be possible in the next 18 to 24 months”.

Tokitae is the oldest killer whale in captivity. Now in retirement, she spent decades performing at the Miami Seaquarium, where she went by the name Lolita. She lived in the [smallest orca enclosure](#) in North America, in a pool of water that made her skin infected and was fed fish that was occasionally rotten and led to [intestinal issues](#).

Over the years multiple groups, including members of the Lummi nation and [animal rights organizations](#), have called for the whale’s release from the Seaquarium, with some staging protests outside the facility.



The audience at the Miami Seaquarium watching Lolita at its 40th anniversary performance. Photograph: Jeff Greenberg/Universal Images Group/Getty Images

A “generous contribution” from Jim Irsay, owner of the NFL’s Indianapolis Colts, helped alleviate the financial questions around Toki’s future. “I know she wants to get to free waters,” Irsay said at a news conference Thursday in

[Miami](#). “I don’t care what anyone says. She’s lived this long to have this opportunity.”

Tokitae’s ordeal began in the calm waters of Penn Cove, Whidbey Island – a quiet island off the coast of Washington State – five decades ago. Men with long sticks and guns corralled a group of resident killer whales, separating mothers from their calves. At least a dozen of those whales died during the capture, and more than 50 were kept for captive display.

One of those calves was four-year-old Tokitae. Back home, the native Lummi people call her Sk’aliCh’elh-tenaut – meaning that she is a member of Sk’aliCh’elh, the resident family of orcas who call the Salish Sea home. The tribe, who views killer whales as part of their extended family, have never stopped fighting for her release.

There are still questions about Toki’s health and her ability to travel across the country to a sea pen. The pen would be constructed with the help of the non-profit [Whale Sanctuary Project](#), which is also creating the world’s first whale sanctuary off the coast of Nova Scotia, following the model of areas to house big cats, great apes or elephants after they have been in captivity.



Activists from Peta and Animal Hero Kids protest to demand freedom for Lolita. Photograph: Cristóbal Herrera/EPA

Toki's relatives – members of the resident L-pod in the Salish Sea – are still alive, including the 90-year-old whale [believed to be her mother](#). Experts worry that if she were to encounter her kin, even through a sea pen, the infections Toki picked up in captivity could be spread to other southern resident killer whales, an already-endangered group that numbers only 74 individuals.

Federal agencies will have to sign off on any plans to transport the whale. And of course, the stress of travel and a new, wild environment might be dangerous for an elderly whale.

Even so, Thursday's move is a momentous one. Howard Garrett, founder of the non-profit Orca Network who has been advocating for Toki's release for decades, says the news was lacking in specifics, but it set the tone for unified intention and action. "That's what will make it happen. That will greatly influence the agencies and skeptics and naysayers," he says. "This was a momentous historical event."

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# Table of Contents

[The Guardian.2023.04.02 \[Sun, 02 Apr 2023\]](#)

[Headlines thursday 30 march 2023](#)

[‘Half-baked, half-hearted’ Critics ridicule UK’s long-awaited climate strategy](#)

[Carbon capture Government takes gamble despite scientists’ doubts](#)

[Explainer What is carbon capture, usage and storage?](#)

[Cheshire Villagers will not be forced to join hydrogen energy trial](#)

[2023.03.30 - Spotlight](#)

[Singing to trees and Indigenous wisdom The UK festival aiming to prevent ecological collapse](#)

[Putin, Trump, Ukraine How Timothy Snyder became the leading interpreter of our dark times](#)

[Sadie Frost’s forever fashion ‘I bought this dress for the Oscars – I had no idea it was see-through’](#)

[Television Unstable review – this Rob Lowe nepo-sitcom is staggeringly joke-free](#)

[2023.03.30 - Opinion](#)

[For Hamburg, devastated by allied bombing, King Charles’s visit is so much more than a photo-op](#)

[Octopus farming turns my stomach – but are some species really more worthy than others?](#)

[Local journalism made me what I am today. Without it, we’ll all be the poorer](#)

[Why are today’s TV dramas so devastatingly difficult to follow?](#)

[2023.03.30 - Around the world](#)

[Refugees Council of Europe finds refugees subject to widespread physical ill-treatment](#)

[Kentucky Two US army Black Hawk helicopters crash on training mission](#)

[Live Spanish inflation almost halves; signs of ‘green shoots’ in UK economy](#)

[Myanmar US, UK, Japan and Australia condemn junta's ban on 40 political parties](#)

[Japan School stirs debate over hairstyle rules after boy with cornrows separated from class](#)

#### [Headlines monday 27 march 2023](#)

[Live Israeli PM Netanyahu urged to halt judicial changes after mass protests](#)

[Israel Netanyahu expected to announce halt to plans to overhaul judiciary](#)

[Explainer What are the Israeli protests about?](#)

[Video Protests in Israel after Netanyahu sacks defence minister](#)

#### [2023.03.27 - Spotlight](#)

[Broke and disabled in Tory Britain The reality of life on one meal a day](#)

['People think I'm an aristocrat' Charles Dance on class, Game of Thrones – and avoiding James Bond](#)

['People will be disturbed' Steve McQueen on airing his Grenfell film](#)

[A new start after 60 My divorce felt mortally wounding – then I walked the Camino de Santiago](#)

#### [2023.03.27 - Opinion](#)

[In a sceptical era, understand this: vaccines do work - and our children need them](#)

[We thought we'd won the fight to stop child detention in the UK. We need to win it again](#)

[Putin and his allies love buying art. To help us win the war in Ukraine, we should confiscate it](#)

