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## Headlines monday 20 february 2023

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# Joe Biden's surprise visit to Kyiv 'unprecedented in modern times', says US – as it happened

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Paul Ansell visiting the River Wyre in St Michael's on Wyre, Lancashire, on 8 February amid the search for Nicola Bulley. Photograph: PA Video/PA

[UK news](#)

## Nicola Bulley: family ‘in agony’ after body found in river near where she went missing

Bulley’s partner, Paul Ansell, says family trying to stay strong as private diving expert defends search

[Josh Halliday](#) *North of England correspondent*

Mon 20 Feb 2023 03.39 ESTLast modified on Mon 20 Feb 2023 03.54 EST

The partner of the missing woman Nicola Bulley has described his family’s “agony” after a body was found more than three weeks after she disappeared.

Paul Ansell told Sky News he had “no words right now, just agony” after walkers found a body in the River Wyre less than a mile from where [the mother-of-two was last seen](#). He added: “We’re all together, we have to be strong.”

Police are yet to formally identify the body but said Bulley’s family had been informed.



Nicola Bulley, 45, was last seen on the morning of 27 January walking her dog on a path by the River Wyre near St Michael’s on Wyre, Lancashire. Photograph: Family Handout/PA

The 45-year-old mortgage adviser has been missing since dropping off her daughters, aged nine and six, at school and taking the family’s dog, Willow, for its usual riverside walk near the village of St Michael’s on Wyre on 27 January.

Lancashire constabulary said they had received a call at 11.36am on Sunday about a body in the River Wyre, close to Rawcliffe Road, within a mile of where Bulley was last seen.

“An underwater search team and specialist officers have subsequently attended the scene, entered the water, and have sadly recovered a body. No formal identification has yet been carried out, so we are unable to say whether this is Nicola Bulley at this time,” Lancashire police said in a statement.

“Procedures to identify the body are ongoing. We are currently treating the death as unexplained. Nicola’s family have been informed of developments and our thoughts are with them at this most difficult of times. We ask that their privacy is respected.”

Lancashire police have been [heavily criticised](#) for releasing a statement referring to Bulley’s struggles with alcohol and the perimenopause.

It was these “vulnerabilities”, coupled with the numerous sightings before she went missing, which led detectives to believe that she was more likely to have fallen into the river than have been harmed by a third party.

A diving specialist who joined the high-profile search said his team had received “unfair criticism” since the discovery of a body by two walkers shortly before midday on Sunday.

### [Map](#)

Peter Faulding, the chief executive of Specialist Group International, who [led an underwater search team for three days](#), said his team “thoroughly search the riverbed and can categorically confirm that Nicola was not laying on the riverbed on the days that we searched.”.

He added that his team had searched the stretch of river where the body was found.

“The police underwater search teams and land search teams were searching for three full weeks and were also unable to find Nicola. Unfortunately it was a member of the public that made a grim discovery, unconfirmed as yet to be Nicola.

“Sadly, the discovery was not found in the river but in the reeds at the side

of the river which was not part of our remit as the side scan sonar does not penetrate reeds above or below the water.

“A riverbank and wade search would be the only way to search this area and we were not involved or tasked with that search. The difference between these two search areas has caused a lot of confusion and unfair criticism towards myself and my team at Specialist Group International (SGI).

“My previous comments saying that if Nicola was in the river, I would find her, still stand. My team and I at SGI did all we could to assist this family with only our best intentions. I am sure I can say this of everyone who has been involved in this difficult search.”

Faulding, who is a registered search expert with the National Crime Agency, said he had not volunteered his services “for any limelight or publicity” and did it with the best intentions. He said his thoughts were with Bulley’s family and friends.

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Yellow ribbons and daffodils adorn the bench where the phone of missing Nicola Bulley was found, on the banks of the River Wyre. Photograph: Christopher Furlong/Getty Images

[Police](#)

[Analysis](#)

## Police's poor communication on Nicola Bulley case is a lesson for other forces

[Robyn Vinter](#)

While Lancashire constabulary's investigative focus may have been right, it will face the consequences of its disclosures for years

Sun 19 Feb 2023 16.11 ESTLast modified on Sun 19 Feb 2023 16.52 EST

"I have never seen anything like it," said Det Supt Becky Smith, the senior investigating officer on the case of missing [Lancashire](#) woman Nicola Bulley, last week. Though Smith was talking about the attention on social media, where wild speculation of the case had blown up, these could have

been the words of anyone after what has become one of the highest profile – and most unusual – missing persons cases in years.

To those who observed it closely, there was probably only one way that Bulley left the field where her phone was discovered, still logged on to a work call, nearly a month ago. And, sadly, after a body was found on Sunday morning in the River Wyre close to where Bulley went missing, it looks as though [the police may have been right](#).

But that will not be vindication for Lancashire constabulary, which will be facing the consequences of its poor handling of communication with the public for years to come.

What happens behind police tape and in incident rooms across the country has become progressively harder for journalists to determine, as police communications have tightened. In the Bulley case, as in so many missing persons cases or crimes yet to be solved, so little information was provided that there was nothing “official” to report for days on end. This vacuum, [as one ex-police officer explained](#), can lead to speculation among a public desperate for news. And once the speculation gets going, [it takes on a life of its own](#).

The focus on the River Wyre, which had been shaped by police intelligence, appeared to many onlookers as a botched investigation. [Police](#) seemed laser-focused on only one “working hypothesis” and after criticism for not securing the scene, allowing it to be visited by all manner of TikTokers and YouTubers, they appeared to backtrack, saying they were looking at hundreds of lines of inquiry. This didn’t do much to raise hopes.

There were signs there was simply not “more to it”, as [some armchair detectives supposed](#). Describing Bulley as high risk, saying they were not looking for a third party in connection with the disappearance and focusing on the river were all clues that Lancashire constabulary had a good idea about what happened to her, even if they were not telling us. The implicit message was: trust us.

But the public simply couldn't. Lancashire constabulary had forgotten that confidence in police, especially when dealing with women, [is at a low](#).

And then, in the empty silence, a loud voice rang out. When the diver Peter Faulding arrived on the scene saying Bulley could not have fallen into the river, suddenly somebody was saying something. Faulding, whose book had been published the week before, gave updates multiple times a day to the eager press – on what intel it wasn't clear, since police had not involved him in the investigation.

Like the pied piper, the public followed and Lancashire constabulary struggled desperately to keep control of the narrative. When they eventually began releasing more details, there was nothing they could have said that would have won over the crowd. What they did say though – revealing that Bulley had an alcohol problem brought on by struggles with the menopause – was roundly criticised by MPs and [labelled “as sexist as it comes”, by campaigners](#).

Though Lancashire constabulary's handling of the search itself may later be proven good enough, having brought in partners including the National Crime Agency and even The Environment Agency to help find the missing 45-year-old, they will be remembered as blundering and incompetent.

Hopefully, this will be a much-needed lesson for police forces across the UK about the importance of trusting the public in the same way as they expect us to trust them.

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## [Politics live with Andrew Sparrow](#)Politics

# Government to hold new talks with EU on NI protocol ‘in coming days’, says foreign secretary – as it happened

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One senior member of the ERG group of pro-Brexit Tory MPs said Braverman's intervention was 'heartening'. Photograph: Danny Lawson/PA

[Brexit](#)

## Suella Braverman urges Sunak not to ditch Northern Ireland protocol bill

First sign of cabinet tensions emerges as Downing Street plays down hopes that deal with EU will be clinched on Tuesday

[Jessica Elgot](#), [Pippa Crerar](#) and [Kiran Stacey](#)

Mon 20 Feb 2023 14.51 ESTFirst published on Mon 20 Feb 2023 03.53 EST

Rishi Sunak has been urged not to drop potential powers to unilaterally override the [Northern Ireland](#) protocol, as the first sign of cabinet tensions emerged over the prime minister's proposed deal with the EU.

The call from Suella Braverman not to abandon the bill echoes the [same message from Boris Johnson](#). Sources close to the former prime minister

over the weekend urged Sunak to keep the legislation as leverage.

The home secretary's intervention came as Downing Street insiders played down hopes of a deal being struck by Tuesday, despite heightened expectations prompted by Sunak's discussions with the Northern Ireland political parties last week.

Senior [Conservatives](#) have questioned whether any deal that does not have the backing of the Democratic Unionist party would secure its ultimate objective, but government sources have stressed that the DUP will not be shown the text of the agreement before it is struck or granted a veto on the contents.

There were reports on Monday night that some ministers could even consider resigning over the latest [Brexit](#) deal if they felt it undermined Northern Ireland's place in the UK.

The foreign secretary, James Cleverly, who held talks by video link with Maroš Šefčovič on Monday, said "intensive work" continued between the two sides and he would hold a further meeting with the Brussels official later this week, again underlining that a deal was not imminent.

Braverman, a former chair of the European Research Group (ERG) of hard Brexiters in the Conservatives, struck a note of caution about plans to drop the bill, understood to be part of the deal package. One senior member of the ERG said her intervention was "heartening".

Stressing the importance of the bill, she told the BBC: "We've been aware for some time now of challenges relating to trade, customs and sovereignty when it comes to Northern Ireland and the NI protocol.

"The legislation that the government introduced is one of the biggest tools we have in solving the problem on the Irish Sea. It's clear and it's right that the PM is committed to finding a pragmatic solution to resolve these issues which are affecting the people of Northern Ireland, and that we find a solution that's pragmatic and workable both for the EU and the UK."

Downing Street insiders said Sunak would continue conversations with the ERG and the DUP but hope they will be able to move quickly once the final negotiations have concluded. Sunak has been meeting restive MPs in the Commons throughout Monday and Cleverly is expected to address the backbench 1922 Committee this week.

The northern Ireland minister Steve Baker attended an ERG meeting on Monday. Sources say there was “a lot of fear of a sell out” but that there was also discussion of the damage a potential reopening of divisions would do to the future of the Tory party at the polls.

There is mounting concern that the longer the two sides leave it to strike a deal, the greater the risk of unravelling, with the knottier issues often left to the end of such negotiations.

Once a deal is agreed on the Northern Ireland protocol, the government is expected to announce it swiftly, with hopes that the European Commission president, Ursula von der Leyen, could come to London to shake on it.

Ministers still hope to put the deal to a vote in the House of Commons, as it would bind in MPs politically, but No 10 has so far refused to commit to a vote.

The DUP MP Sammy Wilson reiterated his party’s pledge that Sunak agreeing a deal with the EU without the consent of the party would mean a continued boycott of Northern Ireland’s devolved assembly. Asked if he expected a consensus to emerge this week, Wilson told Sky News: “No, I don’t.”

There were, he said, “barriers and hills to climb” for Sunak. The government had “gone into these negotiations with an attitude of defeat, almost”, Wilson added.

Senior Conservatives, including those supportive of Sunak, suggested there was little point in progressing without the support of the unionists. “The purpose of the negotiations was to get a deal that would allow DUP to go back into government in Stormont,” one former cabinet minister said. “So DUP support for a deal is the key. Without DUP support, it is pointless.”

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David Jones, the deputy chair of the ERG, said: “The problem is that DUP has told No 10 that whatever they agree needs to meet the ‘seven tests’.

“One of those is that the people of Northern Ireland have to have a say in the laws that govern them, but it is hard to see how they do that without an entirely new agreement. What they are talking about now is some sort of new interpretation of the existing agreement, not a completely new one.”

Jones said he understood the DUP had asked to see the text of the full agreement – rather than the political framework – in order to move forward. That request is unlikely to be accepted.

Braverman’s intervention on the protocol bill took a similar tone to that of Johnson, as well as other former Brexit-backing cabinet ministers such as Simon Clarke and Jacob Rees-Mogg. Johnson warned at the weekend it would be a “great mistake” to ditch the bill rather than retain it as a backup option.

The protocol bill, the brainchild of Liz Truss when she was foreign secretary, would allow the UK to unilaterally override parts of the Brexit



treaty, and discarding the bill is seen as a gesture of goodwill when agreement is reached on application of the protocol.

The bill is awaiting report stage in the House of Lords, but its progress has been frozen. Senior sources have also indicated there are now doubts about whether the bill is legally sound because of progress on the negotiations.

Clarke said it was vital to retain the bill as an option for the government. “We need to make sure that if a deal is struck here, this is genuinely a better one than that which we can achieve through our own legislation to fix the protocol,” he said.

“And I think that is quite a high bar because it is going to involve the EU accepting that Northern Ireland cannot be subjected either to EU law or in the single market and that would be a big move on their part.”

*Additional reporting by [Peter Walker](#) and [Lisa O’Carroll](#)*

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## 2023.02.20 - Spotlight

- Emily Thornberry 'A whip threw me against a wall. He was so close I got spit in my face'
- Taken for granted Rural vote up for grabs if Labour can make hay
- Goth's undead! The dark return of Britain's spookiest subculture
- 'There may still be surprises' Jeremy Farrar warns of pandemic perils ahead

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‘Keir Starmer is going to be the next prime minister and will be the leader for at least a decade’ ... Emily Thornberry in her office in Westminster.  
Photograph: Alicia Canter/The Guardian

[The G2 interview](#)[Emily Thornberry](#).

[Interview](#)

# Emily Thornberry: ‘A whip threw me against a wall. He was so close I got spit in my face’

[Simon Hattenstone](#)

The Labour MP has never let her loyalty get in the way of a good scrap. She discusses her clashes with Tony Blair, Gordon Brown and Ed Miliband – and why Keir Starmer is on course to win



Mon 20 Feb 2023 01.00 EST Last modified on Tue 21 Feb 2023 10.26 EST

We're on the train to Ramsgate in Kent and [Emily Thornberry](#) is giddy at the prospect of a Saturday morning spent canvassing. "I love it. I know it seems weird, but it's the bit of the job that I genuinely like the best," says the MP for Islington South and Finsbury. "I like knocking on the door, not knowing who's going to answer, what their attitude is going to be, what smells will come out of the door and, in Islington, whether they will be wearing any clothes."

Pardon? "In Islington, people constantly come to the door not wearing any clothes. God knows what's going on there!" How does she react? "Just keep

your eyes up at all times.” Thornberry hoots with laughter. She has a great laugh – her face crumbles, her eyes narrow to slits and she shakes with joy.

After numerous Tory scandals, things are finally looking up for Labour. The party may not have won a general election since 2005, when Thornberry became an MP, but it ended 2022 with [a 26-point lead](#) over the Conservative party. She is feeling optimistic. Then again, she is one of life’s optimists.

Thornberry, 62, was born into the [Labour](#) party. Her mother, Sallie, was the local ward secretary of the party and later a councillor; her father, Cedric, stood for parliament in 1966. By nature, she is a loyalist, but she is also outspoken – and has had more than her share of scraps with party leaders. In a way, she personifies the party. Her constituency is representative of the two very different audiences to which Labour hopes to appeal – Islington is home to poor working-class people and the liberal elite.

My dad didn’t pay any bills and we got thrown out of our home. He was a great man, but a terrible father

Cut Thornberry down the middle and you will find a similar split. She had a fascinating childhood. We’re used to hearing about her life on a council estate, being brought up with two brothers by a mother so impoverished that she put the cats down because she couldn’t afford to feed them. But that is only half the story. Her father, who walked out on the family when she was seven, mingled and married at the highest levels, was a global jetsetter and became an assistant secretary general of the UN.

Her early life in Guildford, Surrey, was comfortable. It all changed when Cedric disappeared to Norway with his girlfriend, who later became the second of his four wives. “He didn’t pay any bills and we got thrown out of our home,” she says. When Cedric returned to Britain, he bought the house again and moved his new family in. “He was a great man, but a terrible father.”

In what way great? “He was very brave and worked really hard. He was taken hostage in Mostar [in Bosnia and Herzegovina], and got shot at, according to the papers. He was in the middle of so many wars in Africa. There are photos with colonels and generals and Fidel Castro and my dad. Extraordinary!” She seems to have despised and revered him in equal measure.

When she was 15, Thornberry fell out with Sallie and moved in with Cedric, now living in London with wife No 3. After two years, Cedric headed to New York for the weekend and never returned. He had been given his UN job, while his wife was working for the UN’s refugee agency in Geneva. Emily was left on her tod.

Did her father realise he was a shit? “Yes, he used to feel terribly guilty about his children. But he just couldn’t stop himself moving on.” She was devastated when he walked away again, but there was an upside. “He paid the bills for the house, he paid for my car, so in many ways it was fantastic. My parties went on all night long. People once arrived at 9am. I hate to think what my neighbours thought.”

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Thornberry heads to the loo to put her lippy on. We’re in Ramsgate to support her friend [Polly Billington](#), who is hoping to be selected as Labour’s candidate for South Thanet in the next general election. This is, or was, Ukip country. In the 2015 general election, Nigel Farage narrowly finished runner-up to the Conservative candidate. There are local elections in May; Labour is convinced it can take Thanet, the only council ever to be [controlled by Ukip \(twice between 2015 and 2017\)](#).

At Labour’s local HQ, a tiny building in a sidestreet, about 20 people squeeze in to welcome Thornberry. She stands on a chair and delivers a motivational speech. “If we can plant in people’s minds the idea that they can make a difference by voting, and a difference for the better, we will always win. Where there’s hope, people vote progressive. That’s all we’ve got to give them – hope. We’ve got to let them know there is a change that can come and we just need their help.”

Rosettes, clipboards, hi-vis jackets and pamphlets are handed out and we head off. Thornberry races ahead, her bright-red coat glistening in the winter sun like a beacon. We meet all sorts – a couple of Labour families new to the area, Greens, people who despise politics – but mainly disenchanted Tories. When one elderly woman says how upset she is with the government, Thornberry suggests she give Labour a chance. The woman throws Thornberry a look. “Never. They lack backbone,” she says.



On the campaign trail with Polly Billington (*fourth right*) and supporters in Ramsgate. Photograph: Kane McLaughlin

We walk up the drive of a pretty house. A woman answers the door and talks politely to Thornberry. Then her husband joins her. “Foreigners have destroyed this place,” he says. “And if you see your Paki prime minister you can tell him that.” It’s shocking to meet with such overt racism. We finish off with fish and chips on the beach front. I’m still thinking of the racist. Thornberry sees a more positive side: there was only one obvious racist; a few people said they would vote Labour.

On the way home, she talks in depth about her family – three adult children (a journalist, a civil servant and an aspiring archivist) and her husband, Christopher Nugee, whom she married 32 years ago. Nugee, a judge in the court of appeal, is a knight and a lord. When the Conservatives want to rile

Thornberry, [they call her “Lady Nugee”](#), a title she has never used. She says Nugee is much calmer than she is. Thornberry suspects she has attention deficit hyperactivity disorder, but she has never been diagnosed; she is able to use her extraordinary energy to her advantage.

For more than 20 years, Thornberry was a hard-nosed defence barrister. She was good at her job, she says, but lacked sensitivity. “Having kids really changed me. I got much better. My mum had amazing empathy.” What was she like before having children? She pauses. “I was very tough, pushy, insensitive, ambitious and chippy. I failed my 11-plus and was always needing to prove myself because of the assumptions people had made about me as a child.”

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Three days later, we meet up at parliament. Outside the Commons, a group of people are protesting against government corruption and singing Things Can Only Get Better, the D:Ream song adopted by Labour in their victorious campaign in 1997, after 18 years in opposition.

Thornberry’s huge office overlooks parliament and the clock tower housing Big Ben. By the window is a blue UN helmet that belonged to her father. Eventually, in 2010, Cedric returned home from his adventures. By then, he had dementia. Thornberry looked after him till he died, in 2014.

On the wall is a poster of one of her heroes, the suffragette Emily Davison, and a picture of her standing on Thornberry Way in Guildford, named after her mother for her work as a councillor. “It goes between the sewage works and the dump, but hey – she’s still got a street named after her,” she says in that fabulously smoky voice. Thornberry would make a great late-night DJ.

When she was elected in 2005, she was wrongly considered a Brownite. If anything, she says, she was a “Cookie”. She adored Robin Cook, the former foreign secretary who resigned over the Iraq war. She soon established herself as a confident performer in parliament, with a fine line in putdowns. Last July, she faced Suella Braverman just after Braverman had announced she was standing for the Tory leadership. With an admirably straight face, she said: “Can I say what an honour it is to be at this dispatch box facing the next prime minister as she awaits her call from the palace.” [The guffaws](#)



were loud even for the Commons. Thornberry can appear a little too pleased with her rhetorical skills.

By 2006, she had fallen out with Blair, after campaigning against and successfully voting down the plan to increase the maximum time terrorism suspects could be held without charge from 14 to 90 days. “They have this way of putting you on the naughty step, so people don’t want to be seen talking to you and you’re kept in the cupboard. You’re not allowed to get a bigger room, you’re never allowed to be off the whip, all these things.” How long was she on the naughty step? “About two years. It was bad enough rebelling, but rebelling and winning? That’s what the problem was.”



With Keir Starmer at an anti-Brexit march in 2019. Photograph: Gareth Fuller/PA

She tells me a story about the intimidation she faced over her rebellion. “A whip threw me against a wall in the division lobby in a vote just before the 90-day vote,” she says. “My back hit the wall and he grabbed me by the shoulders and shouted in my face. His face was so close to mine I got spit in my face.” Did you make a complaint? “No, I just voted against them anyway.”

Were you shocked? “Yes, of course.” Do you know of any one else who has been thrown against the wall by a whip? “No, just me.” She smiles. “It’s not good parliamentary behaviour and I don’t think it happens any more. People don’t put up with it.” She won’t name the whip, but makes clear it was not [Tom Watson](#), who is known to have shouted: “Traitor!” at her as she entered the lobby to vote.

She also rebelled when Blair’s successor, Gordon Brown, tried to introduce [a 42-day detention period](#). “I said to Gordon: ‘On 99% of things I agree with you, but I think you get the impression that I rebel all the time because it’s the only time I see you.’”

Thornberry then helped Ed Miliband get elected as party leader, but was made to resign [from his shadow cabinet](#) after posting a photo on Twitter of a house in Rochester, Kent, draped in St George flags with a white van in the drive. The photo went viral, with people accusing her of snobbery. The sacking still hurts today.

“I’d been canvassing. You’ve seen what it’s like when you’re out – there are all these things going on. I saw this house covered in flags and took a photo of it. I put it on Twitter along with a whole load of other photos showing what was going on, like a dog with a union jack on and the Monster Raving Loony party. I said to Ed: ‘This is a complete misunderstanding. These are people making mischief.’ He said: ‘No, this is going to get in the way of us winning.’ And the last thing I ever want to do is get in the way of the Labour party winning the election.”

What upset her most was the accusation of snobbery. “The house looked pretty much like the council house I’d been brought up in and I hadn’t even noticed the frigging van. My brother was a builder and had a van, my other brother has just been working for Sainsbury’s, delivering in a van, so the idea that I was sneering at anybody really upset me, because that is so not me.” She wheezes with frustration. “It’s not fair, but there we are.”

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Thornberry’s most prominent role, as shadow foreign secretary, came under the leadership of her fellow Islington MP, Jeremy Corbyn. Although they may be best remembered for a failed high-five following the honourable

election defeat of 2017 ([Corbyn ended up high-fiving her chest](#)), they had a good rapport in the early days. After Labour's election trouncing in 2019 and Corbyn's subsequent resignation, [Thornberry stood for the Labour leadership](#) and was herself trounced. Did that hurt? "It upset me, of course. But I have got over it!" Would she stand again? "It's not going to happen, because Keir is going to be the next prime minister and will be the leader for at least a decade and I will be in my dotage."

I tell her I don't know what the Labour party now stands for, not least because Keir Starmer has [ditched the 10 pledges](#) he made in his election campaign (including increasing tax for the top 5% of earners and introducing common ownership of rail, mail, energy and water). Thornberry echoes the party line that times have changed since the pandemic and says, amid a cost of living crisis, it would be unrealistic to stick to the pledges.

It seems that the major difference is that Labour promises to be more efficient than the Conservative party in government, I say, and all too often the party panders to the ["red wall"](#). Why was Labour so slow to condemn the plan to [send asylum seekers to Rwanda](#)? "I don't think that's fair. I was doing media that day and it was clear what our lines were. There might have been one person from the leader's office who might not have been as forthright as they should have been." Starmer only criticised the proposal a week after the archbishop of Canterbury said it did not "stand the judgment of God". "Well, all right. Keir can't be quick on everything at all times."



Thornberry, then the shadow foreign secretary, campaigning outside parliament in 2018. Photograph: Matt Crossick/Alamy

Where is the idealism, the passion, the soul, the vision? Where is the oomph? I mention the early days of Corbyn's leadership, when so many young people were fired up by politics. She, in turn, talks about singing and dancing her way through the night of 1 May 1997, when Labour finally won a general election, and walking home in the early hours with a couple of red roses in her hand. "Yes, that kind of excitement!" she says nostalgically. "Well, let's see."

But what about Corbyn himself? Her neighbour [was suspended and had the whip withdrawn](#) in 2020 because of his response to the Equality and Human Rights Commission's investigation into antisemitism. Now there is the unseemly prospect of the party challenging its former leader for his Islington North seat because [it won't let him stand for Labour](#).

Does Thornberry think there is a way back for him? "I fear that, unless there is a fundamental change in him, he is not coming back." Won't it make canvassing in Islington difficult when she has to explain why he is not allowed to stand for Labour in the seat he has held for 40 years? "In the end, all I care about is getting a Labour government. That's more important than any individual." Exactly, I say – it will almost certainly cost you a seat

and it could cost you the election if you find people talking about Corbyn rather than a Labour government. “I think the people of Islington understand the subtlety of politics and they’ll understand more than anything else we need a Labour government.”

What excites her most about Starmer’s Labour? “Like me, they are completely driven by the desire to get into power and change Britain for the better. No messing around. Nothing else matters.”

She is thinking about the lack of oomph. Her tone has softened. “We can’t promise all the things we want to do, so we’re not going to engage the same kind of enthusiasm. I understand that. But to get rid of this lot and have some decent people on board who know where they’re going and why they’re going there is *all right*. It’s *all right*! They might not write songs about it, but it will be OK.”

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Livestock are fed at a farm in Surrey last month. Photograph: Maureen McLean/Rex/Shutterstock

## Farming

# Taken for granted: rural vote up for grabs if Labour can make hay

Countryside feels let down by 13 years of Tory rule but other parties will not pick up votes by default

[\*Helena Horton\*](#) *Environment reporter*

Mon 20 Feb 2023 02.00 ESTLast modified on Mon 20 Feb 2023 02.02 EST

When Keir Starmer takes to the stage at the National Farmers' Union conference next week, he may find his audience more receptive than expected.

The rural vote is swinging away from the Conservatives, and seats in communities that have been true blue for years could be going to Labour or

the [Liberal Democrats](#) at the next election if recent opinion polls are borne out by reality.

Thérèse Coffey, the environment secretary, faced [tough questions and a chilly reception](#) late last year at her first public outing. She had chosen to address countryside landowners, the Country Land and Business Association (CLA), which previously would have been one of the safest audiences. But a botched agricultural strategy that has left land managers out of pocket and trade deals that undercut UK farmers have led to widespread anger in the sector. Not to mention the scourge of second homes, cuts to public services in remote areas, and lack of connection to broadband and the National Grid. Thirteen years of Tory rule have failed to bring many rural areas into the 21st century.

These unresolved issues mean the CLA's polling suggest a move towards Labour. Conducted in March, well before Boris Johnson's resignation and Liz Truss's budget fiasco, the results showed 36% of members intended to vote Labour, while 38% backed the [Conservatives](#). For the 2019 general election, 46% of CLA members said they voted Tory compared with 29% who said Labour. When this year's survey results come out, it would be surprising if Labour was not ahead.



Thérèse Coffey, the environment secretary, faced [a chilly reception](#) when she addressed the Country Land and Business Association. Photograph: Daniel Leal/AFP/Getty Images

Jonathan Roberts, the association's director of external affairs, believes the rural vote is up for grabs: "Any party that comes up with a robust and ambitious plan for the rural economy will win votes. That means substantial planning reform, a sensible approach to housing that allows a small number of homes to be built in a large number of villages, and investment in infrastructure and connectivity."

Roberts says his members feel let down by years of Tory rule: "Conservatives can often talk authoritatively on complex and nuanced rural issues – but after 13 years it's difficult to see what ambition they have for the countryside, with MPs seemingly worried by nimbys or other groups determined to treat the countryside as a museum.

"Left-leaning parties might smell blood, but they won't pick up rural votes by default. They still need to earn people's trust. It's no use having your photo taken with a tractor if you're just going to get back on the train to London and forget about us. Rural voters will see through that all day long."

Mark Spencer, the agricultural minister, probably thought he was on home turf at the [Oxford farming conference](#) in January. From a farming background himself, and often sporting ties featuring pigs and cows, announcing a [£1,000 annual payment](#) for farmers who sign up to the new post-Brexit nature schemes should have gone down well. Instead, farmers were outraged at the "too little too late" sum and lack of clarity from Spencer, who refused to take live questions.





Minette Batters, the president of the National Farmers' Union, says no party has clear policies on the countryside. Photograph: Simon Hadley/Alamy

According to Minette Batters, the president of the NFU, the vote is wide open at the moment. “No one has clear policies on any of this,” she says. “The vast majority of our country is rural. And we’ve got to turbocharge that rural economy. Levelling up has been – rightly in some cases – focused on cities. But rural areas are left behind and could be doing more clean, green business if they could just connect to the internet, the grid, had a bus service. We need bold plans to create a new economic model for the countryside.”

The pitch is open for a politician who is willing to take on these thorny issues – and listen to rural communities. Tim Farron, the Liberal Democrats’ environment spokesperson, thinks he is the man to do just that.

“My sense is the Conservatives do take farmers’ votes for granted,” he says. “I was at a farming conference last year and was asked by the audience: ‘How do we stop them taking us for granted?’ I quite cheekily said ‘stop voting for them’ and was met with laughter and applause. Eighty per cent of the people in the room had voted Conservative at the last election.”



Tim Farron, the Liberal Democrats' environment spokesperson, believes rural communities feel let down. Photograph: Amer Ghazzal/REX/Shutterstock

Farron believes rural communities feel let down as GP surgeries shut, bus services close and second-homeowners push people out of communities.

"The facts are that it simply costs more to run public services in areas that are sparsely populated," he says. "If you want people in rural areas to have healthcare at all, then we need to be prepared to accept that it costs a bit more per head just because you'll be taking fewer people over a much larger area. We have been standing up for that."

He says Lib Dem policies include changes to planning rules to disincentivise second-home ownership, and maintaining and improving public services in rural areas. "You've got a government that doesn't seem to be that bothered about these policies. It doesn't think that it needs to worry about those places because they will vote Conservative anyway," Farron adds.

Labour also sees rural issues as social justice issues. Jim McMahon, the shadow environment secretary, says: "When I speak to people they say: 'I want to know that the areas where I've been born and raised will be the area

where my children, their children can stay, they won't be forced out because there isn't the jobs, there isn't the housing the transport is so bad. They can't get a hospital appointment.' That is what a [Labour](#) government will fix."



George Eustice says the Tories' reputation as the party of the countryside has been dented by recent trade deals. Photograph: Finnbarr Webster/Getty Images

The Tory George Eustice, a former environment secretary, is standing down as MP for Camborne and Redruth at the next election, with Labour likely to win the large, rural constituency in Cornwall.

He says the Tories' reputation as the party of the countryside has been dented by the trade deals negotiated by Truss as trade secretary. Those deals have been described as undercutting British farmers by allowing lower standards in imported food.

"There's no doubt that the [Australia trade deal in particular](#) sends the wrong signal to agriculture, and that's not been helpful," Eustice says. "I share some of the NFU's concerns. Agriculture is an important industry. And it's also bound up in issues around food safety, and animal welfare issues, all of

which are important. The trade deals that Liz Truss did are not the trade deals I would have liked done.”

But he thinks a swing towards Labour could put farmers and landowners out of pocket, as the party has not as of yet committed to maintaining the £2.4bn annual budget for farming payments.

“A Labour government would be a more urban government, and the Treasury would reassert itself,” Eustice says. “You would have junior, more inexperienced ministers in Defra [Department for the Environment, [Farming](#) and Rural Affairs] and there’s a real danger for farming there because I think there’s a risk that the budget that’s currently going on the sustainable farming incentive would be removed. And replaced with regulation.”

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Release the bats ... Jon Klein, Nik Fiend, Olli Wisdom and Jonny Slut.  
Photograph: Mick Mercer

[Music](#)

## Goth's undead! The dark return of Britain's spookiest subculture

From Wednesday Addams to Gen Z's body-modified clubbers, the black-eyeliner brigade is back – and wearing its deathhawk hair higher than ever. But did it ever go away?

[Sylvia Patterson](#)

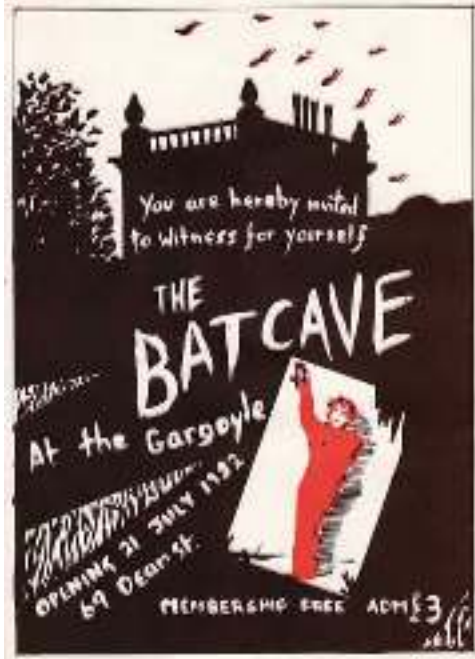
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Last November, the Tim Burton-directed, Netflix Addams Family reboot, [Wednesday](#), saw a dance scene go viral on TikTok: Wednesday herself, played by Jenna Ortega, [flailing beautifully in black organza](#) to the Cramps' goth-schlock-psychobilly 1981 cover, Goo Goo Muck. It came after Burberry showed a dramatic, extreme-goth [collection](#); soon after, [the Cure](#) sold out three nights at Wembley Arena. Now, two hefty books are about to arrive documenting goth's enduringly undead history, [John Robb's The Art of Darkness: the History of Goth](#) and Cathi Unsworth's [Season of the Witch: the Book of Goth](#). And summer sees the return of the long elusive goth sphinx herself, as [Siouxsie Sioux headlines Latitude festival](#).

This month brings the definitive original soundtrack, [Young Limbs Rise Again: the story of the Batcave Nightclub 1982-1985](#). A stunningly comprehensive, 90-track compilation, it features the iconic ghouls heard at London's early-80s goth mecca and includes a lusciously illustrated, 80-page history book, featuring the scratchy, B-movie, Batcave artwork that defines the goth aesthetic to this day.

But if goth feels suddenly back, it never really went away, eternally lurking in a teenage bedroom somewhere: unavoidable in recent years alone in the black tears of Billie Eilish, in Coronation Street storylines about goth [Nina Lucas](#), in Noel Fielding's comedy-horror jumpers on Bake Off ... What's the enduring appeal? Kris Needs, author of the Young Limbs Batcave book and a regular Batcave DJ, sums up his own chaotically carefree goth years with two words.





Fright night ... a flyer for the first night of the Batcave in 1982.  
Photograph: Jon Klein

“Freedom and irreverence,” he says. “We could all just dress up, be really stupid, take loads of drugs, I’d play Bowie, the Gun Club and then a ridiculous Ken Dodd record. It’s a spirit these days I find really rare.”

The original goth phoenix of the late-70s and early-80s rose from the still-smouldering embers of post-punk, its renegade spirit adapting the dressing-up thrills of the fearless new romantics. Atmospherically, what began with the haunting [Bela Lugosi’s Dead](#) by Bauhaus in 1979, the spectral Christine by Siouxsie and the Banshees a year later and the agonised album sleeve mourning scene of Joy Division’s [Closer](#), the music evolved into frenetic, electro-glam, industrial art-rock headed for the nation’s dancefloors.

By 1982, still a year before the term “goth” was widely used, the UK provinces were populated by plume-haired fiends, inky apparitions in bullet belts, buckles and black lipstick. Up in Perth, Scotland, I was one of them, a post-punk obsessive drawn to this glamorous tribe, both deathly serious and fantastically absurd. For disaffected provincial kids like me, this intense, often preposterously grandiose subculture offered not only an alternative reality but a life.

“Leeds was the goth capital,” notes Dave Ball, who formed synth-pop pioneers Soft Cell with Marc Almond in the city in 1978, where they wrote [Martin](#), about a troubled, vampire-fixated boy. Never truly goth themselves, they found it irresistible anyway, and by 1981 were black-clad, stud-festooned pop stars at No 1 on Top of the Pops. “It was romantic, intellectual, Byronesque,” says Ball. “I always found goths were the sensitive, bright kids, very gentle.”

I venture a theory: that the least threatening people are actually the ones who look most frightening: because their madness is all on the outside, not the inside, where the danger lies. “I think that’s true,” he nods. “A hard exterior, with a soft centre. Like a dark chocolate.”



New extremes ... Parma Ham flanked by friends. Photograph: Antony Jones/Getty Images for Spotify

Jonny Slut (AKA Jonny Melton) was the keyboard player with fright-wigged, fishnet-draped, glam-spooks Specimen, the Batcave house band (who also founded the club), famed for his towering deathhawk hair (a deathhawk being an even more voluminous mohawk). Beautiful, androgynous and terrifying, he was a defining goth figurehead who escaped provincial Peterborough to join the band aged 19.



If the goth aesthetic was an outer manifestation of an inner worldview, how would Jonny Slut describe his? “It was an expression of your ‘otherness’, wasn’t it?” he muses. “Of not feeling like you fitted in, of not wanting to fit in. It was sexy but also asexual. I remember feeling not particularly gay, not particularly straight. I didn’t care. Other things were more important, friendships, music, the way we were living.”

He laughs. “I saw a meme the other day, a picture of me and it said something like: ‘I was non-binary back when it was called goth.’ I’m glad whatever it was I was trying to do has transmitted into the future.”

Sophie Chery, bass player with Batcave-playing regulars Sexbeat, a 19-year-old escapee from Paris to London in 1980, found in goth a “timeless expression, this fascination with the dark side”. The Batcave’s decor and artworks (posters, flyers, logo, lettering) were all created by Specimen guitarist/artist Jon Klein (Chery’s then-boyfriend), who would go on to spend seven years in [Siouxsie and the Banshees](#). His Batcave garlands included sheets of cobwebs, camouflage and mannequins spattered with fake blood, while an upright coffin with the bottom removed formed the walkthrough entrance. Chery remains enchanted by the culture, tracing its lineage back to the 18th and 19th centuries, to gothic architecture and literature, “from Bram Stoker’s Dracula to Rocky Horror to fantasy culture, to 20th-century film, Nosferatu, the original Cat People, to elegant, dark, sensual fashion”.



The dark side ... Sophie Chery and Hamish McDonald of Sexbeat at Dingwalls, London, in 1983. Photograph: Dpa Picture Alliance/Alamy

She pauses and thinks again. “It’s logical that people are still amused by it,” she decides. “But also, we live in dark times. Kids today are scared. Climate change. Sexually, it’s difficult. Economically, it’s difficult. In the early 80s I rented a room in London, in a whole house, for £5 a week. It’s not a ‘free’ mood now. Kids are not as liberated as we were.”

It was romantic, intellectual, Byronesque. Goths were the sensitive, bright kids, very gentle

Like all the best clubs, the Batcave, says Jonny Slut, “burned bright” and burned out: youth culture moved on and in 1985 he shaved off his hawk, “and had an orange unicorn point on the front of my head and an Ariel Automatic packet pinned to the back of my jacket”. He went on to work with Adamski and the KLF, and in 2002 launched the electroclash club night [Nag Nag Nag](#). Still an occasional DJ, he lives a “quiet life” in Dorset, where he makes chutney (“I’ll send you a jar if you like”) but keeps an eye on clubland trends. “The coolest London club nights now look very goth,” he notes, citing [Monster Queen](#) and [Wraith](#).

Is the goth resurgence today mostly about the look? “There’s still plenty of music around, coldwave-y, dark, techno-y,” he decides. “But I don’t think music is as important to youth cults now. That was our only form of expression, wasn’t it?”



Constant trauma: neo-goth Salvia Photograph: Antony Jones/Getty Images for Spotify

Wraith is run by Parma Ham, an artist, DJ and designer involved in the recent Burberry campaign, who is, says Jonny Slut, “part of a coterie of little [clubland] devils much more extreme than we were”. Parma Ham could be Jonny Slut: the Next Dimension, creating explicit, S&M fetishist imagery, with a deathhawk two-feet tall. Their partner, the equally fantasy-alien artist [Salvia](#) also creates extreme looks, through disturbing body modification, both Photoshopped and real: a recurring theme is extra limbs and she also glues thin arcs of medical tube to her face. It’s an expression of recovery, she states online, solemnly, “from the constant trauma of living”.

Goth has endured, and will always endure, believes 29-year-old Essex alt-rock insurgent [Cassyyette](#) (real name Cassy Brooking) because the pain of being young will always endure. It remains, she says, the outer representation “of your inner darkness, it’s being anti a society that makes you feel uncomfortable”.

Cassyyette is on Zoom, wearing a pink hairnet over peroxide hair, with a barbed wire neck tattoo, the word “degenerate” tattooed across her throat (her fans are the degenerettes), and on her back, “a massive neo-goth futuristic bat-wing situation”. As with so much alternative music today, she’s incorporated goth elements into both her look and sound – which veers from death metal to Pink-inspired pop. Outspokenly feminist and queer, she’s a TikTok devotee (“it facilitates loads of subcultures”) including fashion TikTok’s “Whimsigoth – amazing!”



‘You don’t get bullied like you did before’ ... Cassyyette. Photograph: Antony Jones/Getty Images for Spotify

The difference for young goths today, she decides, is “you don’t get bullied for it like you did before”. Also, with the permanent threat of being photographed or filmed in public, and the constant pressure from wellness gurus online, their focus is on clean living and staying in control. Most gothy kids today, certainly, are not living in drug-berserk chaos or in threadbare squats (as Jonny Slut happily was, for years). “They’re very health-conscious.”

I wonder if Cassyyette thinks today’s goth resurgence is simply the zeitgeist, reflecting the Wednesday-watching Gen Z, especially: the apocalyptic thinking, horror-bombarded, digital natives who’ve grown up convinced the

planet is wrecked, humanity is hideous, and the world is run by idiots. “You’ve nailed it with that!” she agrees. “And that’s where being anti-society, anti-patriarchy comes in, because fuck this.”

The fabulous, supposedly frightening Jonny Slut, meanwhile, is true to his word (and proves his own goth spirit endures). A jar of chutney arrives, labelled “Jonny Slutney!” and meticulously packaged in a box swathed in glossiest black gaffer tape. He sends a text: “It looked like a little coffin when I sent it off!” Then: Three bat emojis. Three black hearts.

Young Limbs Rise Again, the Story of the Batcave Nightclub 1982-1985 is released via Demon Music on 24 February. Cassyette tours the UK from 10 March

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‘If we allow this amount of virus to continue to circulate we are constantly running the risk of a new variant,’ says Farrar. Photograph: Cheese Scientist/Alamy

[Coronavirus](#)

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## **‘There may still be surprises’: Jeremy Farrar warns of pandemic perils ahead**

[Sarah Boseley](#)

As the former Sage adviser leaves Wellcome to join WHO, he talks about exhausted health workers, the UK’s sluggish response to Covid and the danger of conspiracy theories



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Masks are a rarity now on streets and trains. We don't leave empty seats in theatres or limit how many people browse in our shops. It seems like it's all over – but Prof Sir Jeremy Farrar, director of Wellcome, once a key member of the government's scientific advisory body Sage and an enormously influential figure in global health, says the Covid pandemic could still have unpleasant surprises in store.

Farrar is not a doom-monger. But from where he is sitting, with long experience of epidemics from flu to Sars to [Ebola](#), we are still in a risky place. We need to be ready for what this – or quite possibly another – bug could do to us.

“I would be less sanguine that the pandemic is over. I think the overwhelmingly likely scenario is we are in a completely different place and it's much better. The world has immunity now, largely. But there may still be surprises in this pandemic,” he says.

Speaking to the Guardian as he prepares to leave Wellcome – he is to become chief scientist of the [World Health Organization](#) – Farrar explains



how China's zero-Covid policy has been his biggest concern over the past year.

It was never sustainable. China, in his view, will go through a series of waves of infection now that restrictions have been lifted.

“They’re going through a horrible wave at the moment. I don’t think there’s full transparency about cases or about deaths or about the impact of that.”

Meanwhile on the streets of the UK and in every other country, Covid transmission is extremely high. The Office for National Statistics [says one in 55 people in England has the virus.](#)

We need new vaccines that actually stop infection, he says.

“We are not in a good enough position to be sure this is not coming back until we can get transmission-blocking vaccines. And I don’t know if they’re possible, but I think the ambition should be there by the end of this decade or as soon as possible.

“I think if we allow this amount of virus to continue to circulate we are constantly running the risk of a new variant.”

And, he warns, “this Covid pandemic doesn’t stop any other virus emerging”.

What comes next may not be a twist in the coronavirus tail.



‘The current pandemic of avian H5N1 is a really concerning issue,’ says Farrar. Photograph: Maureen McLean/Rex/Shutterstock

It could be influenza. Just because we have had scares that turned out to be false alarms in the past doesn’t mean flu is not something to fear. It really is.

H5N1 has been circulating among wild birds in the UK since 2021, and has infected poultry, which have to be kept indoors as a result. The virus has jumped into wild animals such as foxes and otters and a few poultry farm workers in Europe have tested positive, although without symptoms.

“The current pandemic of avian H5N1 is a really concerning issue,” says Farrar.

“You want to be really sensible and calm about it – you’re not saying the world is suddenly going to face an H5N1 pandemic tomorrow and it’ll be devastating.”

Yet it’s a worry. Historically, he says, of the hundreds of people who have been infected with the virus, 30% have died.

“We’re not going to face that scenario, I don’t think, but if we allow an avian virus to which none of us has got any immunity to continue to circulate in birds and then increasingly, whether it’s minks or seals, come across into the mammalian sector and therefore start to adapt, there’s a risk there. You can’t quantify it. But we don’t have an H5N1 vaccine tomorrow ready to go.”

Farrar’s concern is that the UK and the world should be ready for whatever the microbial world is going to throw at us. The time to think of how to prepare for a Covid pandemic was not 31 December 2019 after 20 years of underinvestment in public health.

Given what we’ve been through since then, we should have everything we need in place. There have been breakthroughs. Wellcome supported the trialling of the first Ebola vaccine during the epidemic of 2014 in west Africa.

Now it is accepted that research can and must be done in a pandemic. The Recovery trial based in Oxford was set up as the UK locked down for the first time in March 2020 and quickly found treatments for Covid.

But our healthcare workers are not ready. They are exhausted and feel undervalued. Strikes in the UK are a sorry part of that story.

“This is a global issue, which I think is hugely concerning,” he says. “It’s certainly true in this country. The resilience of healthcare workers, broadly defined from ambulance drivers to nurses to doctors, to care workers in social care, etc. They’re shattered. They are absolutely shattered.”

Farrar, 61, who spent 18 years leading the clinical research unit at the Hospital for Tropical Diseases in Ho Chi Minh City in Vietnam, has been through many epidemics.

“You can cope with it for a certain amount of time. But if that becomes the norm, over the months and years while you are also frightened yourself personally ... and your family’s sick ... The resilience in healthcare workers around the world is really thin at the moment, and people are

leaving those professions. Just to go back to delivering non-pandemic healthcare is going to be a huge challenge.”

It’s all about people, he says. Suppose there is what he terms “another event” in the next five to 10 years. “If you stretch people beyond their resilience they won’t be there when you need them,” he says.

“I think we have to address the morale, staffing, the training, everything from public health physicians to care workers, to doctors and nurses and physios and everybody in between because there’s very little spare capacity in any system globally.



‘There’s very little spare capacity in the health system. As you can see from the strikes, morale and resilience is very thin,’ says Farrar. Photograph: Guy Bell/Rex/Shutterstock

“It’s particularly true in the UK. As you can see from the strikes, morale and resilience is very thin.”

We can’t rely on stealing those who have trained in the Philippines, Ghana or India, who are needed in their own countries, he adds.

In his book *Spike*, published in July 2021, he was highly critical of Boris Johnson's government's handling of the pandemic and its sluggish response to Covid.

He singled out for special condemnation the test, trace and isolate system led by Dido Harding and the dismantling of Public [Health](#) England (Harding was initially given charge of its replacement body, the National Institute for Health Protection, which later became the UK Health Security Agency).

Johnson himself, with his "absence of political leadership" in the early weeks and backing for those who touted theories that herd immunity would free the UK from the virus, and the then health secretary, Matt Hancock, come off badly.

Farrar thought about resigning over the failure to lock down in September 2020 and talks of a moral dilemma: "Does staying in an advisory role mean being complicit in the outcomes of bad decisions?" He adds: "To be honest, I still don't know the answer." He wrote of the "carnage" of January and February 2021. "Many of those deaths were preventable," he wrote.

Wellcome has a huge endowment worth £38bn, up from £15bn when he became director in October 2013.

Politico called him the Bill Gates of Europe, but Farrar points out that it's not his money. He says there are issues around the roles of philanthropy versus government. "Philanthropy shouldn't allow governments to get away from their responsibilities," he says. It must be a complementary relationship.

Like other leading scientists – Anthony Fauci in the US, for instance – he has been targeted on social media. He and his children have been subjected to death threats.

"It's intimidating. You try not to be, but when it starts to involve not just you but also your family members and some degree of protection, it's a terrifying place to be in."

Moving to the WHO in Geneva will not protect him from that. There was sniping when his new role was announced from those who claimed he tried to stifle debate about the origins of the virus, publicly supporting its natural emergence from animals while his private emails showed him discussing whether a lab leak was possible.

Farrar's position is that while it is likely to have come from animals, it is important to stay open-minded and gather evidence. Above all, we need transparency, he says.

There is a responsibility on scientists to speak out or they will leave a vacuum for others, he adds.

“That would be a very dark place to be. Conspiracy theories may be amplified now. They may get more airtime through whatever vehicle but there have always been conspiracy theories. This is not a total 21st-century phenomenon. And in the main, I think humanity works through them and comes out into better places, but it doesn't do that by chance.”

His role at the WHO is relatively new and yet to be defined.

Farrar is optimistic about what could be achieved with the help of science, even at this time of wars and suspicion and economic crisis. World leaders may not be able to agree on ways to bring down inflation, “but there are some things you can agree on. And you can agree, whether you're sitting in Beijing or Washington or Geneva or Delhi or Prague or Rio de Janeiro, that climate affects you all.”

Science has got a role to play in tackling the climate crisis, in drug resistance, pandemics, in mental health and in the more equal manufacture and distribution of drugs and vaccines.

He hopes he's not being naive or over idealistic, “but I hope the world could say, ‘Look, I can't necessarily agree on this trade deal or where balloons fly or the South China Sea. These are deeply historic and sensitive issues. But maybe we can agree on these other things. And why don't we start working on those?’

“Can you use science to enhance green shoots diplomacy? I wouldn’t be doing it unless I thought you could. Because otherwise we’re in danger just at a time when the world does face these global existential crises.

“If we do revert to a lack of evidence, a lack of information – if we’re going back to the era where we’re just making policies up with no evidence behind them, the world is in a worse place. And we’re moving away from an era of sort of 20th-, 21st-century enlightenment to something darker. And we can’t let that happen.”

This article was amended on 20 February 2023 to clarify that the National Institute for Health Protection later became the UK Health Security Agency.

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- Therapy taught me I can always change my mind. So I did, and stopped the therapy.
- My husband and I are at war over the radio. Will peace and quiet ever be possible?
- Tár's gender-balanced profession is a utopian fantasy. In the real world, conducting has a gender problem



Challenger II tank of the Desert Rats in Basra, southern Iraq, April 2003.  
Photograph: PA

[OpinionIraq](#)

**Iraq was a terrible war – but it cannot  
excuse our failure to confront the  
tyranny we face today**

[John Kampfner](#)



As the 20th anniversary looms, there is much to reflect upon, but still we must defend the values threatened by Russia and Putin

Mon 20 Feb 2023 01.00 ESTLast modified on Mon 20 Feb 2023 05.30 EST

In 2013, MPs voted narrowly to [reject a motion](#) that would have allowed David Cameron to authorise military action in Syria. A year earlier, President Obama warned that the deployment of chemical weapons would be a “red line”. They were used; he did nothing. Half a million people have died; terrible crimes have been committed. The war continues, but the dictator Bashar al-Assad, supported by Russia, [has largely prevailed](#).

In 2014, a few months after the US, UK and their allies washed their hands of that country, Vladimir Putin launched his first invasion of Ukraine (via proxies) and [annexed Crimea](#). One direct line can be traced back to these events, and forward to present bloodshed: the [invasion of Iraq](#). That war, 20 years ago next month, is a standard text on diplomatic and military failure.

A quick reprise: after the terrorist attacks of September 2001 Tony Blair became the galvaniser-in-chief for the White House. He was spectacularly successful in assembling a coalition of the willing for the invasion of

Afghanistan (those were the days when British prime ministers had clout). Within months, however, George W Bush, had turned his attentions elsewhere, announcing in his State of the Union address that he would go after the “[axis of evil](#)”, at the heart of which was Saddam Hussein.

Blair resolved he would never be blindsided by the Americans again. As I wrote in [Blair’s Wars](#), he told Bush as early as April 2002 at the president’s ranch in Crawford, Texas, that he would go along with him, come what may. The rest, as they say, is dodgy dossiers, spurious legal advice, elusive weapons of mass destruction and a disastrous occupation. All the various public inquiries that followed have corroborated this chain of events.

One of the most important changes enacted after Iraq was the requirement, pushed through by Gordon Brown, that prime ministers seek parliamentary approval for future interventions. In March 2011 MPs [backed action in Libya](#), only two years later to refuse it on Syria. The shock was immense. Bullish bombastic Britain doesn’t do such things; it fights the good fight. That, at least, has always been its self-image.

Asked by the BBC to present a special radio programme on the vote, I was surprised when Blair [agreed to be interviewed](#) (he had blanked me for a decade). He was incredibly eager to be heard, to be understood. I quoted Cameron back to him, saying that people had “felt let down” by Iraq. As is his wont, Blair disagreed, asking in return what might happen to a world “without a referee”?

Iraq has left scars that refuse to heal. Libya was a smaller intervention, equally counter-productive. Afghanistan was the longest of them all, until it collapsed with the humiliating [flight from Kabul](#) in August 2021. Having given them false hope and fleeting security, the US decided that international forces should quit suddenly, leaving Afghans at the mercy of the Taliban.

These interventions and others, such as in Kosovo and Sierra Leone, were wrapped up in the doctrine of liberal, or humanitarian, intervention. It arose from the horror of a global community looking the other way as people were being slaughtered in Bosnia and Rwanda. It morphed into a messianic zeal to remove dictators and install democracy, at the barrel of the gun.

That is no more. On his appointment as secretary of state in March 2021, Antony Blinken declared: “We will not promote democracy through costly military interventions or by attempting to overthrow authoritarian regimes by force. We have tried these tactics in the past. However well intentioned, they haven’t worked.”

When the United Nations general assembly voted last March to [condemn Putin’s invasion](#) of Ukraine, some 35 countries chose to abstain, including pivotal states such as India, Pakistan and South Africa. The ability of the US and its partners to bring the global south along with it is vastly diminished. Some are less than impressed by the “do the right thing” tap on the shoulder form of diplomacy; some have long been non-aligned. Some see business opportunities with China and Russia. Many continue to cite Iraq as the basis of their suspicion of western intentions.

As for Britain, it has taken a while – decades in fact – but is it finally beginning to accept a role in the world more in keeping with its actual status rather than self-delusion? It cannot realistically pursue a global foreign and security policy while mired in the western world’s sickliest economy. It is no longer capable of mounting a military intervention of any note. It knows it has to prioritise.

The childish Johnsonian “[global Britain](#)” mantra is being replaced by “patient diplomacy”. Britain is no longer interested in “dictating or telling others what they should do”, [declared James Cleverly](#), foreign secretary, in December. Instead it wants relationships “based on shared interests and common principles”. There is nothing ignoble in that.

Which brings me to Germany, which thinks harder than most, that takes the practice of democracy far more seriously than most. Yet when it came to their response to Putin’s invasion, many in that country drew the wrong lessons from history. The Germans’ instinctive caution about military action led them to refuse to take part in the Iraq folly. Yet it is also responsible for their dithering over [Ukraine](#). Never Again War – *Nie wieder Krieg* – was not the conclusion to draw from the Nazi era. Yes, war is an option to be avoided where possible; yet succumbing to dictatorship, war crimes and aggression is an even worse outcome.

The west continues to show double standards, to be selective in its choice of allies and adversaries. Saudi Arabia is perhaps the most egregious case in point. No matter how terrible its human rights abuses, the kingdom is never touched. I am not advocating a return to the mindset or the actions of two decades ago. The days of the west setting itself up as the world's policeman are long gone. Much wider alliances need to be built.

Putin has inadvertently reminded the world of its duty to protect. Such has been the despondency about the state of global democracy, so inexorable has been the rise of populism (aided and abetted by the likes of Putin), few expected such resistance from Ukraine and its allies. The response over the past year has been collective, principled and circumspect – in some ways excessively circumspect.

Iraq was a terrible war, but to cite it in perpetuity as a reason for countries never to confront dictators is to give up on values that are worth fighting for.

- John Kampfner is the author of *Blair's Wars and Why the Germans Do It Better*
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‘Thankfully, platforms such as the Black, African and Asian Therapy Network and Black Minds Matter exist – and I found mine through the former.’ Photograph: FatCamera/Getty Images

[Why I quit Counselling and therapy.](#)

**Therapy taught me I can always change my mind. So I did, and stopped the therapy**

[Niellah Arboine](#)





I was a sceptic, but it did get me to a point where I could move on. It is a luxury, especially for Black people like me. I was lucky to do it

Mon 20 Feb 2023 02.00 ESTLast modified on Mon 20 Feb 2023 05.29 EST

I used to think anyone who went to therapy was automatically enlightened. These brave souls had taken a leap into the fortress of their minds, making the effort to unpick old habits, break generational curses and generally “fix” their mental states. Having a therapist was the ultimate form of self-care.

And yet I still avoided it for a long time – even as I started to feel as if I was treading water with no direction. Perhaps I was following a similar logic to the many Black people who [seek help only when they reach crisis point](#). But I didn’t want to share the same fate. After a relationship breakdown, an ADHD diagnosis that spiralled into an identity crisis and the ongoing emotional repercussions of the pandemic, I decided to start therapy in 2021. I didn’t anticipate that I would be quitting it after only a year.

Finding a private therapist is a bit like navigating the dating pool – if dates cost upwards of £50 an hour. Before you decide to meet anyone, you have to sift through all the different types of talking therapy to work out what’s

right for you – from cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT) to counselling and psychodynamic therapy. And once you've got as far as choosing your modality, you have to find the right person: someone who understands your lived experiences, who you can fully trust.

This is particularly difficult for Black people. A lack of Black practitioners, combined with structural racism in services and [a resulting lack of trust](#), means that even thinking about getting a therapist can be draining. Thankfully, platforms such as the [Black, African and Asian Therapy Network \(BAATN\)](#) and [Black Minds Matter](#) exist – and I found mine through the former.

My therapist was great. She was affordable, understood how my identity shaped how I saw the world and equipped me with practical tips. More than anything, she was patient with me. But I wasn't prepared for how uncomfortable therapy would be. I was confronting parts of myself I had buried away, reliving moments I'd rather forget and understanding how events and people in my life have led to my behavioural patterns. I'd leave sessions in tears, feeling drained and wondering if it was worth it. Having to be present in those swirling emotions was exhausting.

Then I found myself trying to “win” at therapy. Had I made her laugh? Did she think I was fine? Perhaps I needed to unpack my tendencies to people-please and put others' perceived feelings before my own – even my therapist's. Over the months, I began spending most of the day leading up to my sessions agonising about what I could bring to the table. I'd already talked about [misogynoir](#), the hatred directed at black women, my loved ones, my childhood, friendship and relationship breakdowns, and how my neurodivergence had affected my confidence throughout my life. Eventually, trying to come up with things made me feel anxious. I started to dread the sessions, and then felt guilty for dreading them. So, after a year, I quit.

On reflection, I think the reason I was racking my brain to come up with talking points was that I didn't have any any more. I didn't quit therapy because it didn't work – in some ways I quit because it did. After a year, I felt more like myself, I had the tools to deal with my emotions, trust my gut

and open up. I also had a better sense of when something wasn't working for me any more.

I know this won't last for ever – our mental states ebb and flow – and maybe one day I'll return to therapy. But some things about me feel changed. Previously, I looked at my mind as something that needed to be fixed or “cured”. I spent so much time trying to reach a place of eternal nirvana – a state in which I could somehow quell my neurodivergence to fit in. Now I give myself much more grace.

Realistically, we can't all go to psychotherapy all the time, for ever. It's not a one-size-fits-all solution for everyone. Therapy is expensive, and isn't always enough on its own. At its worst, it can even actively harm. And with an overstretched NHS, waiting lists for free counselling can stretch to months. I've had friends who have tried hypnosis, [tarot readers](#), medication, cold water swimming, spending time in nature, [reiki healing](#), exercise and life drawing as forms of therapy. Personally, I've turned to art, journalling and gardening. I also try to find meditation in the everyday.

I'll always recommend therapy – it helped me recalibrate my outlook on life. But I know it is a luxury, even though it shouldn't be. Whenever I question whether quitting therapy was the right decision, I remember one of the greatest lessons I learned from my time there: I can always change my mind.

- Niellah Arboine is a writer and deputy editor at Where the Leaves Fall, a magazine exploring humankind's connection with nature
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‘6 Music should work but something terrible always happens within 15 minutes of switching it on, usually jazz.’ Photograph: bernie\_photo/Getty Images

[OpinionRadio](#)

## **My husband and I are at war over the radio. Will peace and quiet ever be possible?**

[Emma Beddington](#)



I loathe jingles and DJ banter while he listens to BBC Radio 1 and doesn't get Radio 4. So who will win: the tinnitus sufferer or the controlling monster?

Mon 20 Feb 2023 02.00 ESTLast modified on Mon 20 Feb 2023 14.07 EST

There's an ominous thumping downstairs as I write this, but it's not the builders who moved in when our sons moved out in September and who have been here ever since. Finally, work is staggering to a long-overdue end, meaning days of drilling and banging are only occasional.

Everything should be quiet, and recently – for whole, wonderful hours at a time – it has been. I have sat near-delirious with happiness, hearing nothing other than the occasional sparrow chirrup. Not right now, though, because my husband has replaced drilling with [BBC Radio 1](#).

He has bad [tinnitus](#), which makes silence (and headphones) unbearable. He needs noise but I'm so noise intolerant that repetitive jingles, DJ banter about Lewis Capaldi and the death of Lilt turn me into Homer Simpson with the cymbal-clanging [monkey in his head](#): crazed with distraction and stupid. In the interests of marital harmony I am trying to be less of a rigid

shrew, so I don't instantly turn the radio off. Instead I mutter things like, "I am 48. I should be listening to Melvyn Bragg haranguing academics about the Nibelungenlied, not Jordan North talking about farts," and look pained until he gives in, which isn't much better.

If there must be sound, I'd prefer [Radio 4](#), but much of its output turns out to be inexplicable and indefensible to someone who didn't grow up with it. "At 10 to 8 daily, a religious spokesperson tenuously ties current events to God for a few minutes." "Ah yes, this is a 72-year-long audio drama, based around discussions of winter barley." "It's a weather forecast for fishers. No, no one understands it." Don't even get me started on Just a Minute.

What audio can a tinnitus sufferer and a controlling monster enjoy together? [6 Music](#) should work for our demographic but something terrible always happens within 15 minutes of switching it on, usually jazz. The only acceptable compromise we've found is YO1 radio, a local station playing 80s and 90s bangers with mercifully little talking, but it's still a poor cousin to silence if you ask me. Are we missing something? Please don't say "podcasts".

Emma Beddington is a Guardian columnist

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Cate Blanchett as conductor Lydia Tar, a performance that saw her win [Best Actress at the 2023 Baftas](#). Photograph: Album/Alamy

[Classical music](#)

## Tár's gender-balanced profession is a utopian fantasy. In the real world, conducting has a gender problem

Emma Warren

The Bafta-winning film has helped increase visibility of women in conducting, but I long for the day when my presence on the podium won't be remarked on

Mon 20 Feb 2023 04.00 ESTLast modified on Mon 20 Feb 2023 23.23 EST

I've lost track of the number of times I've been asked my thoughts on the film [Tár](#) these last few weeks. It seems as if everyone wants to know what it's really like to be a woman in conducting, and how I feel about the

abusive fictional character causing a stir on cinema screens across the globe.

Lydia Tár lives in a world that closely resembles present-day reality, complete with references to a recent pandemic. But one notable difference is apparent: in Tár's world, female conductors have well and truly smashed the glass ceiling, and conducting seems to be a gender-balanced profession. In the film's opening scenes, Tár talks about how the challenges once faced by women are in the past, and suggests that her fellowship programme for female conductors should be opened up to men as it no longer feels necessary to distinguish between genders.

I've been told that I need to conduct 'with more testosterone'

This strikes me as a strange utopian fantasy. In the real world, it's no secret that conducting has a gender problem. According to [recent figures from the Royal Philharmonic Society](#), there are currently only five female conductors with titled roles amid the several hundred conductors on the staff of professional British orchestras, and only 11% of conductors signed by British agents are women.

Things are slowly improving, but as a woman in this field, I still feel like an outlier. I'm currently the only female student on the postgraduate choral conducting course at the Royal Academy of Music, and throughout my musical education, my conducting teachers have been only men.



‘In many ways Lydia Tár perpetuates the masculine conductor trope: she wears tailored power suits; speaks in a low voice; drives fast cars ...’ Cate Blanchett as Tár. Photograph: Landmark Media/Alamy

I’m very fortunate to have learned from some of the best in the business, at inspiring institutions that have provided me with opportunities to excel. But there have been individuals along the way who have commented on my gender. I’ve been told that my conducting is “always just too girly”, that I need to conduct “with more testosterone”, and that “it’s harder for women to show a true forte”.

Such comments might be intended to be constructive, but I find it difficult to respond. No matter how I conduct, I’m always going to look like a woman. In all honesty, I’m still grappling with what it means to be both feminine and a conductor. Historically speaking, conducting is a man’s world: a profession that was created and defined by men. And until recently, the greatest world-famous maestros have all been male, leading many to hold a deep-rooted (often subconscious) view that excellent conducting *looks* masculine.

I would have loved to see Tár challenge that ideal – an ultra-successful celebrity conductor who also happens to look, dare I say it, girly. But even in her seemingly gender-balanced world, in many ways Lydia Tár

perpetuates the masculine conductor trope: she wears tailored power suits; speaks in a low voice; drives fast cars; abuses her position of power.

About 10 years ago, conductor [Vasily Petrenko gave a now-infamous interview](#) in which he claimed that orchestras “react better when they have a man in front of them” and that “a cute girl on a podium means that musicians think about other things”. ([He subsequently said that he had been misquoted](#), and that he was referring specifically to the situation in his homeland, Russia). I wish attitudes like that were a distant memory, but I’ve heard similar comments, and know female colleagues who have been advised to be careful about what they wear to conduct, in case it sends the wrong message.



‘No matter how much I want it to be all about the music, for some my presence on the podium is still a novelty’: student conductor Emma Warren. Photograph: Derri Joseph Lewis

Sometimes, though, being careful still isn’t enough. Recently, I conducted a concert in a long-sleeved, full-length, loose-fitting dress – not that it should matter what I was wearing – and afterwards was approached by an older audience member, who told me that he liked watching my bum wiggle as I conducted.

I'm starting to accept that no matter how much I want it to be all about the music, for some my presence on the podium is still a novelty. I'm hopeful that Tár will help to change that. It has been refreshing to see images of a woman conducting on billboards and online advertisements across the world. But, to state the obvious: we must not forget that she's fictional. Berlin has never had a female principal conductor; there are no female conductor-composer [EGOT winners](#).

And if Lydia Tár is the only representation of a female conductor we see in the mainstream media, we have a problem. When it comes to encouraging more women to pick up the baton, the importance of excellent, real-life role models cannot be overstated. When I was a child attending a local state school in rural Herefordshire, classical music seemed to be worlds away from my everyday life. The idea of becoming a musician – let alone a conductor – felt impossible. My “lightbulb moment” came while working with Mirga Gražinytė-Tyla, as a member of the City of Birmingham Symphony Orchestra's Youth Chorus. She had recently been appointed [music director of the orchestra](#) – the first woman to hold the role, and the only woman at the time to be principal conductor of a major UK orchestra. Watching her lead the rehearsal, I was struck by her kind, gentle, yet firm and self-assured manner. I had a revelation: this was a job that someone like me could do.

I still today meet people who have never come across a female conductor before. Some are confused about how to describe me – I've heard conductress, maestra, chorus mistress. Tár has helped to increase visibility of women in conducting, and hopefully one day I will no longer need to explain myself, and my presence on the podium won't be remarked on. But until then, let's continue giving women opportunities to break into the highest levels of the music industry; to challenge misconceptions; and to inspire the next generation of conductors.

This article was amended on 20 February 2023 to include the fact that Vasily Petrenko later said he was misquoted about female conductors.

Emma Warren is studying for a postgraduate degree in choral conducting.

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Meta has announced it will charge Facebook and Instagram users to have verified accounts, while Twitter says it will provide its SMS-based two-factor authentication only to paid users. Photograph: Dado Ruvić/Reuters

[Facebook](#)

# Facebook and Instagram to get paid verification as Twitter charges for two-factor SMS authentication

Mark Zuckerberg follows Elon Musk's lead in introducing fee for blue ticks, while Twitter to restrict 2FA via SMS to paid users

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[\*Josh Taylor\*](#)  
[\*@joshgnosis\*](#)

Sun 19 Feb 2023 21.21 EST Last modified on Mon 20 Feb 2023 17.05 EST

Facebook and [Instagram](#) users will soon need to pay to be verified on the social media platforms, as Meta follows in the footsteps of rival platform Twitter.

Mark Zuckerberg, Meta's chief executive, announced in a Facebook post on Sunday that the service would first roll out in Australia and New Zealand later this week.

The company said it would cost US\$11.99 a month on web or US\$14.99 on iOS and Android (or, in Australia, \$19.99 on web or \$24.99 on iOS and Android).

Zuckerberg said in addition to a blue badge the service would offer “extra impersonation protection”, improved reach for verified users and direct access to customer support.

In a [blog post](#), Meta said it would rely on government ID documents to prove the identity of verified accounts, to avoid the embarrassment of

accounts impersonating people and brands – as happened when Twitter initially rolled out its paid verification service.

Accounts must also have a posting history and users must be at least 18 years old.

The service would not be available to businesses at this stage, [Meta](#) said.

The increased visibility of posts from verified users would “depend on a subscriber’s existing audience size and the topic of their posts”, the company said. Those with smaller audiences might see more of an impact.

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The company said it would also offer “exclusive stickers” on [Facebook](#) and Instagram stories and Facebook reels.

Meta cut 11,000 staff in November – the equivalent of 13% of its workforce – amid falling ad revenue and economic downturn. The company’s share price fell by more than 70% in 2022 before a rebound and in July it reported its first ever fall in revenue.

Twitter’s CEO, [Elon Musk](#), responded to the news in a tweet saying it was “inevitable” Meta would follow Twitter.

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## Twitter restricts SMS two-factor authentication to paid accounts

Separately, [Twitter](#) announced on Friday it would provide SMS-based two-factor authentication only to users who are subscribed to the US\$8-a-month (\$11.65) Twitter Blue service from 20 March.

The company currently provides free two-factor authentication through third-party apps and a security key, which are considered more secure than SMS-based systems. If non-subscriber accounts that use SMS authentication do not switch before the deadline, Twitter said it would disable two-factor authentication for that account.

The move has sparked concerns that it could lead to widespread hacks on accounts next month if they fail to switch over.

Twitter's [last transparency report prior to Musk's takeover](#) shows that as of December 2021, although just 2.6% of active Twitter accounts use two-factor authentication, 74.4% of those use SMS as their method of authentication.

Musk has [claimed](#) Twitter was being “scammed” US\$60m a year from fake two-factor authentication messages. He separately supported a tweet claiming the scams were being run by telecommunications companies that had set up bot accounts to run the two-factor authentication process to get revenue from the text messages from Twitter.

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China's Li Xiaodong, from Shanghai's Taiwan Affairs Office faces questioning inside Taipei's city hall after meeting city officials in Taiwan on Monday. Photograph: Ritchie B Tongo/EPA

[Taiwan](#)

## Taiwan visit by Chinese delegation spurs internal political tensions

Visit to Taipei by Shanghai officials was arranged by mayor from opposition Kuomintang party, attracting accusations of secrecy

[Helen Davidson](#) in Taipei

[@heldavidson](#)

Mon 20 Feb 2023 02.08 EST Last modified on Mon 20 Feb 2023 02.09 EST

A Chinese government delegation has visited [Taiwan](#) for the first time since the start of the pandemic, sparking some partisan tension on the island over cross-strait interactions as Beijing reiterated its intentions to annex it.

The delegation of six officials, including the deputy head of the Shanghai office of China's Taiwan Affairs Office, Li Xiaodong, arrived in Taipei with plans to visit the Lantern festival and hold talks with local officials. They were invited by the city government, led by mayor Chiang Wan-an, of the opposition Kuomintang party (KMT).

The group arrived on Saturday, and were quickly driven away without answering questions from gathered reporters, local media said. Around a dozen pro-Taiwan independence supporters protested against their arrival outside the airport, shouting "Taiwan and China, separate countries" and "Chinese people, get out", while on the airport road another small group of pro-China supporters shouted their welcome.

Taiwan's Mainland Affairs Council said it had approved the application for a three-day visit, on the condition that it be low-key and without public political statements. But members of the ruling Democratic Progressive party (DPP) accused Chiang of being secretive about the visit, keeping information away from the DPP and the public, out of fear it would attract protest or controversy.

The visit has added to domestic tensions around cross-strait communication. The KMT has traditionally sought closer ties with China's government, and its vice-chairman, Andrew Hsia, recently visited Beijing. Hsia was criticised for his 10-day visit, the second since a controversial visit shortly [after the Chinese military drills](#) that followed Nancy Pelosi's visit to Taiwan last year. Hsia was accused of colluding with an aggressive state, but he and the KMT defended the trip, saying they believed the trip helped reduce tensions. The KMT is seen as having a chance at regaining power in Taiwan's presidential elections in 2024.

The KMT's stance is in contrast with that of the DPP, whose current leadership maintains that Taiwan is a sovereign independent nation, whose people overwhelmingly reject Beijing's plan for what it terms "reunification".



The Chinese government cut communication with Taipei upon their election in 2016, labelling them separatists, but city-to-city visits continued until the pandemic closed borders. In that time, China's military harassment of Taiwan has increased. Air force and navy sorties around Taiwan are now a near-daily occurrence, including frequent crossings of the median line.

Lev Nachman, a political science professor at Taiwan's National Chengchi University, said the cross-strait visits were seen as controversial by those on the "green" (pro-DPP) side of Taiwan's politics, because "there is worry these actions are at the risk of Taiwan's safety and sovereignty".

"It's worth noting that if you are blue-leaning [pro-KMT], these trips are not controversial," Nachman said. "It's possible to support cross-strait dialogue without supporting reunification."

At the same time, Taipei officials welcomed the Chinese delegation, China's foreign minister Wang Yi resisted calls to reassure the world that further Chinese military escalation was not imminent.

Speaking on stage to the Munich security conference on the weekend, [Wang instead accused](#) "separatist forces" on Taiwan of seeking to change the status quo. "I will briefly assure the audience that Taiwan is part of Chinese territory," he said. "It has never been a country and it will not be a country in the future."

The Mainland Affairs Council rejected Wang's characterisation that the status quo was a subordinate Taiwan, saying that the Republic of China (ROC), Taiwan's official name, has not been and never will be a part of the People's Republic of China.

Deadly flooding and landslides in Brazil's São Paulo state – video

[Brazil](#)

## Brazil: flooding and landslides kill dozens in São Paulo state

Cities cancel carnival festivities as rescue workers search for victims and clear roads

*[Sam Jones](#) and agencies*

Mon 20 Feb 2023 14.32 EST First published on Sun 19 Feb 2023 23.01 EST

At least 36 people have died and dozens are missing after torrential rain brought flooding and landslides to coastal areas of south-east [Brazil](#) over the weekend as the country geared up for its annual carnival celebrations.

Rescue efforts continued in São Paulo state on Monday as more than 500 workers searched for victims, cleared roads and tried to reconnect isolated communities.

But the task was hampered by heavy rain, which has also displaced hundreds of people and trapped an undetermined number of tourists who had travelled for carnival.

During a visit to the badly affected coastal city of São Sebastião on Monday, Brazil's president, Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva, said the disaster underlined the need to stop building homes in areas at risk of landslides and major floods.

“Sometimes nature takes us by surprise, but sometimes we also tempt nature,” Lula said. “I think it’s important that neither happens.”

São Paulo declared a 180-day state of calamity for six cities after what experts termed an unprecedented extreme weather event.

The state government said 35 people had been killed in São Sebastião, while a seven-year-old girl died in neighbouring Ubatuba.

Some of the hardest-hit cities under the emergency decree – including São Sebastião, Ubatuba, Ilhabela and Bertioga – cancelled carnival activities as rescuers dug through the rubble and amid fears that the death toll would rise.

Col Henguel Ricardo Pereira, the head of civil defence in São Paulo, said the area of Barra do Sahy in São Sebastião had been hit hardest. “Unfortunately, we are going to have a lot of deaths,” he told the Folha de São Paulo.



The SP-55 highway blocked by a landslide in the municipality of Ubatuba on the north coast of the state of São Paulo. Photograph: Ubatuba Civil Defense/AFP/Getty Images

São Sebastião’s mayor, Felipe Augusto, said dozens of people were missing and 50 houses had collapsed in the city due to the landslides. “Our rescue teams are not managing to get to several locations; it’s a chaotic situation,” he added. “Many people are still under the rubble.”

The mayor shared several videos of widespread destruction in his city, including one that showed a baby being rescued by local people lined up on a flooded street.

A woman called Mailsa said she and her husband, daughter and grandson had barely escaped after a landslide destroyed her house in the Juquehy municipality of São Sebastião. The house was partially submerged, parts of it fell away and the rest was left precariously perched on the edge of a hill.

“It was very quick. Either you run or you die,” she told the Associated Press. “It’s not possible to take anything, only your life, which is the most important thing.”

São Paulo’s governor, Tarcísio de Freitas, met Lula on Monday to help coordinate the response to the disaster. He has requested support from the army, which has sent planes and rescue teams to the region.

“We have 36 missing persons in Barra do Sahy and we have information that there are four more missing persons in Juquehy,” Freitas told the TV Globo network on Monday. “We will update this number throughout the day. Teams have already gone to the region to carry out searches and we are reinforcing their number.”

In [a tweet on Monday](#), the governor announced three days of mourning for the victims of the emergency. “I ask God to comfort the hearts of these families,” he said. “We will keep working and we will not rest until all the displaced and homeless people are safe.”

Operations at Santos, Latin America’s busiest container port, were interrupted amid wind gusts exceeding 34mph (55km/h) and waves over 1 metre high on Saturday, according to a local news outlet.

Freitas said the extent of the damage on the main road linking the port to Rio de Janeiro remained unclear. “At some points we don’t even know what’s left of the Rio-Santos highway,” the governor said after his meeting with Lula. “We even raise the possibility that it was dragged away; that the highway no longer exists.”

TV footage showed houses flooded with only roofs visible, and people using small boats to carry items and people to higher ground.

The São Paulo state government said more than 60cm (23.6in) of rain had fallen in the region in a single day – one of the highest amounts ever recorded in Brazil in such a short period – with Bertioga alone recording 68.7cm during the same period.

The northern coast of São Paulo state is a popular carnival destination for wealthy tourists who prefer to stay away from massive street parties in big cities.

Brazil had been hoping for a swift and seamless resumption of its famous festivities after the Covid pandemic prompted Rio to delay last year's carnival by two months.

The country's federal government expects 46 million people to join the festivities, which officially [began on Friday](#) and which run until 22 February. While Rio remains the best-known carnival venue, Salvador and Recife are also popular – as is metropolitan São Paulo, which has recently emerged as a hotspot.

*Reuters and Associated Press contributed to this report*

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A 'Walk For Gold' in the Sri Lankan capital Colombo raises awareness of childhood cancer. Photograph: Indira Cancer Trust

[A common condition](#)[Sri Lanka](#)

## **‘A place of healing’: comfort for young cancer patients amid Sri Lanka’s economic crisis**

The families of sick children have been pushed into poverty to access the country’s severely limited care services. Now a refuge is about to open its doors

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[\*Weronika Strzyżyńska\*](#) and [\*Dilrukshi Handunnetti\*](#)

Mon 20 Feb 2023 01.30 EST Last modified on Tue 21 Feb 2023 05.25 EST

Despite a [combined economic crisis and drug shortage](#), Sri Lanka is poised to open its first children's palliative care centre – and also hopes to vastly improve the country's poor survival rates for child cancer.

The centre will offer end-of-life care as well as a place to stay for families who have to travel long distances to the country's only paediatric oncology ward in the capital, Colombo.

The new centre is called Suwa Arana (place of healing) and is due to open in June amid a national strategy to more than double Sri Lanka's survival rates for children with cancer to 60%, as part of a World Health Organization global initiative.

Quick Guide

**A common condition**

Show



The human toll of non-communicable diseases (NCDs) is huge and rising. These illnesses end the lives of approximately 41 million of the 56 million people who die every year – and three quarters of them are in the developing world.

NCDs are simply that; unlike, say, a virus, you can't catch them. Instead, they are caused by a combination of genetic, physiological, environmental and behavioural factors. The main types are cancers, chronic respiratory illnesses, diabetes and cardiovascular disease – heart attacks and stroke. Approximately 80% are preventable, and all are on the rise, spreading inexorably around the world as ageing populations and lifestyles pushed by economic growth and urbanisation make being unhealthy a global phenomenon.

NCDs, once seen as illnesses of the wealthy, now have a grip on the poor. Disease, disability and death are perfectly designed to create and widen inequality – and being poor makes it less likely you will be diagnosed accurately or treated.

Investment in tackling these common and chronic conditions that kill 71% of us is incredibly low, while the cost to families, economies and communities is staggeringly high.

In low-income countries NCDs – typically slow and debilitating illnesses – are seeing a fraction of the money needed being invested or donated. Attention remains focused on the threats from communicable diseases, yet cancer death rates have long sped past the death toll from malaria, TB and HIV/Aids combined.

'A common condition' is a Guardian series reporting on NCDs in the developing world: their prevalence, the solutions, the causes and consequences, telling the stories of people living with these illnesses.

**Tracy McVeigh, editor**

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Thank you for your feedback.

Eight-year-old Lochana Lahiru Athauda is one of the children set to benefit from Suwa Arana. He was two when he became one of the [828 Sri Lankan children](#) diagnosed with cancer each year. In the six years since, he has grown used to the 160km (100-mile) return journey from his village in Warakapola, Kegalle district, to Apeksha hospital in Colombo.

“The travel costs are unbearable,” says Lochana’s mother, Enoka Chandani Wijesinghe, who had to quit her job as a computer operator after her son’s diagnosis with acute lymphocytic leukaemia. She tells of the ruinous cost of food and lodging in Colombo: “It’s exhausting and very expensive for a low-income family like ours. In the three years following Lochana’s diagnosis, we spent all our earnings and sometimes borrowed to ensure his treatment was uninterrupted.”

Cancers behave differently in children, and young patients can generally expect better outcomes than adults. However, survival chances are to a large extent determined by where a child lives. While in high-income countries the survival rate for paediatric cancers is 80%, in low- and middle-income countries [the rate falls as low as 20%](#). A lack of data collection means the exact survival rate for Sri Lankan children is not known, but doctors at Apeksha hospital estimate it at 26%.



Marchers in Colombo raise awareness of the new strategy to double survival rates from childhood cancer. Photograph: Indira Cancer Trust

Unlike some low- and middle-income countries, treatment abandonment is low in Sri Lanka, says Sanjeeva Gunasekera, a paediatric oncologist at Apeksha. “This is due to high literacy levels, family support and a reliable public healthcare system,” he says. “People understand that early detection can result in complete cure and that children have a much higher possibility of survival.”

The centre is being funded by the Indira [Cancer](#) Trust, Sri Lanka’s first such charity, founded in 2016 by former MP Karu Jayasuriya. The trust aims to bridge the gap not only between children living in Colombo and those in rural areas, but between Sri Lankan children and their counterparts in wealthy countries.

Suwa Arana is being built close to Apeksha hospital. With 32 ensuite rooms, it will have enough room to house families. “Often, families will travel all together for treatment,” says Joan Hyde, a retired nurse and coordinator of the Suwa Arana project. “They will be able to come here to recover between treatments and receive food and accommodation free of charge.”

Most rooms will only be used for a few days, although some will house children, with their families, during the last months of their lives.

Parents go through severe hardships to ensure their children receive uninterrupted treatment

*Sanjeeva Gunasekera, oncologist*

Hyde says a child’s cancer diagnosis will often push the whole family into poverty as parents have to leave work to make the regular long-distance trips to the capital and care for the sick child. Gunasekera adds: “Parents go through severe hardships and make sacrifices to ensure their children receive uninterrupted treatment. The paediatric ward caters to children but there are no facilities for their parents.”

“When Suwa Arana is complete, we will be able to stay free of charge and prepare meals for the child as per instructions. This will be a huge burden off poor people like us,” says Thaksila Madhawi, mother of nine-year-old Raini from Veyangoda, who was diagnosed with kidney cancer in 2018.

Raini’s condition improved after surgery in 2019, and now the family make the 50km journey to Colombo only once every two months. But even so, the visits are increasingly expensive as costs soar in Sri Lanka, where economic turmoil coupled with the pandemic left the country in its [worst financial crisis](#) since it regained independence from Britain in 1948.

While the economy is slowly stabilising, inflation remains at 54%. Nearly a third of people suffer food insecurity and [two in five households](#) spend at least 75% of their income on food. The World Bank projects that a quarter of the population will remain in poverty for many years.

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“We can’t even afford the basics for the child let alone meet her nutrition needs,” says Madhawi, who has been relying on food parcels from the Indira Trust to feed her daughter as she recovers. She values the trust’s livelihood support programme which offered her vocational training and a modest allowance.

Wijesinghe says that Lochana's meal costs have doubled and the cost of travel to the hospital quadrupled since the pandemic began. She is not sure how she would have afforded her son's treatment without support.

The financial crisis has also caused [a widespread drug deficit](#). "There is a shortage of medicines for cancer throughout Sri Lanka," says Indira Trust chair Dr Lanka Jayasuriya Dissanayake. "The governmental mechanism for purchasing medicine is disturbed by the lack of dollars – it is running on donations."

The trust has been working nationwide with 22 hospitals to secure outside donations for cancer medication. "We procured 500,000 Sri Lankan rupees (£1,140) worth of medicines for one hospital just yesterday," says Dissanayake. "We get patients walking daily into our office, asking for medicine. Often, we are able to buy the medication for them."

Even before the crisis, availability of cancer drugs for children was patchy. Between 2019 and 2020, [less than half the medication considered essential](#) for treating paediatric cancers was consistently available in Apeksha hospital.

Wijesinghe says she has been forced to buy her son's medication from a pharmacy at an exorbitant price because the hospital was not able to provide "even simple painkillers".

While the economic crisis postponed the opening of Suwa Arana, the £1.2m project is going ahead thanks to donors from abroad, including the Sri Lanka Medical Association of North America, Tennessee's St Jude children's hospital and technical support from the WHO.

"Now we just need to pay for the lifts and generators," says Hyde.

The centre will boast a rooftop garden where families can relax, and there will be access to counselling and art therapy. In time, Hyde hopes, they will be able to offer school classes too. "We want it to be a real place of calm and peace," she says.

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A newspaper seller in Dhaka, Bangladesh. Journalist unions called the decision a ‘reflection of the repression of opposition voices’. Photograph: Monirul Alam/EPA

[Bangladesh](#)

## Bangladesh shuts down main opposition newspaper

Campaigners fear media crackdown under PM Sheikh Hasina after suspension order upheld

*Agence France-Presse in Dhaka*

Mon 20 Feb 2023 03.02 ESTLast modified on Mon 20 Feb 2023 17.00 EST

The only newspaper of Bangladesh’s main opposition party has stopped publishing after a government suspension order was upheld, stoking fears about media freedom in the south Asian nation.

Campaigners and foreign governments including the US have long expressed worries about efforts by the prime minister, Sheikh Hasina, to



silence criticism and what they see as creeping authoritarianism.

The Dainik Dinkal, a broadsheet Bengali-language newspaper, has been a vital voice of the Bangladesh Nationalist party (BNP) for more than three decades. It employs hundreds of journalists and press workers and covers news stories that the mainstream newspapers, most of which are controlled by pro-government businesspeople, rarely do.

This includes the frequent arrests of BNP activists and what the party says are thousands of fake cases against its supporters.

The newspaper said the Dhaka district authorities ordered the shutdown on 26 December, but it continued to publish after lodging an appeal at the press council headed by a top high court judge.

“The council rejected our appeal yesterday (Sunday), upholding the district magistrate’s order to stop our publication,” Shamsur Rahman Shimul Biswas, the managing editor of the newspaper, told AFP.