[The Finns hold the secret of happiness – and it is not what you might expect](#)

#### [2023.03.27 - Around the world](#)

[Germany Millions face transport disruption in cost of living 'mega-strike'](#)

[Jack Ma Alibaba founder seen in China after months of absence](#)

[Silicon Valley Bank Most of failed lender bought by First Citizens](#)

[Live Markets calmer despite fears over risks to financial stability from bank turmoil](#)

[US Pennsylvania chocolate factory explodes, killing seven in run up to Easter](#)

#### [Headlines tuesday 28 march 2023](#)

[Nashville School shooter carefully plotted attack that killed six, say police](#)

['Hits very close to home' Nashville shooting reporter recounts attack at her own school](#)

[Food UK supermarket inflation hits record high, making shoppers hunt for bargains](#)

[Refugees UK to evict thousands of Afghan people from hotels](#)

#### [2023.03.28 - Spotlight](#)

[The long read Three abandoned children, two missing parents and a 40-year mystery](#)

[The healthspan revolution How to live a long, strong and happy life](#)

['I've had so many death threats' David Lammy on regrets, Rwanda flights and racism](#)

['Legacy, what legacy?' Fight goes on for migrant workers in Qatar 100 days after World Cup](#)

#### [2023.03.28 - Opinion](#)

[It's the great TikTok panic – and it could accelerate the end of the internet as we know it](#)

[A tragic accident should not have landed Auriol Grey in prison. Our justice system is stuck in the dark ages](#)

[After Impressionism: why has the National Gallery left female artists out of the picture?](#)

[My sister has become a great gardener – and I have never felt so betrayed](#)

#### [2023.03.28 - Around the world](#)

[Global development Disabled people are 'lost and excluded' when disasters hit, says UN advocate](#)

[France Hundreds of thousands to continue strikes and protests](#)

[Environment Meatball from long-extinct mammoth created by food firm](#)



[Afghanistan Founder of girls' school project arrested in Kabul](#)

[Republicans Trump builds national lead over DeSantis but early-voting states closer, polls show](#)

#### [Headlines saturday 1 april 2023](#)

['We won't be here for long' UK firms fear the worst as energy bill support ends](#)

[Live Russia-Ukraine war: Russian general 'pushing limits of how far Putin will tolerate failure'](#)

[AI Letter signed by Musk demanding research pause sparks controversy](#)

[AI Italy bans ChatGPT over data privacy concerns](#)

#### [2023.04.01 - Spotlight](#)

[Our sleeping secrets caught on camera Nine beds and the people in them reveal everything – from farting to threesomes](#)  
[The secret to good hair, beating jetlag and great photos Plus 13 other ways to do the little things better](#)

[Budget airlines Which is the best – and what about the worst? 'It feels like a scandal' Wizz Air passengers claim website bug cost them extra](#)

[Blind date I wasn't expecting a full-on kiss on each cheek. It felt a bit forward](#)

#### [2023.04.01 - Opinion](#)

[University Challenge was biased towards Oxbridge when I worked on it, and it still is. But there's a fix](#)

[You can keep your nostalgic club nights – in my 50s, I've discovered the magic of the rave](#)

[Now we know: in Trump's fantasy comeback, he'll be wearing handcuffs](#)

['Take back control'? With this Pacific trade deal, Brexit Britain has just signed it away](#)

#### [2023.04.01 - Around the world](#)

['Absolute chaos' Theatre roof collapses as deadly storms tear through southern and midwest US](#)

[Finland election Tight race has Marin's SDP polling behind far right](#)



[Andrew Tate Influencer released from detention and moved to house arrest in Romania](#)

['Heartbreaking' Eight bodies recovered from waters at US-Canada border](#)

[Donald Trump Will indictment make white evangelicals ditch 'imperfect vessel'?](#)

### [Headlines](#)

[Rishi Sunak PM took £500,000-worth of private jet trips in less than a fortnight](#)

[Live Badenoch hails Asia-Pacific trade deal and dismisses claims it will only boost economy by 0.08%](#)

[Live UK house prices in biggest fall since 2009; eurozone inflation drops to 6.9%](#)

[Housing market UK house prices fall at fastest annual rate since 2009](#)

[UK economy Country avoids recession as economy stronger than first thought at end of 2022](#)

[Cost of living Rising bills and tax hikes to make UK families hundreds of pounds worse off](#)

### [2023.03.31 - Spotlight](#)

['We live from month to month' People in UK brace for bill rises](#)

[Explainer What to expect from 'UK national price hike day'](#)

[Experience I have the biggest mouth in the world](#)

['We used to chat as we walked our dogs' Readers on the Paul O'Grady they knew and adored](#)

### [2023.03.31 - Opinion](#)

[It's tempting for Starmer to fall back on the Blair playbook – what are the risks?](#)

[This gung-ho government says we have nothing to fear from AI. Are you scared yet?](#)

[The war in Ukraine reminds us what the EU is for. But even bigger challenges lie ahead](#)

[Trump's indictment will probably hurt him with the electorate. But how much?](#)

### [2023.03.31 - Around the world](#)

[Exclusive 'Vulkan files' leak reveals Putin's global and domestic cyberwarfare tactics](#)

[India Thirty-five dead after floor of temple collapses](#)

[Spain Abusive working conditions endemic in strawberry farms, report claims](#)

[Mansion madness Los Angeles realtors in sell-off frenzy as wealth tax looms](#)

[Free Whaley Tokitae, the oldest orca in captivity, has path to freedom after 50 years](#)