Sheikh Hasina’s government last month ordered the closure of 191 websites it accuses of publishing ‘anti-state news’. Photograph: Xinhua/Rex/Shutterstock

The order, a copy of which was obtained by AFP, said the printing permit of the newspaper was cancelled after the newspaper violated the country's printing and publication laws. The council said the paper's publisher, Tarique Rahman – the acting chief of the BNP – was a convicted criminal and was living abroad without handing over his job to another person.

Biswas said Rahman, now based in London, submitted his resignation and appointed a new publisher, but the authorities did not accept the changes. "This shutdown is all part of the government crackdown on dissenting voices and freedom of speech," Biswas said.

The government on Monday did not comment on the shutdown.

Two Dhaka-based journalist unions said in a joint statement that the decision was a "reflection of the repression of opposition voices".

Unions and journalists staged small street protests over the shutdown on Monday.

Last month, Hasina's government ordered the closure of 191 websites it accused of publishing "anti-state news", citing intelligence reports. The Bangladesh government has previously blocked websites several times, notably in December 2018 before national elections.

The 2022 World Press Freedom Index compiled by Reporters Without Borders ranked Bangladesh at 162, worse than Russia (155) and Afghanistan (156).

Bangladesh's draconian Digital Security Act, under which hundreds of people have been arrested since 2018, has caused particular alarm.

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Rishi Sunak met restive Conservative MPs in the Commons throughout Monday. Photograph: WPA/Getty Images

[Brexit](#)

## Call to back Rishi Sunak on NI protocol deal amid fears ministers may quit

Senior Brexiter Maria Caulfield says PM must be given ‘time and space’ to conclude talks with EU

[Jessica Elgot](#) and [Lisa O'Carroll](#)

Tue 21 Feb 2023 03.49 ESTLast modified on Tue 21 Feb 2023 05.47 EST

A senior Brexiter minister has urged colleagues to give Rishi Sunak “time and space” to finish negotiations with the EU over the [Northern Ireland](#) protocol, as warnings grew of potential ministerial resignations.

Sunak has been told he is facing the possibility ministers may quit if his deal does not significantly rewrite the protocol or remove any powers for the European court of justice.

The home secretary, Suella Braverman, a former chair of the European Research Group of hardline pro-Brexit, MPs, made a [pointed intervention on Monday](#) to urge Sunak not to drop a controversial bill that gives the UK potential powers to unilaterally override the protocol.

The health minister Maria Caulfield, who quit Theresa May's frontbench over her Chequers plan, said threats of resignations were premature. "We have to give the prime minister that time and space to get these negotiations done. We need to give him the time and space to thrash out the final elements of any final deal," she told Times Radio.

But Caulfield also suggested it was right the protocol bill remained on the table. "Absolutely the Northern Ireland protocol bill was put in place as a mechanism to fall back on and that's still going through parliament at the moment."

Sunak met restive Conservative MPs in the Commons throughout Monday, and talks will continue over the coming days. The foreign secretary, James Cleverly, is expected to address the backbench 1922 Committee on Tuesday.

The Northern Ireland minister Steve Baker attended an ERG meeting on Monday. Sources say there was "a lot of fear of a sellout" but that there was also discussion of the damage a potential reopening of divisions would do to the future of the Conservative party at the polls.

One senior ERG source described Braverman's intervention as "heartening", as the first sign of cabinet tensions emerged over the prime minister's proposed deal with the EU.

Her call struck a remarkably similar tone to the call from Boris Johnson. Sources close to the former prime minister over the weekend urged Sunak to keep the legislation as leverage.

Jacob Rees-Mogg, a former cabinet minister and prominent Brexiter, said he had grave doubts about Sunak's strategy. "There seems to me to be no point in bringing a deal that does not restore power-sharing. That must be the objective. If it doesn't achieve that objective, I don't understand why the



government is spending political capital on something that won't ultimately succeed," he told ConservativeHome.

He said the protocol bill was "a much simpler route ... which ensures that goods can go freely between GB and Northern Ireland."

Rees-Mogg, an influential figure in the ERG, said Sunak was making the same mistakes on Brexit as one of his predecessors. "I don't know why so much political capital has been spent on something without getting the DUP and the ERG on side first," he said.

"It's quite surprising, because this is very similar to what happened with Theresa May. They would hope that people just conveniently fall in behind the announced policy, and life doesn't work like that. It's important to get support for it first before you finalise the details. And that doesn't seem to have been done here."

Cleverly, who held talks by video link with Maroš Šefčovič, the European Commission vice-president, on Monday, said "intensive work" continued between the two sides and he would hold a further meeting with the Brussels official later this week, again underlining that a deal was not imminent.

Braverman, who gave legal advice to support the bill as attorney general, told the BBC: "We've been aware for some time now of challenges relating to trade, customs and sovereignty when it comes to Northern Ireland and the NI protocol.

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“The legislation that the government introduced is one of the biggest tools we have in solving the problem on the Irish Sea.”

Senior [Conservatives](#), including those supportive of Sunak, suggested there was little point in progressing without the support of the Democratic Unionists.

“The purpose of the negotiations was to get a deal that would allow DUP to go back into government in Stormont,” one former cabinet minister said. “So DUP support for a deal is the key. Without DUP support, it is pointless.”

David Jones, the deputy chair of the ERG, said: “The problem is that DUP has told No 10 that whatever they agree needs to meet the ‘seven tests’.

“One of those is that the people of Northern Ireland have to have a say in the laws that govern them, but it is hard to see how they do that without an entirely new agreement. What they are talking about now is some sort of new interpretation of the existing agreement, not a completely new one.”

Jones said he understood the DUP had asked to see the text of the full agreement – rather than the political framework – in order to move forward. That request is unlikely to be accepted.

The protocol bill, the brainchild of Liz Truss when she was foreign secretary, would allow the UK to unilaterally override parts of the Brexit treaty, and discarding the bill is seen as a gesture of goodwill when agreement is reached on application of the protocol.

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Body recovered from Lancashire river is Nicola Bulley, say police – video

[UK news](#)

## ‘Misquoted and vilified’: Nicola Bulley’s family attack media as body identified

Statement read by police after ‘worst fears’ confirmed, critical of press and members of public who accused partner of wrongdoing

[Robyn Vinter](#), [Jamie Grierson](#) and [Josh Halliday](#)

Mon 20 Feb 2023 16.24 ESTLast modified on Mon 20 Feb 2023 17.21 EST

The family of Nicola Bulley have said they would never comprehend “what Nikki had gone through in her last moments”, but excoriated the media and members of the public for vilifying her family and friends, after a body found in a river was identified as hers.

Her body was discovered on Sunday morning in the River Wyre in Lancashire, more than three weeks on from when she [disappeared while walking her dog](#) on 27 January.

In a statement read by police after they had confirmed the body belonged to the 45-year-old mortgage adviser, her family criticised the media and the sections of the public who had accused her partner of wrongdoing and “misquoted and vilified friends and family”.

“This is absolutely appalling, they have to be held accountable this cannot happen to another family,” they said.

The case has received vast attention from the press and across social media, attracting armchair detectives and conspiracy theorists.

Shortly after Bulley's disappearance, police were forced to put in place a dispersal order after TikTok and YouTube influencers arrived on the scene, intimidating local people and causing a nuisance to police.

Hundreds of people have since traipsed through the beauty spot, taking photographs for social media, and other visitors broke into buildings and went through local people's gardens at night in the hope of finding her.



Nicola Bulley. Photograph: Family Handout/PA

Bulley's partner, Paul Ansell, and close friends have been interviewed numerous times on television in the weeks since she was reported missing, including participating in an hour-long Channel 5 documentary earlier in the month, in which they spoke emotionally about Bulley, who had two daughters aged six and nine, and made an appeal for the public to help find her.

A statement was read out on behalf of Bulley's family, which was predominantly an excoriating assessment of the media response to her disappearance.

"Our family liaison officers have had to confirm our worst fears today.

“We will never be able to comprehend what Nikki had gone through in her last moments and that will never leave us.

“We will never forget Nikki, how could we, she was the centre of our world, she was the one who made our lives so special and nothing will cast a shadow over that.

“Our girls will get the support they need from the people who love them the most,” the statement said.

“And it saddens us to think that one day we will have to explain to them that the press and members of the public accused their dad of wrongdoing; misquoted and vilified friends and family. This is absolutely appalling, they have to be held accountable, this cannot happen to another family.”

The family singled out ITV and Sky News, who were the first to interview Ansell, for making contact with them directly on Sunday night after police confirmed a body had been found, adding they had asked for privacy.

The statement continued: “They again have taken it upon themselves to run stories about us to sell papers and increase their own profits. It is shameful they have acted in this way. Leave us alone now.

“Do the press and other media channels and so-called professionals not know when to stop? These are our lives and our children’s lives.”

The statement concluded: “Finally, Nikki, you are no longer a missing person, you have been found, we can let you rest now. We love you, always have and always will, we’ll take it from here.”

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Lancashire constabulary said they had identified her after a body was found by two members of the public in undergrowth near the village of St Michael's on Wyre on Sunday.

Bulley, who went missing 24 days ago, was discovered less than a mile from where she was last seen walking her dog after dropping off her two young daughters at school.

Lancashire constabulary said the case was now in the hands of the coroner.

Police have faced intense criticism for their communication during the case, having been labelled "sexist" by MPs and campaigners for revealing Bulley suffered from alcoholism as a result of struggles with the menopause.

Speaking at a press conference on Monday, the assistant chief constable, Peter Lawson, said: "Sadly, we are now able to confirm that yesterday we recovered Nicola Bulley from the River Wyre.

"Nicola's family have been informed and are of course devastated. Our thoughts are with them at this time as well as with all her loved ones and the wider community.

"We recognise the huge impact that Nicola's disappearance has had on her family and friends, but also on the people of St Michael's. We would like to thank all of those who have helped during what has been a hugely complex and highly emotional investigation.

"Today's development is not the outcome any of us would have wanted, but we hope that it can at least start to provide some answers for Nicola's loved ones, who remain foremost in our thoughts."



Wyre council said it was “devastated” to hear of Bulley’s death and it would be lowering the union flag at the civic centre to half mast as a mark of respect.

Michael Vincent, the leader of Wyre council, said: “We are deeply saddened by the news today and our sincerest sympathies go out to Nicola Bulley’s family, friends, the communities of Inskip and St Michael’s and everyone who knew and loved her.

“We would ask that Nicola’s family are allowed to grieve in private and that the public remain respectful at this extremely difficult time.

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Jon Snow: 'I think politics has become less fun. We seem to have run out of steam.' Photograph: David Levene/The Guardian

[Jon Snow](#)

[Interview](#)

# ‘I’m a nepo baby’: Jon Snow on class, sanity and Margaret Thatcher

[Zoe Williams](#)

Two years ago, Snow left Channel 4 News, after anchoring the show for more than three decades. Now he has written a memoir. He discusses boarding school misery, family connections and why Boris Johnson is a chancer



[@zoesqwilliams](#)

Tue 21 Feb 2023 01.00 EST Last modified on Tue 21 Feb 2023 09.34 EST

I meet Jon Snow in Penguin’s new offices in south London, where everything is hushed and plush, uncorrected proof copies of Snow’s memoir-cum-polemic, *The State of Us*, piled neatly next to finished copies of Prince Harry’s *Spare*. Snow announced his retirement, after 32 years anchoring [Channel 4](#) News, almost two years ago, and now he can finally tell us what he *really* thinks about everything.

Broadcasters are supposed to be impartial – a standard that not just Ofcom but millions of keyboard warriors everywhere insist on – and Snow has been a broadcaster most of his working life. Before he joined Channel 4, he

was Washington correspondent for ITN, and before that, a roving international reporter. He joined LBC in 1973, one of its first hires, meaning that for 50 of his 75 years, he has been under contractual obligation to keep his opinions to himself.



Margaret Thatcher – just after becoming Britain’s first female prime minister in 1979 – talks to reporters including Snow (left of Thatcher). Photograph: Mirrorpix/Getty Images

He still expresses himself extremely carefully, even cannily at times, though, indicating strong disapproval (of Jeremy Corbyn, in this instance) with a scrunched up mouth rather than any words. All I’ve got on tape is me saying: “Don’t make that face! I can’t quote your grumpy face.” He says, of his elaborate discretion: “The transition from being enslaved to the free world is not very easy at my age.” “Slavery” is a strong word for being nationally feted across five decades for your sober, thoughtful clarity and colourful socks. But it’s certainly an unusual thing to have to foreswear his point of view.

There was always a hum of speculation in Snow’s case that he was a secret leftie, and, latterly, a remainer. In 2017, he was reportedly heard shouting [“Fuck the Tories”](#) at Glastonbury, and after that Grant Shapps refused to be interviewed by him. I take all that with a pinch of salt: frankly, we’re in a

period in which “Fuck the Tories” is barely even an opinion, it’s just how we greet each other, and senior Conservatives will find any excuse not to be interviewed, but I am intrigued to find out a little more about his political leanings.

Blair wasn’t literally Putin, for God’s sake. War is a very challenging issue ... I felt empowered to ask the questions

His book represents a break in a half-century of silence; and it is trenchant in surprising ways. He makes a direct comparison, for instance, between Blair’s war in Iraq and Putin’s invasion of Ukraine. “Despite the difference in the two political systems,” he writes, “the result is the same.” Innocents dying, at the command of distant men in authority who will never have to live with the consequences.

In person, he rows back on this pretty swiftly. “Obviously one’s being provocative,” he says. “No, Blair wasn’t literally Putin, for God’s sake. War in a foreign land is a very challenging issue. The more collective it is, the more international it is, the more it is tied into the United Nations, Nato, whatever, the more comfortable I feel. And it wasn’t in 2003.” I wonder if he wishes he had been able to say that at the time. “No, I felt empowered to ask the questions, which I did. I wouldn’t want to cross the floor. I didn’t want to become an activist.”

The only time he has ever joined a campaign was in 1975 – Michael Foot’s bid to keep us out of the EU. It’s a piquant detail, given his taint of remaineyness, that he waves off with, “I was naive, and trying to cleanse my public school past.”



Snow and his team prepare for the evening news in the Channel 4 newsroom. Photograph: Independent/Alamy

The State of Us starts with the Grenfell Tower fire, and that tragedy is the lens through which he describes his politics, his motivation, everything he thinks is wrong with the country. “Grenfell is utterly inexcusable,” he says. “It’s an excellent and important moment in history to guide us on our way: the idea that the richest borough in this country even had a Grenfell, how disgraceful. The whole ethos was horrible, horrible. Very few people looking at Grenfell in a dispassionate way could conclude other than that there was genuine and aware policy to let people rot up at the top of that tower, whatever happened. People should be held to account for it.” Does he think people will be held to account? “I don’t think there’s any danger of that at all.”

The issue is close to his heart, not just because he had met a girl who perished in the fire – 12-year-old Firdaws Hashim – at a debating competition two months before. He explicitly decries inequality and, in the book, identifies housing as the “central strut that keeps the whole rotten structure standing”,

tracing the problem directly to property being valued as an asset: it is basically a Marxist point, that the exchange value for investors has come completely unstuck from the use value.



“Those aren’t Marxist terms, those are terms learned on the road. I worked in a day centre for homeless and vulnerable teenagers for three years,” he says, robustly, and I counter that maybe Marxists also learned it on the road. “Well, they can have it, but I happen to believe it. That doesn’t make me a Marxist.” This sounds bad tempered (from both of us) but was actually very friendly: and it gets to the heart of his stance. He loathes inequality, feels the hardship of others keenly, yet also loathes the idea of upheaval or radicalism. He both decries the status quo and upholds it, like a secular bishop.



Snow cycling in north London in 2021. Photograph: Beretta/Sims/Shutterstock

Which makes sense, as his father was a bishop. “Very academic. He’d been to Winchester, he taught at Eton. Went to Oxford. The whole thing went like an express train.” The childhood he writes about was extremely cosy and sheltered: log fires, public school, wealth; he checks his privilege so often it’s like OCD. But when he describes his upbringing, it sounds quite sad. “The home I was raised in was pretty odd. In retrospect, now that I’m a father myself and my older children are in their 30s, I think I had a very weird childhood. I had a nanny. I didn’t see much of my father, who was always writing sermons. My parents were quite distant, emotionally. Public school is a dreadful thing to do to somebody.” His mother had alopecia

totalis, “so she had no hair at all. And no confidence among men. I was never physically close to her.” He has two brothers, whom he hasn’t seen in “a number of years”.

“There’s no mutual interest in meeting up. And why, necessarily, should there be, actually? My older brother is extremely political, and was a trade union official for Nupe (the national union of public employees, which became Unison in 1993). I was anathema, because I’d gone absolutely straight, broadcasting to the nation. I wasn’t leftwing enough,” he says, adding drily: “Though, within my own terms, I was adequately leftwing.”

If, in the book, he constantly circles back to how unintelligent he is, in conversation he emphasises this even more: “I’m not very bright. I got abysmal O-levels”; “My school report at about the age of 16 said, ‘He sets himself low standards, which he fails to meet.’” I don’t really buy this, either as a bald fact or a thing he truly believes; it doesn’t tally with the life he has had, or his ambition. I wonder if there’s some other explanation for his lack of academic success. “Like what?”, he asks, beadily. Literally anything: rebelliousness; ADHD; trauma (a servant tried to molest him when he was six, but was interrupted); maybe he was just sad, boarding schools are pretty brutal. “I didn’t exactly get any encouragement,” he says, “but I loved to be a chorister. It was another family. You had 16 brothers, who you saw every single day and sang with every day.”



Snow at the scene of the Grenfell Tower fire in London, 14 June 2017.  
Photograph: Dinendra Haria/Rex/Shutterstock

Having flunked his exams, he went to Scarborough technical college to get some undistinguished A-levels, spent a year volunteering as a teacher in Uganda, went to Liverpool university which his father facilitated (he met a law professor on the train and talked his son into a place) but wasn't impressed by ("I think he barely knew that Liverpool had a university"), then got kicked out for challenging the chancellor, the Marquess of Salisbury, on his support for South African apartheid. "It was utterly traumatic," he says. "We were not expecting that at all. More or less every university was having minor rebellion. It was par for the course."

He moved to London and, through his cousin, Peter Snow, met the Earl of Longford, who gave him [New Horizon](#) (a homeless young people's walk-in centre) to run, "aged 19 to 23 or whatever it was". A funny era, the 60s; full of possibility and ideas and change, but still one in which a well-connected scion of the upper classes would find it impossible to do anything other than succeed.

It was there that Snow met Madeleine Colvin, a lawyer whom he was with for 35 years until they split up in the early 00s. They had two daughters and didn't marry. New Horizon instilled in him a kind of radical pragmatism.

“Frank Longford didn’t interfere, he helped us raise the money and let us get on with it. Imagine somebody coming in and wanting an abortion. Where do you go from there? You certainly don’t ring up Frank Longford and say, do you mind if we find an abortion counsellor?”



Snow interviewing Nelson Mandela in 1994 for Channel 4. Photograph: Channel 4

But Snow didn’t want to be a social worker, he wanted to get into journalism and, again through his cousin Peter, landed a job at LBC. “I’m a nepo baby,” he says wryly. “I would have been nowhere, but for nepotism.” A pause. “I don’t think that’s true, to be honest. It wasn’t just independent radio news, everybody was generating posts for journalists. It was a wonderful time to come of age. Also, because I’d been a chorister, I had a good voice. Cadence and delivery are really important in radio.”

By the 80s, he was a roving reporter for ITN, and these were some of his happiest times, covering “the wars in Central America: El Salvador, Nicaragua, Honduras, Guatemala, not places that anybody really remembers anything about at all, I loved being there. I loved being in America for Reagan. I didn’t agree with him at all. But there was something avuncular and quite charming about him.” He was and remains quite surprisingly scathing about American society – “It’s absolutely incredible, actually, that

so rich a being as the United States doesn't look after its citizens. It's quite extraordinary" – but relished his time as Washington correspondent and, later, diplomatic editor.

Margaret Thatcher was a gift. She was a sparring partner and a flirt – you were never quite clear where you were

He returned to front Channel 4 news in 1989, in time to catch Margaret Thatcher in her pomp. "Thatcher was a joy. She was a gift. She was a sparring partner and a flirt. It would be too strong to say there was something sexual in it, but there was something going on. It wasn't just sitting in front of a prime minister. It was everything from a primary school teacher, to nanny to semi-royalty, you were never quite clear where you were. Everybody talks about Maggie Thatcher as being a rigid thing. She wasn't."

Snow can find something good to say about almost everyone in public life, which speaks partly to his gregarious nature, but partly, too, of this complicated, establishment sense, that anyone in power is there for a reason. Even Boris Johnson he calls a chancer, "but a chancer must be given his chance". Why, though? This has been a terrible chapter in British politics. "Well, he had his chance and he fucked up." "But it would have been better," I insist, "if he hadn't had his chance." "Well, we can say that now." "I could have said that then!" Finally, he concedes, "I agree. I think history would say, what on earth possessed a political party to produce a leader like Boris Johnson? Because he never made sense to me, and I don't think it really made much sense to anybody in the country. You wonder whether the Etonian accent and the rest of it in some way still has some allure to the British public." He doesn't, however, have any direct criticism of Rishi Sunak or Liz Truss, although he concludes, sadly, "I think politics has actually become less fun. I don't know what's taken the fun out of it. We seem to run out of steam." We can't just have run out of people, I counter. It's impossible. "I didn't say people, I said steam. There's a distinction."



With his wife Precious Lunga in London, 2015 Photograph: David M Benett/Getty Images

Snow will be dedicating at least some of his retirement time to parenting. In 2010 he married the distinguished epidemiologist and entrepreneur Precious Lunga, and remarks: “I’m very proud to be married to my wife, I’m proud of her neuro-scientific capacity, her PhD. I’m proud of the fact that she is a Zimbabwean and I’m very, very proud of the fact we have a two-year-old boy.” There’s something defensive, not in his tone but in his formulation, as if he’s answering a question I haven’t posed, like “what on earth is a 75-year-old doing with a wife 25 years his junior and a two-year-old son?” (I would never ask that, it would be rude). But I do ask whether he is a different kind of parent this time around – there is an entire generation between his first family and his second, after all. “I’d need notice of that question,” he says firmly. I’m not completely clear on whether he means, “time to prepare”, or “time to decide whether I want to answer it or not”.

He is not leaving broadcasting entirely; he has made two documentaries which are yet to air, one about “blue zones”, areas of the world where people live to remarkable ages, although this doesn’t reflect a personal longevity quest. “I can’t say that living for ever is one of my ambitions. I’d like to remain sane until I die. Nobody wants any rotting.” Then, out of nowhere, he adds: “I’m an old bore. I’ve bored the pants off you.” He is



actually way too frustrating, complicated, arch and elegant in his delivery to be boring. But I think he knows that.

Even as he leaves his anchorman spot, which he clearly loved, it is impossible to imagine him ever fully retiring: the values of the job haven't changed, in his mind, so its importance hasn't. "News values are about compassion," he says. "They're about observation. They're about inwardly determining where right and wrong part company, determining the truth and then telling it in a way that wakes the viewer up."

*The State of Us* by Jon Snow (Transworld, £20) is published on 2 March. To support the Guardian, order your copy for £17.60 at [guardianbookshop.com](https://guardianbookshop.com). Delivery charges may apply.

Jon Snow will join Zoe Williams for a Guardian Live online event on Wednesday 1 March at 8pm. Book tickets [here](#)

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# Baghdad memories: what the first few months of the US occupation felt like to an Iraqi

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# Being the only one leaves a mark: a Black mother on the long shadow of school segregation

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## 2023.02.21 - Opinion

- Rishi Sunak can't compromise his protocol deal. He must face down the DUP
- 'Football Twitter' is a nightmare of abuse and attention-seeking, so I walked away
- You don't need pricey gear and high design to be a good parent, but a decent pair of socks helps
- I gatecrashed a party for young people – and have never been less welcome



‘Rishi Sunak’s reputation has no time for error.’ Photograph: Ben Stansall/PA

[OpinionNorthern Ireland](#)

## **Rishi Sunak can’t compromise his protocol deal. He must face down the DUP**

[Simon Jenkins](#)



The prime minister has to stand firm against Northern Ireland's backwoodsmen and their cheerleaders in his own party

Tue 21 Feb 2023 01.00 ESTLast modified on Fri 24 Feb 2023 09.25 EST

Rishi Sunak knows what he must do in [Northern Ireland](#). He cannot cringe any longer before that region's backwoodsmen and their cheerleaders in his own party. Unlike his predecessors, he has nothing to lose, with probably just two years in office. He clearly has a deal on a revised Irish trade protocol with the EU on the table, and he has the parliamentary votes to push it through. His reputation has no time for error.

The partition of [Ireland](#) was born a century ago to appease northern Protestant sentiment. That sentiment has ever since abused self-rule – under licence from London – with blatantly sectarian government. This was sustainable as long as trade and citizenship were left fluid across Ireland, with both sides of the border still partners in the European single market.

Brexit crashed that sustainability. Boris Johnson's (largely personal) fixation that Brexit meant leaving the single market required a trade protocol to keep Irish economic unity intact. Though temporary and a mess,

this rescued the Brexit deal. Now Johnson is plotting to undermine Sunak's clearing of that mess. Red and green lanes will separate internal and "external" Irish commerce, aided by digital technology. Regulatory disputes will be handled by a two-tier process under the European court of justice. This is perfectly sensible, given the nature of Ireland's geography. All trade is a compromise of sovereignty.

The Protestant DUP was born of objection. It was formed in 1971 and served as a vehicle to oppose things such as the cooperative unionism of the 1980s and the Good Friday peace agreement. Its members were political primitives who called for creationism to be taught in schools. Dusted with the covenant of unionism, they have held the Tory right – and Johnson – in thrall, a toxin on the party's Westminster backbenches. They represent just a quarter of the region's population.

Northern Ireland is desperate for a settlement, especially its young people, and for the return of self-government, which the DUP denies in opposing the protocol. The region voted against Brexit and barely half its voters are still firmly committed to the union with Britain. A poll a year ago showed a majority [expects Irish reunification within a decade](#). Perhaps most significant is that declared [Catholics now outnumber Protestants](#). Things are clearly changing.

Yet one concession for resolving the DUP impasse this week is said to be a strengthening of the minority veto in the Stormont assembly. This entrenchment of sectarian "power-sharing" is precisely what has frozen the region's government for most of a quarter of a century. It should be unthinkable that one party should be free to veto not just facets of Britain's overseas trade policy but, in effect, any improvement in the UK's absurdly ill-judged dealings with the EU over [Brexit](#). If the DUP continues to oppose power-sharing, that sharing should be revised, not the protocol.

The dire history of British rule over Ireland merits the "reparation" of some London sympathy for eventual reunion. One day this will come. Protocol revision offers the glue of restored economic unity. Letting the DUP block such a joining would be outrageous. Sunak must know this – and know what he should now do.



- Simon Jenkins is a Guardian columnist
- This article was amended on 24 February 2023. The DUP was formed in 1971, not in the 1980s as an earlier version inferred, and the party did not introduce dividing walls into cities in Northern Ireland.

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Twitter has its benefits but can also be really bleak. It can also be viewed as a game involving people trying to collect as many followers as possible. Photograph: Dado Ruvic/Reuters

### Soccer

**‘Football Twitter’ is a nightmare of abuse and attention-seeking, so I walked away**

[Sachin Nakrani](#)



Enough was enough when it came to the noise of the social media platform and I am loving life without it

Tue 21 Feb 2023 04.56 ESTLast modified on Wed 22 Feb 2023 09.55 EST

A few years ago, Charlie Brooker – creator of the brilliant Black Mirror and a [former Guardian columnist](#) – hosted a show for Channel 4 that counted down the greatest video games of all time. A sucker for those sorts of things, not to mention a bit of a gamer in my youth, I tuned in with great interest. There they were: Super Mario Bros, Street Fighter II, Call of Duty ... on it went until it was time for Brooker to reveal the No 1. “What could it be?” I wondered. I was not ready for the answer, because the answer was Twitter.

A baffling choice and I can’t remember Brooker’s logic for why [Twitter](#) was best of the lot. But I do remember his argument for why it was definitely a game, which was that, ultimately, the aim of people who use it is to collect as many followers as possible. Nobody wins Twitter, but everyone plays it, trying their hardest to be among the most popular, influential, important people on there.

It's something that stuck with me and turned over in my head whenever I logged into my account. What is the point of this? What am I trying to achieve? Am I, as Brooker suggested, desperately seeking attention? The answer I came to is yes, I am, so I decided to log out once and for all.

Yes, that's right, I'm off Twitter. Sober for a little under three months and loving it. I left during the World Cup and because of the World Cup, having decided to disengage as much as possible with a tournament whose [very existence](#) led to sick forming in my mouth. But it had been a long time coming and fundamentally for what we can at this stage call Brooker's Law; that every tweet, to varying degrees, is a cry to be noticed.

A big opinion. Look at me. A hot take. Look at me. A six-part thread. Look at me. An eight-part rant. Look at me. This job I've got, this award I've won, this photo of my cute daughter on the swings, this photo of my cute dog on Whitby beach. Look at me, look at me, look at me, look at me. On it goes, as relentless as it is nauseating.

I was just as bad, what with my wry quips, silly puns and pictures of beer and bridges from trips to watch Liverpool play in Europe, all with the aim of chasing those likes and retweets. I knew what I was doing and kept on doing it until, finally, I stopped. On a Thursday. In late November.

Attention is a human craving, one that's incredibly addictive, which is why social media thrives. It can be hard to kick the habit and that is why I knew I had to go cold turkey in regards to the only platform I was on. No half measures such as deleting the app from my phone and pretending I wouldn't just log on via Google. No, the account had to be deactivated. Get out quickly and emphatically. My sense is few of my followers noticed what I did, which pretty much summed up my time on Twitter, too.



Elon Musk enters a car in Washington DC last month. It's fair to say the tech billionaire's decision to enter the world of social media by buying Twitter has not gone well. Photograph: Jonathan Ernst/Reuters

But that's fine because my decision to quit Twitter was based on factors beyond a need for recognition. More broadly, its descent into hell under Elon Musk – or as the comedian John Oliver described him: “A man who answers the question: ‘[What if Willy Wonka benefited from apartheid?](#)’” – and because of my increasing unease with being part of “Football Twitter”.

It's been a nightmare of noise for some time, exhibiting the [racism](#), sexism and homophobia you get on other parts of the site, while also providing its own uniquely tribal flavour, which can be stupidly childish as well as searingly nasty, seen starkly in the abuse those who lost loved ones at Hillsborough are [subjected to](#). Then there's the increasingly tiresome scourge of [whataboutery](#).

Has football discourse always been this way and the difference now is we can see it laid out in front of us, 280 characters at a time? Or have things changed as a consequence of the polarised times we live in? It's probably a bit of both and sadly there is little sign of things becoming nicer, kinder, any time soon. You can mute and block as much as you want, but such are

Twitter's algorithms and the way things are shared, some of the sewage will always wash up on your shore.

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I've walked away from Twitter before, including 11 years ago when I received abuse from a gang of trolls so vicious it led to me getting the police involved, but this time really does feel like for keeps. I'm not missing it in the slightest and the impact on my job has been minimal – turns out it is possible to be a sports journalist without reading and writing tweets. More importantly, the benefit to my mental health is clear. It's not that it's necessarily improved – life ensures my state of mind is always a bit crap – but no more timeline-scrolling has undeniably meant it not getting notably worse.

Concerns over his mental health is why fellow Liverpool-supporting football writer [Henry Jackson](#) has also given consideration to coming off Twitter. "It has become a far nastier place," he says. "People are so opinionated that they can never be wrong and it all feels so tribal, not just between rival fans, but among those of the same team. Start tweeting about Jordan Henderson or Naby Keïta to lots of Liverpool-focused accounts, for instance, and all hell will let loose.

“It can be damaging to be on Twitter, especially when you’re sensitive and take criticism to heart like I do,” he says. “There’s enough negativity in the world without social media adding to it.”

As Jackson stresses, there are positives to Twitter, in his case being somewhere he can plug articles and “allow my personality to shine through”. That’s also the case for others and it’s where I made friends and came across important and stimulating journalism, as well as important and stimulating debates. Then there was the fun stuff, such as podcast recommendations and [Josh Pugh sketches](#). For many, the sense of community is also important, which in relation to “Football Twitter” means people connecting with a sport that can otherwise feel unwelcoming to them, for various reasons.

So good luck to the good folk who continue to use Twitter. I wish you well. But for now and the foreseeable future, I’m done. No more attention-seeking and abuse. Account deactivated. Game over.

This article was amended on 22 February 2023 to remove reference to some games that were not included in Charlie Brooker’s top 25 games mentioned in his programme How Videogames Changed the World.

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‘Psychologically and emotionally, the right baby gear can make a dramatic difference to your everyday life.’ Photograph: Image Source/REX

[Republic of Parenthood](#) [Parents and parenting](#)

**You don’t need pricey gear and high design to be a good parent, but a decent pair of socks helps**

[Rhannon Lucy Cosslett](#)



Alongside all the false promises and guilt-trip sales offers are clever inventions and ingenious tech that can make life a lot easier

Tue 21 Feb 2023 02.00 ESTLast modified on Tue 21 Feb 2023 05.14 EST

Everyone in north London has the same pushchair. I exaggerate slightly, but not by much: the Babyzen YoYo, a compact stroller that folds down small enough to go in a plane's overhead compartment, is a phenomenon. On the pavements, at the library, outside the children's centre – they are ubiquitous.

At about £400, they are not the cheapest, but I have observed that their ownership transcends the sort of rich millennial parents who work at Google and own large townhouses around these parts. They are used by all kinds of families. If you were to nominate a bit of parenting kit that defines my generation of parents – at least those who live in cities, though friends from the countryside have hired them to go on holiday – this would probably be a good example, designed as it is with travel, flexibility and mobility in mind.

Although an earth (grand)mother type might say that all you need for a baby is a sling, a pair of breasts and a drawer, baby products are big

business. The average amount that new parents spend on baby equipment, according to [a 2022 report](#), is £6,000. A [2019 study](#) found that 90% of parents felt they'd overspent on baby gear. And you can understand why: not only is the social media marketing relentless, but many companies make big promises, usually to do with sleep.

The guilt-tripping and fearmongering can be intense, and, as [a recent feature in this newspaper](#) highlighted, could even be making us more paranoid. Like the mother in that article who threw money at trying to solve her baby's wind problem, I've sometimes been taken in by claims that purport to be the solution to whatever stage the baby is at, with mixed results.

On the other hand, never has product design felt more important than it has in parenthood. The book and social media account [Designing Motherhood](#) (the former published by MIT with the subtitle Things that Make and Break Our Births) highlights the designs that have helped define the relationship between parents and their babies over the past century, from the BabyBjörn sling (of which I'm a huge fan), to the incubator (likewise: I had a premature baby), to the breast pump.

The strides made in breast-pump design alone have been transformative and liberating. The Elvie wearable breast pump is such a far cry from the industrial-feeling milking machines of the past, and I'll never forget how it helped me establish breastfeeding after my son was in intensive care. Similarly, I could weep in gratitude at the genius of Ewan the Dream Sheep, who helped him learn to sleep through the night (listening to an old episode of [Parenting Hell](#), I discovered that Josh Widdicombe is also among Ewan's legions of fans).

Of course, all babies are different, and there's no guarantee that what will work for one parent will work for another, but some design classics have stood the test of time. The [Stokke Tripp Trapp high chair](#), for example, turns 50 this year and has revolutionised how generations of children eat – a friend of mine says her family still sit on the ones she and her siblings had as babies. Perhaps that's why we are liable to be a bit sentimental about

some baby gear: the best examples become part of family life, making it all just that little bit easier.

When I realised that my son was frustrated by how constrained he felt by his baby sleeping bag, a late-night Google search turned up the [BugBag](#), which has split legs and allows him to sleep in his favoured starfish position. [The Little Sock Company](#) makes miraculous socks that don't come off even when he rubs his feet together in the pram. The [Rockit pram rocker](#) does exactly what it says on the tin, freeing your hands so that you can eat lunch. Often these small businesses have been founded by parents who have spotted a gap in a market, because nothing gets you thinking about what would make your life easier than tending a newborn 24/7.

For example: I loved the bassinet of our Ark pushchair, but as I pounded the pavements I used to wish for one that had built-in speakers that played white noise and a selection of classical music so that I didn't have to put my phone in with him. One dad I know fantasised about some sort of device that could take you from a standing to a lying down position without disturbing the baby on your chest.

When I asked parents on Twitter, a whole range of weird and wonderful ideas were put forward, from a [Wrong Trousers](#)-style dressing machine for active toddlers to earplugs that cut out your partner's snoring but are still linked to the baby monitor. One mum's dream is "a replica of my hand that would automatically pat the bottom of a sleeping baby. A washing-up glove full of uncooked rice on some sort of pendulum, perhaps", while another wishes for a product that can automatically return a dummy to a baby's mouth.

These may be fanciful, but who knows what the future holds? What I do know is that psychologically and emotionally, the right baby gear can make a dramatic difference to your everyday life. The [Babyzen YoYo](#) is proof of that. Yes, reader, I have one. Having decided that pushing heavy, cumbersome pushchairs up various local hills was actually making me feel exhausted and downtrodden, it has come as a surprise just how altered my psyche has been by this change. I feel lighter, freer. More like my pre-baby self. The city streets feel less like an army assault course to be navigated.

It's totally liberating: the best design always is.

## What's working

I'm so grateful to all the readers who recommended which baby books to get with his Christmas vouchers. [Peck Peck Peck](#), [I Want My Hat Back](#) and [Little Owl's Bedtime](#) are already firm favourites, but [Emma Dodd's Me](#) is the one winning the biggest smiles. This kid just loves a baby penguin.

## What's not

I won't go into what we've been dealing with this week as you may be eating breakfast, but let's just say that infant antibiotics, necessary though they are, have had some rather dramatic side-effects the likes of which my traumatised mind hopes never to see again.

- Rhiannon Lucy Cosslett is a Guardian columnist and author

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Not my sort of thing ... some young people, having young people fun.  
Photograph: shironosov/Getty Images/iStockphoto

[Opinion](#)[Life and style](#)

## **I gatecrashed a party for young people – and have never been less welcome**

[Zoe Williams](#)



The host was on to me and my friends as fast as a security guard trying to get a chaotic drunk out of McDonald's

Tue 21 Feb 2023 02.00 ESTLast modified on Tue 21 Feb 2023 11.53 EST

So the scene was a set of railway arches, and there was a different party in each one. In retrospect, it was really easy to tell them apart: it went Weird People, Old People (40+), Young People (-30). But when you first arrive at a venue, it's a bit discombobulating: too much sensory stimulation, very little signposting. It's a reasonable human imperative, I think, to move towards the visible bar, rather than stop to notice that every arch has a bar.

This is how I and a group of friends and family ended up fleetingly in the Young People party on our way to the Old People one. My brother-in-law has form; only last week he was refused entry at a rave because he had no ID, and was last seen taking his bike helmet off, yelling: "My bald head is my ID!" I only know that because I was there, inside the rave, and we can deal with what the hell I was doing at a rave another time.

The young people were in fancy dress because that's what they're into (old people are eccentric enough in our personal style). And the theme, I think,



was something a bit rubbish like “fabulous”, because they were all in hot pink. Needless to say, none of us met this head on, but I’m not sure that’s what alerted the host to our unbelonging, rather than, say, our obvious not-30-ness, or perhaps that we weren’t her friends. She was on us as fast as a security guard trying to get a chaotic drunk out of a McDonald’s, but verbally, her approach was indulgent – eerily so. “Do you think you’re in the right place?” she said. “Because there’s another party next door, and their music is so much better than ours. It’s bound to be much more your sort of thing.” She leaned in conspiratorially: “Between you and me, I wish I was at *their* party. But this is *my* party.” My sister and I exchanged looks, which in the dense, economical interplay of siblings’ facial expressions, conveyed: “This young lady appears to think we’ve escaped from an old people’s home”, “Yes, but shall we berate her, or accept that Old People’s Party is halfway to old people’s home?” and: “The second, definitely the second.”

The annoying thing is, if I’d been gatecrashing deliberately, I would have started with the Weird People.

- Zoe Williams is a Guardian columnist

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## 2023.02.21 - Around the world

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So-Sung-uk and Kim Yong-min celebrate after a court in South Korea ruled same-sex couples were entitled to the same coverage from the national health insurance program as heterosexual couples. Photograph: Yonhap/EPA

[South Korea](#)

## South Korean court recognises legal status of same-sex couples for first time

Seoul high court rules gay couple allowed same health insurance rights as heterosexual couple in landmark case

[Justin McCurry](#) in Tokyo

Tue 21 Feb 2023 01.58 EST Last modified on Tue 21 Feb 2023 16.28 EST

A court in [South Korea](#) has ruled that same-sex couples are entitled to the same spousal coverage under the national health insurance service as heterosexual couples – the first time the country has recognised the legal status of a gay partner.

Tuesday's landmark decision by the Seoul high court overturned a previous ruling by a lower court in January 2022 that rejected a gay couple's petition after one partner was told he had to make separate health insurance payments.

Under South Korean law, a dependent is exempt from making health insurance payments if their spouse meets certain employment conditions. The lower court threw out the petition because it did not recognise the partners as spouses.

More than 30 countries, including Taiwan, have legalised same-sex marriage, but it is still illegal in South Korea and Japan, where [pressure is building](#) for a change to the law before the country hosts the G7 summit in May.

A Seoul high court judge said in a brief statement that the lower court ruling had been overturned and insurance contributions imposed on one of the spouses revoked, adding that the insurance service would have to pay costs for both sides in the case, the Korea Herald reported.

The ruling was the court's "first recognition of the legal status of a same-sex couple", said Park Han-hee, a lawyer who represented the plaintiff, according to the Yonhap news agency.

The decision was welcomed by the couple who launched the legal petition, So Sung-uk and Kim Yong-min.

"I am delighted because I felt like the judges told us through a court decision that the feelings of love I have for my husband should not be the target of ignorance or insults," So told reporters, according to the Herald.

Kim said: "It took us such a long time to have our marriage status recognised within the legal framework."

The couple held a wedding ceremony in 2019 but were unable to register their marriage because South Korean authorities do not recognise their

union as legal.

Kim was registered as a spousal dependent as part of So's insurance scheme in early 2020, according to reports, but the insurance service later ordered Kim to pay retrospective contributions since the couple were not legally married.

The decision denied Kim the right to receive spousal coverage even though the service grants such rights to heterosexual common law couples.

The high court, however, ruled spousal coverage under the state health insurance scheme was not limited to legally defined families, and that denying that right to same-sex couples was discriminatory, Yonhap said.

Protecting the rights of minorities is the "biggest responsibility" of the court as the "last bastion" of human rights, the court added.

Campaigners described the ruling as "significant".

"This is an important decision that moves South Korea closer to achieving marriage equality," Amnesty International's east Asia researcher, Boram Jang, said in a statement. "There is still a long way to go to end discrimination against the [LGBTQ+ community](#), but this ruling offers hope that prejudice can be overcome."

"By not recognising partners in same-sex relationships, the national health insurance service was discriminating against same-sex couples, denying basic rights afforded to couples of the opposite sex. Today's ruling will help to rectify this wrong."

"This ruling is significant as the first decision legally recognising same-sex couples to be made by a court at any level in South Korea, but much more needs to be done to end discrimination against, and criminalisation of, the LGBTQ+ community."

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A Burmese python is held during a safe capture demonstration in Miami.  
Photograph: Lynne Sladky/AP

[Florida](#)

## Florida researchers capture invasive pythons by attaching GPS collars to prey

Burmese pythons, which can grow up to 20ft, have surged in south Florida due to snake owners releasing them when they get too big

[Coral Murphy Marcos](#)

Tue 21 Feb 2023 02.00 ESTLast modified on Tue 21 Feb 2023 02.02 EST

To better find, capture and remove invasive Burmese pythons in [Florida](#)'s Everglades, a team of researchers is attaching location-tracking collars on animals such as raccoons and opossums that the predatory snakes feed on.

[Burmese pythons](#) have surged in south Florida in recent years, because many snake owners release them into the wild after they become too large to take care of.

Those pythons in particular can grow up to 20ft or more long, and the small mammal population bears the brunt of the large snake's appetite.

In their original funding proposals, researchers at Southern Illinois University, the Crocodile Lake and the North Carolina Museum of Natural Sciences did not count on capturing the pythons in [Florida](#).

The research intended to study – with the aid of GPS collars – how supplemental food resources, such as feral cat feeding stations and unsecured garbage sources, could influence the movement and behavior of small and medium-sized mammals.

But in September, they detected unusual movement coming from the location collar on one of the possums and found it had been eaten by a 12ft Burmese python that weighed 62lbs (28kg). It was not until November that the team finally captured the snake, which was underground, using the signal from the collar.

“We always knew it was a possibility and that it had the potential to be flashy and scale up as a means of python removal from the environment,” said Michael Cove, a research curator at the North Carolina Museum of Natural Sciences.

The traditional method to capture the invasive species is to release male pythons equipped with radio tags into the environment during breeding season, which leads researchers to female snakes.

Cove said that the new alternative with opossums and raccoons has the potential to lead to captures without having to deploy pythons back into the environment.



A couple of months after their first capture, the team caught a 77lbs female python after a racoon had been eaten. The snake was later euthanized.

Still, researchers have met pitfalls along the way, pinpointing ways to enhance future plans to expand the capturing method.

Researchers in February detected a signal coming from a GPS collar attached to an opossum and, when the scientists finally tracked down the device, it had been defecated by the python.

“That was a reality check that we have a more finite time than we thought of retaining the collar,” Cove said.

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An ancient Angkorian crown that was returned to Cambodia from Britain last Friday. Seventy-seven pieces of lost Angkorian crown jewellery have been returned. Photograph: Wu Changwei/Xinhua News Agency/eyevine

[Cambodia](#)

## Stolen trove of Angkor crown jewels returned to Cambodia after resurfacing in London

Family of British antiquities dealer Douglas Latchford, who died in 2020 while awaiting trial for art trafficking, returns 77 Khmer artefacts

*Agence France-Presse*

Mon 20 Feb 2023 21.55 EST

Dozens of pieces of Angkorian crown jewellery stolen from [Cambodia](#), many never seen by the public, have been returned after resurfacing in London, the Cambodian culture ministry said on Monday.

The trove includes crowns, necklaces, amulets and other treasures from the Angkor period, which ran from the ninth to the 14th century AD, when the Khmer empire was a dominant force in south-east Asia.

The ministry said officials in Cambodia received the 77 pieces from the family of British antiquities dealer Douglas Latchford.

Latchford died in 2020 while awaiting trial in the United States for art trafficking, and his family reached an agreement with Cambodia the same year to return his collection of Khmer antiquities.

The collection, which arrived discreetly in Cambodia on Friday, features “gold and other precious metal pieces from the pre-Angkorian and Angkorian period including crowns, necklaces, bracelets, belts, earrings and amulets”, the ministry said.



The trove includes crowns and other treasures from the Angkor period, which ran from the ninth to the 14th century AD. Photograph: Cambodian Ministry of Culture and Fine Arts/Handout via Xinhua

As Cambodia was ravaged by civil wars and a genocide by the Khmer Rouge regime in the 1970s, thousands of antiques were looted and sold through dealers in Thailand and Hong Kong to wealthy buyers and museums in Europe and the US.

US prosecutors have been pushing to return many of the works in recent years.

In 2021, Cambodia received five lost stone and bronze artefacts from the Latchford family.

Last year, the US also returned to Cambodia 30 looted antiquities, including bronze and stone statues of Buddhist and Hindu deities that were carved more than 1,000 years ago.

Cambodia's culture minister, Phoeurng Sackona, appealed to individuals and museums around the world to return stolen artefacts to the country to contribute to the "reconciliation and healing of Cambodians who went through decades of civil war".

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Japan is set to raise its age of consent from 13 to 16 in an overhaul of sexual offence laws. Photograph: Yoshio Tsunoda/AFLO/REX/Shutterstock

[Japan](#)

## Japan poised to raise age of consent from 13 in overhaul of sexual offence laws

A justice ministry proposal is expected to be submitted to parliament soon, with the way rape crimes are prosecuted under scrutiny as well

[Justin McCurry](#) in Tokyo

Mon 20 Feb 2023 23.51 EST Last modified on Tue 21 Feb 2023 16.32 EST

[Japan](#) is poised to raise the age of consent from 13 to 16 in an overhaul of legislation prompted by criticism that existing laws fail to protect children from rape and other sexual offences.

A justice ministry panel has proposed raising the age of consent from 13 – the lowest among all G7 countries – as part of a series of reforms to the penal code that will also make voyeurism a criminal offence and clarify the requirements for rape prosecutions.

The overhaul of Japan's laws on sex crimes comes after several [rape acquittals](#) in 2019 caused public outcry, including a case in which a man repeatedly raped his teenage daughter.

A branch of the Nagoya district court acquitted the father and prompted anger when it said there was no definitive proof that the daughter had been unable to resist, even though it recognised that she had not consented. A higher court later overturned the decision and sentenced the man to 10 years in prison.

Japanese criminal law requires two conditions to be met to conclude that a sexual assault has been committed – sex must be non-consensual, and there must be proof that the victim was unable to physically resist.

Among the most controversial provisions in the existing law is a requirement that prosecutors prove that rape perpetrators used “violence and intimidation” to incapacitate their victims.

The justice ministry panel did not remove the wording in its recommendation, but clarified that the definition also covers intoxication, drugging, catching victims “off-guard” and the use of psychological control.

The clarification “isn't meant to make it easier or harder” to secure rape convictions, but “will hopefully make court verdicts more consistent,” a ministry official said.

Human Rights Now welcomed the change as a step forward, but said it “still fails to meet international rape legislation standards”. Instead, Japan should “redefine the crime of rape as all non-consensual sexual intercourse”, the group said in a statement.

The age of consent is 16 in Britain and South Korea, 15 in France, and 14 in Germany and China. Japan's age of consent has remained unchanged since 1907.

While regional laws ban “lewd” acts with people aged 18 or under, prosecutions resulting from violations of these local laws result in significantly lighter penalties.

The ministry's recommendations have been submitted to the justice minister, Ken Saito, and are expected to be submitted to parliament in the coming months, the Kyodo news agency reported.

The panel also proposed a new offence covering the act of secretly filming someone for sexual purposes, and extending the statute of limitations for rape from 10 to 15 years to give survivors more time to come forward.

*Agence France-Presse contributed reporting.*

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HSBC reported \$5.2bn in pre-tax profit for the last three months of 2022.  
Photograph: Reinhard Krause/Reuters

[HSBC](#)

## HSBC quarterly profits more than double after interest rate rises

Bank increases CEO's bonus and plans bigger shareholder payout as it faces pressure from investor Ping An

[Kalyeena Makortoff](#) *Banking correspondent*

[@kalyeena](#)

Tue 21 Feb 2023 07.25 EST First published on Tue 21 Feb 2023 04.31 EST

HSBC has increased bonus payouts for its chief executive after fourth-quarter profits more than doubled on the back of a jump in mortgage and loan costs for its borrowers.

The London-headquartered lender said it had increased Noel Quinn's bonus by 36% to nearly \$2.2m (£1.8m), taking his overall pay to \$5.5m for 2022.



That compares with his \$4.9m payout in 2021.

The strong performance in the final three months of 2022 also means HSBC is planning its highest annual shareholder payout in four years – worth 32 cents a share – as it tries to appease its largest investor, Ping An, and [stave off further calls](#) to split off the more profitable Asian business. Executives are also planning a special dividend of 21 cents a share – worth roughly \$4bn in total – once HSBC completes the sale of its Canadian business.

HSBC, which makes the bulk of its profits in Asia, reported \$5.2bn in pre-tax profit for the last three months of 2022, more than double the \$2.5bn it reported for the same period a year earlier.

That was partly because of “strong growth” in net interest income, which accounts for the difference in the amount paid out to savers compared with the amount charged for loans and mortgages. The lender has benefited from the rise in interest rates across most of the 62 countries and territories in which it operates, including the UK, as central banks have tried to curb inflation caused by the war in Ukraine. It has led lenders to increase borrowing costs for their customers.

On an annual basis, HSBC’s profits fell 7% to \$17.5bn because of a \$2.4bn charge linked to the sale of its retail banking network in France.

However, the bank was affected by the \$3.6bn it put aside to cover a potential increase in defaults by its borrowers, including those in the UK, where HSBC expects the economy could experience a “relatively shallow” recession.

Quinn told journalists on Tuesday that while there were some signs that UK customers were struggling due to higher borrowing rates and the broader cost of living crisis, it was not presenting a major concern. He applauded Rishi Sunak’s government for having restored stability on financial markets, helping ease the cost of borrowing, after [Liz Truss’s disastrous mini-budget](#).

“We’ve seen marginal-to-small signs of stress in our book at the moment in the UK,” Quinn said. “There is still a challenging year ahead and a number of people remortgaging on to higher rates, but I’m pleased that the yield curve has come down because of the positive action that government took. We’re passing on the reduction of that yield curve as quickly as possible into the cost of borrowing for our mortgages.”

Meanwhile, HSBC said the overall annual bonus pool for its top-performing bankers fell 4% to £3.4bn.

HSBC made multimillion-pound payouts to its highest-earning bankers, with 429 receiving more than €1m (£888,000) in 2022. Fourteen were paid more than €5m each, while one unidentified banker was took home more than €11m – double Quinn’s pay – according to disclosures in HSBC’s annual report.

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Quinn indicated he was comfortable with receiving a higher payout, despite the slight drop in the overall bonus pool, and ongoing job cuts that have been a key part of HSBC’s efficiency drive.

“The group’s financial performance was strong in 2022... if you go back to the prior year, the 2021 bonus pool was up for the majority of our [staff]

and for the executive directors, it was not significantly up: it was flat. So it goes in swings and roundabouts,” Quinn said.

The bank has cut around 15,800 roles since it announced plans to slash around 15% of its then-235,000 global workforce in 2020. HSBC said it now employs around 219,200 staff.

Quinn said 2022 was “another good year for HSBC” and it was “on track to deliver high returns in 2023”.

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- [Revealed Scale of ‘forever chemical’ pollution across UK and Europe](#)
- [Explainer What are PFAS, how toxic are they and how do you become exposed?](#)
- [Buncefield The PFAS legacy of ‘biggest fire in peacetime Europe’](#)



In the UK, the highest levels of PFAS were found in a discharge on the River Wyre.

Photograph: Ken Leslie/Alamy

### PFAS

## **Revealed: scale of ‘forever chemical’ pollution across UK and Europe**

Major mapping project reveals PFAS have been found at high levels at thousands of sites

- [What are PFAS, how toxic are they and how do you become exposed?](#)
- [Buncefield: the PFAS legacy of ‘biggest fire in peacetime Europe’](#)

*[Rachel Salvidge](#) and [Leana Hosea](#)*

Thu 23 Feb 2023 00.00 EST Last modified on Thu 23 Feb 2023 09.36 EST

Pollutants known as “forever chemicals”, which don’t break down in the environment, build up in the body and may be toxic, have been found at

high levels at thousands of sites across the UK and [Europe](#), a major mapping project has revealed.

The map shows that per- and polyfluoroalkyl substances (PFAS), a family of about 10,000 chemicals valued for their non-stick and detergent properties, have made their way into water, soils and sediments from a wide range of consumer products, firefighting foams, waste and industrial processes.

Two PFAS have been linked to an array of health problems. PFOA has been connected with kidney and testicular cancer, thyroid disease, ulcerative colitis, high cholesterol and pregnancy-induced hypertension. PFOS has been associated with reproductive, developmental, liver, kidney, and thyroid disease. At lower levels PFAS have been associated with [immunotoxicity](#).

The substances have been found at about 17,000 sites across the UK and Europe. Of these, PFAS have been detected at high concentrations of more than 1,000 nanograms a litre of water at about 640 sites, and above 10,000ng/l at 300 locations.

“These sorts of concentrations raise concerns with me,” said Prof Crispin Halsall, an environmental chemist at Lancaster University. “You have the risk of livestock gaining access to those waters and [then PFAS is] in the human food web.” Halsall says there are also risks involving people “accessing wildlife as food sources like fishing and wildfowl”.

The map shows that Belgium is home to the highest levels of pollution, where PFAS was found in groundwater at concentrations up to 73m ng/l around 3M’s PFAS manufacturing site in Zwijndrecht, Flanders.

People living within 15km (10 miles) of the site have been told not to eat any eggs laid in their gardens and to avoid homegrown vegetables. Meanwhile, 70,000 people living within a 5km (3 mile) radius of the plant have been offered a blood test to look for the presence of PFAS. 3M says it will remediate the site and has “signed an agreement with the Flemish region ... with an investment amount of €571m” (£503m). It has also

announced plans to exit PFAS manufacturing “and work to discontinue the use of PFAS across its product portfolio by the end of 2025”.



Residents of Zwijndrecht, Antwerp and the surrounding area demonstrate with eggs to request the establishment of a parliamentary inquiry into PFOS pollution. Photograph: David Pintens/BELGA/AFP/Getty Images

In the Netherlands, an accident involving PFAS in firefighting foam has contaminated land around Schiphol airport in Amsterdam, resulting in soils containing extremely high levels of PFOS. Some airports and military sites in Germany have been found to have similar problems.

In the UK, the highest levels of PFAS were found in a discharge from a chemicals plant on the River Wyre, above Blackpool. Fish in the river have been found to contain high levels of PFAS, with flounder containing up to 11,000ng/kg, according to data from Defra’s Centre for Environment, Fisheries and Aquaculture Science.

Prof Ian Cousins, an environmental scientist at Stockholm University, said that sites with readings above 1,000ng/kg should be “urgently assessed” so that they can be remediated.



“At [highly] contaminated sites, local authorities should consider testing to ensure that PFAS levels are safe in local produce. This would help determine if local health advisories and publication campaigns to discourage regular consumption of wild fish, shellfish, free range eggs ... are needed,” he added.

Halsall said: “PFAS in groundwater is a big problem because if that groundwater is abstracted for farming, or more importantly for humans as a water source, then you’ve got PFAS in your drinking water and it’s very difficult to remove.”

The map shows that drinking water sources in the UK have been contaminated with PFAS but water companies say that the chemicals do not make it into the final tap water because it would first either be blended with another source to dilute the PFAS, or it would undergo a specialised treatment process and be removed.

Data obtained from water companies and the Environment Agency by the Guardian and Watershed shows that since 2006 about 120 samples of drinking water sources have been found to contain concentrations of PFOS or PFOA at above the 100ng/l level – the point at which the Drinking Water Inspectorate’s (DWI) guidelines state that water companies should take action to reduce it before supplying it to people’s homes. Until 2009, the DWI guideline limit was much higher, at 3,000ng/l.

The guideline limits for PFAS in drinking water are much lower in the US, where the Environmental Protection Agency has set a health advisory limit of 0.004ng/l for PFOA and 0.02ng/l for PFOS. In Denmark, the Environmental Protection Agency stipulates that drinking water must not contain more than 2ng/l for the sum of four PFASs.

Drinking water limits for PFAS continue to be brought down in response to growing evidence about their health impacts, according to Rita Loch-Caruso, a professor of toxicology at the University of Michigan. “We’re finding health effects at lower and lower concentrations – in the single digits,” she said.

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Chemist and PFAS expert Roger Klein said he believes the UK's "DWI limits are ridiculously high by current international standards".

He also believes the practice of blending water to dilute the PFAS is wrong. "It is the lazy way out and it doesn't remove the PFAS, which remains a problem since [they are] highly persistent and bioaccumulative."

A Defra spokesperson said the UK had "very high standards" for drinking water and that water companies were "required to carry out regular risk assessments and sampling for PFAS to ensure the drinking water supply remains safe.

"PFAS chemicals are in the environment because they have been used widely in products and are extremely persistent. Since the 2000s we have taken action to increase monitoring and support a ban or highly restricting specific PFAS both domestically and internationally," they said, adding that the department would continue to work with regulators to understand the risks.

Despite the large number of detections revealed by the map, it is thought to be the tip of the iceberg. The Environment Agency has admitted that PFOS – known to be toxic to fish and other aquatic life – is ubiquitous in the

environment and that the presence of PFOS in rivers will mean that many will not meet water quality standards until 2039.

In the UK just PFOS and PFOA are regulated. In the EU, there is a proposal to regulate PFASs as one class, rather than to attempt to deal with each substance independently. The European Chemicals Agency [says](#) that about 4.4m tonnes of PFAS will end up in the environment over the next 30 years unless action is taken.

The Fluoropolymers Product Group (FPG) opposes the EU's moves to treat all PFAS as one class, instead advocating differentiating between fluoropolymers and other PFAS groups, and considering the different risk profiles and uses of each group separately. "While the FPG understands the concerns related to the potential persistency of most of PFAS, we consider that this concern for the environment can be managed through alternative restrictions rather than a ban," said Nicolas Robin, director of the FPG.

"[PFAS pollution] is similar to plastic pollution in that these chemicals are not degradable, [but] in the case of PFAS it is invisible," said Cousins. "We continuously release them, so the levels in the environment will continue to increase and it's only a matter of time before the levels of PFAS in the environment or in our bodies pass the threshold where there will be an effect on human health," he said.

*The Forever Pollution Project was initially developed by Le Monde (France), NDR, WDR and Süddeutsche Zeitung (Germany), RADAR Magazine and Le Scienze (Italy), The Investigative Desk and NRC (Netherlands) with the financial support of [Journalismfund.eu](http://Journalismfund.eu) and Investigative Journalism for Europe ([IJ4EU](http://IJ4EU)); further investigated and published by Knack (Belgium), Denik Referendum (Czech Republic), Politiken (Denmark), YLE (Finland), Reporters United (Greece), Latvian Radio (Latvia), Datadista (Spain), SRF (Switzerland), [Watershed Investigations](#)/The Guardian (UK); and supported by [Arena for Journalism in Europe](#) for cross-border collaboration.*

*Some areas may appear on the map to have worse pollution problems than others but this could be a result of that region having a more rigorous monitoring regime in place, or being more willing to share data. For water*

*concentrations, 1 ng/l is equivalent to 1ng/kg. Every effort has been made to ensure that the data, collected from a wide range of sources across the UK and Europe, is correct.*

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PFAS foam gathers at the the Van Etten Creek dam in Oscoda township, Michigan, near Wurtsmith Air Force Base. Photograph: Jake May/AP

[PFAS](#)

[Explainer](#)

## What are PFAS, how toxic are they and how do you become exposed?

Everything you need to know about ‘forever chemicals’ detected in air, water, soils, sediments and rain

- [Revealed: scale of ‘forever chemical’ pollution across UK and Europe](#)
- [Buncefield: the PFAS legacy of ‘biggest fire in peacetime Europe’](#)

[Rachel Salvidge](#) and [Leana Hosea](#)

Thu 23 Feb 2023 00.00 ESTLast modified on Thu 23 Feb 2023 09.36 EST

## What are PFAS ‘forever chemicals’?

You may not realise it but you have an intimate relationship with [PFAS](#). The human-made chemicals are in your blood, your clothes, your cosmetics. They have been detected in air, water, soils, sediments, and in rain at levels that would be considered unsafe in drinking water in some countries.

PFAS stands for per- and polyfluoroalkyl substances, it's an umbrella term for a family of thousands of chemicals – about 12,000 at the last count – that are prized for their indestructible and non-stick properties.

They are used in a huge range of consumer products, including waterproof clothing, furniture, cookware, electronics, food packaging and firefighting foams and are employed in a wide array of industrial processes.

Most PFAS are so well designed and robust that they won't break down in the environment for tens of thousands of years, earning them the moniker “forever chemicals”. This persistence means the PFAS burden is ever growing, so much so that a group of scientists have concluded that the global spread of just four PFAS in the atmosphere has led to the “planetary boundary for chemical pollution being exceeded, raising risks to the stability of the Earth system”.

The substances' grease and water repellent properties enable them to be very mobile, which means that once the chemicals have departed their original products they can slide their way out of old landfills for example, and migrate into the environment.

That's bad news because many PFAS also tend to bioaccumulate, which means they are absorbed by organisms faster than they can be excreted and will build up over time. PFAS biomagnify up food chains too, supplying apex predators such as orcas with hefty doses at mealtimes.

## **What about PFOS and PFOA?**

Little is known about most PFAS because, as The Environment Agency's former chief scientist put it, “few PFAS have been subject to extensive testing so information about their hazardous properties is ... sparse”.

However, two widely used problematic substances – perfluorooctane sulfonate (PFOS) and perfluorooctanoic acid (PFOA) – have been scrutinised following a number of major pollution incidents in the US, Australia and Europe, linked to chemicals manufacturing plants and contamination from PFAS-laden firefighting foams.

Both were eventually banned or had their uses restricted under various European and international laws, but being forever chemicals, they have not gone away.

In the UK today, of the thousands of PFAS in use, only PFOS and PFOA are subject to regulation.

## **Are they toxic to health?**

There's a hint in the shorthand for the properties of some PFAS, which is PBT: persistent, bioaccumulative and toxic.

So far toxicity can only be applied to PFOS and PFOA, but PFOS has also earned itself an additional letter: uPBT, with the u standing for ubiquitous – a clue as to how widespread the contamination has become.

It was DuPont that introduced PFAS to the world in the 1940s as Teflon and it was DuPont that revealed how harmful they could be. It emitted PFOA from its US plant in south-west Parkersburg into the air and Ohio River from the 1950s until the early 2000s, and it eventually reached drinking water supplies. The ensuing lawsuit, which led to DuPont settling 3,500 personal injury cases for \$670.1m (£555m), was made famous by [the Mark Ruffalo film Dark Waters](#).

A US study that ran between 2005 and 2013, involving the collection of blood samples from about 69,000 people living near the DuPont plant, concluded that there was a “probable link” between exposure to PFOA and six diseases: high cholesterol, ulcerative colitis, thyroid disease, testicular cancer, kidney cancer and pregnancy-induced hypertension.

Other studies have reported that PFOS and PFOA can affect the immune system and that by depressing immune response, they can make vaccines

less effective. They have also been linked to low birthweight, birth defects, delayed development and newborn deaths in laboratory animals.

Ian Ross, PFAS practice lead at engineering company CDM Smith, said: “It was known that PFAS are extremely persistent in the environment since at least 1950 but they have been widely used in highly dispersive applications such as in firefighting foams since 1962.”

Public interest science has only just begun to wrap its head around PFOS and PFOA, decades after they were first produced, and so there is little chance it will ever catch up with manufacturers, who can tweak an existing molecule, rename it, and have it on the market in a fraction of the time it takes to establish a body of evidence to demonstrate whether or not it needs regulating.

It’s a high stakes, slow motion game of whack-a-mole.

## **How do you become exposed?**

It’s estimated that, given the widespread use of PFAS and the ubiquitous presence of some of them in the environment, almost everyone on the planet has PFAS in their blood at some level.

For the general public, the main sources of PFAS exposure are from drinking water and food, such as eating fish, eggs, or milk, or livestock that has fed on contaminated land. Direct exposure can also come via cosmetics, sprays or dust from consumer products, but little is known of the impacts through these pathways.

But to fall foul of the worst effects of PFOS or PFOA, you would need to be exposed for a sustained period of time to pretty high concentrations of the substances. That’s why most PFAS health scandals in the US and Europe have been related to contaminated drinking water supplies.

There are lots of potential sources of PFAS pollution. Aside from chemicals manufacturing plants, any site that has regularly used PFOS-laden aqueous film-forming firefighting foams, such as airfields, military bases and

firefighting training grounds, could in theory contaminate soils, air and water in the vicinity.

Other sources include landfills, paper mills, wastewater treatment works, land spread with sewage sludge, runoff from urban areas, industries that involve textile waterproofing, metal finishing and plating, carpet and furniture production, paint, refrigerators and cleaning products.

PFAS “behave like surfactants, like soaps”, says Prof Crispin Halsall, an environmental chemist at Lancaster University. “They sit at the interfaces between water and particles, water and biota, they can transfer to the atmosphere and they’re so abundant they cycle around the wider environment, and that’s the problem we’ve got.”

Add to this the minefield of consumer products laden with PFAS, the existing load in the environment, while at the same time more PFAS are being manufactured and created, and it is hard to imagine how at least low-level exposure could be avoided.

## **What do PFAS do to the wildlife and the environment?**

PFAS have been detected in even the remotest parts of the globe, from the Arctic to Antarctica.

In England many rivers fail to meet standards for chemical health due to the presence of PFAS, and this widespread pollution could be affecting the wildlife that live in them. Cardiff University analysed the livers of otters across England and Wales and found PFAS in all 50 otters sampled, with 12 different types of PFAS found in 80% of the animals. At sea, PFAS have been found in killer whales near Norway and in bottlenose dolphins stranded along the northern Adriatic coast.

In Flanders, the government has advised people living in the neighbourhood of a 3M PFAS factory to stop eating eggs and vegetables from their hens and gardens, and a study by the Technical University of Denmark National



Food Institute and the Danish Veterinary and Food Administration found that organic eggs in Denmark are contaminated with high levels of PFAS.

Linda Birnbaum, toxicologist and former director of the US National Institute for Environmental Health Sciences, said: “There’s an increasing amount of data showing PFAS are associated with a wide variety of health effects, not only in people but in animals.

“I like to remind us all that we are a kind of animal ... there are now hundreds of epidemiology studies showing associations with a wide variety of effects, including cancer, liver effects, kidney effects, effects on development and reproduction, growing evidence for effects on neurodevelopment, growing evidence for effects on type 2 diabetes ... It’s kind of like the more you look, the more you begin to find associations with this very broad class of chemicals.”

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A police officer looks towards a huge cloud of smoke rising from the burning Buncefield oil depot in 2005. Photograph: Alastair Grant/AP

[PFAS](#)

**Buncefield: the PFAS legacy of ‘biggest fire in peacetime Europe’**

Wayne Crossman, a firefighter deployed to the oil depot after the huge explosion in 2005, suspects firefighting foam contributed to his myeloid leukaemia

- [Revealed: scale of 'forever chemical' pollution across UK and Europe](#)
- [What are PFAS, how toxic are they and how do you become exposed?](#)

*[Leana Hosea](#) and [Rachel Salvidge](#)*

Thu 23 Feb 2023 00.00 EST Last modified on Thu 23 Feb 2023 09.35 EST

The oil depot fire raged for three days. “Wherever you looked, you could see devastation. The windows of the buildings were blown out and all the cars were damaged,” recalls Wayne Crossman, a 43-year-old firefighter from London who attended the scene.

Crossman was among 250 firefighters deployed to the Buncefield oil depot in Hemel Hempstead early on a Sunday morning [in December 2005](#). The explosion of the first oil tank was so intense it measured 2.4 on the Richter scale and ignited 20 more. Over [250,000 litres of firefighting foam](#) was used to extinguish the flames, creating huge volumes of contaminated runoff.

The cause of Crossman’s myeloid leukaemia is not known and there is currently a lack of evidence to link it to [PFAS](#), but he suspects it was the firefighting foam and his personal protective gear that has caused him harm.



Fireman Wayne Crossman, who was deployed to the from Buncefield oil depot fire in 2005.

“Every day I was prepared to risk my life for a total stranger. I never expected the stuff we’re using or the kit we’re wearing to have health implications. At no point was I told that I could end up with cancer.” Crossman’s rare form of cancer is difficult to treat, and he has had to retire early due to ill health.

Among the key ingredients in firefighting foams and PPE are the “forever chemicals” PFAS, the name of a family of 10,000 compounds, none of which break down in the environment, may be toxic and build up in the body. Two PFAS have been linked to a wide range of diseases, including kidney and testicular cancer. Crossman is one of a group of firefighters in the UK and abroad who believe their contact with the chemicals may have made them seriously ill.

“This is the highest issue on our agenda,” says the Fire Brigades Union’s (FBU) Riccardo la Torre. He’s scathing about what he says is a lack of policy and inaction at all levels, from the National Fire Chiefs Council to government ministers. “They’re asleep at the wheel. Unlike in other countries, we don’t have health screening, and decontamination practices are only getting better because of the FBU’s campaign.”



Nasa satellite image showing the spread of smoke from the burning oil depot at Buncefield in 2005. Photograph: Dundee University/PA

Firefighters already suffer an increased risk of cancer from exposures to chemicals released from fires, according to researchers at the University of Central Lancashire. “They have a greater ratio of cancers, including rare cancers like leukaemia,” says Anna Stec, professor of fire chemistry and toxicity.

Her ongoing health research includes a number of toxins that firefighters are exposed to in the line of duty, including PFAS. “We know they’re exposed, but we don’t know by how much or what impact it’s having, which is one of our research objectives.”

The government is aware of the concerns. The Home Office says the “health and safety of firefighters is of great importance and the emerging research indicating they are being exposed to increased risks of cancer, including by forever chemicals, is very concerning”. It says it will “consider recently published studies to understand their conclusions”.

“This is a hot area for research right now,” says Dr Linda Birnbaum, toxicologist and former head of the National Institute for Environmental Health Sciences in the US. “We know that firefighters tend to have higher

rates of cancer and some other health conditions than the general population. So, people are looking to see whether some of these effects are associated with their PFAS levels.”



A firefighter is covered with aqueous film-forming foam (AFFF) as he tries to control a fire that broke out in a thinner manufacturing plant on the outskirts of Ahmedabad, India, 2018. Photograph: Amit Dave/Reuters

It's not just the firefighters who were exposed to PFAS from the Buncefield disaster. The chemicals from the firefighting foams washed into rivers via drains, water treatment plants, by wind and rain, and leached through the soil into the groundwater, to eventually come out of people's taps.

Groundwater around St Albans was tested for PFAS after the fire. The Drinking Water Inspectorate (DWI) said no samples were “in excess of guidance”, which at the time was 3,000ng/l. But guidance has now been slashed to 100ng/l and the drinking water did exceed these. From 2006-7, 28 samples contained concentrations up to 5,910ng/l – 59 times higher than the current limits. Today, water companies would have been required to reduce the levels in the water before it reached people's homes.

The DWI said the nearest drinking water abstraction point to Buncefield was removed from supply until 2009, from which point it was regularly



monitored and did not exceed 3,000ng/l for PFOS, one of the regulated substances. It said it was removed from supply again in 2016 for sustainability reasons.

“Were people drinking that PFAS? Of course they were. They didn’t have the same safety ... system,” said Dr Cecilia MacLeod, programme leader for wastewater and environmental engineering at the University of Greenwich. MacLeod was working for the Arcadis consultancy at the time of the fire and was brought in by the Environment Agency as an expert observer. MacLeod said she flagged up immediately that PFAS contamination of the water supply would be a problem.

[For decades fire departments internationally](#) had used foam manufactured by the US company 3M. But in 2000, 3M [announced](#) it would phase out PFOS, saying the substance accumulated in human tissue and could be a “risk to human health and the environment”.

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One of the fuel storage tanks at the Buncefield oil depot is hosed by firefighters. Photograph: Reuters

“By 2006 we in the UK should have known and we should have been prepared,” says MacLeod.

It is not known to what extent the Buncefield PFAS may be affecting the water supply today. Working with the University of Greenwich and Manchester Metropolitan University, Watershed Investigations tested tap water in St Albans and found it had levels of PFOS in it between 11 and 21 nanograms per litre (ng/l). The DWI states that for levels above 10ng/l, the water company should “consult with local health professionals” and “monitor levels in drinking water”.

Today’s DWI’s guidelines are high compared with other parts of the world such as Denmark, where the limit is 2ng/l. The current health advisory standards in the US are 0.004ng/l for PFOA and 0.02ng/l for PFOS.

The water company for the area, now Affinity Water, said its processes to remove PFAS have been in place since 1997. “We monitor for PFAS weekly and have done since 2009,” it said. “There are several raw water sources that feed into the water treatment works supplying St Albans area

and the blending of these raw waters ensures the concentration in the final water going into supply does not exceed 0.1 µg/l of any PFAS.

Ian Cousins, a professor of environmental science at Stockholm University, warns against the use of chemically similar alternatives to PFOS and PFOA in firefighting foam. “These alternative PFAS will be in the environment for a very long time in the future. So, we shouldn’t use them,” he said. “There are good alternatives which are biodegradable. Of course, the industry will say that it’s not as effective, but they’re good enough.”

Crossman believes it is too late for his generation. He says he and his fellow firefighters were kept in the dark about potential health issues and not enough protections were put in place. It’s only in the past 10 years that changes are starting to happen, he says.

“I have a son, George, who is 10 years old and if he wants to be a firefighter we’re fighting to make him safer and save him from cancer. As much as I loved what I did, I’m 43 now and having these health conditions I would try to discourage him unless policies are changed.”

Angus Fire and the National Fire Chiefs Council did not respond to requests for comment.

A Defra spokesperson said: “PFAS represent a group of thousands of chemicals, with hundreds present in products used across industry and society. Since the 2000s, we have taken action to increase monitoring and support a ban or highly restrict PFAS chemicals both domestically and internationally. This action has included issuing revised Drinking Water Inspectorate guidance for water companies on PFAS limits, as a precautionary measure.

“Following the Buncefield fire in December 2005, the nearest drinking water abstraction point Bow Bridge was removed from supply. Independent tests carried out in May 2006 showed no evidence of drinking water being contaminated as a result of the fire. Bow Bridge was returned to supply in 2009 and continues to be regularly monitored.”

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Vulnerable in different ways ... (from left): Laura Hughes, Mary Sharp and Lauren Preston helped convict Martin Butler of rape. Photograph: Anna Gordon/The Guardian

[Rape and sexual assault](#)

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# **‘He stole my childhood’: how three women banded together – and took down their rapist**

[Diane Taylor](#)

Martin Butler had escaped justice for the rape of young women in the 1980s and 90s. Then one of the survivors put out a call on Facebook ...

Thu 23 Feb 2023 01.00 EST Last modified on Fri 24 Feb 2023 08.00 EST

It was the first time the three women had been in a room together. Sipping their drinks nervously in a London bar, it wasn't long before they were hugging and crying and clasping each other's hands as they talked about the decades-long battle that had brought them there. In an extraordinary act of teamwork, the evidence of Mary Sharp, Laura Hughes and Lauren Preston had secured a conviction for rape and buggery against Martin Butler, a convicted drug dealer living in Stevenage. All three women have chosen to waive their right to anonymity.

Until the trial concluded earlier this month with a majority verdict at Truro crown court, the women had not been allowed to discuss the case. Hughes and Preston, both 42, grew up in the same area as Sharp, 54, but did not know her and were not even told what her name was. Once Butler, 61, was convicted of his crimes against Sharp, which had taken place in the summer of 1988, the first thing they wanted to do was get together.

All three women knew Butler because he lived in the same area as them – Eastcote in Ruislip, in north-west London – in the 1980s and 90s. Sharp began a relationship with Butler in 1988, when she was 20. She believed he was going to kill her when he raped and suffocated her on holiday in Mevagissey, Cornwall. Six years later he began to abuse Hughes and Preston, then in their early teens.

Sharp tried to block out the trauma she had suffered and did not approach police. Hughes and Preston reported Butler's crimes separately but

prosecutions did not go ahead.

Only one in 100 rapes recorded by police in 2021 resulted in a charge the same year – let alone a conviction

Everything changed in 2018, when Hughes posted an appeal on Facebook for victims of Butler to come forward. She found three photos of him and wrote: “Martin Butler: Call for victims and witnesses. Grooms, drugs and rapes children in Ruislip, London, UK, possibly in Mevagissey, St Austell, Cornwall.”

The post attracted a huge response. “What I wrote was shared 1,700 times in four days and went as far as Australia,” says Hughes. “People who responded to the post said things like: ‘Yeah, he was a right sleaze.’”

Why did she try to bring Butler to justice again when her earlier attempt had failed?

“I was doing a master’s in human rights law, it was the time of the [#MeToo movement](#), and I was involved in a justice campaign for someone who was very vulnerable and which made headlines,” she says. “I put out the Facebook post because I wanted justice for myself and because I was certain I was not Butler’s only victim.”

She says that legal contacts urged her to take down the post, believing it to be libellous. She refused and received many messages from people who knew Butler. It still took five years for her attacker to come before a jury. While Butler was not tried for offences against Hughes and Preston, their “bad character” testimony was used by the prosecution. They gave evidence in person at the trial while Sharp chose to testify via video link.

A spokesperson for the Crown Prosecution Service (CPS) said: “We commend the bravery of the two other complainants who assisted the prosecution’s case as bad character witnesses and provided evidence against Martin Butler. Their courage, and that of the victim in this case, meant we were able to secure a conviction.”



Despite greater awareness about rape, successful prosecutions make up a very small percentage of cases reported. And many attacks are not reported at all. According to data collated by [Rape Crisis England & Wales](#) from official statistics, only one in 100 rapes recorded by police in 2021 resulted in a charge the same year, let alone a conviction. The highest number of rapes ever recorded was in the year ending September 2022, with 70,633 rapes reported but just 2,616 leading to charges.

All three of Butler's accusers were vulnerable in different ways. Sharp had become pregnant without being married, something of which her family disapproved. She subsequently lost the baby and was living alone and grief-stricken when she first met Butler. Hughes and Preston also had difficult relationships with their families at the time. Butler's filthy home, with its fridge full of vodka and seemingly infinite supplies of cannabis, speed and ecstasy, was an exciting escape.

Butler groomed all of them, tied them up and raped them.

Sharp first met Butler when she saw a little girl wandering around the estate where she was living. The girl looked lost and Sharp asked her what had happened. The child explained that she had been with a babysitter who had sent her home to her father – Butler – at the time he was due back home. But he wasn't there. Sharp took her in and put a note through Butler's door to explain what had happened. Sharp and Butler eventually became friends – and later started a relationship.

Things started innocuously enough. They had consensual sex on two occasions, Sharp says. "And then he asked me to go on holiday with him and his daughter to stay at his parents' house in Mevagissey [in Cornwall]. I was happy to go. I remember my lovely dad had given me a present of about £150 for my 21st birthday. We spent a lot of that money on food and petrol for the journey. My dad is dead now; I'm so glad he never got to find out about Butler."

On the second night of the holiday, Sharp woke up and discovered that Butler had bound her hands and feet so she was unable to move and had begun to rape her.

“He pinched my nose and covered my mouth with his hand. I had no oxygen; I was being suffocated and could feel the life going out of me. Everything went dark. I couldn’t see, but I could hear. I felt as if I could hear the beads of sweat dripping from his face. Somehow, I managed to turn my head so his hand was not so tightly over my mouth and I screamed. He realised that I might wake up his parents and daughter and so he untied me.”

“I remember going downstairs afterwards. He was there and he said to me: ‘It’s all your fault.’ He went out after that and I didn’t see him for the next few days. His dad bought me a train ticket home. I blocked everything out and tried to carry on with my life.”

Six years later, Preston also got to know Butler through his daughter, with whom she was friends. “He threw a 14th birthday party for his daughter and I went along. There was alcohol and drugs everywhere,” she says.

Butler began grooming Preston, using alcohol and drugs and persuading the 14-year-old to perform sex acts on him. “I remember one night at his flat I was paralytic. I went to bed and was leaning over a bucket to be sick. He got behind me and raped me. I was just a lost kid.”

He started to tie her up for sex. “I was absolutely petrified. He told his daughter he was in love with me and he used to collect me from school on his motorbike. He sold drugs to lots of people. I was dyslexic and felt like I didn’t fit in. He turned me against my family.”

At the age of 21, Preston walked into Watford police station to report what had happened. While the police did not disbelieve her, they asked what evidence she had. She didn’t have the kind of proof they were asking for. “I just know what happened to me,” she told them.

At the end of 1994, the year in which Preston’s abuse had begun, 14-year-old Hughes also ended up at Butler’s home. Looking for security, she found the opposite. “It was like a party that never stopped,” she says. “My hands got tired from rolling so many spliffs. It was a filthy and disgusting place. He had created his own world. He used to force people to take speed. I took it every single day for two and a half years and I developed speed

psychosis. There were times when I got away from him. I used to run, but I ended up back with him. He used to strangle me and eventually I knew that if I didn't get away I would die."

When I heard the word 'guilty', I immediately felt much lighter

More than a decade later, in 2008, Hughes went to the police station to report a stolen camera. But Butler was in the back of her mind. "There's one more thing," she told the police. "When I was younger I was really badly abused by this guy."

"The police officer called the station commander, who took it really seriously," she says. "He shook my hand and thanked me for having the courage to report it."

In the end the case was stayed – not dropped but not proceeded with – though Hughes did get £16,500 from the Criminal Injuries Compensation Board based on evidence she was able to provide. She says being believed gave her an enormous boost. But even years later she was determined not to let Butler off the hook – which is why she made that appeal on Facebook in 2018.

Sharp saw the post. "My Pandora's box opened up. I started having nightmare after nightmare," she says. "I had buried this for so long. I realised it went so deep and I needed to deal with it. I was ashamed of myself for not having reported it and thought that if Butler went on to kill somebody because I hadn't reported what he did to me, I would never be able to forgive myself."

After Sharp contacted the police, the CPS repeatedly told her there wasn't sufficient evidence to prosecute Butler. "I had to fight three times to get them to proceed with the case. I very nearly gave up," she says. "There were so many times when I felt I couldn't cope. I thought to myself: 'Why am I living through this hell again and again when it isn't going anywhere?'"

But she didn't give up. The case did go ahead – and Butler was found guilty. He will be sentenced in April.

All three women found the process of reporting the crime, getting involved with the prosecution and testifying gruelling. “I shook so much when I was giving evidence that my whole body was convulsing,” says Hughes. She and Preston were in court when the verdict was given. They had been told not to show any expression to the jury whatever the decision was.

“I kept clenching and looking down when I heard the word ‘guilty’,” says Preston. “I immediately felt so much lighter.”

Sharp was not in court. She was out walking her dog when the police liaison officer called her to break the news.

“I was crying, I was laughing, I collapsed on the floor,” she says.

While the women are jubilant to have finally secured justice, Butler has scarred them all. They believe there are other vulnerable people who endured similar treatment from him.

“He stole my family from me and he stole my childhood,” says Hughes.

“He stole a lot of my life,” says Preston. “I was addicted to drugs and alcohol. I suffered from agoraphobia and couldn't leave the house for four years. A bit of me still feels groomed to this day. And we all blamed ourselves.”

“I wouldn't want anyone else to experience the near-death torture I experienced from Martin Butler,” says Sharp. She hopes any more victims will now come forward.

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

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Tomatoes grow at an APS Group farm on the Isle of Wight. Photograph: APS Group

[Food & drink industry](#)

## **‘We have to pay more for food’: Britain’s biggest tomato farmer on the runaway costs of growing**

Soaring costs from light and fertiliser to pickers and packaging led APS Group to leave one in 12 of its glasshouses empty last winter

- [Why are UK supermarkets facing fresh food shortages?](#)
- [Spanish growers blame weather, rising costs and Brexit](#)



[Joanna Partridge](#)

Thu 23 Feb 2023 01.00 EST Last modified on Thu 23 Feb 2023 09.57 EST

Multiple glasshouses owned by tomato grower APS Group were left empty last year, for the first time in the business's 80-year history.

The [current shortages of tomatoes and other salad crops](#) on British supermarket shelves have unfortunately come as no surprise to Philip Pearson, development director at the UK's largest tomato producer.

“We did say, as an industry, last year: ‘If you don’t support us through the winter you will have empty shelves,’” Pearson says. “Government didn’t listen, our customers didn’t listen, nobody listened.

“I don’t want to sound ‘I told you so,’ as that doesn’t help anybody, but we are where we were worried we would end up.”

The combination of soaring energy bills to provide artificial light to help the plants grow, especially during the winter, combined with associated [surges in the price of fertiliser](#) and the cost of packaging prompted many British producers and their European counterparts to take the decision to plant fewer crops this winter.



APS chose to leave about 8% of the glasshouses across its 70-hectare estate empty for the first time since the family-owned business was founded by Philip's grandfather Albert Pearson, who started off with a single nursery in Alderley Edge, Cheshire, in 1949.

The company decided it could not afford to run the LED lights in its glasshouses required to grow a winter tomato crop, which is traditionally sown in August and harvested from Christmas until July.



Philip Pearson, APS Group's director of development, poses in front of an advertisement for British farming at the NFU conference. Photograph: Joanna Partridge/The Guardian

"We have only ever gone forwards, never gone backwards," Pearson said. "But I think it was the right decision. It would have had a much more negative impact on the business had we not done that."

At the time, rising energy costs had been sent soaring to near-record highs by the conflict in Ukraine. Pearson said these "unbudgeted" costs came at the worst possible time for producers, the start of their growing season.

"We couldn't recover the costs at the retail level, because the retailers couldn't recover it from the consumer, because the consumer was under

pressure as well because of the cost of living crisis.”

About 160 tomato varieties – from cherry to beefsteak – are grown by APS across its six UK sites stretching from Middlesbrough to the Isle of Wight, producing an estimated 650m tomatoes each year.

Supplying all of the UK’s largest retailers, as well as vegetable box companies, the company is responsible for just under a third (30%) of all UK tomato production.

APS also imports tomatoes from countries such as Morocco to fill the gaps during the winter.

However, there has been a [smaller harvest because of cold weather in north Africa](#), at a time of lower British and European winter production. Combined with other factors such as a tomato virus which damages and kills plants, demand for Spanish and Moroccan crops has far outstripped supply.

Adding to the challenges, APS will not be able to start picking its tomatoes for another six to eight weeks, later than usual, after the company delayed some planting because of economic uncertainty.

In the face of the cost of living crisis, the company is not growing the highest value sweet cherry tomato varieties this year, as these are also more expensive to cultivate. Instead, it has diversified the business, planting higher quantities of other crops such as cucumbers, aubergines and peppers.

The National Farmers’ Union (NFU) has called on government to support intensive users, such as tomato and salad growers, with energy bills. The NFU president, Minette Batters, has criticised how botanical gardens receive support with energy bills for their glasshouses, but food producers with greenhouses do not.

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Brexit has also added cost to operations, predominantly through the additional cost of employing seasonal workers. In 2022, companies were required to pay workers coming to the UK on the post-Brexit seasonal worker scheme from overseas an additional 60p an hour on top of the government's national minimum wage, a decision which Pearson said cost the company "millions" more.

However, the farming minister, Mark Spencer, informed delegates at the NFU on Tuesday that this year growers would only be required to pay workers the national minimum wage.

The length of stay permitted for workers on the post-Brexit seasonal scheme has also proved challenging for tomato businesses with a nine-month season, during which time they require an additional 1,250 people on top of about 750 full-time employees.

Under post-Brexit visa rules, seasonal workers are only allowed to stay for six months at a time, meaning two cohorts of staff are required.

"What that means to us is I now have to train everybody twice. I have to use my best people to train the new people, so my productivity at the peak of the season is really struggling," Pearson said, adding this was true for the whole industry.

Technology is unlikely to replace pickers any time soon. APS is working on developing a robotic hand, but estimates it is still about five years away from being rolled out.

For now, Pearson has a stark warning for British shoppers: “The consumer has to realise they have to pay more for food. [Food](#) is far, far too cheap, I’m afraid,” he said.

“I’m sorry to be the bearer of bad news, but as an industry, we can’t absorb it any more.”

He believes that government, retailers and consumers all need to work to support the domestic industry.

“I want to have product to sell; if I haven’t got any product, I can’t sell it, I don’t take any money. Nobody is benefiting from this, the consumer hasn’t got any product, everybody loses.”

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‘Suddenly everyone had powerful games machines in their pocket’ ... Tetris on an iPhone. Photograph: FocusTechnology/Alamy

### [Mobile games](#)

## **I was an App Store games editor – that’s how I know Apple doesn’t care about games**

Neil Long

The tech giant has taken billions from game developers but failed to reinvest it, leaving the App Store a confusing mess for mobile gamers

Thu 23 Feb 2023 04.30 EST Last modified on Fri 24 Feb 2023 05.55 EST

In the 15 years since it launched the App Store, [Apple](#) has proved again and again that it cares very little about games – though it is happy to make billions from them. I should know: I was an App Store games editor for seven years.

It all started so well. When the iPhone and iPad arrived, those devices transformed games almost as much as they upended the rest of the tech world. Suddenly everyone had powerful games machines in their pockets, and it was amazing. Some wonderful developers broke through. Zach Gage kickstarted his career with the artsy Tetris-meets-wordsearch game [SpellTower](#); Adam Saltsman's Canabalt turned platforming tropes into a desperate post-apocalyptic dash; ingenious gothic puzzler Helsing's Fire gave us our first glimpse into the mind of Lucas Pope, later the creator of [Papers, Please](#).

There were so many more. And not just indie games but mainstream bangers: Spry Fox's brilliant Triple Town, Rovio's [Angry Birds](#); Flight Control; Doodle Jump; Cut the Rope; Drop7; Jetpack Joyride; New Star Soccer. All true breakthrough games for developers that had never had global hits before.

Apple seemed to create a whole new games ecosystem by accident, then presided over it like a contemptuous landlord

So what did Apple do next? Nothing really. It seemed to create a whole new games ecosystem by accident, and ever since has presided over it like a contemptuous landlord. It takes a tasty 30% cut of almost every in-app purchase while doing next to nothing to earn that fee. Recent privacy policies – including the introduction of that “ask app not to track” pop-up you will have seen again and again – have even actively harmed the mobile games business.

As the App Store grew and grew, Apple's small App Review team in Cupertino, California, which checks whether a game should be approved for sale or not, was overwhelmed. At the same time, free-to-play happened, and the mobile game gold rush was on. Developers released their games for free and made their money from the in-app purchases of a small number of high-spending players – termed whales – instead of asking everyone for cash upfront.





Lucas Pope's award-winning Papers, Please. Photograph: Lucas Pope

The woefully understaffed team of app reviewers couldn't handle the volume of games coming through – and seemingly still can't today. Ask any staffer at a mobile game studio and they're guaranteed to have an app review horror story involving their game being repeatedly rejected for an arbitrary reason, or removed from sale entirely. Developers are being treated with contempt.

Meanwhile, some brazen clone sails through the app review process no sweat. It's been happening for years. In 2016, a hilariously fake "[Minecraft 2](#)" was approved for sale by the App Review team and made it all the way into the Top 10 chart before it was pulled from sale. Brazen Pokémon rip-offs make it through surprisingly often too.

Late last year, the developer of indie hit [Vampire Survivors](#) said it had to rush-release a mobile edition to stem the flow of App Store clones and copycats. Recently a fake ChatGPT app made it through app review and quickly climbed the charts before someone noticed and pulled it from sale. It's not good enough.





A rush to beat the clones ... Vampire Survivors Photograph: PR

Apple could have reinvested a greater fraction of the billions it has earned from mobile games to make the App Store a good place to find fun, interesting games to fit your tastes. But it hasn't, and today the App Store is a confusing mess, recently made even worse with the addition of ad slots in search, on the front page and even on the product pages themselves.

Search is still terrible, too. Game developers [search in vain for their own games](#) on launch day, eventually finding them – having searched for the *exact title* – under a slew of other guff.

Mobile games get a bumpy ride from some folks – [this esteemed publication](#) included – for lots of reasons. But there is good stuff out there. If you want the best of mobile right now, try Marvel Snap, Song of Bloom, Beatstar, Brawl Stars, Royal Match, Among Us, Vampire Survivors, Mario Kart Tour, Archerio or Scrabble Go. Try blockbusters such as Diablo Immortal and Call of Duty Mobile too, both cleverly compressed PC and console games which are much more immediate and accessible than anything you'll find on a dedicated games platform.

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Among the best ... Marvel Snap. Photograph: Marvel

However, finding the good stuff is hard. Apple – and indeed Google’s Play store – opened the floodgates to developers without really making sure that what’s out there is up to standard. It’s a wild west.

Happily things may be about to change – including that 30% commission on all in-app purchases. After a bruising US court battle [between Apple and Epic Games](#) over alleged monopolistic practices, government bodies in the

UK, EU, US, Japan and elsewhere are examining Apple and Google's "effective duopoly" over what we see, do and play on our phones.

A recent White House report stated that Apple and Google's current app store policies "have the potential to harm consumers by inflating prices and reducing innovation". It recommended that the tech giants open up their digital storefronts to outside competition and offer other ways for users to pay for in-game content.

So perhaps, once those huge App Store profits are under genuine threat, we'll see Apple start to take its role as a mobile game platform more seriously. It has the excellent [Apple Arcade subscription service](#), sure, but it'll take more than that to help rescue mobile gaming's reputation.

Neil Long is a journalist and former App Store editor who runs [mobilegamer.biz](#), a website for the mobile games industry

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# ‘One billionaire at a time’: inside the Swiss clinics where the super-rich go for rehab

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## 2023.02.23 - Opinion

- It may be the most effective anti-obesity drug yet – but even Wegovy is no ‘wonder cure’
- There is a surefire way for the English to correctly pronounce Irish names. Just ask us
- ‘Just give Ukraine the planes’ is the battle cry of the armchair generals. It’s not that simple
- Loneliness is awful – so every day I try to start a conversation with a stranger



‘Wegovy will soon be available in UK chemists in the form of a weekly, self-administered injection.’ Photograph: Maureen McLean/Rex/Shutterstock

[OpinionObesity.](#)

**It may be the most effective anti-obesity drug yet – but even Wegovy is no ‘wonder cure’**

[Jason Halford](#)





The much-hyped medicine is due to hit UK chemists in spring. However, one drug in isolation is never the answer

- Jason Halford is president of the European Association for the Study of Obesity

Thu 23 Feb 2023 03.00 EST Last modified on Thu 23 Feb 2023 03.33 EST

In my 30 years as an obesity researcher, I've seen all kinds of “wonder cures” come and go. Some were withdrawn due to serious side-effects; most have had only a relatively modest effect on people's body mass.

But now a new generation of medications has arrived, based on a better understanding of the biological underpinnings of obesity. While previous pharmaceutical treatments resulted in weight loss of 5-10%, clinical trials of this new wave of drugs are reporting initial weight loss of 15-20%. They work by suppressing appetite and slowing down digestion so we feel full for longer. One of these medications – semaglutide, sold under the brand name Wegovy – will soon be available in UK chemists in the form of a weekly, self-administered injection.



Social media users who have tried semaglutide (which is sold in the US under the brand name Ozempic) rave that the drug instantly changed their relationship with food – “flicking a switch” to turn off their hunger and cravings. Elon Musk has used it, and rumours abound about that other celebrities have too. It sounds revolutionary, right? Potentially, yes – but only up to a point.

These drugs are so effective because they address one of the many complex causes of obesity. When we eat, our bodies usually release “satiety hormones” to make us feel full. But in people living with obesity this doesn’t always happen, which can result in uncontrolled hunger and a heightened responsiveness to food. Prolonged restriction of food – also known as dieting, something most people living with obesity will face pressure to do – can further weaken that satiety hormone response. Wegovy contains the satiety hormone GLP1, which steps in where the body’s hormones may have failed, boosting sensations of fullness, suppressing reward-driven eating and increasing feelings of control.

However, caution is needed. Semaglutide side-effects can include nausea, bloating, diarrhoea and wind, and close medical supervision is needed as the dose is increased over the first four weeks.

While there is no doubt that these drugs are an important tool in the management of obesity, they are only that – one tool. The drug fulfils a biological function, but it doesn’t provide mental health support or treatment for an eating disorder. Drastic weight loss can have unpredictable effects on mental health: one study found that [almost one in five](#) people who receive bariatric surgery later experience depression.

Some people living with obesity have used food as a coping mechanism to deal with stress, or underlying mental health issues – they will need support once that coping mechanism is removed. Weight-loss treatments should be implemented as part of a much wider support programme that includes advice on nutrition and eating behaviour, psychological support and supported physical activity.

The National Institute for [Health](#) and Care Excellence has released draft guidance recommending that Wegovy become available on the NHS for those with a BMI over 35, but for now the drug will only be sold through chemists such as Asda, Superdrug and Boots. You'll still need a prescription, but these chemists won't necessarily be able to ensure that the drug is used as part of a programme of wider support.

Obesity is complex, and is becoming widely recognised as a lifelong, chronic, relapsing disease. We can get better at management, but we haven't found a cure, Wegovy included.

Healthcare practitioners need training in obesity management, access to a range of clinical tools and options to work with, and an evidence base to help inform treatment plans to meet individuals' need. We also require considerable investment in specialised weight management services within the communities which need them most.

And while most people appropriately prescribed the drug will experience some benefits, Wegovy will not work for everyone. The drivers of obesity are diverse, and no drug addresses situational and psychology factors. Structural health inequalities, poverty, mental health issues and the impact of trauma – all shown to drive weight gain – will never be fixed by a jab.

- Jason Halford is a professor of biological psychology and health behaviours at the University of Leeds and president of the European Association for the Study of Obesity
- ***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](#).***





The actor Saoirse Ronan on US TV show Late Night with Seth Meyers  
Photograph: NBC/NBCU Photo Bank/Getty Images

[OpinionIreland](#)

**There is a surefire way for the English  
to correctly pronounce Irish names.  
Just ask us**

[Niamh Ní Hoireabhaird](#)



We're used to people struggling with our names and we're here to help. But it's an issue heavy with history. Quips and scoffs can hurt

Thu 23 Feb 2023 02.00 ESTLast modified on Fri 24 Feb 2023 23.19 EST

Last year, the lead singer of The 1975, Matt Healy, managed to offend a whole lot of *Gaelgeoirí* (Irish speakers) when he appeared to [mock a fan's name](#) – Dervla – at a meet-and-greet.

Healy isn't alone, though, when it comes to anglophone bafflement at Irish names. A [recent study](#) based on an analysis of Google searches revealed the words that British people have the most difficulty pronouncing. The names Aoife, Saoirse, Niamh and Siobhán occupy places in the top 10.

And it's not exclusively a British problem: I always cringe watching US talkshows where the host quizzes their Irish guest (usually Saoirse Ronan) on the pronunciation of their and other Irish names.

I've heard every possible variation of my own name from non-Irish people. It's not uncommon in Ireland; in secondary school, there were four Niamhs

in my class. But I rarely come across an English person who is familiar with it, despite the proximity of our two countries.

In case you don't know, it's pronounced "Neev" or "Nee-av", either is perfectly acceptable. The prefix Ní means "daughter of". My surname is trickier, and has even tripped up a few Irish people; it can be translated as Herbert, and is pronounced "her-a-varð".

When I lived in London, I quickly learned saying Niamh at the counter in a coffee shop wouldn't fly

When I was living in London, I quickly learned that saying Niamh at the counter in a coffee shop or over the phone to make a booking simply wouldn't fly. This led to the invention of what I call my "Starbucks name". Anything easily pronounceable with a simple spelling would do. Mia, Sophie and Rose were among my common aliases.

Speaking to others reveals a litany of similar experiences. Aoibhe Ní Shúilleabháin, a designer and teacher, spent two years at college in England having her name mispronounced and disrespected. (Her first name is pronounced "Ay-vah".) More than one lecturer resorted to calling her "blondie".

She tells me: "I was asked to say, 'Three hundred and thirty three trees'" – a tongue-twister that does the rounds on TikTok – "more often than I was asked to repeat my name." She recalls the lack of interest when she attempted to explain that Irish and English are different languages with different pronunciation rules.

Clearly, the sensitivities at play here are rooted in history: Ireland was colonised by the English and our national language was all but wiped out. A language revival began in earnest in the 19th century, but it's never quite recovered. [Ireland's most recent census](#) shows that about 40% of Ireland's population can speak Irish. The English destroyed our language once before, so every little throwaway comment and scoff at our names hurts a little bit more – and ultimately becomes just tiresome. A handful of people

even remark, “Oh! I didn’t know Ireland had its own language,” when I tell them about my name.

Writer Darach Ó Séaghdha is all too familiar with these difficulties. (The “rach” in Darach is pronounced like “Bach”, he says.) He hosted a podcast called [Motherfoclóir](#), a podcast about the Irish language and culture, and whenever there were guests on with Irish names, “inevitably the episode would turn into group therapy”. There was one bad experience, he recalls, when he was told that his surname “looked like a wifi password”. But he decided to give his children Irish names, too. It’s a common trend, he says, “because parents with Irish names have been battle-hardened”.

Like the others I spoke to for this piece, writer and director Rioghnach (think “Ree-nock”) Ní Ghrioghair believes that a sense of superiority among English speakers is to blame for the constant mistreatment of Irish names. But she’s defiant. “We are going to scrutinise the British for any transgression regarding the pronunciation of our names,” and other things, she tells me, like British media claiming Irish actors [as their own](#) during awards seasons.

There is no easy crash-course I can give to you on the pronunciation of Irish names, but you can always try out “how to pronounce”-style websites (which themselves can be contested). But the simplest and most reliable solution is perhaps just to politely ask an Irish person – and listen attentively to what they say. I may have accepted that English people are very rarely going to get my name right on the first go, but I appreciate a well-intentioned effort. Just don’t laugh at it, please.

Niamh Ní Hoireabhaird is a disability activist and journalist

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Ukrainian soldiers with a US-made M109 self-propelled howitzer in the Donetsk region, Ukraine, 17 February 2023. Photograph: Anadolu Agency/Getty Images

[OpinionUkraine](#)

**‘Just give Ukraine the planes’ is the battle cry of the armchair generals. It’s not that simple**

[Martin Kettle](#)



A year on from Russia's invasion, there is no shortage of pontification. What's required now is statecraft

Wed 22 Feb 2023 13.01 ESTLast modified on Thu 23 Feb 2023 02.47 EST

Cut to the chase and give them the planes, demanded Boris Johnson during Monday's [Commons exchanges on Ukraine](#). Send them the fighter jets, insisted Liz Truss a few moments later during the same debate, as the two ex-prime ministers vied to flaunt the leadership qualities they lacked when they were actually in power.

If only the Ukraine war were as easily resolved as we armchair experts like to think. But it is not – and it won't be when the fighting resumes soon either. The anniversary of Vladimir Putin's invasion this week has provided a platform for a lot of well intentioned pontification. It's often spot on, as Joe Biden's was in [Kyiv and Warsaw](#) this week. Good for morale, undoubtedly. Not so good for objectivity, however, or for statecraft.

We urgently need more of both on Ukraine. Take the example of planes. Sending fighter jets to aid Volodymyr Zelenskiy's forces has been [seized on by Johnson and Truss](#) as the latest ratchet-up in their respective Churchill

and Thatcher tribute-act contest at Westminster. But people who know about these things say that Britain's Lightnings and Typhoons are in fact not easily serviceable in Ukrainian conditions. So what would we actually be giving them?

Meanwhile, a report on Wednesday on European air forces' war-fighting credibility by the [Royal United Services Institute](#)'s Justin Bronk paints a far less gung-ho reality of what might really be involved in a Ukraine air war. Almost all European air forces, the RAF included, currently lack key capabilities that would enable them to gain and exploit air superiority over Russia, says Bronk. The planes are inadequately protected on the ground, and vulnerable to long-range missile attack. Their pilots, reared in peacetime patrolling, are not trained for high-intensity fighter missions. And the Europeans cannot credibly take out enough enemy air defences to gain aerial battlefield control.

These defects can be remedied with enough time and money. But we don't have endless amounts of either. Planes are also just one example. Before fighter jets it was [battle tanks](#). Tanks, as I understand it, are a mobile battlefield gamechanger if everything else on which they depend for combined advances – signals, artillery, troops and air cover – is in place too. That's not the case – not yet, anyway. If they get bogged down or isolated, tanks become targets, as the Russian tank crews discovered outside Kyiv a year ago.



‘Russia has a historic sense of insecurity, from which it has never fully been able to escape.’ Photograph: Anadolu Agency/Getty Images

The larger point, though, is that there is too often a gulf between the boosterish talk about how the Ukraine war can be won and the likely realities on the ground. This can lead to unguarded ambitions as well as oversimplification. Questioned about ammunition shortages, the foreign secretary, James Cleverly, promised airily on Monday that Britain’s manufacturers would have to “[step up a gear](#)”. What that actually means in practice is anybody’s guess.

There is a similarly dangerous problem when politicians start virtue signalling about war aims and postwar dispositions. Whether the issue is Ukraine’s future territorial boundaries, Nato or EU membership, reparations from Russia, human rights trials or other sanctions, politicians would be wise to hold their tongues when they can. It is easy to play to the gallery over such a historic outrage as Putin’s war, but promises made now can be a hostage to fortune in an unpredictable future. Peace will impose different priorities.

History matters enormously. Russia is a huge country with enormous resources, including people. It has a historic sense of insecurity, not without justification, from which it has never fully been able to escape. In 1946 the

American diplomat George Kennan, often seen as the architect of the US cold war policy of “containment” towards the Soviet Union, put it in terms that still seem broadly accurate today, especially in the light of [Putin’s paranoid speech](#) this week.

“Russian rulers have invariably sensed that their rule was relatively archaic in form, fragile and artificial in its psychological foundation, unable to stand comparison or contact with political systems of western countries,” [Kennan wrote](#). “And they have learned to seek security only in patient but deadly struggle for total destruction of rival power, never in compacts and compromises with it.” Putin exemplifies all that.

One consequence, argued Kennan, was that Russian leaders are able to take a long view of the struggle. Autocracy gives them time that democracies, always more susceptible to short-term domestic concerns, do not enjoy. Hence, in our day, Putin’s clear belief that he cares more about crushing Ukraine than the west cares about defending it. He is not alone. The George W Bush era officials [Condoleezza Rice and Robert Gates argued](#) last month that a year of military stalemate in Ukraine could see western public opinion tire of the conflict and western nations press for ceasefire lines.

There isn’t much evidence of that yet, although it may come. Support for Ukraine in [Europe](#) and North America remains stable. But so is opposition to direct military involvement. Talk of a US shift against support for Ukraine is premature right now, although as the US elections in November 2024 get closer, it could happen. It is a delicate balance.

Rice and Gates draw the conclusion that the west must act decisively this spring, in weeks not months. That is Biden’s and Nato’s approach too. More and better weapons for Ukraine now can inflict decisive defeats on [Russia](#), forcing Putin to back down. That thinking underlies recent summits in Germany and Poland. But it leaves uncertainty about what a Ukrainian victory would actually look like.

None of us knows what Biden and Zelenskiy tell one another on such subjects when they are together. But there has to be an end goal and it is

likely there is disagreement. We have to assume such talks are taking place. They certainly should be.

The last thing that is needed is a crushing victors' peace that makes Russians believe they and their children are being punished for losing. Magnanimity in victory always makes far better sense. Emmanuel Macron [grasps this](#). So, you sometimes sense, does Biden. In some ways the most intriguing – and perhaps, for the future, the best – news of the week is that the US still has back channels to Moscow that were used to [alert the Russians](#) to Biden's Ukraine visit.

Everything here ultimately hinges on what happens to Crimea. Historically, both Russia and Ukraine have territorial, emotional and naval claims on Crimea. Neither claim entirely trumps the other. In the end, though, if Kyiv's arms prevail, then Kyiv's allies will have won the right, as paymasters and suppliers, to set conditions on the peace that follows. It's called statecraft, and it is the skill that the western powers now need to deploy more decisively and wisely than ever.

- Martin Kettle is a Guardian columnist

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It's good to talk – once you've got started. Photograph: Jamie Garbutt/Getty Images (Posed by models)

[OpinionFriendship](#)

**Loneliness is awful – so every day I try  
to start a conversation with a stranger**

[Adrian Chiles](#)





For years I have been recognised off the telly, and it has been easy to meet new people. But a memorable party reminded me of why it pays to work at the art of conversation

Thu 23 Feb 2023 02.00 ESTLast modified on Thu 23 Feb 2023 12.26 EST

I enjoy having conversations like, you know, face-to-face, in person. Or just on the phone will do. Weird, I know. I'm assuming analogue chit-chat is dying out, as the rise of AI means we'll have to get used to talking to computers. Already, many of the face-to-face conversations we are having were initiated via them. For example, I had a young male colleague, a good-looking and confident rascal. Even though, as far as I could see, he was enjoying conspicuous success with his Tinder dating, he bemoaned the march of technology. He said he'd often approach a woman in a bar, only to be told that she was waiting for a Tinder date. "The game's over," he said sadly. Tellingly, in relating this, it strikes me that approaching somebody unbidden to talk to them might now come across as dodgier than meeting a stranger you've found on the internet.

Whether you're dating or not, the knack of starting conversations is at least as important – and challenging – as the art of conversation itself. The

talking is the easy bit. It helps no end, of course, if you're interested in other people, in which case you'll generally bring yourself and others pleasure by asking them about themselves. If you're more interested in yourself than anyone else, then that can be straightforward, too – just rattle on about your own brilliance and either turn a blind eye to any yawning or glazing over, or move on to your next victim. This is all set out nicely in [Dale Carnegie's famous/infamous book, \*How to Win Friends and Influence People\*](#). "Show interest in others" being his key point. I read it as a teenager and it made a huge impression on me – so much so that I gave it to a close friend of mine to read. His critique was exactly as follows: "This is all very well if you're interested in other people, but I'm not really." So that was that.

I wish Mr Carnegie had written another book called *How to Start Conversations*. I thought that I used to struggle with this but had got better at it. In fact, the opposite was true – if I'd ever had the knack, I had lost it. If you've been on the telly a lot, you tend to get recognised. Unaccountably, I suppose, this seems to motivate people to speak to you. It's a great conversation-starter, but it's always the other person doing the starting. This dawned on me a few years ago when Croatia's Davis Cup tennis team beat Great Britain at Wimbledon. I was invited to the group's celebration party at a pub in that part of London. The Croatian friend who'd invited me couldn't come, so I knew not a soul there. But, no matter, I thought: I'll just turn up and win friends and influence people with great enthusiasm.

In I walked, looking around in expectation of being engaged in conversation. Nothing happened. Nobody recognised me, therefore no one felt any urge to talk to me. OK, then I'd have to start a conversation. I opened my mouth to speak to someone, but nothing came out. I'd utterly forgotten how to do it. I really couldn't think of what to say.

After half an hour shuffling about trying to look less mortified than I was, I resolved to leave. At that moment a physio who had worked in London for a time recognised me, said hello, introduced me to someone else, and it was all fine. But I've never forgotten that awful feeling of being lonely in a crowd. So, every day I try to start a conversation with a stranger, hoping

they don't edge away in alarm. And I hope I'm always as open as possible to a conversation anyone sees fit to start with me.

- Adrian Chiles is a broadcaster, writer and Guardian columnist

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## 2023.02.23 - Around the world

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Smoke rises during an Israeli airstrike on Gaza City early on Thursday morning. Photograph: Mohammed Salem/Reuters

[Israel](#)

## Israeli airstrikes hit Gaza after militants fire rockets in wake of West Bank raid

Region braced for escalation in violence as attacks from both sides follow deadliest Israeli army raid in decades in Nablus

[Bethan McKernan](#) in Jerusalem

Thu 23 Feb 2023 10.31 ESTFirst published on Wed 22 Feb 2023 21.52 EST

Israel and militants in the Gaza Strip have exchanged fire just hours after the deadliest Israeli army raid in decades killed 11 Palestinians and wounded more than 100 more in the occupied West Bank, leaving the region braced for an escalation in violence.

The Israel Defence Forces (IDF) said early on Thursday morning that it carried out airstrikes on two military sites operated by Hamas, the Islamist movement that controls the strip, after the launch of six rockets from the blockaded enclave towards southern Israel.

Five of the rockets were intercepted by Israel's Iron Dome air defence system, and no casualties were reported on either side. Neither Hamas nor the smaller militant groups operating in the strip have claimed responsibility for the attack, but several factions vowed that the Israeli army raid in Nablus would be met with a response.

The attack carried out by the IDF in the northern West Bank city on Wednesday was a rare daytime raid, which turned exceptionally bloody even by the standards of the rapidly deteriorating security situation in Israel and the [Palestinian territories](#).

The UN's Middle East envoy, Tor Wennesland, was scheduled to meet the leadership of Hamas in [Gaza](#) on Thursday as part of international mediation efforts.

"I am deeply disturbed by the continuing cycle of violence and appalled by the loss of civilian lives," he said before leaving Jerusalem. "I urge all sides to refrain from steps that could further inflame an already volatile situation."

Israeli officials said troops had entered Nablus's old city to arrest three men in their 20s wanted in connection with the killing of a soldier last year and who they said were planning new attacks. The IDF forces met fierce resistance from armed Palestinian fighters, and the Israelis eventually fired shoulder-launched missiles at the house in which the three militants were surrounded.

The Palestinian health ministry said 103 people, including many passersby, were injured during the four-hour gun battle that broke out in the middle of the busy shopping area, and that at least three of the dead were civilians. In the aftermath, shellshocked residents inspected the bloodstains and

widespread damage in the centuries-old souk. Public funerals organised by militant groups immediately got under way.

Medics said the city's an-Najah hospital struggled to deal with the casualties. Ahmad Aswad, the head nurse of the cardiology department, told the Associated Press that he saw many patients shot in the chest, head and thighs. "They shot to kill," he said. According to several media reports, one overwhelmed nurse pronounced a man in his 60s as dead, only to realise that the patient was his own father.

The raid in Nablus was one of the deadliest IDF operations in the West Bank since the end of the second intifada, or Palestinian uprising, which raged between 2000 and 2005. It came after another in the nearby city of Jenin last month, in which 10 people were killed, including two civilians.

A day after the Jenin raid, a Palestinian gunman believed to be unaffiliated to any established militant groups opened fire near a synagogue in occupied East Jerusalem, killing seven Israeli civilians.

Tensions between Israel and the Palestinians have soared of late, increasing fears of another intifada. Last year was the deadliest on record in Israel and the West Bank since 2005, and 62 Palestinians, 10 Israelis and one Ukrainian national have already been killed in 2023 so far, according to rights groups and the Israeli foreign ministry.

There has been a surge in violence since last April, when Israel launched a huge, still continuing operation - mainly targeting Nablus and Jenin - in response to a wave of Palestinian terrorist attacks against Israelis. Several new militias with only tenuous links to traditional Palestinian factions have emerged in the last two years, including the Lions' Den in Nablus.

Israel's police force said on Thursday it would deploy extra personnel across Jerusalem and the West Bank in anticipation of continued attacks.

The fighting comes as the newly re-elected Israeli prime minister, Benjamin Netanyahu, struggles to assert control over radical far-right elements of the new government who helped return him to office. The Religious Zionists faction has pushed for the full annexation of the West Bank and a relaxation



of the rules of engagement for Israel's police and soldiers. Just three days before the Nablus raid, the Israeli government reportedly agreed to a US-brokered plan to reduce IDF incursions in Palestinian cities.

Tensions in Jerusalem and the West Bank often spiral during the Muslim holy month of Ramadan, which begins on 23 March.

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Afghan women and children in Kabul in January. Donors are withdrawing from Afghanistan because of the Taliban's harsh treatment of women. Photograph: Wakil Kohsar/AFP/Getty Images

[Global development](#)

## **Afghan women face further harm if donor funding is withdrawn – report**

Aid agencies repelled by the Taliban's harsh treatment should avoid moves that would leave women worse off, says thinktank

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[Kaamil Ahmed](#)

Thu 23 Feb 2023 01.00 EST Last modified on Thu 23 Feb 2023 01.02 EST

Western countries have risked causing further harm to Afghan women by withdrawing funding and suspending operations in protest against [Taliban](#) policies that adversely affect women, the International Crisis Group said in a report today.

The Brussels-based thinktank said outside powers should hold the Taliban to account for its bans on secondary and university education for girls and women as well as on those working for non-governmental organisations, but they should avoid “self-defeating” policies that left women without services.

“Donors are turning away from [Afghanistan](#), disgusted by the Taliban’s restrictions on women’s basic freedoms. However, cutting aid to send a message about women’s rights will only make the situation worse for all Afghans,” said Graeme Smith, ICG’s senior consultant on Afghanistan.

“The most principled response to the Taliban’s misogyny would be finding ways to mitigate the harms inflicted on women and other vulnerable

groups.”

Several leading [charities suspended their operations in Afghanistan](#) in December, calling on the Taliban to reverse its decision to ban female humanitarian staff working for aid agencies. About a third of the agencies’ workforce are women, who are seen as vital in providing services in a culturally appropriate way.

Though the Taliban has since made exceptions for women working in healthcare or education, which has allowed NGOs to resume some operations, they say the Taliban’s restrictions have made it difficult for them to carry out their work.

“Banning female humanitarian workers prevents us from reaching half of the population. Due to cultural norms in the country, male aid workers cannot register women and girls to receive aid, it must be done by other women,” said Méliissa Cornet, an adviser for Care Afghanistan.

[Save the Children said last week](#) that after the ban, women had reported being overlooked by male-only humanitarian teams if they were not accompanied by a male family member.

According to a [survey of humanitarian workers](#) by UN Women, the biggest issues were being able to assess needs and provide information.

“In Afghanistan, it is not culturally acceptable for men to do humanitarian assessments with women and girls, so without female staff we struggle to do meaningful assessments on the impact on women,” said Becky Roby, the Afghanistan advocacy manager with the Norwegian Refugee Council.

Roby said it was unsustainable for two-thirds of Afghanistan’s population to depend on humanitarian aid and a political roadmap was needed that included direct engagement with the Taliban.

She said the NRC hoped the Taliban “will see sense” but until that point it does not feel it could safely or effectively reach women and girls.

“We are sticking to our principles on this topic, because it is these principles that help us access the people who are most in need and the most vulnerable,” she added.

The ICG report said many western officials supported the idea of cutting the Taliban off as a consequence of the policies but that the group’s record, including when it was in power in the 1990s, showed it was unlikely to respond to such pressure.

It said the decisions of western powers risked doubling the impact in a society where women bore the brunt, by taking smaller rations or through girls being forced into early marriages.

It called for greater funding for humanitarian campaigns, more work to be done on infrastructure and supporting agriculture – where most women earn their livelihood – and negotiating concessions at a local level with Taliban officials.

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Merrick Garland appointed Smith to take over two investigations involving Donald Trump. Photograph: Martin Divíšek/EPA

[Donald Trump](#)

## **Ivanka Trump and Jared Kushner subpoenaed in January 6 investigation – report**

Special counsel looking into Trump's efforts to overturn 2020 election subpoenas former president's daughter and son-in-law

*Reuters*

Wed 22 Feb 2023 21.02 EST Last modified on Wed 22 Feb 2023 21.10 EST

Former US president Donald Trump's son-in-law [Jared Kushner](#) and daughter Ivanka Trump have been subpoenaed by the special counsel Jack Smith to testify before a federal grand jury regarding the January 6 attack on the Capitol, the New York Times reported on Wednesday, citing sources.

Merrick Garland, the attorney general, appointed Smith in November last year to take over two investigations involving Trump, who is running for president in 2024.

The first investigation involves Trump's handling of highly sensitive classified documents he retained at his Florida resort after leaving the White House in January 2021.

The second investigation is looking at efforts to overturn the 2020 presidential election's results, including a plot to submit phony slates of electors to block Congress from certifying Democrat Joe Biden's victory.

Earlier this month, media outlets reported that the former US vice-president Mike Pence, the former national security adviser Robert O'Brien and Trump's former chief of staff, Mark Meadows, were subpoenaed by Smith in his investigations.

Grand juries in Washington have been hearing testimony in recent months for both investigations from former top Trump administration officials.

Smith's office and Kushner did not immediately respond to requests for comment on Wednesday. [Ivanka Trump](#) could not immediately be reached for comment.

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Starbucks launched its Oleato range at the company's Reserve Roastery in Milan. Photograph: Valentina Za/Reuters

### Coffee

## **‘It went down smoother’: Starbucks’ olive oil coffee approved in Milan**

Company's CEO credits idea to mix classic Italian tastes to a daily ritual he adopted on a trip to Sicily

- [Starbucks launches extra virgin olive oil-infused coffee](#)

[Giorgio Ghiglione](#) in Milan

Wed 22 Feb 2023 14.42 EST Last modified on Wed 22 Feb 2023 16.02 EST

Starbucks is once again daring to challenge Italy's sacred coffee-drinking tradition by blending the beverage with another of the country's revered food items: olive oil.

The US chain launched a range of coffees laced with olive oil at its main store in central Milan on Wednesday.

Called *oleato* – a play on words between the Italian terms *oliva* (olive) and *oliato* (meaning oiled, and, by extension, smooth) – the range includes an iced shaken espresso, an espresso martini and olive oil latte “steamed with oat milk”.

The idea came to Starbucks CEO Howard Shultz, he said, during a trip to Sicily, where he adopted a daily ritual of taking a spoonful of extra virgin olive oil along with his morning coffee before deciding to experiment by mixing the two together.

In an announcement on the company’s website, Shultz, whose vision for Starbucks came about during a visit to [Italy](#) in 1983, said he can’t remember a moment in the last 40 years when he’s been “more excited, more enthused”, adding that olive oil’s “unexpected, velvety, buttery flavour ... enhanced the coffee and lingers beautifully on the palate”.

When Starbucks first ventured to Italy in 2018 with its inaugural store – the Starbucks Reserve Roastery in Milan – it caused a mini-uproar among coffee traditionalists, with many seeing it as an attack on the home of espresso and not needed in a country full of traditional coffee bars.

But the vibe has shifted since then, and customers at the store on Piazza Cordusio – a former post office designed much like a coffee museum – appeared to be in less of a froth about the olive oil-infused line.



Starbucks' oleato lineup includes a latte, an iced cortado, a cold brew, an 'oleato deconstructed' and an espresso martini. Photograph: Starbucks

Not far from Milan's famed cathedral, a bold yellow sign announced that the product is now on sale, while a large can of oil stood in the centre of the store.

An oleato latte was described by one customer as having a "sweeter taste" that "went down smoother".

Another said that "the taste of coffee dominates the oil".

Others, however, were not up for trying. Maria Franceschi, who works for the nearby municipality of Milan, said she is not opposed to Starbucks coffee but "oil and coffee are different tastes" that could not possibly be paired together.

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Dennis D’Anna, a bar worker from Catania who was visiting Milan to watch a Champions League match, said he prefers normal coffee but that “novelties are not necessarily to be rejected”.

Bar owners in the area also took the arrival of olive-oil coffee in their stride. “Coffee is oily by nature,” said Marcello Mannile, the owner of the Rose by Mary bar. “If you take a coffee bean and put it in your mouth you’ll notice it.”

However, even though he serves his customers cocktails with olive oil, he said they’re not quite ready to add it to their coffee due to “a cultural factor”.

Still, he believes oleato has the potential to be successful because Italy is much more international than in the past, with even culinary traditionalism slowly fading: “We are willing to experiment much more. If you still want to find authentic Italian coffee, you must go outside the big cities.”

In short, in Italy coffee is sacred, but a drop of olive oil doesn’t hurt.

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The new guidelines are aimed at providing consumers with clear nutrition information, the FDA said. Photograph: Andrew Kelly/Reuters

[US news](#)

## Soy, oat and almond drinks can still be called milk, US regulators say

FDA says consumers are not confused if plant-based beverages use the term, after dairy producers call for crackdown on labeling

*Associated Press*

Wed 22 Feb 2023 16.10 EST Last modified on Wed 22 Feb 2023 17.12 EST

Soy, oat, almond and other drinks that bill themselves as milk can keep using the term, according to draft federal rules released on Wednesday.

Food and Drug Administration (FDA) officials [issued guidance](#) that says plant-based beverages do not pretend to be from dairy animals – and that US consumers aren't confused by the difference.



Dairy producers for years have called for the FDA to crack down on plant-based drinks and other products that they say masquerade as animal-based foods and cloud the real meaning of the term “milk”.

Under the draft rules, the agency recommends that beverage makers label their products clearly by the plant source of the food, such as soy milk or cashew milk.

The rules also call for voluntary extra nutrition labels that note if the drinks have lower levels of nutrients – such as calcium, magnesium or vitamin D – than dairy milk.

The new guidelines are aimed at providing consumers with clear nutrition information, the FDA commissioner, Robert Califf, said in a statement. The draft rules do not apply to nondairy products other than beverages, such as yogurt.

The National [Milk](#) Producers Federation, an industry trade group, applauded the call for extra nutrition information on drink labels, but said it rejected the FDA’s conclusion that plant-based drinks can be called milk because it’s a “common and usual name”.

The Good [Food](#) Institute, a group that advocates for plant-based products, objected to the extra labeling.

In recent years, the number of plant-based drinks has exploded to include dozens of varieties, including cashew-, coconut-, hemp- and quinoa-based liquid extracts of plant materials labeled – and described – as milk.

In the US, almond milk is the most popular variety, but oat milk has been seeing the fastest growth. However, sales of refrigerated cow’s milk grew to \$12.3bn in the year ending 28 January, compared with \$2.5bn for nondairy milk, according to consumer information company NielsenIQ.

In the past, lawmakers in dairy states have tried to pass legislation requiring the FDA to enforce a federal standard defining milk as a product from cows.

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# Headlines

- [PFAS ‘Forever chemicals’ mean England’s waters will miss pollution targets for decades](#)
- [River Wyre Toxic substances from chemicals firm site found polluting protected river](#)
- [Northern Ireland Police officer shot in Omagh ambush has ‘life-changing’ injuries](#)
- [Teacher shortages Labour says government has created ‘perfect storm’ in England’s teaching workforce](#)



Jesmond Dene, Newcastle upon Tyne. All of England's rivers fail to meet pollution standards. Photograph: geordiepics/Alamy

## PFAS

# **‘Forever chemicals’ mean England’s waters will miss pollution targets for decades**

Mapping project reveals standards for PFAS will not be met until 2063 in many areas

- [Toxic substances from chemicals firm site found polluting protected river](#)
- [What are PFAS, how toxic are they and how do you become exposed?](#)

*[Helena Horton](#) and [Sandra Laville](#)*

Fri 24 Feb 2023 01.00 ESTLast modified on Fri 24 Feb 2023 04.24 EST

The government is investigating and mapping out the sources of dangerous “forever chemicals” present in our waterways.

But England will not meet its targets for waterways having good chemical status by 2027, the government admits, in part because of the [PFAS](#) “forever chemicals” in our rivers.

Officials admit there is no way for them to remove PFAS (per- and polyfluoroalkyl substances), some of which are classified as uPBT (ubiquitous, persistent, bioaccumulative, toxic) substances.

The chemicals do not break down in the environment, build up in the body and may be toxic. They form a family of about 10,000 chemicals valued for their non-stick and detergent properties.

High levels of PFAS in England’s waters mean that far from meeting good chemical status by 2027, in many areas standards for PFAS will not be met until 2063.

This week a [big new mapping project](#) has revealed that these chemicals have been found at high levels at thousands of sites across the UK and Europe.

In 2021 the [Environment Agency admitted](#) in a report: “Monitoring data for rivers, lakes, groundwater, estuaries and coastal waters suggests it is likely that PFAS is widely present in English surface waters and groundwater.”

Another document from [the agency found](#): “PFOS is a widespread environmental contaminant. Our monitoring programme in surface waters has reported the presence of PFOS in all fish sampled from fresh, estuarine and coastal waters.

“Measured concentrations in fish ranged from below the environmental quality standard (EQS) to up to four times greater than the biota EQS.”

The government has said that the UK will not meet the water framework directive target of all waterways meeting good chemical status by 2027,

because of PFAS chemicals.

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Officials told the Guardian that it is recognised that there is no feasible technical solution to removing them entirely and that they will take time to naturally drop to required levels.

At the moment, all of England's rivers [fail to meet](#) pollution tests because of chemical and sewage pollution.

The government said: "Since the 2000s we have taken action to increase monitoring and support a ban or restrict specific PFAS both domestically and internationally. We are undertaking investigations to understand and map out the sources of PFAS, using additional controls to reduce their risk to the environment.

"We are also taking significant steps to improve our water environment, including new legal targets on pollution, tougher regulation and enforcement, and a requirement on water companies to deliver their largest ever infrastructure investment."

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Samples of the effluent flowing into the River Wyre found some of the highest PFAS concentrations ever recorded in environmental samples, according to a forensic scientist. Photograph: Christopher Furlong/Getty Images

## PFAS

# Toxic substances from chemicals firm site found polluting protected river

Guardian investigation reveals ‘extremely high levels’ of toxic effluent in Lancashire river

- [‘Forever chemicals’ mean England’s waters will miss pollution targets for decades](#)

[Rachel Salvidge](#) and [Leana Hosea](#)

Fri 24 Feb 2023 01.00 ESTLast modified on Fri 24 Feb 2023 01.02 EST

Toxic substances from the site of a chemicals company have been found polluting a protected river in [Lancashire](#) at “extremely high levels”, in what has been described as a “huge concern”, an investigation by the Guardian and Watershed Investigations has uncovered.

More than 700 types of perfluorinated and polyfluorinated alkyl substances (PFAS) were detected in effluent coming from the site of AGC Chemicals’ plant at Thornton Cleveleys, near Blackpool, into the River Wyre which flows into Morecambe Bay.

The area into which the polluted effluent is flowing has been designated a [marine protection zone](#) since 2019 because it is important habitat for key fish species.

PFAS is a family of thousands of human-made substances known as “forever chemicals” because they are extremely persistent and will not break down in the environment for thousands of years.

Some are also known to be toxic and can accumulate in the human body. It is not illegal to release them into the environment, but activists have urged the government to introduce legal restrictions.

PFOA, one of the most-studied substances in the group, has been strongly linked to a wide range of diseases, including testicular and kidney cancer, thyroid disease, hypertension and ulcerative colitis. It has also been linked to high cholesterol, low birth weight, reduced immune function and developmental problems.

It is classed as persistent, bioaccumulative and toxic (PBT) with its use [severely restricted under the Stockholm convention](#), a global treaty to which the UK is [a signatory](#). The European Commission [recently announced plans to outlaw the entire PFAS class](#) of about 10,000 chemicals.

Analysis of samples of AGC’s effluent revealed levels of PFOA as high as 12,000 nanograms a litre in 2021.



AGC's discharge is not illegal and, while levels of PFOA was detected, the company said it does not use PFOA in its manufacturing processes.

“Any PFOA in the effluent may have come from historical usage at the site, with AGC Chemicals Europe, Ltd. having voluntarily phased out the substance over a decade ago in 2012,” it said.

There is no UK standard for PFOA in rivers or effluent, but the EU is considering imposing standards of 4.4ng/l of PFOA equivalents for the sum of 24 PFAS. The sum is calculated using relative potency factors – which multiply or divide concentration values depending on how potent a PFAS is compared with PFOA.

When all PFAS in the effluent are added together, the total concentration is estimated to be about 400,000ng/l.

Dr David Megson, a forensic environmental scientist from Manchester Metropolitan University, said the “extremely high levels of PFOA detected in these environmental samples are clearly a cause for concern” but that he believes they are just the “tip of the iceberg”.

Working in collaboration with Agilent Technologies, Megson performed an analysis to establish what other PFAS may also be present in the samples.

“When comparing our data against a PFAS library provided by the [National Institute of Standards and Technology](#), our results came back to suggest there could be [more than] 700 different PFAS within just one sample.

“From this data we were able to estimate approximate total PFAS concentrations in that sample of [more than] 400,000ng/l.

“These are some of the highest PFAS concentrations ever recorded in environmental samples and so the thought of these being present in our UK waters is of huge concern.

“What is also particularly concerning [in the UK] is the reliance on targeted analytical approaches that are commonplace in current environmental assessments.”

Megson says his data shows that “we don’t just have a few legacy PFAS such as PFOA and PFOS in UK waters, we have hundreds and potentially thousands of different compounds”.

He added: “More appropriate research and funding is desperately required so we can start to get a handle on how widespread this issue is and what impacts it is having on our environment and human health.”

Crispin Halsall, professor of environmental organic chemistry at Lancaster University, said he believed the levels of PFAS discovered in the effluents were “unacceptable”.

“With PFOA, you’ve got a chemical which is currently [deemed] a persistent organic pollutant under the Stockholm convention and is a largely banned substance ... being released into estuarine waters, so straight away that’s a red flag to me.

“It will certainly bioaccumulate, there will be seabirds and wading birds with higher levels of PFOA in the south Morecambe Bay area as a result.

“It can affect the functioning of the liver, egg viability with breeding pairs ... there’s evidence it can interfere with the developing foetus ... [and] there are epidemiological studies where women exposed to levels of PFOA generally have lower postnatal birthweight: that’s very well-established now.”

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AGC said that data from studies it has commissioned “do not indicate a significant impact on the environment from the effluent”.

Halsall said that some of the perfluoroalkyl ethers [a type of PFAS] found in the effluent “are used as replacements for things like PFOA and they’re being produced in really high quantities and they’re being released into the environment and we simply don’t know what are the risks associated with those compounds. There is evidence that they’re bioaccumulating but we really don’t know what the toxicities are associated with that exposure.”

One such substance is a perfluoroalkyl ether manufactured by AGC which has replaced PFOA in some manufacturing processes since the Stockholm convention ban on PFOA.

AGC says its perfluoroalkyl ether is not classed as being persistent, bioaccumulative and toxic, but some scientists consider it to be persistent and likely to bioaccumulate. No evidence has been produced that it causes harm to human health.

Detlef Knappe, professor of civil construction and environmental engineering at North Carolina State University, is deputy director of the university’s [Centre for Environmental and Health Effects of PFAS](#).

He says his work has shown that perfluoroalkyl ether carboxylic acids are long-lasting and do not break down in the environment. He says he “would expect AGC’s perfluoro[(2-ethoxy-ethoxy)acetic acid] to be persistent as well” because it is also a perfluoroalkyl ether carboxylic acid.

Knappe also expects the AGC chemical to be bioaccumulative, since similar substances have exhibited bioaccumulative properties.

AGC Chemicals Europe said that “its site at Thornton Cleveleys strictly adheres to legal requirements set by the Environmental Agency in all areas, including any discharge into the River Wyre”.

It said it does not “use or manufacture PFOA. Any PFOA in the effluent may have come from historical usage at the site, with AGC Chemicals Europe having voluntarily phased out the substance over a decade ago in 2012.

“We regularly monitor our manufacturing processes and discharge. The reality is that samples taken from the effluent of an industrial site do not represent concentrations found in surface water.

“Our studies, conducted in accordance with EU regulations, confirm that the trace amount of proprietary compound emitted during our manufacturing processes is not classified as persistent, bioaccumulative and toxic. Our freshwater studies have found no accumulative potential.

“We are constantly improving our manufacturing processes in line with our sustainability goals with a view to implementing additional abatement technologies to reduce our emissions even further. In addition, we will continue our engagement with the Environment Agency and local authorities, and stand ready to comply with any changes in regulatory requirements.”

It added that data from studies it has commissioned “do not indicate a significant impact on the environment from the effluent”.

An Environment Agency spokesperson said that beside its extensive monitoring programme for PFAS chemicals, it was working with operators at AGC as part of a wider effort to examine the risks posed by PFAS.

“This analysis will be published in Spring 2023 and will make recommendations for risk management measures, building on the commitment in the [25 Year Environment Plan](#) to tackle chemicals of concern.”

But for some groups the UK government appears to lack the urgency required to tackle this issue.

“PFAS have been described as probably the greatest chemical threat the human race is facing in the 21st century,” said Dr Clare Cavers of the environmental charity Fidra.

“Not only do the results found by this investigation show we need to improve monitoring, we also need to urgently address the discharge of all PFAS into the environment and take action to prevent it.”

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A PSNI forensic officer works at the sports complex in Omagh where DCI John Caldwell was shot. Photograph: Lorraine O’Sullivan/Reuters

[Northern Ireland](#)

## Police officer shot in Omagh ambush ‘fighting for his life’

Party leaders unite to condemn attack on DCI John Caldwell as police continue to question four men

[Rory Carroll](#) and [Jamie Grierson](#)

Fri 24 Feb 2023 10.46 EST First published on Fri 24 Feb 2023 02.58 EST

The police officer who was shot in an ambush in Northern Ireland on Wednesday night is heavily sedated and “fighting for his life”, colleagues have said.

DCI John Caldwell, 48, is critically ill and sustained life-changing injuries, police said on Friday, as four suspects continued to be questioned.

The gravity of Caldwell's injuries emerged as leaders of Northern Ireland's five main political parties met to show unity and support for the police. The leaders gave a joint press conference after a briefing from Simon Byrne, the chief constable of the Police Service of Northern Ireland (PSNI).

Michelle O'Neill, Sinn Féin's deputy leader, said: "It is so important in moments like this that we stand united, and we do stand here united as one voice in our condemnation against this horrific attack on a police officer, someone who is part of our community."

"The most powerful message that we as political leaders can send is to stand with the chief constable today, with the police service and to say: 'This is not good enough, this is an attack on all of us, an attack on our community.'"



DCI John Caldwell, pictured in 2020. Photograph: David Young/PA

Jeffrey Donaldson, the Democratic Unionist party leader, pledged that the police would have the necessary resources to combat such attacks. "To the evil people who carried out this heinous attack, and to their organisation: you are not the future of this place. We stand against you."



Four men, aged 22, 38, 45 and 47, are being questioned at Musgrave serious crime suite in connection with the attack.

Two men shot Caldwell several times while he was off duty and putting footballs in the boot of his car at about 8pm on Wednesday at a sports complex in Omagh, County Tyrone.

The chief constable told reporters Caldwell remained critically ill in hospital and was “fighting for his life”. Liam Kelly, the chair of Northern Ireland’s Police Federation, said the injuries were life-changing.

Caldwell, a senior officer who has led high-profile investigations into paramilitaries and other criminals, is understood to have been shot four times. No one has claimed responsibility but police said the primary line of inquiry was focused on dissident republican groups, especially the New IRA, which has launched sporadic attacks on police and prison officers in recent years.

It was the most serious attack on the police since a booby trap bomb killed a constable, Ronan Kerr, in 2011. Police and intelligence services have thwarted many attempted attacks since then.

The market town of Omagh was the scene of the worst attack of the Troubles when a [car bomb killed 29 people](#) in 1998. The device had been left by the Real IRA, a dissident republican group opposed to the peace process.

Wednesday’s attack occurred 20 miles (32km) from Strabane, where a New IRA improvised explosive device [damaged a police patrol car](#) last November. The two officers inside were not hurt.

At the joint press conference Doug Beattie, the Ulster Unionist party leader, said those responsible for the attack had “depraved ends”. Colum Eastwood, the leader of the Social Democratic and Labour party, said the attempted murder represented nobody and would achieve nothing. The Alliance MP Stephen Farry said all five parties were united in condemning the attack.

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The shadow education secretary, Bridget Phillipson, criticised the government over the number of teachers leaving their jobs. Photograph: Tayfun Salcı/ZUMA Press Wire/Rex/Shutterstock

### [Teacher shortages](#)

## Labour says government has created ‘perfect storm’ in England’s teaching workforce

Labour analysis shows recruitment down by third outside London compared with 2019

[Sally Weale](#)

Fri 24 Feb 2023 02.00 EST Last modified on Fri 24 Feb 2023 14.54 EST

Labour has accused the government of creating “a perfect storm” in England’s teaching workforce, after analysis revealed the scale of the crisis, with teachers old and new quitting the classroom and too few replacing them.

A teacher who qualified in 2010 is 15% more likely to have left teaching within a decade than one who qualified in 2000, according to Labour's analysis of the most recently available official figures.

There is also a concerning gap between the number of teachers quitting the profession and those entering it, Labour says. Its research found 36,262 left the teaching profession in 2020/21, compared with 34,394 who joined via initial teacher training, leaving a shortfall of 1,868.

The [government's own teacher training statistics](#), published in December, revealed recruitment down by a fifth, which was described as "catastrophic". Fresh analysis by Labour, however, found that outside London recruitment is down by nearly a third compared with 2019/20.

Labour says the recruitment crisis threatens to jeopardise the quality of pupils' education and harm the life chances of children, particularly in the north of England and the Midlands.

It is also at the centre of talks between government and unions, who say the erosion of teacher pay has made the job less attractive. Barring a last-minute breakthrough in negotiations, the National Education Union is due to hold its second day of strike action next Tuesday in the northern, Yorkshire and Humber regions in pursuit of its claim for a fully funded above-inflation pay claim.

The shadow education secretary, Bridget Phillipson, said: "The Conservatives have created the perfect storm in our teaching workforce, with teachers old and new leaving and with too few replacing them.

"Our children will reap the whirlwind of lower school standards and worse life chances in years to come unless the Conservatives get to grips with the dangerous exodus of teachers that began under their watch."

She went on: "Labour will recruit an additional 6,500 teachers to fill vacancies and reduce workloads on our overworked, overstretched and undervalued teaching workforce and drive up standards of education."

Further analysis by the Liberal Democrats showed the government has missed its recruitment targets every year for the last five years in maths, physics and modern languages. The total shortfall over the five years is 3,112 maths teachers, 6,367 physics teachers and 3,519 modern-language teachers.

The Liberal Democrats are also concerned that too many secondary-school pupils are not being taught by subject specialists because of recruitment and retention problems. In physics, for example, where the shortage of specialist teachers is most critical, 40.6% of teachers don't have a relevant post-A-level qualification, up from 37.3% five years ago.

Liberal Democrat analysis also reveals the scale of burnout among young teachers. In the last five years, a total of 102,588 teachers have given up teaching before reaching their 40th birthday.

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Munira Wilson, education spokesperson for the Liberal Democrats, said: "The Conservatives are failing our children badly. They are missing their own recruitment targets and driving thousands of young teachers out of the profession, leaving millions of children to be taught by someone who isn't an expert in their subject."

A Department for Education spokesperson said: “The number of teachers in the system remains high and there are now more than 465,000 teachers working in state-funded schools across the country, which is 24,000 more than in 2010.

“Our bursaries and scholarships worth up to £27,000 and £29,000 tax-free are helping to encourage talented trainees to key subjects such as maths, physics, chemistry, and computing. On top of this, these teachers can receive a levelling up premium worth up to £3,000 tax-free in years 1 to 5 of their careers.

“As well as making the highest pay award in 30 years – 5% for experienced teachers and more for those early in their careers, including an up to 8.9% increase to starting salary – we are having ongoing conversations with unions on issues concerning recruitment and retention.”

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‘This is a monumental change’ ... Martin Gore (left) and Dave Gahan.  
Photograph: Anton Corbijn

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# **‘Fletch was meant to outlive us all’: Depeche Mode on death, rebirth and defying the odds**

[Alexis Petridis](#)

Hit hard by the death of keyboardist Andy Fletcher, Dave Gahan questioned whether he wanted to continue – until Martin Gore’s new songs revived him. Making the most of their lives has never been more important, they say



Fri 24 Feb 2023 01.00 ESTLast modified on Fri 24 Feb 2023 07.11 EST

As Dave Gahan happily admits, there was a moment when he thought there would never be another Depeche Mode album. Actually, he says, there were two. The first came as a result of the pandemic, when he underwent a rock star equivalent of [the Great Resignation](#), the phenomenon in which people stuck at home started reconsidering their priorities. He had tried to gig with his other band, Soulsavers, at the end of 2020, between the first and second lockdowns (“Wonderful shows, but the whole thing was a constant state of anxiety – are you fit to fly? What’s happening tomorrow?”), but spent most

of the time at home in the US. It was the longest he had ever spent off the road.

“Not making a record; spending time with my family, friends, my fucking cat,” he says. “I thought: I want to stay here. I was quite happy listening to records, watching the Knicks lose at basketball, plugging in my guitar and playing along to someone else’s music, not really interested in making new music.” He smiles. “I was 18 when [Depeche Mode](#) started. I thought: it’s enough. I’ve had a good run. So when our manager called and said ‘It’s time’, I honestly said: ‘Jonathan, I don’t know if I want to do this any more.’”

Gahan was eventually persuaded back, energised by the new songs sent by his bandmate Martin Gore. Depeche Mode’s last album, 2017’s [Spirit](#), was stridently political, which was perhaps just as well: a month before its release, American neo-Nazi Richard Spencer attempted to claim them as “the official band of the alt-right”. (“He’s a cunt,” offered Gahan, with winning bluntness, in response.) In contrast, these were songs that hit what the Guardian’s Dorian Lynskey once called the “horny, morbid sweet spot” central to Depeche Mode’s appeal: songs about sex, about addiction, about information overload and, especially, about death, the latter perhaps the inevitable result of writing during a global pandemic.

In fact, there were so many songs about death that Gore suggested they call the album *Memento Mori*. Gahan looked forward to working on them in the studio, “making the songs more colourful, elevating them, getting them to the point where Fletch would say” – he imitates bandmate Andy Fletcher’s gruff Essex accent – “‘Let’s leave this alone, we’ve got it, what are you guys doing, don’t over-fucking-complicate it!’ The enjoyable part of making an album.” He employed a trainer – “sports therapist, trains American footballers, doesn’t fuck about” – to get him in shape for another tour: “I’m 60, and I’m not going to half-arse it up there.”

Six weeks before the recording sessions for Depeche Mode’s 15th album, Fletcher died, suddenly, at his London home, of an aortic dissection. The reaction among fans was one of stunned disbelief. He was only 60, and

moreover, Fletch was the band's rock: the least affected by their global fame, the one who kept his head during the early 90s, when Gahan succumbed to a heroin addiction that nearly killed him, Gore was in the grip of alcoholism, and keyboard player and songwriter Alan Wilder quit. It was, says Gahan, a reaction mirrored within the band. "*What?*" he says, shaking his head. "Alan used to say it: 'He'll outlive us all the way we're all going.' Fletch was always the steady one."

He was so stunned, Gahan says, that Fletcher's death only fully hit him at the funeral, when he saw Daniel Miller, founder of Mute Records: the man who signed Depeche Mode as teenagers and maintained his faith in them when their chief songwriter, Vince Clarke, left after their debut album; who, says Gore, "let us experiment and grow at our own pace" and who still contributes ideas to their albums. "He walked in with his wife, and Martin and I stood up and kind of fell into him, and he put his arms around us and all of us were just ... I was sobbing. It was just the three of us. I can't explain it, but that's when I totally lost it. He pointed it out: when he met me and my band, I was a teenager, just about to turn 19. I thought about that. It's been 40-odd years. My entire adult life."



Depeche Mode on Top of the Pops in 1981: (L-R) Andrew Fletcher, Dave Gahan, Martin Gore and Vince Clarke. Photograph: Michael Putland/Getty Images

In the wake of Fletcher's death, Gahan says that "for a minute" he was convinced once again that Depeche Mode was over. "But Martin and I had a conversation. I was just calling up to see how he was doing and he was like, 'We're moving on, right?' I said, yeah. I didn't miss a beat."

For his part, Gore says he never really considered the band ending. "I did question for a second whether it was a good idea to carry on with the schedule we had," he says, "because we were due to start in the studio six weeks after he died, and I wondered if we should put that back a little bit. But we decided it was probably best for us to focus on the album, on the music, something we know, something to take our minds off Andy's death."

We talk a lot more on the phone, even FaceTime sometimes. That's something we just never did before

*Martin Gore*

Recording went remarkably smoothly: certainly smoother than some of the famously fractious sessions for previous albums. "I think that the one thing that's come out of Andy's dying that's possibly, you know, positive," Gore says, before his voice trails off and he reconsiders. "There's nothing positive about it. But you know, the one good thing is that it's brought me and Dave closer. We have to make decisions as the two of us, so we talk things out, we talk a lot more on the phone, even FaceTime sometimes. That's something we just never did before."

Certainly, meeting them separately, each in their own rooms in a luxurious London hotel, it's hard not to be struck by their differences. Gahan is friendly and garrulous and very much a rock star, charismatic and blessed with his ability to look supremely cool while wearing clothes that would make anyone who wasn't a rock star look ridiculous: leathers, purple-tinted sunglasses, tight trousers (slightly flared), his all-black ensemble rounded off with a pair of bright red snakeskin pointed boots.

Gore, meanwhile, looks exactly like Martin Gore: even at 61, the biker jacket and shock of curly blond hair, shaved at the sides, are immediately recognisable from the pages of 80s Smash Hits. He is friendly but businesslike and less expansive: as Gahan suggests, Gore is "not one to

wear his feelings on his sleeve, he always wears his feelings in his songs”. Gore says he never considered changing the album title or dropping its songs about death following Fletcher’s passing. “For me, when Andy died it cemented the idea that we had to carry on with these songs and the title. The idea that we should all be making the most of our time on Earth and it’s very limited – it’s kind of an important message. And it’s even more important now Andy’s gone.”

Nevertheless, Gore concedes, it is a slightly odd situation: releasing an album full of intimations of mortality less than a year after a co-founder’s death. “I don’t want to sound too new age-y about this, but sometimes you wonder when you write songs, if there’s something out there in the ether that you tap into. Sometimes I’ll sit down and write something and it comes naturally and flows and I don’t really know where the words come from. When I look at it, I think: Oh, it’s about that.”



Gahan on stage in 2018. Photograph: Paul Bergen/AFP/Getty Images

But then, as both Gore and Gahan point out, Depeche Mode have almost always been in an odd position. On YouTube, you can find a clip from [a 1981 ITV documentary](#), shot just as their first big hit, *New Life*, breached the Top 20. They are filmed doing the kind of things that “futurist” bands did: playing monophonic synthesisers with one finger, eschewing old-

fashioned entertainment for a Space Invaders-style arcade game, earnestly discussing the new romantic movement. On one level, it's very of its time, but on another, what's striking is how detached Depeche Mode seem from the scene they're supposed to represent. The denizens of the Blitz club think they're a bit non-U: they aren't hip London scene-makers, but kids from the distinctly unfashionable environ of Basildon, and they aren't terribly arty, at least by the standards of the time.

They enthusiastically discuss their love of disco and pop and their videos look very British and provincial – shot in tacky nightclubs and branches of Woolworths – rather than meaningful and serious and mitteleuropäisch. They subsequently became huge, but that was odd, too. Their peers became globally successful with big pop hits or by switching to a more traditional, guitar-based approach; Depeche Mode did it while sticking fast to electronics and getting weirder and more experimental (they are, perhaps, the only band in history ever to break the US shortly after launching a new musical direction heavily influenced by metal-banging Berlin experimentalists Einstürzende Neubauten).

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My job is to perform. It's about creating something that's larger than any existence you could possibly have had



## *Dave Gahan*

By the early 90s, when most of their peers' careers had waned, Depeche Mode were selling millions of albums and exercising a staggering global reach: even Gore admits to being taken aback when the 2019 documentary [Spirits in the Forest](#) revealed the band had fans in Outer Mongolia. Thirty years after their biggest-selling album, 1990's *Violator*, they could still call themselves the biggest cult band in the world without much fear of contradiction: as Gore points out, the tour they're about to embark on "will probably be the biggest tour we've ever done, and the tour before that was the biggest we'd ever done. Every time we go out, we seem to play to more people."

And yet, something of the outsider clings to them. They were inducted into the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame at the end of 2020 (their acceptance speech, via Zoom, was the last time Gahan and Gore appeared in public with Fletcher), but even so, Gahan says he felt oddly out of place. "I'd heard a few years before, when we were first nominated, that someone on the panel had said something about us being dull 'eyeliner-wearing weirdos'." He laughs. "I loved that. Let's just go down the line of eyeliner-wearing fucking weirdos: Prince, Mick Jagger, Dave Vanian from the Damned. I'm happy to join *that* club."

He is, understandably, delighted with *Memento Mori*, an album that offers a perfect blend of ominous mood, electronic textures that range from intense to ethereal and a classic Depeche Mode way with a melancholy but nagging melody. He compares the single *Ghosts Again* to *Enjoy the Silence*, "one of those songs that to me are key anchors for Depeche". It's another song about the fleeting and fragile nature of life: "Everybody says goodbye ... whisper we'll be ghosts again."

It is a subject that Gahan is uniquely placed to sing about, not because of Fletcher's passing, but because he has technically died himself, in the days when he was, as he puts it, "following the rock-star thing in way that was beyond cliché". His heart stopped beating for two minutes after he took an overdose of heroin and cocaine in 1996, an incident that ultimately led him to get clean. "There was complete blackness and this feeling I've never felt

before of utter terror. No sound in the room, nothing, but the blackness felt close to you.

“I had the thing that people talk about, the out-of-body-experience, and then the next thing I know I’m sat up in the back of an ambulance being brought around. In that particular time the only real thought I had, which was terrifying, was that I don’t get to decide what happens. I thought I did. I was hellbent on the idea of ‘if I’m going out, I’m going out with a bang’, having what I thought was a good time, surrounded by other fucking sycophantic losers. It’s coming to all of us, but you don’t really know when.”

Which starts Gahan talking about Fletch again, about how weird it is doing things without him for the first time: interviews, TV appearances, photoshoots with long-term collaborator Anton Corbijn. He gestures towards the next-door balcony. “I keep expecting to hear him outside my room,” he says. “Or smell him lighting a cigarette. ‘Put that fucking thing out, Fletch! I’ve got to sing later!’”

People always asked what Fletch did in the band, he says, because Fletch always used to run his own contribution down, telling an interviewer in the 1989 documentary 101 that while the others dealt with the music, he “bummed around”.

“To me that was kind of offensive. His personality was huge. He was the voice of reason if we were going too far out with a song. We’ve been doing this a long time – me, Martin, Fletch. So this is a monumental change. Not a monumental musical change, he didn’t do masterful things on the records, but what Fletch represented within the band was identity.”

He says it is going to be odd without him on stage; Fletcher always looked so excited to be there: “Depeche Mode’s biggest supporter” performing with the band. “My job is to perform. It’s about creating something that’s larger than any existence you could possibly have had. Martin’s like the gunslinger by my side. And Fletch was the superfan.”

He pauses and grins at me, as if he’s recalling why he decided to come back to Depeche Mode despite his initial doubts. “He knew it’s the best job in the

world. You know, you've won the lottery a thousand fucking times.”

Memento Mori is released on 24 March on Columbia Records. [Depeche Mode play Malahide Castle, Dublin, on 14 June and Twickenham Stadium, London, on 17 June.](#)

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Illustration: Joren Joshua/The Guardian

[You be the judge](#)[Family](#).

**You be the judge: should my mum stop telling me to remove my body hair?**

Her mother says her daughter should be well groomed, Imani says it's against her feminist principles. You decide if mum should get out of Imani's hair

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Interviews by [Georgina Lawton](#)

[@georginalawton](#)

Fri 24 Feb 2023 03.00 EST Last modified on Fri 24 Feb 2023 21.18 EST

## **The prosecution: Imani**

*Mum has strong ideas on how I should present myself and calls my body hair 'unladylike'*

My mum is always nagging me about my beauty regime, which, as an adult, I find annoying. She is always telling me what to do with my body hair.

I think her sentiments are a product of her cultural upbringing. We are Muslim and Middle Eastern, and Mum has always had strong opinions about how to present as a feminine woman. Waxing my leg hair, bikini area,

arms and upper lip was encouraged from the moment I started to develop at 14, and I know her mother suggested the same when she was growing up.

But as I've got older, I've rejected some of these norms. I don't really shave or wax my legs and arms any more as I can't be bothered. I've had boyfriends and they don't care. In the UK, we spend so much time covered up, I don't think it's necessary to be worried about hair all the time.

My mum jokes that I'll never find a husband if I let all my hair grow

I've taken to growing my underarm hair in the winter, so it's quite long now. I reckon it's because I went away to university in Germany two years ago and found more women who thought like me. I also learned a lot of feminist theory that supported my ideas.

But after I graduated and moved back home, my mum called my body hair "unladylike". I ended up giving in and waxing again a few times. The one thing I could never stop waxing, however, was my upper lip. Growing up, my mum always threaded hers, but a few years ago she got this battery-powered hair remover and I started nicking it because it was so good and painless. She bought me my own and I use it every couple of weeks.

My mum jokes that I'll never find a husband if I let all my hair grow. But I'm only 22 and don't want to get married anyway. I try to explain the concept of the male gaze, and how much women pander to it, but she doesn't get it. My sister, who is 27 and single like me, also gets comments about her appearance, but I get it worse.

My parents do it in a lighthearted way, but my mum really does worry that I'm ruining my chances of getting married. We try to educate our parents on how their views can be harmful, but it never does any good.

## **The defence: Aleyna**

*When it comes to beauty, I know best – and thick body hair sends out the wrong message*

I always say Imani thinks she's too fancy to be feminine. She's a very smart girl, but since she came back from university she thinks she knows it all. I never try to control her or her sister. I only give advice because I want to help.

When it comes to beauty, of course I know best. I am their mother and I've been in their position. I know what it's like to be a single young woman, trying to find a way in the world. But I'm married now and one reason why is because I've always taken pride in my appearance. In a Middle Eastern and Muslim culture like ours, how a woman presents herself sends out a very strong message.

Waxing has always been a part of my beauty regime. I introduced it to the girls when they hit puberty

I'd be lying if I said marriage wasn't important to me. I want my daughters to be taken care of, I want them to have a family. I just worry that they are too independent. I came to this country from Lebanon with their father 28 years ago. We had to adjust to the British way of doing things, but with hair removal and beauty treatments, I have always done what is normal to me – that means staying well groomed.

Waxing has always been a part of my beauty regime. I introduced it to the girls when they hit puberty because we all have very dark hair and it's normal for us to remove it. My mother always said it was important, and I've passed that on to my girls.

Imani loves the hair-removal tool I've used for the last couple of years, so I bought her one and I'm happy to say she still uses it on her face. I started laser hair removal on my legs and bikini area a few years ago and it's great – much better than waxing as it's permanent and not as painful. I implore Imani to do the same, but she won't listen.

She's rejected a lot of beauty advice that I taught her and, honestly, I am offended. I also don't think it looks nice. She can have her opinions, but not everyone needs to hear them. Going around with such thick hair on her arms, legs and armpits sends the wrong message to the world.



As long as she's in my home I'll continue to petition her to take care of herself. That's what mothers do.

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## The jury of Guardian readers

### Should Aleyna stop telling her daughter how to groom herself?

“Take care of herself” makes it sound like it's somehow detrimental to her well-being or health. It's not. What's important is what makes Imani feel comfortable, and it's quite clear she's comfortable with her body hair. A parent constantly nagging her can't be pleasant either.

**Jonathan, 34**

Imani is quite right. She knows people will notice her upper lip, but why would they notice the rest? If she goes swimming or sweats a lot, as I do, she might want to do her underarms once a week, but if it is not too thick I would leave that too. As to the pubic area – no, no, scissors only, and only if you want to.

**Mary, 72**

Imani's happiness will not be dictated by her body hair. Her mother should consider that Imani is more likely to meet someone if she is happy and comfortable in her own skin.

**Lucy, 33**

Aleyna means well but is living in the past. Imani should be allowed to do what she chooses with her body. She is young and does not have to bow to cultural norms or societal pressures.

**Debbie, 57**

As a proud feminist, I completely agree with Imani. Contrary to Aleyna's opinion, you can take pride in your appearance without removing body hair – something which is never expected of men. I understand that Aleyna wasn't exposed to feminism growing up, but she should embrace her daughter's attempts at educating her about the male gaze.

**Titir, 26**

## **Now you be the judge**

In our online poll below, tell us: should Aleyna lay off telling her daughter how she ought to look?

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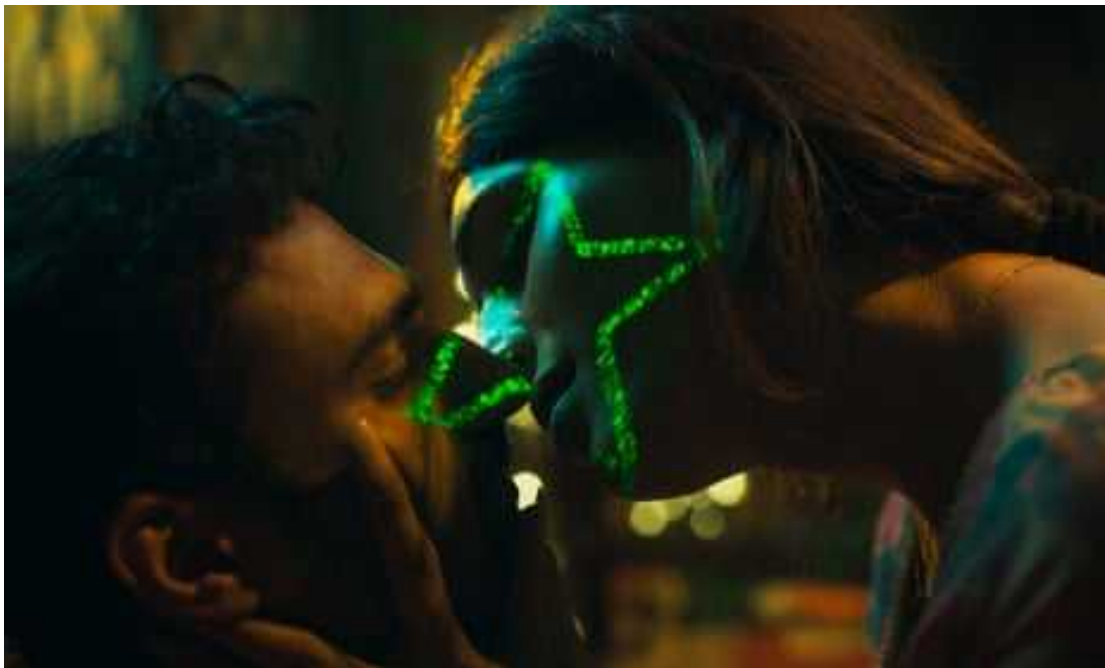
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‘We spend our lives trying to hide our desires’ ... Joyland.

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**Saim Sadiq on his banned trans love story, Joyland: ‘We spend our lives**

## trying to hide our desires'

[Sarfraz Manzoor](#)

The director's debut won the Cannes Jury prize, yet was denounced in his native Pakistan. He discusses masculinity, religious censorship and challenging the patriarchy

Fri 24 Feb 2023 03.00 ESTLast modified on Fri 24 Feb 2023 07.10 EST

Saim Sadiq is at a cafe in London ahead of a screening of his debut film, [Joyland](#). The film, which he co-wrote and directed, is a tender love story set in Lahore about an unemployed married man, Haider (Ali Junejo), who comes from a traditional family but takes a job as a backing dancer at an erotic dance theatre where he falls in love with a transgender woman called Biba (Alina Khan).

The film won the Jury prize at Cannes last May. It was the first Pakistani film to be screened at the festival; it has been praised by Riz Ahmed and Malala who both signed on as executive producers.

“It’s almost like everybody was home during the pandemic and they saw everything that white men had to make,” says Sadiq. “Then they’re like, ‘give us something new because whatever’s on the internet we have seen’.”

The novelty of a Pakistani film that features a trans woman might have been what ignited initial interest in Joyland, but for Sadiq that eye-catching love triangle is a means to discuss questions that have long obsessed him. “When you finish the film you realise it is not really about the trans character. I was using the love triangle premise to talk about what I really want to talk about – which is patriarchy.”

Sadiq, 31, grew up in Lahore, the only son of an army major father and home-maker mother. “I was a smart kid,” he says. “I was a good writer, a well-mannered kid and kind of funny. I was checking all the boxes, there was nothing wrong with me apart from one thing: growing up, I always knew that there is a right kind of masculinity, and I knew that because it

was not me. The right kind of masculinity meant being interested in cricket, it meant going out and getting into fights and looking at girls in a certain way.”

Sadiq preferred looking at films. He began with Bollywood movies, but by the time he was 11 he was renting DVDs by John Cassavetes, Paul Thomas Anderson and Krzysztof Kieślowski. He was, he says, a “feminine child”, who as a small boy enjoyed trying on heels and wearing his female cousins’ clothes. Close to his mother’s family home was an exotic theatre where the local trans people would perform. Trans people were not uncommon in Pakistan – “they were once part of the royal courts, they used to be poets and artists” – and Sadiq was fascinated by how they challenged ideas of gender. When he would dress up in girl’s clothes his relatives would tell him to stop by threatening to hand him over to the trans people.

“I knew these people were transgressing,” he says today. “Their very existence reminded us that there are people in the world doing exactly what they want. They are saying fuck you to everyone.”

Sadiq revisited the world of exotic theatres in Joyland and some of the scenes were filmed in the Mehfil Theatre in Lahore. He started working on the film in 2016, and as part of his research he took a semester off from studying film at Columbia University in New York to return to Lahore where he spent four months attending shows at exotic theatres and talking to the dancers. The popularity of such venues in an otherwise very conservative country is a reminder that Pakistan is more complicated than outsiders might assume.

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If I am making a film about desire and shame the film itself can't be so shameful

“Pakistan has become a bit schizophrenic, it's a bit bipolar,” says Sadiq. “People pray and then they do a lot of things that they're not supposed to do. There are these weird sort of outlets that people have found to be able to express themselves.”

One week before its domestic release in November 2022, [Joyland was banned by the Pakistani government](#) due to its “highly objectionable material”. The ban was reversed but the film remains banned in Punjab. “The minute the film was linked to religion – as in this film is going to destroy Islam – nobody is going to fact-check that,” says Sadiq. “Religion is the one topic you don't discuss: you defend your religion, you don't discuss it.”

Islam may be the reason cited for why Joyland was considered offensive but to Sadiq religion is just a convenient excuse. “It's mostly people trying to avoid discomfort that stems from the idea that people have sex,” he says. “We spend our lives trying to hide our desires and the fact that other people have desires around us.”





‘Pakistani stories are my stories’ ... Saim Sadiq. Photograph: Tim P Whitby/Getty/BFI

One of the most charged scenes in *Joyland* is when Haider and Biba finally kiss. “If I am making a film about desire and shame the film itself can’t be so shameful,” says Sadiq. “I needed to show some desire.” The scene – not included in the Pakistani cut of the film – was meant to have been filmed on a street in Lahore but the actors got nervous, and so did Sadiq. “It was too risky so we shot it on a closed set.”

I wonder what might have happened if the scene had been shot on a Lahore street; it isn’t as if Pakistan has religious police such as in Iran. “Everybody’s the religious police. That’s why there isn’t a religious police. Anybody can stand up and become a religious police. You don’t need to appoint anybody and pay them when everybody’s willing to do it for free.”

*Joyland* was filmed in Pakistan but it was financed largely with American money, and having spent time in both countries Sadiq sees parallels between Christian and Muslim conservatives. “It is in their inability to engage with facts,” he says. “Why does a white straight man in Texas care so much about trans rights? Why he is obsessed with that when it’s not going to affect his life at all? It’s the same thing with why a 50-year-old

lady in Punjab thinks my film is going to somehow hamper her life when she's never going to have to encounter a trans person in her whole life."

What was his answer to that question? "It's just a fear of the unknown, and the fact that trans people just by their very existence are a threat to the patriarchal system, which works in binaries." It was these restricting binaries that so frustrated Sadiq growing up in Lahore, but while Pakistan might be at times maddening he harbours no dream to leave. "I've lived most of my life in Pakistan," he says. "Pakistani stories are my stories and every time I tell one it allows me to move forward. It's like therapy."

Joyland is released on 24 February.

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‘You are the only man who can do this – will you help me?’ wrote Della Walker in her letter to Frank Lloyd Wright. The artist complied and designed her house. Photograph: Matthew Millman/Courtesy of Sotheby’s International Realty

[California](#)

# **‘Delicate as the seashore’: rare Frank Lloyd Wright home sells for \$22m**

Architect designed his only oceanfront house in California’s Carmel-by-the-Sea for a lumber executive’s widow

[\*Dani Anguiano\*](#) in *Los Angeles*

[@dani\\_anguiano](#)

Fri 24 Feb 2023 01.00 ESTLast modified on Fri 24 Feb 2023 17.56 EST

The only oceanfront home designed by architect Frank Lloyd Wright has sold for \$22m in California’s Carmel-by-the-Sea, the dreamy coastal enclave where Clint Eastwood once served as mayor.

Known as the Mrs Clinton Walker house and the Cabin on the Rocks, the residence was built for the artist Della Walker in 1952, according to the [Wall Street Journal](#), and had remained in the hands of descendants until this month when it was sold.

The property comes with a fascinating origin story. The famed architect agreed to design the home after Walker, the widow of a lumber executive, wrote him a letter in 1945.

“I am a woman living alone – I wish protection from the wind and privacy from the road and a house as enduring as the rocks but as transparent and charming as the waves and delicate as the seashore,” she wrote, according to the Journal, which first reported on the sale. “You are the only man who can do this – will you help me?”



The house features a hexagonal living room. Photograph: Matthew Millman/Courtesy of Sotheby's International Realty

Wright designed a stunning 1,400 sq ft home with cedar wood, Carmel stone and glass on a triangular spit of land that features a hexagonal living room with sweeping views of the sea. The home was acclaimed even before it was completed with columnist Herb Caen [describing](#) it as an “eye-popper” resembling a bird “with outstretched wings, landing in the pounding surf”.

Under Wright's direction, the lot was lowered 4ft so that the home would blend into its surroundings. The residence looks like “a ship, thrusting outward from the rocky shoreline, yet almost one with it”, according to [Frank Lloyd Wright Sites](#). It also features a studio and expanded primary bedroom designed by Wright and added later.



The residence looks like ‘a ship’. Photograph: Matthew Millman/Courtesy of Sotheby’s International Realty



The house was built in 1952. Photograph: Matthew Millman/Courtesy of Sotheby’s International Realty

It took five years to build the home, Walker’s great-grandson said in an interview with the online magazine the [Architect’s Take](#), and the artist argued with Wright about the design of the kitchen.



“She wanted an exit to take out the trash, and Wright insisted that it would destroy the integrity of the grid. Wright was willing to sacrifice practicality for an architectural idea,” said Brooks Walker, an architect. “She had to fight to get a door. The kitchen is cramped and tiny, but for site context, the house is brilliant – a perfect fit for the tide pools all around.”



Della Walker argued with Wright over the design of the kitchen, according to her great-grandson. Photograph: Matthew Millman/Courtesy of Sotheby's International Realty

The home has long captured attention in Carmel. The 1959 film *A Summer Place* featured scenes filmed at the residence.

The property includes a small beach, the sellers' agent told the journal.

The real-estate investment and development firm Esperanza Carmel LLC purchased the home.





The property has a small beach. Photograph: Matthew Millman/Courtesy of Sotheby's International Realty

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Illustration: Ben Jennings/The Guardian

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## **We owe it to the people of Ukraine to bring Vladimir Putin to trial for war crimes**

[Gordon Brown](#)



The special tribunals for Rwanda and the former Yugoslavia show they work. The US must back one for Russia

Fri 24 Feb 2023 02.00 ESTLast modified on Fri 24 Feb 2023 05.16 EST

It is time to bring [Vladimir Putin](#) and his enablers to justice – and the US should now take a lead from Europe. Having witnessed first-hand the devastation inflicted on Ukraine, Joe Biden should mark 24 February, the first anniversary of Russia’s invasion, by announcing American support for a special tribunal to try Putin and his henchmen for the crime of aggression.

Biden should make it abundantly clear that there will be no hiding place for those whose invasion has displaced more than 8 million Ukrainians within their own country, and forced nearly 9 million more [into exile](#) as refugees. And that there will be no safe haven anywhere in the civilised world for those who are hellbent on inflicting incalculable numbers of injuries and deaths on innocent civilians.

Last month, the [UK joined](#) France, Germany, the Netherlands, and the Nordic, Baltic and eastern European countries in endorsing Volodymyr Zelenskiy’s request that the Russian president and his coterie [be indicted](#).

The charge sheet, supported by the EU, the European parliament and the Council of Europe, includes the invasion of Crimea and eastern Ukraine in 2014, the planning and declaration of war on Ukraine, and the indiscriminate shelling this winter of its [civilian population](#), designed to starve and freeze them into submission.

The one major western country yet to endorse the tribunal is the US. If it did so, such a tribunal could be constituted within weeks. And there are good reasons why the US – whose vice-president, Kamala Harris, last weekend joined Biden in accusing Putin of “[crimes against humanity](#)” – should back this approach.

The crime of aggression is Putin’s original and foundational crime, the one that has been the starting point for all the other atrocities. Aggression is a crime for which evidence is already available, and a special tribunal on aggression that complements the work of the international criminal court (ICC), now investigating war crimes and crimes against humanity, is the best way forward.

Neither Russia nor [Ukraine](#) have signed up to the anti-aggression statute of the ICC, so the court does not have the power to prosecute the crime of aggression, and this jurisdictional loophole should be closed.

Special tribunals have been promoted by the US before. Exactly 30 years ago, with the US’s endorsement, the UN security council created the international criminal tribunal [for the former Yugoslavia](#). One year later, it supported the international criminal tribunal for Rwanda. An agreement between the government of Sierra Leone and the UN led to an independent special court and, with the assistance of the UN, special tribunals were created for Cambodia and Lebanon with US support.



‘Ukrainian towns and villages have been destroyed, but Ukraine’s spirit has been indestructible.’ People in the streets of Bakhmut, Ukraine, 19 January 2023. Photograph: Spencer Platt/Getty Images

But the most obvious parallel is the decision made by nine European allies that met in London in 1942 and [drafted a resolution](#) on German aggression, which led, at the war’s end, and with American support, to the creation of the international military tribunal and the trials of Nazi war criminals. The trial of Japanese war criminals followed.

Those who say prosecutions like this do not work should remember not only the verdicts of Nuremberg and Tokyo, but also that the notorious former president of Liberia, Charles Taylor, languishes in a British prison after a [50-year sentence](#) was imposed upon him in 2012 for atrocities committed on his instruction in Sierra Leone. A similar verdict was likely to be imposed on the butcherous Serbian leader Slobodan Milosevic, who was being tried in The Hague for war crimes when he died of a heart attack in his prison cell. And war tribunals can sentence criminals in their absence, making it difficult for them ever to travel abroad again.

The US military will probably be advising Biden to resist, worried that such a tribunal would open the door to attempts to prosecute it for actions elsewhere. But the proposed tribunal would not only owe its existence to a

request from the Ukrainian government, it would be rooted in the country's law and lean on customary international law. The crime of aggression would be being applied in the Ukrainian context only.

Others may argue this additional pressure on Putin is counterproductive, upsetting the fine line that Biden continues to walk between defensive assistance and active engagement. And that it would leave Putin less willing to sue for peace.

This would be to misjudge the character of Putin. I first met him in his Kremlin office in 2006 and this, and my dealings with him as chancellor and prime minister, convinced me that all he understands is strength. Similarly, at every turn he is quick to exploit weakness. In every encounter I had with him, threats were the order of the day. Threats to stop gas going west. Threats to sell oil to the east. Threats of retaliation in the event of Nato expansion.

I was never under any illusion: Putin could not be relied on to keep his word and he was not a leader to be trusted. He was determined to return [Russia](#) to its superpower status at all costs. His motto appeared to me to be that of Caligula, who rampaged through ancient Rome, murdering anyone who stood in his way: "Let them hate as long as they fear."

British intelligence told us that he had not only initiated the killing of Alexander Litvinenko in November 2006, but that he was planning further assassinations on the streets of London. It was only by a show of strength on our part – making clear there would be a forceful response to any further attacks and providing years of 24-hour protection for known targets – that most of the threats eased. Sadly, 12 years later, when Britain's guard had dropped, the [Salisbury poisonings](#) took place.

There must be no western weakness this time, and that is why bipartisan pressure is growing within Congress for action, and why a group of prominent Americans will urge the UN general assembly to support such a tribunal.



We owe this to an embattled people now entering a second year under siege. Ukrainian towns and villages have been destroyed, and hearts have been broken, but the spirit and unity of Ukraine's people have been indestructible. Now, all of us need to summon up similar strength and courage to bring Putin and his henchmen to justice. In a war Russia is losing, this is the intervention they will fear the most.

- Gordon Brown was UK prime minister between 2007 and 2010
- ***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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Starmer's speech on Thursday had all the feel of a manifesto launch during a general election – only there's no election. Photograph: Gary Roberts Photography/Rex/Shutterstock

[The politics sketch](#)[Keir Starmer](#)

## Starmer grabs the limelight and shows practice almost makes perfect

[John Crace](#)



Labour leader shrugs off reputation as wooden performer as he delivers what feels like a manifesto launch

Thu 23 Feb 2023 11.54 ESTLast modified on Thu 23 Feb 2023 17.22 EST

When is a pledge not a pledge? When it's a mission.

Keir Starmer's speech on Thursday had all the feel of a manifesto launch during a general election. The atrium setting of the Co-op building in central Manchester. Hundreds of people watching from the balconies above. Party activists bussed in to create a vibe. Several people stuck in the revolving doors. Most of the shadow cabinet squeezed into the front row, eyes rapt with wonder and hands bruised from the applause.

Only there's no election. At least not for another 18 months. At the earliest. Possibly longer. The Tories are 25 percentage points and counting behind in the polls. There's no way Rishi Sunak is going to call an election until he actually has to. "I'm sorry that everything is a lot worse than it was 13 years ago, but trust me to sort out the mess my party has created" doesn't quite cut it as an election slogan.

So what was Starmer doing in Manchester? You'd have thought he might have been happy enough to sit back and let the Conservatives carry on making mistakes. After all, it's worked well enough so far. But with Sunak currently doing his best to remain invisible, maybe the [Labour](#) leader thinks it can't do any harm to grab the limelight. To let people see that there is an alternative. That he has some ideas. And he gets to look like the real prime minister.

Then again, Starmer does quite enjoy making speeches. Depending on how you are counting, this Thursday was his 11th or 12th major relaunch since he became party leader three years ago. Sometimes whole policies have been junked. Sometimes they have just been fine-tuned. And the speeches seem to have been coming with ever-increasing frequency. It feels as if we have had at least four since December last year. Come the autumn we could be up to two or three a week.

But practice does make ... if not perfect, then something not far off. When he first became leader, Starmer had a well-deserved reputation for being a wooden performer. Someone who wasn't entirely sure he believed in what he was saying, being forced out of his natural habitat into a public arena. He looked sweaty. Nervous. As if he had something to hide.

Now, though, Starmer seems to relish the TV cameras. Comes alive on the big occasions. He's grown into the job. He's seen off Boris Johnson and Liz Truss. And Sunak has given him no reason to believe he can't see him off as well.

Not that Keir will ever be a total natural as an orator. He will never have the evangelical power of a Gordon Brown. But he's found the self-belief and the confidence. He's more than good enough as he is. The country doesn't want a snake oil salesman offering shares in a promised land. We've given up on the all-too-fallible Tory Messiahs. Our sights are lowered. We now want someone decent and competent. Someone who looks as if he knows what he's doing and can be more or less trusted. And Starmer knows he can deliver that.

Keir stripped off his jacket and raced to the podium in the centre of the atrium. He wasn't here to make any pledges. Pledges were so last year.

Instead he was on a mission to deliver his five missions. There are always five. It's not a credible election offer unless there are five. Good growth. An NHS fit for the future. Safe streets. Equality of opportunity. Clean energy. Nothing to frighten the horses. Nothing to which anyone could possibly object. No one would have been that surprised if the Tories had come up with something similar.

At this stage, most of the missions were kept a bit vague. Though Starmer repeatedly insisted there was nothing vague about his missions. They would all have measurable targets one day. Most importantly, they weren't just the mindless Sunak promises to try to fix the stuff he had broken. But they were all fully costed and would be achievable inside 10 years. He hadn't even won the first election yet and he was already making a pitch for a second term.

The one mission where Keir did offer detail was growth. The UK would have the highest sustained growth of every country in the G7. This certainly wasn't an easy target. Only once, in the 1990s, has the UK ever grown faster than Germany. And Germany hasn't made the schoolboy error of leaving the EU. Starmer never did quite explain how we were going to make up the 4% Brexit hit to GDP and overtake the US and Germany. Brexit was not up for grabs. It was a fait accompli. Though he would manage to negotiate us a better deal. Good luck with that.

The missions might have been tough but the overall message wasn't. The UK needed to stop the short-termism. Sticking-plaster solutions to the NHS. Never stopping to wonder why the same problems hit the NHS every winter. Now was the time for a radical overhaul. To prevent the problems occurring. At times it all sounded too good to be true, but Starmer always had the perfect comeback. After 13 years of Tory government, name one thing that works better than it did in 2010. There's no comeback to that.

After a prolonged standing ovation – no minister wanted to be seen to be the first to stop – Starmer took questions. Few took issue with the missions. More on number of promises/pledges/missions – delete as necessary – that had been junked along the way. What had happened to the halfway house Corbynista promises on which he had been elected? How could anyone trust him again?

Starmer didn't miss a beat. A year or so ago he might have got flustered. Tried to ignore the question. Now he went in with a smile. Almost a laugh. He's no longer ashamed of who he is. Those promises were then. This was now. People change their minds. His goal was a Labour government, not some kind of ideological purity. A promise that could never be met because you were in permanent opposition was completely worthless. Besides, Sunak U-turned on everything. So why shouldn't he?

And if the Tories were so worried about Starmer's trustworthiness they knew what to do. They could call an election. And then we could see who the country trusted. Over to you, Rishi.

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‘We see a lack of any moral urgency in relation to the alleged breaches of Shamima Begum’s core human rights.’ Photograph: The Shamima Begum Story/BBC/PA

[OpinionShamima Begum](#)

## **Shamima Begum has shown up courts’ deference to this government. It’s a worrying new era**

[Conor Gearty](#)

Issues related to national security have always been hard to crack, but judges are unwilling to consider human rights

Thu 23 Feb 2023 12.16 ESTLast modified on Fri 24 Feb 2023 03.20 EST

Are the courts reverting to type? Until quite recently, it was widely assumed that the last people to look to for protection from the state were the judges. The Irish knew this, so too did union officials, leftwing campaigners and



civil libertarian activists. Progress on racial and gender equality was achieved despite judges, not because of them.

Then along came the 1998 [Human Rights Act](#) and the flourishing of a new generation of abrasively liberal judges, men and women not afraid to impose their will on the executive where the law demanded it, undaunted by “enemy of the people” jibes. The Human Rights Act survives in law, it is true – but what of its spirit?

In the latest case involving [Shamima Begum](#)’s effort to have the decision to deprive her of her citizenship overturned, the Special Immigration Appeals Commission (chaired by a judge, Mr Justice Jay) has concluded both that there was a “credible suspicion” that she had been trafficked to Syria for the purpose of sexual exploitation, and that there were “arguable breaches of duty” by state authorities in having allowed her to make the journey into that country. But none of that meant that the secretary of state could not choose to take her citizenship away and then deny her the right to argue against this decision in person.

And equally, while the idea that she had travelled entirely voluntarily to Syria, as the secretary of state asserted, might be hard for many to accept, including perhaps even the commission, once again, so what? There might well be, at the very least, lots of grey areas around the edges of her supposed voluntary decision to travel. But voluntary was what the secretary of state believed it to be, what the intelligence experts advised it was, and that once again was that – it wasn’t bonkers wrong (in the sense of being a totally irrational) decision, and that was all the court cared about.

The spectre of the [supreme court’s ruling](#) on Begum in early 2021 hangs over this decision by Mr Justice Jay and his colleagues. Reflecting that earlier judgment, we see a determination to defer to the widest possible extent to government on the grounds of national security, as well as a lack of any moral urgency in relation to the alleged breaches of Begum’s core human rights. And that’s without mentioning the lack of interest shown in both decisions in the wider international human rights law on the matter.

Shamima Begum's lawyers vow to fight decision after she loses UK citizenship appeal – video

Issues related to national security and the control of borders have always been hard nuts for litigants to crack, but it is hard to resist the conclusion that the departure of the strongly human-rights-oriented president of the supreme court [Lady \(Brenda\) Hale](#) and her replacement in that position by [Lord \(Robert\) Reed](#) in January 2020 has ushered in a new era of deference. This has gone beyond national security to embrace economic and social matters, even where discrimination in the enjoyment of individual rights can be plausibly argued.

As in the Begum case, the judges are not saying they have no role to play, but they are raising the bar extremely high before they can be tempted into action against the government. Arguably, this is as good as (if less honest than) their declining jurisdiction from the outset.

There is also a new impatience with intervenors in cases, such as NGOs and others not directly involved, but desirous nevertheless of explaining the importance of the issues that the litigation has brought before the court, or campaigners. Under the new dispensation, human rights experts from afar, no matter how esteemed, no matter how legitimised by a UN appointment, can expect to be given short shrift, as many already have been. The current supreme court seems to hanker after a past in which judges mainly adjudicated on civil matters and had next to nothing to say about public law.

This withdrawal by the supreme court from the wider political-legal fray comes at a bad time. Courts are being overtly challenged in many ostensible democracies on the basis that they are not sufficiently mindful of “the will of the people”. Israel is racing down a path already taken by governments in Hungary and Poland (and, of course, Russia).

Boris Johnson may return to power here, and even if he does not, Dominic Raab’s effort to debilitate judicial protection of human rights in Britain (via his [bill of rights](#) proposals) may yet secure its passage through parliament. The judges should not do his work for him.

- Conor Gearty is professor of human rights law at LSE and a barrister at Matrix Chambers. He is also vice-president for social sciences at the British Academy
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# Ben Jennings on unappealing Tory vegetables – cartoon

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Protests during the Munich Security Conference last weekend. Photograph: Kai Pfaffenbach/Reuters

[Germany](#)

## Leaders of German left condemn ‘peace rally’ over far-right involvement

Renegade former leader of Die Linke among organisers of rally opposing western weapons exports to Ukraine

[Philip Oltermann](#) in Berlin

[@philipoltermann](#)

Fri 24 Feb 2023 01.00 ESTLast modified on Fri 24 Feb 2023 01.02 EST

A “peace rally” due to take place in Berlin this weekend condemning western weapons exports to [Ukraine](#) has been criticised by the leadership of the leftwing party Die Linke for failing to distance itself from far-right groups that have announced their attendance.

Police expect about 10,000 people to take part in Saturday's rally in front of the Brandenburg Gate, which is co-organised by a renegade former leader of Die Linke, Sahra Wagenknecht.

A counter-protest supported by politicians and public intellectuals including the Nobel literature prize-winner Herta Müller has been registered in Berlin for Friday afternoon.

In a TV interview on Wednesday, Wagenknecht said she did not want to see neo-Nazi symbols at her protest, but she fell short of uninviting groups of a nationalist persuasion.

"We have made clear that rightwing extremist symbols have no place at this rally," she told the public broadcaster ZDF. "But of course, everyone is welcome who wants to demonstrate for peace with an open heart."

Wagenknecht set out the theme for her rally in a "manifesto for peace" published earlier this month, in which she argued that western military support for Ukraine's defensive effort was merely prolonging a conflict that would inevitably be settled at the negotiating table. Volodymyr Zelenskiy's demands for fighter jets and long-range missiles could drag [Germany](#) into a nuclear war, it warned.

The manifesto's original 70-odd signees were mostly prominent figures of the soft-left western German peace movement of the 1970s and 80s, including the singer-songwriter Reinhard Mey, the centre-left EU commissioner Günter Verheugen, and the former head of the German Protestant church Margot Käßmann. The open letter's co-author, the journalist Alice Schwarzer, was once Germany's most prominent feminist icon.

In the weeks since its release, however, the manifesto has also been embraced by the far right. Among the half a million signatures since added to the online petition is that of Tino Chrupalla, a co-leader of the far-right Alternative für Deutschland (AfD) party, while a link to the manifesto has been shared online by Hans-Christian Strache, the disgraced former leader of Austria's far-right Freedom party.

Groups from the rightwing extremist spectrum, including Saxony's Freie Jugend youth movement and the neo-fascist magazine Compact, have encouraged participation in Saturday's gathering on their social media channels.

While Wagenknecht's condemnation of such support has remained ambiguous, her party has distanced itself from the event. "After intensive consultation, the party leadership has decided not to join this callout," said Die Linke's federal chair, Tobias Bank, criticising the lack of a clearly drawn line of separation from "well-known Nazis" mobilising supporters for the rally.

Kässmann also announced she would not join the rally, decrying the lack of condemnation of "nationalist and misanthropic persons and groups".

Even without their participation, Saturday's rally is likely to mark a further fusion of old left and nationalist protest groups, which was a hallmark of the *Querdenker* protests against lockdown measures and vaccine mandates during the Covid-19 pandemic.

Last weekend, a rally organised by the *Querdenker* scene mobilised about 10,000 protesters outside the annual Munich Security Conference, police said. A second protest march made up mainly of leftwing protesters drew about 2,700 people.

After Russia's invasion of Ukraine a year ago, more than 100,000 people took to the streets of Berlin in protest. Organisers had expected 20,000.

Days before the invasion, Wagenknecht portrayed the threat as an invention of western media, telling the broadcaster ARD: "We can be happy that Putin isn't what he is portrayed to be, namely a crazy Russian nationalist who gets high on moving borders. If that were so, negotiations would probably be pointless."

According to a survey by the pollster Forsa released on Wednesday, only 22% of Germans believe Putin is interested in negotiations, though a majority of AfD supporters hold that view.

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North Korea launches a strategic cruise missile during a drill in an undated photo released on Friday by state media. Photograph: KCNA/Reuters

[North Korea](#)

## North Korea test-fires four missiles to show ability to launch nuclear attack

Strategic cruise missiles hit a target after travelling 2,000km, says state media, to demonstrate ‘war posture’ of nuclear force

*Reuters in Seoul*

Thu 23 Feb 2023 18.41 EST

North Korea test-fired four strategic cruise missiles during a drill designed to demonstrate its ability to conduct a nuclear counterattack against hostile forces, its state media said.

The exercise on Thursday involved an apparently operational strategic cruise missile unit of the Korean people’s army, which fired the four

Hwasal-2 missiles in the area of Kim Chaek city, North Hamgyong province, towards the sea off the east coast of the Korean peninsula, the news agency KCNA said. Other units conducted firepower training at hardened sites without live firing.

The four strategic cruise missiles hit a preset target after travelling the “2,000km-long [1,243-mile] elliptical and eight-shaped flight orbits for 10,208 seconds to 10,224 seconds”, the English-language report said.

The drill demonstrated “the war posture of the DPRK nuclear combat force bolstering up in every way its deadly nuclear counterattack capability against the hostile forces”, KCNA said.

The missiles were not announced by South Korea or Japan, which often detect and publicly report North Korean launches.

US and South Korean officials took part in a tabletop, or simulated, exercise that focused on the possibility of North Korea using a nuclear weapon, the Pentagon said on Thursday.

North Korea has forged ahead steadily in developing and mass producing new missiles, despite sanctions imposed by UN security council resolutions that ban the nuclear-armed country’s missile activities.

Many launches, including an intercontinental ballistic missile (ICBM) on Saturday, have been reported by state media as drills designed to improve the capabilities of the troops operating the weapons.

“These demonstrations might be considered missile exercising rather than developmental testing,” the US-based Centre for International and Strategic Studies said in a report this week.

North Korea could test-fire ICBMs on a lower, longer trajectory and conduct its seventh nuclear test this year to perfect its weapons capabilities, South Korean legislators said on Wednesday, citing intelligence officials.

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A man walks past electoral campaign posters in Lagos. Photograph: Temilade Adelaja/Reuters

[Nigeria](#)

[Explainer](#)

## Nigeria election 2023: what are the issues and why is this vote different?

People will go the polls on Saturday in what is seen as a potential turning point for Africa's most populous country

[Jason Burke](#) in Lagos

Fri 24 Feb 2023 00.00 EST Last modified on Fri 24 Feb 2023 14.08 EST

### When do Nigerians go to the polls and what are they voting for?

On Saturday, up to 94 million voters in Africa's most populous country and biggest economy will cast their ballots to elect lawmakers and the president.

It's the seventh election since the end of military rule in 1999, and an exercise involving enormous expenditure and logistics, keenly watched across the continent and beyond.

## **Why does the election matter?**

Nigeria faces a host of serious challenges: growing insecurity, a struggling economy, massive debt, deep poverty and a corrupt political class – and this moment is genuinely seen as a potential turning point, with hopes that a fair and credible poll may alter the country's trajectory for the better, allowing its youthful, creative and entrepreneurial energy to be harnessed for the good of all. Alternatively, it could lead [Nigeria](#) towards a very difficult future.

Nigeria is regionally dominant and a keystone state in Africa. Matthew Page, [an expert at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace](#), describes the election as a chance for Nigeria's democratic process "to send a proof-of-life message to the world". With democracy in retreat across the continent, some analysts say a good election in Nigeria would revitalise the hopes of democratic reformers in other countries, with many of the issues resonating elsewhere.

Everyone recognises that the next decade is vital for the country, which is forecast to become the [third](#)-most populous in the world, behind India and China, by 2045.

## **What have been the issues for voters in the buildup to the vote?**

The most obvious are security, with violent crime that was once restricted to more marginal areas now reaching into major urban centres, and the economy, as most people are considerably worse off now than they were in 2015 when the outgoing president, Muhammadu Buhari, started the first of his two terms. Corruption is also an issue for voters.

In recent weeks, a self-inflicted crisis after a poorly executed effort by authorities to replace the country's banknotes has brought acute hardship and inconvenience. With naira currency so scarce, the poorest simply cannot buy basic foodstuffs or travel to vote. Many are adapting, but only slowly. In the meantime, "people are cashless and desperate ... That is adding to tensions around the poll," says [Nnamdi Obasi](#), the International Crisis Group's Nigeria-based expert.

## **What is different about this election?**

A lot. One big difference is the size of the electorate, with 10 million more registered voters than in 2019, including many who are very young. A second big change from earlier polls is that the two main parties that have dominated Nigerian politics for decades – the ruling All Progressives Congress and the People's Democratic party – have been challenged by a third credible contender: Peter Obi is an energetic 61-year-old who appears a generation younger than his main rivals, Bola Tinubu and Atiku Abubakar, who are in their 70s and look increasingly frail. More than anything, Obi represents a new kind of politics, reaching out beyond Nigeria's sectarian and ethnic divides with the promise of dynamic, clean and efficient governance. Whether he will be able to fulfil that if he wins is another question. A final difference is new voting technology, which should cut down on rigging.





Presidential candidates (from left) Bola Tinubu, Atiku Abubakar and Peter Obi. Composite: Kola Sulaimon/Afolabi Sotunde/Reuters/Pius Utomi Ekpei/AFP/Getty Images

Many opinion polls have given Obi a substantial lead, and there is no doubt that the wealthy businessman turned politician has run a very effective campaign. However, analysts and ruling party officials say Obi may have difficulty converting “virtual” support on social media and among the young into enough votes to beat the vast patronage networks, deep pockets and powerful political organisation of his rivals.

Much depends on turnout, which has been woefully low in recent elections. Last year, before Obi launched his campaign, a survey found that just 39% of Nigerians felt close to a political party, a sharp decline compared with 2015. If more than two voters in five reach the voting booths, this will be seen as a boost to Obi’s chances, possibly signalling a wave of support.

## **When will we get a result?**

Official results could take up to five days to be announced after the polls close, but the turnout should become clearer much earlier, along with some

of the counts. This should give a sense within 36 to 48 hours of who will lead Nigeria.

Nigerian electoral law makes a runoff unlikely, as the winning candidate needs only a simple majority, provided they get 25% of the vote in at least two-thirds of the 36 states.

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Harvey Weinstein in court in Los Angeles in October. Photograph: Reuters

[Harvey Weinstein](#)

## Harvey Weinstein sentenced to 16 additional years for LA rape conviction

Disgraced producer was previously convicted of rape and sexual assault in New York and is serving a 23-year term

[Lois Beckett](#) in Los Angeles

[@loisbeckett](#)

Thu 23 Feb 2023 19.37 ESTFirst published on Thu 23 Feb 2023 08.57 EST

Harvey Weinstein was sentenced to 16 additional years in prison on Thursday in Los Angeles, three months after being [convicted](#) of rape and sexual assault.

The disgraced film producer, whose pattern of predatory behavior galvanized the #MeToo movement, was previously convicted of rape and sexual assault in New York in 2020 and is currently serving a 23-year

prison term. The new sentence nearly doubles the 70-year-old producer's remaining prison time.

In December, a Los Angeles jury [found Weinstein guilty](#) on three counts of rape and sexual assault against a single victim, a European model and actor who testified anonymously as “Jane Doe #1”. Jurors acquitted Weinstein of assaulting another woman, a massage therapist, and failed to reach a verdict on whether he raped or assaulted two other women, including Jennifer Siebel Newsom, an actor and film producer who is now married to Gavin Newsom, the Democratic governor of California.

Siebel Newsom posted a video message to her Instagram account after the sentencing in which she called Weinstein “a serial predator for decades” and called the entire process “one of the hardest experiences of my life”.

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Jane Doe #1 wept in court on Thursday as she described the impact of what Weinstein had done to her in a 2013 attack.

“Ten years later, the effects of this rape are still raw and difficult to discuss. I have been carrying this weight, this trauma. This irrational belief that it was my fault,” she said. “There is no prison sentence long enough to undo the damage.”

The woman said that the way Weinstein had looked at her in the small courtroom during the trial had shown her that he was “the exact same man who raped me all those years ago”, and that he had “ripped out my soul and has no regret”.

Legal observers said Weinstein's Los Angeles trial, which came more than two years after his conviction in New York, was marked by a striking

degree of misogyny that included Weinstein's defense team attacking his accusers' credibility and their sexual behavior, and labeling Siebel Newsom as "just another bimbo who slept with [Harvey Weinstein](#) to get ahead in Hollywood".

His attorneys also used the trial as a referendum on the #MeToo movement, with defense attorney Alan Jackson telling jurors: "The truth is immutable. It's not a feeling. It's not a whim. It's not a hashtag."

At the sentencing hearing, defense attorney Mark Werksman defended Weinstein as a 70-year-old in bad health, and said he had lost four teeth while in the [Los Angeles](#) county jail. He asked the judge to remember the good Weinstein had done in his career.

"Please do not sentence the man who has become a caricature because of the #MeToo movement," Werksman said.

Weinstein pleaded not guilty to all charges in both of his criminal trials, and has denied ever engaging in non-consensual sex. In his own statement in court on Thursday, Weinstein admitted no guilt, and called the woman he was convicted of raping an "actress" who can "turn the tears on" and the rape a "made-up story".

"Please don't sentence me to life in prison. I don't deserve it," Weinstein said. He called the case "a setup".

Other women who have spoken out against Weinstein said the sentence in Los Angeles brought a measure of relief.

"I have a sense of peace knowing that he will likely spend the remainder of his life in prison," Caitlin Dulany, an actor who has publicly accused Weinstein of assaulting her in 1996, said in a statement after the sentencing.



Attorney Gloria Allred speaks to members of the media after Weinstein was sentenced in Los Angeles, California, on 23 February. Photograph: Caroline Brehman/EPA

Weinstein's second criminal trial centered on the allegations of four women who accused the producer of raping or sexually assaulting them in [California](#), but also included supporting testimony from women who said he raped or assaulted them in similar ways in Toronto, London and Puerto Rico.

Over more than nine days of deliberation, the [majority of jurors wanted to convict](#) Weinstein on charges of sexual assault against two other women, including Siebel Newsom, but could not convince a minority of jurors, who remained skeptical of the allegations, the Associated Press reported.

In interviews with jurors, the Associated Press found that the European actor and model's composure on the stand and her behavior after the assault convinced the jury, which included at least one "very old-school" man, that her account of Weinstein's rape was credible beyond a reasonable doubt.

Jane Doe #1 was the only accuser who had no further direct dealings with Weinstein or his representatives after the incident. She testified she had barely known who he was, having been introduced only briefly at the film

festival, and wanted nothing from him. Others, including Siebel Newsom, had friendly email exchanges with Weinstein or sought out future meetings after their incidents, a point the defense emphasized in their cross-examinations and closing arguments.

That resonated with some jurors. One male juror said he voted to convict on the Jane Doe #1 counts, but reluctantly voted to acquit on the counts involving Siebel Newsom. The difference, he said, was the women's "subsequent action".

"In a two-and-a-half-year period she had sent Mr Weinstein over 35 emails," he said of Siebel Newsom. "She wanted access to Harvey Weinstein. It sounded like she wanted access to a lot of his resources. It raised a reasonable doubt in my mind."

Another male juror said the intensely [emotional testimony of Siebel Newsom](#), might have been too much for some fellow jurors.

"Throughout the trial, Weinstein's lawyers used sexism, misogyny, and bullying tactics to intimidate, demean and ridicule us survivors," Siebel Newsom said in a statement after the verdict. "This trial was a stark reminder that we as a society have work to do."

In her statement during the sentencing hearing, Jane Doe #1, weeping, spoke to "all those people who feel ashamed, who blame themselves". Being raped, she said, had made her feel "invisible to myself and to the world" but, by coming forward to testify, "I'm no longer invisible".

Weinstein has been publicly accused of rape, sexual assault or sexual harassment by more than 90 women in incidents stretching back decades. In 2018, dozens of women, including some of Hollywood's most prominent actresses, began to speak publicly about his behavior towards them, a series of disclosures that galvanized the #MeToo movement and raised questions about how the film and media industries shielded powerful men from facing consequences for sexual misconduct.

A previous sentencing hearing for Weinstein in January was pushed back until 23 February to allow his attorneys to file a motion for a new trial. In



the motion, Weinstein's attorneys argued that the jury should have seen Facebook messages between Jane Doe #1 and another man who testified in the trial, which they suggested would have undermined the jury's perception of her credibility on the stand. His lawyers also argued that one of the instructions the jury received, related to defendants who threaten witnesses from testifying, also unfairly prejudiced jurors against Weinstein. The judge rejected these arguments.

Legal uncertainties will remain on both coasts for Weinstein. An appeal of his New York conviction is due for a hearing later this year. Prosecutors in Los Angeles have yet to say whether they will retry Weinstein on counts they were unable to reach a verdict on.

It is not yet clear where he will serve his time while these issues are decided. His New York sentence would be served before a California prison term, though a retrial or other issues could keep him from being sent back there soon. Weinstein is eligible for parole in New York in 2039.

Before his conviction in Los Angeles, some of some of the dozens of women who have spoken out publicly against him had worried that, like Bill Cosby, Weinstein could end up being released if he won his appeal in New York.

"If he was out right now, he would still be doing what he was doing before," Dawn Dunning, who testified in Weinstein's New York trial, [told the Guardian](#). "We just want him to stay in prison so he can't do this to anyone else."

*The Associated Press contributed reporting*

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Signs rest on a tree during a protest near the White House in Washington DC on 11 January 2023, the 21st anniversary of the opening of the detention facility at Guantánamo Bay, Cuba. Photograph: Bryan Olin Dozier/NurPhoto/Rex/Shutterstock

[Guantánamo Bay](#)

## Guantánamo Bay sends two inmates to Pakistan after 20 years

Pair were held for al-Qaida involvement but never charged – their release leaves 32 people detained in prison camp

*Reuters*

Thu 23 Feb 2023 23.12 EST

The US has transferred two brothers from its [Guantánamo Bay](#) detention centre to Pakistan, bringing the total number of people held at Guantánamo down to 32, according to the Pentagon.

Abdul Rabbani and Mohammed Rabbani were arrested in 2002. Abdul Rabbani was an al-Qaida facilitator while Mohammed Rabbani was a financial and travel facilitator for prominent al-Qaida leaders, according to the Pentagon's website.

“The United States appreciates the willingness of the government of Pakistan and other partners to support ongoing US efforts focused on responsibly reducing the detainee population and ultimately closing the Guantánamo Bay facility,” a Pentagon statement said.

Guantánamo started being used by President George W Bush in 2002 to house foreign terrorism suspects following the 2001 hijacked plane attacks on New York and the Pentagon that killed about 3,000 people.

It came to symbolise the excesses of the US “war on terror” because of harsh interrogation methods that critics have said amounted to torture.

There were 40 detainees when Joe Biden, a Democrat, became president in 2021. Biden has said he hopes to close the facility. The federal government is barred by law from transferring Guantánamo detainees to US mainland prisons.

A total of 32 detainees remained, of whom 18 were eligible for transfer, the Pentagon statement said.

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## Headlines

- ['Forever chemicals' Ministers told to get a grip on scale of pollution in UK](#)
- ['Toxic legacy' UK risks falling behind Europe in controlling chemical pollution](#)
- [Theo Clarke Tory MP reveals abuse over pregnancy as reselection bid fails](#)
- [Radio 2 Ken Bruce says BBC has hastened his exit](#)
- [Radio 2 Vernon Kay confirmed as new host of Ken Bruce's slot](#)



In the UK, the highest levels of PFAS were found in a discharge on the River Wyre. Photograph: Nick Jenkins/Alamy

## PFAS

# Ministers told to get a grip on scale of ‘forever chemicals’ pollution in UK

Tougher regulations needed now, says Green MP Caroline Lucas as Tory colleague calls for monitoring

- [UK risks falling behind Europe in controlling ‘forever chemicals’](#)
- [What are PFAS, how toxic are they and how do you become exposed?](#)

[Sandra Laville](#) and [Rachel Salvidge](#)

Sat 25 Feb 2023 02.00 EST Last modified on Sat 25 Feb 2023 02.01 EST

The UK government must get a grip on the scale of “forever chemicals” polluting rivers and seas and threatening human and animal health, the Green MP [Caroline Lucas](#) has said.

The Guardian has revealed that high levels of per- and polyfluoroalkyl substances (PFAS), known as [forever chemicals](#), have been found at thousands of sites across the UK and Europe in a major mapping project.

The map shows drinking water sources in the UK have been contaminated with [PFAS](#). Water companies say the pollutants do not make it into the final tap water because they are blended with another source to dilute the chemicals, or they undergo a specialised treatment process to be removed.

But Caroline Lucas, the MP for Brighton Pavilion, said: “A cocktail of toxic persistent chemicals is polluting our rivers and seas, infecting our food and water supply, and posing a severe threat to human health, marine and animal life. Yet the UK’s chemical pollution limits are nowhere near international standards, and water companies’ claims that blending chemicals with other sources to dilute the pollutants simply won’t wash.

“The government urgently needs to get a grip on this chemical crisis and adopt tougher regulations now.”

Data obtained from water companies and the Environment Agency by the Guardian and Watershed shows that since 2006 about 120 samples of drinking water sources have been found to contain concentrations of perfluorooctane sulfonate (PFOS) or perfluorooctanoic acid (PFOA), collectively known as PFAS, at above the 100ng/l level. This is the level at which the Drinking Water Inspectorate (DWI) guidelines say water companies should take action to reduce the concentrations before supplying people’s homes. Until 2009, the DWI guideline limit was much higher, at 3,000ng/l. The guideline limits for PFAS in drinking water are much lower in the US.

Forever chemicals are one of the reasons no river in England passes [biological and chemical pollution](#) tests.

Philip Dunne, the Conservative chair of the environmental audit committee, led an inquiry into river water quality that concluded a chemical cocktail of pollutants was pouring into waterways. His committee has called on

ministers to carry out a UK-wide survey to understand better the chemicals we are being exposed to in everyday life.

“The stark fact is that we are blind to the harmful pollutants coursing through our waterways because they are simply not being routinely monitored,” said Dunne. “Monitoring for these persistent pollutants absolutely must be improved if we have any hope in turning the tide: not a single river in England has received a clean bill of health for chemical contamination.”

He added: “It was disappointing the government did not accept the committee’s recommendations in the toxic chemicals report it made in 2019, and in the water quality in rivers report of 2022, that a UK-wide survey be undertaken to understand better the chemicals we are being exposed to in everyday life. I trust the government’s current work to address water quality will prioritise the systematic monitoring of forever chemicals.”

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In a [tweet](#), Mary Creagh, who previously chaired the Commons’ environmental audit committee, said: “Everything we do to the Earth, we do



to ourselves. Environmental pollution causes huge damage to human health.”

The dangers of PFAS are widely known in the US, thanks in part to the pioneering work of the lawyer Rob Bilott, who was played by Mark Ruffalo in the 2019 film about this subject, Dark Waters. On Friday, he [tweeted](#) about the revelations.

Massive contamination across the UK and Europe from [#PFAS](#) “forever chemicals” - for the history of how this happened, read the book “Exposure” or see the film [@DarkWaters\\_UK](#) [@rightlivelihood](#) [@thinkfilmimpact](#) [@Taftlaw](#) [@Participant](#) [@MarkRuffalo](#) [@Lesscancer](#) [@YaleSPH](#) <https://t.co/wVn79SRFh5>

— Robert Bilott (@RobertBilott) [February 24, 2023](#)

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The River Roding in east London has 20 times the level of PFAS the EU standard is proposing. Photograph: Graham Turner/The Guardian

[PFAS](#)

## UK risks falling behind Europe in controlling ‘forever chemicals’

Only two of thousands of PFAS are regulated, while the EU is already contemplating stricter standards

- [Ministers told to get a grip on scale of ‘forever chemicals’ pollution in UK](#)

[Rachel Salvidge](#) and [Leana Hosea](#)

Sat 25 Feb 2023 02.00 EST Last modified on Sat 25 Feb 2023 02.01 EST

PFAS “forever chemicals” are everywhere, they don’t break down in the environment, and they can build up in the body and can be toxic. The world is waking up to the issue but so far action has been slow.

There are thousands of PFAS but in the UK, just two – PFOS and PFOA – are regulated, and the country risks falling behind the EU, where plans to get a grip on the substances are under way.

The European Chemicals Agency is considering a proposal by Denmark, Germany, the Netherlands, Norway and Sweden to restrict the manufacture and use of about 10,000 PFAS in an effort to regulate them as a class, reduce emissions and make products safer.

The EU is also contemplating stricter new standards on the levels of PFAS that are deemed safe in rivers. Currently an environmental quality standard for rivers is in place in the UK only for PFOS at an annual average of 0.65 nanograms/litre with a maximum allowable concentration of 36,000ng/l.

The proposed EU standard goes well beyond this, mooting a level of 4.4ng/l of PFOA equivalents for the sum of 24 PFAS. The sum is calculated using relative potency factors, which multiply or divide concentration values depending on how potent a PFAS is compared with PFOA.

Judged against them, many of England's rivers would fail.

Analysis by the [Rivers](#) Trust for the Wildlife and Countryside Link (WCL) nature coalition found that at least 81 of 105 of English river sites where PFAS had been found would not meet the standard, with 44 exceeding the level by more than five times.

Some river sites, including on the River Ouse in Bedfordshire, the River Avon in Somerset and the River Mersey in Cheshire, have at least 10 times the EU's proposed new safe level of PFAS, with the River Roding in east London having more than 20 times this amount, according to the analysis.

Richard Benwell, the chief executive of WCL, said: "Our research on English rivers found toxic chemical concentrations at levels that will soon be deemed unsafe across the rest of Europe.

"Without swift action, the UK could fall behind on protecting the public and nature from pollutants like hormone-disrupting PFAS chemicals, which can

build up in our rivers for thousands of years.”

He added that the government’s forthcoming chemicals strategy and PFAS regulations were a chance to take a lead. “The government should ban unnecessary PFAS use, tackle similar chemicals as a group, and set safety standards that account for the growing risks of chemical cocktail effects.”

WCL is concerned that official monitoring data covers only a handful of PFAS chemicals and that not all rivers are tested, so pollution levels could be much worse.

Rob Collins, director of policy and science at the Rivers Trust, said more resource was needed for monitoring. “We urgently need government to take action to markedly reduce the release of PFAS to the environment if we are to avoid a worsening toxic legacy for our rivers,” he said.

PFAS pollution in rivers poses a threat not only to wildlife, but potentially to human health, too.

“Fish can bioaccumulate PFAS and if people are eating that fish, then people could become ill,” said Cecilia MacLeod, programme lead for wastewater and environmental engineering at the University of Greenwich. “And if those fish are being ingested by birds, by water mammals, then you could be impacting a much wider biome.”

Industry is pushing back against the EU’s proposals to ban all 10,000 PFAS as a class. “Fluoropolymers are needed to meet the EU’s priority objectives in terms of the green transition and digitalisation,” said Nicolas Robin, the director of the Fluoropolymer Product Group. He believes it is not acceptable to group all PFAS together, saying fluoropolymers are different toxicologically.

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“There are different PFAS,” said Linda Birnbaum, a toxicologist and former director of the US National Institute of Environmental Health Sciences, “but every single one is never going to go away from the environment”.

It took up to 40 years to gather enough data on PFOS and PFOA to pass regulation, and it could take a similar amount of time to research another two PFAS, Birnbaum said. Using this method, “we’re never going to get to 12,000”, she said. “We’ve been regulating groups of chemicals for years ... that is the pragmatic approach.”

Improved technology at wastewater treatment works can reduce pollution in drinking water and rivers but is expensive and creates its own waste. “Granular activated carbon is effective for removal of PFAS like PFOA and PFOS, but other ... PFAS are less efficiently removed,” said Rita Loch-Caruso, a professor of toxicology at the University of Michigan.

“It is only now that we are starting to realise just how much damage we have done,” said David Megson, forensic environmental scientist at Manchester Metropolitan University. “Water companies are going to have to be more vigilant than ever to ensure drinking water is fit for our consumption, and this will require more testing and additional resources. To me it seems unfair that they and the consumers should pay the costs for this when neither are responsible for the pollution.”

Despite the challenge ahead, Ian Cousins, an environmental scientist at Stockholm University, is optimistic. “I think there’s a hopeful message globally, there’s a lot of change on the way,” he said. “You have this

restriction proposal in the EU. There's also a lot of progressive companies, like Apple, which has now committed to the phaseout of PFAS. Even some PFAS manufacturers are moving in the right direction.”

A government spokesperson said: “We are working at pace across government to assess the levels of PFAS occurring in the environment. We will shortly publish further analysis of the risks of PFAS which will also make recommendations to inform future policy – with further details on our approach to be announced later this year.

“We will also establish an expert advisory board who will consider a range of international research to help us ensure our drinking water standards and regulations continue to be based on the latest evidence.

“Since the 2000s we have taken action to increase the monitoring of PFAS, including initiating the environmental monitoring for PFOS and PFOA and later expanding this to include a wider range of PFAS. We have also taken actions to support a ban or highly restrict specific PFAS both domestically and internationally.”

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Theo Clarke said: ‘I have only returned from maternity leave this week and I have been very disappointed by the abuse that I have received since I announced I was having a baby.’ Photograph: UK Parliament/PA

[Conservatives](#)

## **Tory MP reveals abuse over pregnancy as reselection bid fails**

Theo Clarke, niece of Jacob Rees-Mogg and Stafford MP since 2019, says she will now approach party membership

*PA Media*

Fri 24 Feb 2023 18.56 ESTLast modified on Sat 25 Feb 2023 02.18 EST

A Conservative MP said she is “deeply disappointed” not to have been chosen as the party’s candidate to fight a revised version of her current seat.

Theo Clarke announced the outcome of Friday’s Stafford Conservative Association selection meeting on Twitter.

The parliamentarian, who has recently returned from maternity leave, also revealed that she had been on the receiving end of “abuse” since announcing she was having a baby.

According to reports, some on social media were critical of her having six months away from parliament for maternity leave.

My statement following tonight’s selection meeting in Stafford [pic.twitter.com/zixMTjcY4b](https://pic.twitter.com/zixMTjcY4b)

— Theo Clarke MP (@theodoraclarke) [February 24, 2023](#)

Clarke, the niece of former business secretary Jacob Rees-Mogg, was elected as MP for Stafford in 2019 with a majority of more than 14,000.

In a statement on social media, she said: “I am deeply disappointed not to have been adopted this evening as the Conservative candidate to fight the new Stafford constituency at the next general election.

“Living at home in the new constituency and working here, I stood on a record of successfully bringing investment into Stafford such as millions for mental health services and crucial infrastructure.”

Clarke said she had “tirelessly campaigned” for investment to “make Stafford an even greater better place to live, work and raise a family”.

She added: “I have only returned from maternity leave this week and I have been very disappointed by the abuse that I have received since I announced I was having a baby.

“The selection committee have made their decision and it is my full intention to go to the membership.”

Clarke contested the seat of Bristol East at the 2015 and 2017 general elections before her success in Stafford during Boris Johnson’s landslide victory.

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The next general election, due to be held by the end of January 2025, will see some constituencies contested under new boundaries as part of an attempt to make voter numbers per MP more equal.

On Sunday, senior [Tory Damian Green was rejected as the party's candidate for the newly created Weald of Kent constituency](#).

Green, who was effectively deputy prime minister under Theresa May, has been the MP for Ashford since 1997 and is a centrist Conservative.

David Campbell Bannerman, chairman of the Conservative Democratic Organisation, suggested Green's rejection was part of a bid to "directly hold to account and punish" MPs associated with putting an end to Mr Johnson's premiership.

In July, Clarke quit as trade envoy to Kenya as part of a series of resignations in protest at Johnson's leadership.

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Ken Bruce in a BBC Radio 2 studio Photograph: Mike Lawn/Rex/Shutterstock

[Radio 2](#)

## Ken Bruce says BBC has hastened his Radio 2 exit

Veteran presenter says BBC has brought forward his last show to beginning rather than end of March

[Nadeem Badshah](#)

Fri 24 Feb 2023 18.01 EST Last modified on Fri 24 Feb 2023 18.05 EST

Ken Bruce has suggested he has been forced to leave the BBC earlier than he intended with his final [Radio 2](#) show scheduled for next week rather than at the end of March.

The 71-year-old Scottish broadcasting veteran will present his final 9.30am-to-midday show on 3 March.

He wrote [on Twitter](#): “I will be presenting my last show on Radio 2 next Friday. I had intended fulfilling my contract until the end of March but the BBC has decided it wants me to leave earlier. Let’s enjoy the week ahead!”

Vernon Kay, 48, is [returning to the BBC to replace Bruce](#) on the coveted mid-morning weekday show, the broadcaster announced earlier on Friday.

Bruce announced last month he would be stepping down from presenting on [Radio 2](#) after 31 years.

The [BBC](#) confirmed Gary Davies, host of the station’s Sounds of the 80s, would present the mid-morning show from 6 March until Kay joined on a yet to be confirmed date in May.

A BBC spokesperson said: “Ken decided to leave Radio 2 and it’s always been known he’s leaving in March.

“Returning to [BBC Two’s base at] Wogan House for a week after a month of broadcasting the [Piano Room sessions](#) at Maida Vale provided a natural break. We wish Ken all the best for the future.”

Bruce is joining Bauer’s Greatest Hits Radio in April to present a new mid-morning show from 10am to 1pm.

He has hosted the current incarnation of his show since 1992, and prior to that had worked at the broadcaster since 1978.

There has been widespread criticism of Radio 2’s recent effort to rejuvenate its lineup.

Longstanding DJs Paul O’Grady, Vanessa Feltz, Craig Charles and Simon Mayo have all left or announced their departures in recent months. Their replacements – such as Rylan Clark and Michelle Visage – are all younger, leading to ageism complaints from listeners.

Steve Wright also left his weekday afternoon show last year, replaced by former Radio 1 DJ Scott Mills, but still hosts Sunday Love Songs and occasional specials.

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Vernon Kay will replace Ken Bruce on his mid-morning weekday slot on BBC Radio 2. Photograph: Richard Sellers/PA

[Vernon Kay](#).

## Vernon Kay confirmed as new host of Ken Bruce's BBC Radio 2 slot

TV presenter will take over in May when veteran Scottish broadcaster steps down after 31 years

[Rachel Hall](#)

[@rachela\\_hall](#)

Fri 24 Feb 2023 11.09 ESTFirst published on Fri 24 Feb 2023 10.57 EST

Vernon Kay is returning to the BBC to replace Ken Bruce on his Radio 2 mid-morning weekday show, the broadcaster has confirmed.

The 48-year-old TV presenter will take over in May to replace the Scottish broadcasting veteran, who [announced last month he would be stepping down](#) from presenting on Radio 2 after 31 years.

Bruce will present his final 9.30am-to-midday show on 3 March.

Kay, who is married to Strictly Come Dancing presenter Tess Daly, is best known for fronting Channel 4's T4 and ITV programmes including All Star Family Fortunes, Just The Two Of Us and Beat The Star.

But he has previously hosted BBC radio, including his own Radio 1 show between 2004 and 2012. He is also a familiar voice on [Radio 2](#), filling in for presenters including Zoe Ball, Steve Wright, Rylan Clark and Dermot O'Leary. Kay also hosted Radio X between 2015 and 2017.

He said: "I'm absolutely over the moon to be handed the microphone to present the mid-morning show on [Radio 2](#), and what an honour to follow in the footsteps of the mighty Ken Bruce.

"I look forward to playing some of the best music in the world whilst in the company of the Radio 2 listeners who I feel I've got to know over the last 18 months. It's a dream come true to join the Radio 2 family and I can't wait to start."

Helen Thomas, head of Radio 2, said Kay was picked as a "hugely talented, warm and witty host" who is already a "firm favourite" with listeners after filling in for other hosts.

Nevertheless, there has been widespread criticism of Radio 2's recent effort to rejuvenate its lineup. Longstanding DJs Paul O'Grady, Vanessa Feltz, Craig Charles and Simon Mayo have all left or announced their departures in recent months. Their replacements – such as Rylan Clark and Michelle Visage – are all younger, leading to ageism complaints from listeners.

Steve Wright also left his weekday afternoon show last year – replaced by former Radio 1 DJ Scott Mills – but still hosts Sunday Love Songs and occasional specials.

Speaking to the Guardian in December, Feltz said of her departure: "I was aware of women over the age of 60 suddenly biting the dust. I don't think that I would have been exempt from that at all.

“It seems to be a casual culling and jettisoning of proper broadcasting adornments. And it feels as if that casualness and that callousness is applying not just to the presenters but to the audience. It’s like: ‘Oh, we don’t need you and we don’t want you. You’re too old, you’re too staid, you’re too middle-class, you’re too middle-aged.’”

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The [BBC](#) confirmed Gary Davies, host of the station’s Sounds of the 80s, would present the mid-morning show from 6 March until Kay joined on a yet to be confirmed date in May.

He will introduce a new weekday pop quiz to replace Bruce’s popular PopMaster format, as well as continuing his own radio show, which he has fronted since 2018.

Bruce announced he was leaving the BBC in January before confirming he would be moving to Bauer’s Greatest Hits Radio in April to present a new mid-morning show from 10am to 1pm.

The 72-year-old, who started at the BBC in his early 30s, said he would always be proud of his association with the BBC and Radio 2, but that he wanted to continue his career “in a slightly different way in the next few years”.

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## 2023.02.25 - Spotlight

- [Widows by Margaret Atwood Read the exclusive short story](#)
- [Dining across the divide US special 'She tried to educate me on why AR-15s aren't really military-style weapons'](#)
- [Blind date She said I looked like Paul Mescal but it might have been the cocktails talking](#)
- [Sex Actually With Alice Levine No other presenter is this good at bizarre intercourse](#)

# Widows by Margaret Atwood – read the exclusive short story

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Heidi, left, and Janalee. All photographs: Chad Kirkland/The Guardian

[Dining across the divide US special](#)[Life and style](#)

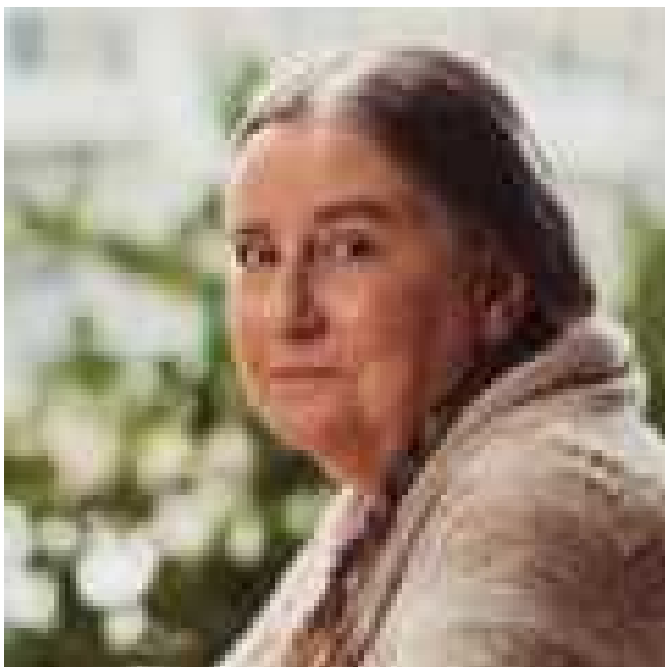
**Dining across the divide US special:  
‘She tried to educate me on why AR-15s**

## aren't really military-style weapons'

One is anti-abortion and pro-guns. The other is pro-choice and thinks 'war tools' shouldn't be in the hands of the public. Could they agree to disagree?

[Edward Helmore](#)

Sat 25 Feb 2023 02.00 EST



**Heidi, 62, Price, Utah**

**Occupation** Retired school teacher

**Voting record** Usually Democrat

**Amuse bouche** Heidi is an enthusiastic archaeologist and anthropologist. "We can learn a lot about how to use the land and protect it," she says



**Janalee, 59, South Jordan, Utah**

**Occupation** Campaigner for God, guns and urban green space

**Voting record** Has previously voted Democrat or Independent. Now straight-ticket Republican

**Amuse bouche** Janalee's grandfather, Jesse, had five wives and 44 children. She has 80,000 cousins, she says, "like a multilevel marketing scheme"

### **For starters**

**Janalee** We shared an appetizer of loaded rock chips, then I had an omelet with vegetables, bacon and sausage. I was worried we were going to fight. I told Heidi I lost my best friend over Donald Trump, but she wasn't mean to me about supporting him. It never felt confrontational. We weren't representing corporations; we were there as grandmothers who care.

**Heidi** I had a Reuben sandwich and fries. Janalee told me she's a Trump person. I said that's OK. She said something about a stolen election. I thought, "Oh good grief." I don't think the election was stolen. A lot of

people like Trump because of his personality, but that's the reason I don't like him.



## The big beef

**Heidi** Janalee tried to educate me on why AR-15s aren't really military-style weapons. I don't have a problem with handguns, shotguns and rifles, but these new fancy guns – the ARs, the Uzis that became a problem in 90s – should not be in the hands of the public. It's a war tool and we just don't need it. I said no to guns in the classroom, absolutely not.

**Janalee** I prefer to talk about people violence not gun violence. A gun doesn't do anything – it can just sit on a table fully loaded for 1,000 years. An AR-15 isn't a military weapon. We have a constitutional right to own them. We did agree that schools should have some kind of sign, maybe like: "Warning to criminals: we protect our children". We agreed that the news media is irresponsible in the way they report stories about guns.

**Heidi** I agree that some news channels only focus on the group that watches them. That's true on the left and right. They fearmonger and rile people up.



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**Janalee** Abortion was the subject that scared us both the most. She said women should be able to get an abortion. So I said: “What’s your understanding of the [supreme court ruling](#)?” She said: “To turn it back to



the states.” I said: “Yes, it did.” Heidi asked if I could bend on abortion. She said: “Maybe we could agree on 10 weeks?” I said: “OK, maybe we can agree on 10 weeks, but the methods used to kill babies are still barbaric.”

**Heidi** Janalee is totally against abortion. I think every women should have the right to make that decision, and there should be a federal right to abortion up to 10 weeks to ensure the safety of the woman. Most women know they’re pregnant by eight weeks. If you go beyond that, then you have to decide to keep the baby or give it up for adoption. There needs to be more support for women to make that decision privately.



## **For afters**

**Janalee** Heidi is a teacher so I listened and learned a lot from her about how slavery is taught in schools. We learned about it in elementary school. Heidi said high school students probably need a refresher course. I remembered that in school we created a slave cell as a classroom exercise. Someone would be the enslaver and someone the slave. It was really powerful. I said: “Why don’t we do role play about the civil war? One side fights to keep slavery, and the other to end it.” Because America ended slavery. It’s not the evil empire. But I’m sure slavery still exists, like in China.



**Heidi** We have to learn about slavery and other bad things that happened in this country, so we don't repeat them. Janalee said: "Well, what about other countries?" I said that can be done in a world history class. I just stressed: teach the facts. I want students to think on their own. But we shouldn't be doing slavery role play.



## Takeaways

**Heidi** We live in a conservative state, but we're pretty mellow about it. People have different opinions, but we're not going to get in your face about it. We respected each other's opinions and considered each other's proposals. Sometimes you have to give a little to get what you want.

**Janalee** Heidi was delightful. We agreed that we need to come together as Americans and stop being divided. We felt like some kind of power is trying to separate us and keep us fighting. We wondered, why is this happening?

*Additional reporting: Kitty Drake*

Heidi and Janalee ate at [Balance Rock Eatery & Pub](#) in Helper, Utah.

Want to meet someone from across the divide? [Find out how to take part](#)

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Photograph: David Levene/The Guardian

[Blind date](#)[Relationships](#)

**Blind date: ‘She said I looked like Paul Mescal but it might have been the**

# cocktails talking'

Tyla, 28, furniture restorer, meets Toby, 29, a sales manager

Sat 25 Feb 2023 01.00 EST

## Tyla on Toby



### **What were you hoping for?**

Someone who I wouldn't need to prise their life story out of, with a bit of fire in their belly.

### **First impressions?**

Very polite and cool as a cucumber.

### **What did you talk about?**

How well dressed he was. Hot yoga. Decent kebab vans. Houseshares. People-watching. Launderette stories. Boats.

### **Most awkward moment?**

When I told him I didn't eat meat while sitting in a steakhouse (although

there were veggie options).

**Good table manners?**

Yes. We shared the starter – how romantic.

**Best thing about Toby?**

The conversation was very balanced, no awkward voids to fill, and he was quite inquisitive. Sometimes with dates it's like squeezing blood out of a stone.

**Would you introduce Toby to your friends?**

Yes.

**Describe Toby in three words.**

Thoughtful, kind, salt of the earth.

**What do you think Toby made of you?**

That I was boat mad.

**Did you go on somewhere?**

Yes, to a pub.

**And ... did you kiss?**

Yes just a lickle one.

**If you could change one thing about the evening what would it be?**

Everywhere was closing so we had to just take any pub we could get.

**Marks out of 10?**

8.

**Would you meet again?**

Yes, Toby was a good date.



Toby and Tyla during their date  
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](https://www.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.

**Toby on Tyla**



**What were you hoping for?**

Someone who'd studied the menu and was up for sharing either the tomahawk or porterhouse.

**First impressions?**

She looked great and instantly made me feel at ease.

**What did you talk about?**

Living on a boat – I had a million questions that I managed to slip in during the course of the evening.

**Most awkward moment?**

Discovering Tyla is a vegetarian while we were in a steakhouse.

**Good table manners?**

I didn't notice, which is a positive.

**Best thing about Tyla?**

She's fun to hang out with and a good conversationalist.

**Would you introduce Tyla to your friends?**

She'd get on with anyone.



**Describe Tyla in three words.**

Attractive, engaging, interesting.

**What do you think Tyla made of you?**

Overall positive. At one point she said I looked like Paul Mescal but I think that was the cocktails talking.

**Did you go on somewhere?**

After schlepping across London, we found a place for a few Guinnesses.

**And ... did you kiss?**

Briefly.

**If you could change one thing about the evening what would it be?**

My trousers. I managed to rip them cycling to the restaurant.

**Marks out of 10**

8.

**Would you meet again?**

I'd definitely like to see her again, and check out her houseboat at some point.

*Tyla and Toby ate at SK Steakhouse, London SW1. Fancy a blind date?  
Email [blind.date@theguardian.com](mailto:blind.date@theguardian.com)*

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From left: Alice, Mimi (doll) and Alexander in Sex Actually With Alice Levine. Photograph: Barnaby Fry/Liana Stewart/Channel 4

[The watcherTelevision](#)

## Sex Actually With Alice Levine: no other presenter is this good at bizarre intercourse

From VR brothels to ‘synthetic’ wives, Levine’s fun and empathic presenting style is just perfect. If we’re ever to grasp the dizzying world of tech-inspired sex, she’s a must

[Joel Golby](#)

Sat 25 Feb 2023 02.00 EST

Sex! Ah, you’ve gone all uncomfortable, haven’t you. Blushing and wriggling in your chair. Is someone watching you read this? What if ... what if they see the word “Sex!” there, right at the top? They’re going to

think you're a pervert, aren't they? They're going to tell all the neighbours. Your life as you know it is going to end. Maybe take this to a private room and finish it there.

Anyway, now you've calmed down, Channel 4 is back with a second series of Sex Actually With Alice Levine (Monday 27 February, 10pm). Shows such as these don't [normally make it](#) to series two – a roving reporter, going on a hyper-itineraried trip around Berlin or Northampton or the US, probing gently (and with an occasional raised eyebrow) at generous interviewees who explain their one-degree-from-usual approaches to sex and intimacy, accompanied by a closeup shot of the gnarled fingers of a sex doll? But what makes Sex Actually With Alice Levine so good is her. There is nobody else in Britain who can so cheerfully go “Oh! OK so that's my penis” in a VR sex dungeon in Berlin and make it seem like something between a fun jape and a deeply important emotional toolkit for the modern world.

It's fair to say, as a nation, we're strange about sex (remember when you went bright red two paragraphs up?). But intercourse culture is accelerating at a dizzying rate, and Channel 4 has for years been the main channel trying to document that (don't mention [Planet Sex With Cara Delevingne](#) to me, please. I've had enough). It's hard to get the tone of voice of sex right – at once an inherently stupid and serious thing, the sharp tip of many couples' foundational intimacy but also a sort of fun game you can play with someone you met at a nightclub and don't know the surname of – and the advent of the internet, 4K pornography, kink forums and a general millennial and gen X open-mindedness that has taken sex to a very new and world-changing place. This ain't your grandma's missionary intercourse! We've got Second Life furies here, using digital hardware to penetrate each other from a thousand miles away!



Levine with Adela and Philipp. Photograph: Barnaby Fry/Liana Stewart/Channel 4

Again, it's Levine keeping this train on the rails. She's just so perfect in the role: jokey but not always pushing for the joke; light-touch with the more delicate stories but unafraid to be a bit silly with whatever bizarre new sex aid is presented to her; crucially, quite visibly squeamish about a lot of it but never in a way that makes anyone else uncomfortable; and, probably most importantly, truly empathetic and interrogative. In the first episode we meet Alexander, a sweet US-based gas station attendant who is in a relationship with what he calls his "synthetic wife", Mimi. Mimi is an AI presence he can interact with via his phone and computer, but he's also got a physical avatar for her in the form of a demurely dressed sex doll, which sits on his sofa and digitally tries to talk over everything he says. In the wrong hands this would be a deeply strange situation or the opening scene of an indie horror movie, but with Levine there it's suddenly fun, interesting and not normal exactly but not *not* normal. Mimi and Alexander seem incredibly at peace. They all have a meal with his mum and it's a lot more wholesome than you'd expect.

That line in empathic open-mindedness really gets people to open up, too. In Berlin, at a new sex-doll-and-VR brothel run by Philipp (or, as Levine describes him, "sex work's answer to Willy Wonka") and his girlfriend

Adela, Levine tries out the various Blade Runneresque wares, watches as Adela commentates a client's session, then sits down with them both in their incredible sprawling flat. "I know our normal is not the normal of the world," Adela admits, "but everyone is like, come as you are. And in many ways cum as you are." During a brief trip to a US robotic workshop, Levine gets the creator to say, out of nowhere: "We as humans need each other: we hate to love each other and love to hate each other!" as a pneumatically breasted sex doll that just faked an orgasm flutteringly blinks behind him.

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The whole series is filled with these curiously beautiful human moments, all while someone or something wears an ill-fitting bra in the background. Listen, sex has changed. I'm scared of it and you're scared of it, too. But if we're ever going to understand it again, this series is somehow going to be involved.

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## 2023.02.25 - Opinion

- If Keir Starmer is to win an election, he has to restore Britain's faith in politics
- Ten years ago I won a trip to New York. If this happened today I'd delete the email
- For years, Putin didn't invade Ukraine. What made him finally snap in 2022?
- Edith Pritchett on millennial life We promise you the craziest shave of your life!



‘The very depth of the hole that got Keir Starmer into Downing Street could swallow him up once he’s there.’ The Labour leader announcing the party’s ‘five missions’, Manchester, 23 February 2023. Photograph: Gary Roberts Photography/REX/Shutterstock

[OpinionLabour](#)

## **If Keir Starmer is to win an election, he has to restore Britain’s faith in politics**

[Jonathan Freedland](#)





The Tories have smashed up the country so much, there's little confidence that anyone can do better. That's dangerous for Labour

Sat 25 Feb 2023 01.00 ESTLast modified on Sat 25 Feb 2023 07.26 EST

Everyone will have their own moment when they concluded that things were broken, but here's mine. I was talking to the headteacher of an east London primary school who told me of a pupil who had attempted suicide three times. The head had sought urgent intervention from a range of services, but had had no luck. The services all said they were simply too stretched to help.

I can't shake that story. I'm haunted by the notion of a child so young and in such distress that they wanted to take their own life. But I think too of the state of our country, where the safety net that should catch such a child is [so frayed and torn](#) it is no longer there. Because we all know it's not just this one area – mental health provision for young people – that's in a parlous state. The damage is everywhere.

It could be the A&E wards where patients wait all night to be seen, or the [ambulances that don't come](#), or the [trains that don't work](#). The prisons that



are overcrowded, the courts jammed by backlogs, [the military so shrunk](#) by cuts that the brass warn they can no longer defend the country. The [classes that are so big](#), children cannot learn properly. I'm told that when focus groups are asked to describe in a single word the current state of Britain, they come back with "grim".

You would think the political impact of all this would be obvious: disaster for the incumbent party that has presided over a 13-year hollowing out of the public realm, and a boost for the opposition that seeks to replace it. On one level, that is indeed what is happening. Note the sustained [average poll lead](#) for Labour of 20 points or more: proof that voters have looked at the condition of Britain, the evidence of their daily lives, and lost faith in the people in charge.

But that verdict contains foreboding for [Labour](#) too. Put crudely, the Tories have smashed up the place so badly, Britons may well instruct Labour to clear up – thereby handing them an increasingly daunting, if not impossible, task. Suddenly, those overcrowded classes and unbearable waiting times will not be reasons to support Labour: they will be Labour's duty to fix.

The last time the party seemed set to replace a Tory government was in 1997, and then too that meant repairing a public sphere neglected for years. But there is a big difference this time. When Tony Blair took over, the UK economy was growing, the exchequer flush with rising tax receipts. Now the country is not merely at a low point in the economic cycle, when you might assume an upturn is on the way, but in a period of structural decline: growth in labour [productivity is lower](#) now than it has been for 250 years. As the economist [Adam Tooze puts it](#), assessing the epoch from the start of the Industrial Revolution until now: "There has literally never been a period of underperformance, of stagnation in labour productivity, of the type that we have seen since the 2010s."

So a new Labour government would come under immediate pressure to restore services long starved of cash, and yet it will struggle to spend what needs to be spent. The very depth of the hole that got [Keir Starmer](#) into Downing Street could swallow him up once he's there.

Labour's high command understands the danger. This is why, when Starmer unveiled his "[five missions](#)" for government in Manchester on Thursday, he used the phrase "long term" five times, spelling out that some of Labour's ambitions could not be realised over a mere five years in office. He is already in the business of managing expectations, warning Britons that if they see a country that is broken now, it will take more than one term for Labour to put it back together again (which made it all the odder that he promised to deliver "the highest sustained growth in the G7" within a single parliament).

In the same vein, Starmer is returning to the New Labour playbook and speaking of [public service "reform"](#). To be sure, Starmer and his team genuinely believe that Britain's crumbling services need more than cash to work better, but they also know that reform is something a new government could actually do, even when money is scarce.

Some Labour supporters will say these are good problems to have, that if the current Tory mess ensures a Labour victory, they can live with the challenge of the clean-up job to come. But it may not be quite as simple as that.

Because no win is guaranteed when the public mood is sceptical, even cynical, about whether politics works. That mood has been reinforced by the appalling behaviour of the [Conservatives](#) – the kamikaze administration of Liz Truss, the serial scandals and deceptions of Boris Johnson – but its impact is not confined to the Conservatives. It affects, however unfairly, politics as a whole. The toxic combination of both the conduct and the record of the Tories has left people doubting government's ability to improve their lives – and that hurts Labour, which believes in an active, interventionist state, especially.

The party sees it in its own focus groups. Even when presented with a small, specific proposal, voters instantly ask how it can be done, how it would be paid for. "People's belief that even modest change is possible is just rock bottom," one senior Labour figure tells me. In that context, making Labour's promise bigger or bolder, as some advocate, is hardly a

solution: it would only lead voters to conclude that the party is disconnected from reality.

As a result, Starmer's first task is to make the case for the efficacy of politics. It's always better to show rather than tell, which is one reason why the Labour leader likes to point to the transformation he has brought about in his own party. As leader of the opposition, it's the only major change he can effect. Except Starmer can also cite his record at the Crown Prosecution Service. The aim is the same: to break through the cynicism and prove that politicians can get things done.

This, then, is the paradox of our current politics: that what hurts the Tories helps but also hurts Labour. Yes, the dismal Conservative performance in office has given Labour a fat poll lead, but that failure is understood by too many voters as the failure of politics itself, sapping public confidence that Labour could do any better. That makes a Labour win less certain. More sobering still: even if victory comes, the new government will be staring into a hole so deep, plenty will doubt the country can ever dig itself out.

- Jonathan Freedland is a Guardian columnist
- In the UK, the youth suicide charity [Papyrus](#) can be contacted on 0800 068 4141 or email [pat@papyrus-uk.org](mailto:pat@papyrus-uk.org), and in the UK and Ireland [Samaritans](#) can be contacted on freephone 116 123, or email [jo@samaritans.org](mailto:jo@samaritans.org) or [jo@samaritans.ie](mailto:jo@samaritans.ie). In the US, the [National Suicide Prevention Lifeline](#) is at 988 or chat for support. You can also text HOME to 741741 to connect with a crisis text line counselor. In Australia, the crisis support service [Lifeline](#) is 13 11 14. Other international helplines can be found at [befrienders.org](#)



‘Ever since that day I’ve been convinced that you’ve got to be in it to win it. No doubt such belief has sold many a lottery ticket and birthed a fair few unexpected millionaires, so why shouldn’t it be you?’ Photograph: Gary Hershorn/Getty Images

[Opinion](#)[Australian lifestyle](#)

## **Ten years ago I won a trip to New York. If this happened today I’d delete the email**

[Maddie Thomas](#)



Something so incredible had to be a scam. No one at school could believe it either

Fri 24 Feb 2023 18.00 ESTLast modified on Sat 25 Feb 2023 16.35 EST

Everyone needs a good dinner-party story up their sleeve. Mine? I once won a trip to [New York](#).

I was 16 and, at the start of school term in 2013, I set out to make a short film for English class. I'd always been a film buff so it was, in part, a test to see if film-making could be a future career.

For inspiration I turned to the short film festival [Tropfest](#). While trawling through the winning films, a pop-up window appeared: "Win a trip to Tropfest NYC."

For once you didn't have to write 25 words on why you wanted to go or who you'd take – no witty one-liner required. And so I absentmindedly typed in my email address and hit enter.

Within a month, I received a response:.

You've won return air fare + 4 nights accommodation for you and a friend to go to New York to do Tropfest in style.

I was jumping around the living room, but my parents were dubious. Something so incredible had to be a scam. No one at school could believe it either, so I was forced to quell my excitement.

It had been so simple that a part of me didn't trust it either. I barely remembered entering and had just ticked the box saying I was over 16 and had my parent's consent – never imagining I'd have to prove it.

It didn't help that we'd never heard of the now-dormant company sponsoring the prize. But after a few emails back and forth, the notion it was a hoax faded. When my name was published in the paper, sandwiched between the winners of an SBS lunar new year adventure and an Uncle Toby's competition, it finally felt real.



Newspaper clipping of Maddie Thomas winning a trip to NYC. Photograph: Maddie Thomas

If I won this trip today, in a world where [scams are rampant](#), I think I'd delete the email, too scared I was being duped. I can't imagine sending copies of my passport to someone who never even provided their last name.

But 10 years ago we didn't treat every text with suspicion and fishy calls were less likely to catch you off guard. I remember phoney calls would always go to the landline about 7pm, just as you were sitting down to dinner, and there would be a few seconds of crackly noise after you answered.

Just be sure to do your due diligence – so you might be a victor rather than a scam victim

In my correspondence with the organiser there is one email in the chain, where, after a week or two of silence, 16-year-old me asks for an update on our flight bookings. I can sense some fear my dream was about to be destroyed.

But everything arrived, from festival passes to plane tickets, and we were sent on our way, into a yellow taxi and to Manhattan, where we were greeted by a concierge who said bonjour and bonsoir as we walked through the hotel lobby.

I was enchanted. New York was full of landmarks I knew from the movies, from the Empire State Building to [Katz's Deli](#). Mum and I developed a penchant for breakfast bagels and tried to cover as many boroughs as we could in two weeks (we extended our stay). High on luck, we made the most of everything.

I made my short film to show off some of those moments. More of a compilation than a narrative, and cut to the beat of Jay-Z's Empire State of Mind. Watching it now, it's clear I wasn't destined to be a film-maker. But it reminds me of the [sights and sounds of an incredible city](#).

Ever since that day I've been convinced that you've got to be in it to win it. No doubt such belief has sold many a lottery ticket and birthed a fair few unexpected millionaires, so why shouldn't it be you? After my stroke of luck, it's an idea my family lives by.

So write the 25 words about why you need the luxury holiday. Guess the number of jelly beans in the jar. Enter the lottery on a whim when you're

walking past the newsagent. You just never know. Just be sure to do your due diligence – so you might be a victor rather than a scam victim.

One day I'll go back to New York on my own dime. For now, it will always be the city I lucked out on.

Maddie Thomas is an editorial assistant at Guardian Australia

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(L-R) Ukraine's president, Volodymyr Zelenskiy, the then German chancellor, Angela Merkel, and Vladimir Putin in December 2019. Photograph: Charles Platiau/AFP/Getty Images

[Opinion Vladimir Putin](#)

## For years, Putin didn't invade Ukraine. What made him finally snap in 2022?

[Anatol Lieven](#)

This war is Russia's fault. But European nations rebuffing Russia during the noughties did not help

Fri 24 Feb 2023 10.43 EST Last modified on Fri 24 Feb 2023 11.05 EST

Why did Vladimir Putin invade Ukraine and try to capture Kyiv in February 2022, and not years earlier? Moscow has always wanted to dominate Ukraine, and Putin has given the reasons for this in his speeches and writings. Why then did he not try to take all or most of the country after the

Ukrainian revolution of 2014, rather than only [annexing Crimea](#), and giving limited, semi-covert help to separatists in the Donbas?

On Friday's one-year anniversary of Russia's criminal invasion of [Ukraine](#), it is worth thinking about precisely how we got to this point – and where things might be going.

Indeed, Russian hardliners spent years criticising their leader for not invading sooner. In 2014, the Ukrainian army was hopelessly weak; in Viktor Yanukovich, the Russians had a pro-Russian, democratically elected Ukrainian president; and incidents like the [killing of pro-Russian demonstrators](#) in Odesa provided a good pretext for action.

The reason for Putin's past restraint lies in what was a core part of Russian strategy dating back to the 1990s: trying to wedge more distance between Europe and the United States, and ultimately to create a new security order in Europe with Russia as a full partner and respected power. It was always clear that a full-scale invasion of Ukraine would destroy any hope of rapprochement with the western Europeans, driving them for the foreseeable future into the arms of the US. Simultaneously, such a move would leave Russia diplomatically isolated and dangerously [dependent on China](#).

This Russian strategy was correctly seen as an attempt to split the west, and cement a Russian sphere of influence in the states of the former Soviet Union. However, having a European security order with Russia at the table would also have removed the risk of a Russian attack on Nato, the EU, and most likely, Ukraine; and allowed Moscow to exert a looser influence over its neighbours – closer perhaps to the present approach of the US to Central America – rather than gripping them tightly. It was an approach that had roots in Mikhail Gorbachev's idea – welcomed in the west at the time – of a “[common European home](#)”.

At one time, Putin subscribed to this idea. He [wrote](#) in 2012 that: “Russia is an inseparable, organic part of Greater Europe, of the wider European civilisation. Our citizens feel themselves to be Europeans.” This vision has

now been abandoned in favour of the concept of Russia as a separate “[Eurasian civilisation](#)”.

Between 1999, when Putin came to power, and 2020, when Biden was elected president of the US, this Russian strategy experienced severe disappointments, but also enough encouraging signs from Paris and Berlin to keep it alive.



Putin and President Macron of France meet in Moscow in February 2022  
Photograph: Sputnik/AFP/Getty Images

The most systematic Russian attempt to negotiate a new European security order came with the interim presidency of Dmitry Medvedev from 2008 to 2012. With Putin’s approval, he proposed a [European security treaty](#) that would have frozen Nato enlargement, effectively ensured the neutrality of Ukraine and other states, and institutionalised consultation on equal terms between Russia and leading western countries. But western states barely even pretended to take these proposals seriously.

In 2014, it appears to have been Chancellor Angela Merkel’s [warnings](#) of “massive damage” to Russia and German-Russian relations that persuaded Putin to call a halt to the advance of the Russian-backed separatists in the Donbas. In return, Germany refused to arm Ukraine, and with France,

brokered the [Minsk 2](#) agreement, whereby the Donbas would return to Ukraine as an autonomous territory.

In 2016, Russian hopes of a split between western [Europe](#) and the United States were revived by the election of Donald Trump – not because of any specific policy, rather because of the strong hostility that he provoked in Europe. But Biden's election brought the US administration and west European establishments back together again. These years also saw Ukraine refuse to guarantee autonomy for the Donbas, and western failure to put any pressure on Kyiv to do so.

This was accompanied by other developments that made Putin decide to bring matters concerning Ukraine to a head. These included the US-Ukrainian [Strategic Partnership](#) of November 2021, which held out the prospect of Ukraine becoming a heavily armed US ally in all but name, while continuing to threaten to retake the Donbas by force.

In recent months, the German and French leaders in 2015, Merkel and François Hollande, have [declared](#) that the Minsk 2 agreement on Donbas autonomy was only a manoeuvre on their part to allow the Ukrainians the time to build up their armed forces. This is what Russian hardliners always believed, and by 2022, Putin himself seems to have come to the same conclusion.

Nonetheless, almost until the eve of invasion, Putin continued [unsuccessfully](#) to press the French president, Emmanuel Macron, in particular to support a treaty of neutrality for Ukraine and negotiate directly with the separatist leaders in the Donbas. We cannot, of course, say for sure if this would have led Putin to call off the invasion; but since it would have opened up a deep split between Paris and Washington, such a move by Macron might well have revived in Putin's mind the old and deeply held Russian strategy of trying to divide the west and forge agreement with France and Germany.

Putin now seems to agree fully with Russian hardline nationalists that no western government can be trusted, and that the west as a whole is implacably hostile to Russia. He remains, however, [vulnerable](#) to attack

from those same hardliners, both because of the deep incompetence with which the invasion was conducted, and because their charge that he was previously naive about the hopes of rapprochement with Europe appears to have been completely vindicated.

It is from this side, not the Russian liberals, that the greatest threat to his rule now comes; and of course this makes it even more difficult for Putin to seek any peace that does not have some appearance, at least, of Russian victory.

Meanwhile, the Russian invasion and its accompanying atrocities have destroyed whatever genuine sympathy for Russia existed in the French and German establishments. A peaceful and consensual security order in Europe looks very far away. But while Putin and his criminal invasion of Ukraine are chiefly responsible for this, we should also recognise that western and central Europeans also did far too little to try to keep Gorbachev's dream of a common European home alive.

- Anatol Lieven is director of the Eurasia programme at the Quincy Institute for Responsible Statecraft

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## [Edith Pritchett on millennial life](#)[Life and style](#)

# ‘We promise you the craziest shave of your life!’: Edith Pritchett on the lure of advertising – cartoon

[Edith Pritchett](#)

Sat 25 Feb 2023 01.00 EST

[Advertising claims: 1 \(Woman in bath with Nourishing Creme body wash\). This body wash has an image of a pat of butter falling into a vat of cream. 2 \(Fluffette - Bunnies on a cloud - and Les Plus Doux - Chinchilla on a chaise longue - toilet paper\) But I guess brands are always having to up the ante to outshine their competitors. Tough call. Do I want my ass to feel dreamy or opulent? 3 I saw a razor ad with a customer endorsement: 'The CRAZIEST shave of my LIFE' - Laura, 27. Woah. What would it take for me to say those words to my flatmate? 'Sorry to interrupt your work call, but this simply can't wait. I just had the CRAZIEST shave of my LIFE.' 4 The razor knits the hair it collects into a little merkin? The razor is actually a tiny lawnmower operated by a wee man? The razor recites Naomi Wolf's seminal 1990 book The Beauty Myth? Only one way to find out: BUY](#)

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## 2023.02.25 - Around the world

- [New York Piece of flotsam may be part of 200-year-old shipwreck SS Savannah](#)
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An 1819 painting of the SS Savannah, by Hunter Wood. A chunk of weatherbeaten flotsam that washed up on a New York shoreline after Tropical Storm Ian last fall has piqued the interest of experts who say it is likely part of the SS Savannah. Photograph: AP

[US news](#)



# Piece of New York flotsam may be part of 200-year-old shipwreck SS Savannah

‘Thrilling’ discovery on Fire Island could have come from a historic steam vessel that ran aground in 1821

*Associated Press*

Sat 25 Feb 2023 00.03 EST Last modified on Sat 25 Feb 2023 12.47 EST

A chunk of flotsam that washed up on a New York shoreline after Tropical Storm Ian last year has piqued the interest of experts who say it is likely part of the [SS Savannah](#), which ran aground and broke apart in 1821, two years after becoming the first vessel to cross the Atlantic partly under steam power.

The roughly 13ft (four-meter) square piece of wreckage was spotted in October off Fire Island, a barrier island that hugs Long Island’s southern shore, and is now in the custody of the Fire Island Lighthouse Preservation Society. It will work with National Park Service officials to identify the wreckage and put it on public display.

“It was pretty thrilling to find it,” said Betsy DeMaria, a museum technician at the park service’s Fire Island National Seashore. “We definitely are going to have some subject matter experts take a look at it and help us get a better view of what we have here.”

Evidence includes the wooden pegs holding the wreckage’s planks together, consistent with a 100ft (30.5-meter) vessel, park service officials said in a news release. The Savannah was 98ft and 6in (30 meters) long. Additionally, the officials said, the wreckage’s iron spikes suggest a ship built around 1820. The Savannah was built in 1818.

It may be difficult to identify the wreckage with 100% certainty, but park service officials said the Savannah is a top contender among Fire Island’s

known shipwrecks.

Explorers have searched for the Savannah for over two centuries but have not found anything they could definitively link to the famous ship. The newly discovered wreckage, though, “very well could be” a piece of the historic shipwreck, said Ira Breskin, a senior lecturer at the State University of [New York](#) Maritime College in the Bronx. “It makes perfect sense.”



Tony Femminella of the Fire Island Lighthouse Preservation Society, and Betsy DeMaria from the Fire Island National Seashore, stand beside a section of the hull of a ship believed to be the SS Savannah. Photograph: Steve Pfost/AP

Breskin, author of *The Business of Shipping*, noted that the Savannah’s use of steam power was so advanced for its time that the start of its transatlantic voyage – on 24 May 1819 – is commemorated as [National Maritime Day](#). “It’s important because they were trying to basically show the viability of a steam engine to make it across the pond,” he said.

Breskin said a nautical archaeologist should be able to help identify the wreckage. “It’s plausible, and it’s important, and it’s living history if the scientists confirm that it is what we think it is,” he said.

The Savannah, a sailing ship outfitted with a 90-horsepower steam engine, traveled mainly under sail across the Atlantic, using steam power for 80 hours of the nearly month-long passage to Liverpool, England.

Crowds cheered as the Savannah sailed from Liverpool to Sweden and Russia and then back to its home port of Savannah, Georgia, but the ship was not a financial success, in part because people were afraid to travel on the hybrid vessel. The Savannah's steam engine was removed and sold after the ship's owners suffered losses in the Great Savannah Fire of 1820.

The Savannah was transporting cargo between Savannah and New York when it ran aground off Fire Island. It later broke apart. The crew made it safely to shore and the cargo of cotton was salvaged, but the Augusta Chronicle & Georgia Gazette [reported](#) that "Captain Holdridge was considerably hurt by being upset in the boat".

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Texas students raised a quarter-million dollars for a janitor who was forced to come out of retirement to pay his rent. Photograph: Michael Casey/AP

[US news](#)

## Texas students raise \$250,000 for 80-year-old school janitor forced out of retirement

After Mr James's rent increased by \$400, he had to go back to work, but students raised enough funds for him to retire again

[Sam Levine](#)

Fri 24 Feb 2023 13.41 ESTLast modified on Fri 24 Feb 2023 14.35 EST

After an 80-year-old janitor had to return to work after his rent was increased, Texas high school students [raised more than \\$250,000](#) to help him retire.

The janitor, known to students as Mr James, returned to work in January after his rent shot up by \$400 a month, [according to KDFW](#). The students at Callisburg high school, about 80 miles (130km) north of Dallas, started their campaign last week and shared it on TikTok, hoping to raise \$10,000. As of [Friday afternoon](#), it had received nearly \$270,000 from more than 8,000 donors.

“When I saw him in the hall, it broke my heart,” Greyson Thurman, a senior who started the campaign, [told KTEN](#). “Nobody at that age should be working; they should be living the rest of their life, you know?”

James has declined to be interviewed by local outlets. “When we told him, he was kind of like, ‘Dang, that’s alright!’” Marti Yousko, another student who helped launch the campaign, told KDFW. The fundraiser will remain up until noon on Friday.

James’s story underscores the severe financial barriers older Americans face.

Millions of Americans are working into the years when they would typically retire – by 2030, the number of people aged 75 and older in the workforce is expected to grow by 96.5%, [according to the US Bureau of Labor and Statistics](#). People aged 75 and older are the only age group for whom the labor force participation rate is expected to rise over the next decade.

The average social security benefit in August of last year [was \\$1,546.59](#).

“I have to work just to keep paying my regular bills,” Kathy Luebbe, a teacher in her late 60s, told the Guardian in 2021.

Many older Americans also must keep working to pay off debt – the fastest-growing demographic of student borrowers is Americans 62 and older, [according to the New Yorker](#). About 20% of the 45 million people who have student debt are aged 50 and older, the magazine reported.

“I have been working full-time for the last eight years since retiring, and my wife also,” Ted Newman, a retired state government employee in Ohio, said

in 2021. “Her yearly salary went almost completely to pay student debt, and I worked to have extras for the home.

“I can’t live long enough to pay the debt and plan to let it go to default because I can’t afford to pay it any more.”

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An Indonesian man has been arrested and police say will be charged with murder after the death of Perth man Troy Johnston, pictured.

[Indonesia](#)

## **Troy Johnston death: Indonesian man arrested after Australian Rio Tinto worker dies in Bali bar**

Perth man dead after altercation in South Kuta bar

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[\*Nino Bucci\*](#)

Sat 25 Feb 2023 01.49 ESTLast modified on Sat 25 Feb 2023 08.40 EST

An Indonesian man has been arrested and police say will be charged with murder after the death of an Australian man in a Bali bar.

Local media reported that on Wednesday night [Perth](#) man Troy Johnston, 40, was drinking at Uncle Benz cafe in South Kuta.

The [Bali](#) Sun reported the head of public relations of the Bali police, Stefanus Satakake Bayu Setianto, said that Johnston had been in an altercation with an Indonesian man.

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The man, Gede Wijaya, reportedly owned the cafe where Johnston was drinking.

“The perpetrator and the victim [started] drinking alcohol at 7.30pm. Shortly thereafter, the victim got drunk and hit the perpetrator,” Setianto said.

“Before hitting the victim using a chair, the victim first threatened the perpetrator.

“Seeing the victim lift a chair, the perpetrator reflexively lifted the chair and hit the victim’s head many times at once.”

Wijaya reportedly gave a similar account of the altercation during a press conference at the South Kuta police station on Friday. Police told the press conference he would be charged with murder.

Police believe the pair had met several days before the altercation and that Johnston had been staying with his wife at a villa nearby.

Johnston, reportedly a father of one, worked for mining company [Rio Tinto](#), which has confirmed his death and expressed their sympathy for his family and friends.

“We are devastated by the news that one of our much loved and valued team members has tragically passed away overseas,” the company said in a statement.



“Our thoughts and deepest sympathies are with Troy’s family and friends, and we are providing them all the support we can during this very difficult time.

“Troy’s colleagues are deeply saddened and we are providing them access to a range of support services.”

A spokeswoman for the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade said consular assistance was being provided to the Australian’s family.

This article was published on 25 February 2023 to replace an earlier version, which erroneously said the suspect had been charged with murder. The correct position, now reflected, is that the police said the man would be charged with murder.

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Paul Dano, Mateo Zoryon Francis-DeFord and Michelle Williams in The Fabelmans. Photograph: Merie Weismiller Wallace/AP

[France](#)

## ‘What a film!’ Spielberg’s The Fabelmans stuns French critics and audiences

Semi-autobiographical story receives unprecedented number of five-star reviews, making it the best-scoring film in decades

[Kim Willsher](#) in Paris

Fri 24 Feb 2023 08.09 EST Last modified on Fri 24 Feb 2023 14.13 EST

Steven Spielberg’s new film The Fabelmans attracted more cinema-goers than any other film in France on its release on Wednesday after an unprecedented number of five-star reviews from the country’s critics.

French media gave the film, a semi-autobiographical story based loosely on the director's childhood and his early years behind the camera, an average score of 4.9, one of the best scores for any film in more than two decades.

All but six of the 42 publications collated by the French cinema news website [AlloCiné](#) gave The Fabelmans five-stars.

AlloCiné said the film had been watched by almost 65,000 people by the end of its release date on Wednesday – 41,000 on the day and another 14,000 at previews and premieres – more than any other film that day. This first day figure is three times more than Spielberg's 2021 film West Side Story, which sold around 23,000 on the first day of its release including previews, but still short of the 85,000 who flocked to see the film-maker's Ready Player One in 2018.

Cahiers du Cinéma, the reference for French cinema-lovers, said that at 76 years old, Spielberg had “come to represent like no other, the idea of cinema as wonder, at a time when the relationship to the spectacular and the cinema seems more tormented than ever”.

It declared [The Fabelmans](#) would “undoubtedly remain the most important and singular film of his career”.

Spielberg was awarded [France's highest civil honour, the Légion d'Honneur](#), by the then French president, Jacques Chirac, in 2004. Chirac praised him as a “great director” and saluted his work fighting hatred and intolerance with films such as Schindler's List.

The culture magazines Les Inrockuptibles said The Fabelmans was clearly a success with the press and public.

“The support of the press, the loyalty of the public and his favourable position for an Oscar could also play in favour of the film being a success in French cinemas,” it wrote.

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Libération newspaper described Spielberg as the “guardian of the cinema temple” who “reveals uncomfortable truths”.

“What a film!”, “Unforgettable”, “Majestic and moving ... the press is unanimous”, wrote Le Figaro, declaring The Fabelmans as the director’s “declaration of love for the cinema”.

Le Parisien described it as a “magnificent autobiographical story”.

The Canadian website [World of Reel](#) said The Fabelmans was France’s “most critically-acclaimed film of the 21st century”.

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Jill Biden gave the hint during her five-day Africa tour. Photograph: Thomas Mukoya/Reuters

[Jill Biden](#)

## ‘He’s not finished’: first lady signals Joe Biden’s run for second term

Jill Biden gave one of the clearest indications on Friday that the president will seek re-election in 2024

*Guardian staff and agency*

Fri 24 Feb 2023 15.49 ESTFirst published on Fri 24 Feb 2023 14.29 EST

First lady [Jill Biden](#) on Friday gave one of the clearest indications yet that Joe Biden will run for a second term, saying that there’s “pretty much” nothing left to do but figure out the time and place for the announcement.

Although Biden has long said that it is his intention to seek reelection, he has yet to make it official, and he’s struggled to dispel questions about

whether he is too old to continue serving as president. Biden is currently 80 and would be 86 at the end of a second term.

“He says he’s not done,” Jill Biden said in Nairobi, the Kenyan capital, on the second and final stop of her five-day trip to Africa, which started in Namibia earlier this week. “He’s not finished what he’s started. And that’s what’s important,” she told the Associated Press in an exclusive interview between events in Kenya.

She added: “How many times does he have to say it for you to believe it?”

Biden aides have said an announcement is likely to come in April, after the first fundraising quarter ends, which is around the time that Barack Obama officially launched his 2012 reelection campaign.

The first lady has long been described as a key figure in Biden’s orbit as he plans his future.

“Because I’m his wife,” she laughed.

But she brushed off the question about whether she has the deciding vote on whether the president runs for reelection.

Donald Trump, who turns 77 in June, announced last November that he would run for the presidency again in the 2024 election, despite his being soundly defeated by [Joe Biden](#) in 2020 and fomenting an insurrection at the US Capitol on 6 January 2021 by his own supporters intent on overturning Biden’s victory.

Trump is also under investigation in a series of criminal cases and civil actions. These relate to a variety of matters including [fraud at his](#) real estate company, [election interference](#), federal investigations by [a special counsel](#) into [his role](#) in the January 6 Capitol attack and [the stashing](#) of secret government documents at his Florida residence after seeking office. There is also a forthcoming civil trial in New York concerning lawsuits [alleging rape](#) and defamation.

Jill Biden's remarks Friday come after a poll released earlier this week brought good news for the president's standing among Democrats.

[The NPR/PBS NewsHour/Marist Poll](#) shows an even half of Democrats or Democratic-leaning independents believe the party has a better chance with Biden as the nominee while 45% think they would be better off backing someone else. That is an improvement for Biden from November of last year, when it was roughly flipped: then, 54% wanted someone else, and just 38% backed the president.

On the other hand, that survey had disappointing news for Trump as he seeks to be renominated for the presidency by the GOP. Among [Republicans](#) and and GOP-leaning independents, 54% thought the party is best off with someone other than Trump as the nominee, and 42% believe the ex-president remained the best man for the job.

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