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Police said they had received ‘strong’ intelligence dissidents plan to launch terror attacks against officers on the bank holiday. Photograph: Liam McBurney/PA

[Northern Ireland](#)

Northern Ireland police warn of potential dissident attacks on Easter Monday

Warning comes ahead of US president Joe Biden’s much-anticipated visit to Belfast on Tuesday

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[Emily Dugan](#)

[@emilydugan](#)

Fri 7 Apr 2023 04.37 EDTFirst published on Fri 7 Apr 2023 03.52 EDT

Police in [Northern Ireland](#) are warning of potential dissident republican attacks over the Easter weekend, as the Democratic Unionist party leader, Sir Jeffrey Donaldson, said the lack of a government in Stormont was not to blame for the increasing threat of violence.

Tensions have increased as the bank holiday weekend marks the 25th anniversary of the Good Friday agreement. The date falls on Easter Monday though many will mark it on Friday, given its association with the day.

Police said they had received “strong” intelligence that dissidents planned to launch terror attacks against officers on the bank holiday. They also warned there could be street violence in Derry.

PSNI chief constable, Simon Byrne, said the “exceptional circumstances” of the Easter weekend meant officers would be moved to frontline duties to counter any potential threats, a policing strategy he said that had not been used in years.

Politics is in stalemate in Stormont, where there has been no functioning government for more than a year. The DUP withdrew support for power sharing as part of its protest against post-Brexit trading agreements.

MI5 recently upgraded the terror threat in Northern Ireland to severe, meaning an attack is “highly likely”. But Donaldson said the idea that a lack of government at Stormont had fuelled violence “doesn’t stack up”.

“While Stormont was sitting for many years these dissident republicans engaged in violence, they murdered police officers,” he told BBC Radio 4’s Today programme on Friday.

Donaldson said the situation could not be blamed on Stormont. “Of course we want to see Stormont fully functioning, but the idea that when we get Stormont back up and running, that dissident republicans will put their guns away, I didn’t hear the chief constable suggest that,” he said.

“The idea that evil men and women who go out to commit murder react to political circumstances simply doesn’t stack up.”

He added: “Some of the chief constable’s police officers have been murdered by these dissident republicans while Stormont has been sitting and indeed they have murdered other people and they have continued with their terrorist activity during all of the period that Stormont was sitting.

“All of the party leaders have stood together in solidarity with the chief constable when these attacks have taken place.”

The recent change in terror threat followed a gun attack in County Tyrone on senior detective [John Caldwell](#), who was left with life-changing injuries. Police blamed the New IRA for the attack.

The assistant chief constable Bobby Singleton told a press conference in Belfast it was going to be “a really significant weekend for the PSNI”.

He added: “There is also very strong community intelligence specifically coming forward in respect of Monday’s events in Derry/Londonderry and a real concern that there may be attempts to draw police in to serious public disorder and to use that then as a platform to launch terrorist attacks on police as well.

“So going into our operation that’s something that is very clearly right at the forefront of my mind, the minds of the commanders that will be delivering that and of course our officers as well.”

Easter Monday is when dissident republicans traditionally mark the anniversary of the Easter Rising rebellion against British rule in 1916, with a parade planned in Derry.

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‘I’ve never met a politician like [Mo Mowlam]. She was instrumental in setting an ambience that was conducive to reaching agreement,’ says ex-politician Bríd Rodgers. Photograph: Paul McErlane/AP

[Good Friday agreement](#)

Women who helped strike Good Friday deal finally recognised – 25 years late

Mo Mowlam and other female participants in talks confronted ‘sexism and scorn’ at the time

[Rory Carroll](#) *Ireland correspondent*

[@rorycarroll72](#)

Fri 7 Apr 2023 05.00 EDT Last modified on Fri 7 Apr 2023 16.53 EDT

It took a quarter of a century but Mo Mowlam and other women who helped clinch the [Good Friday agreement](#) are finally gaining recognition.

After years of being belittled, marginalised or forgotten, the late [Northern Ireland](#) secretary and other figures are receiving tributes from politicians,

diplomats and artists on the eve of the agreement's 25th anniversary.

An exhibition titled [Peace Heroines](#) has opened at the UN's headquarters in New York. Hillary Clinton will recognise 25 women who made significant contributions at a conference at Queen's university in Belfast. Ulster University has named a refurbished arts studio after Mowlam and will unveil a video portrait of her. A [new play](#) in Belfast gives Mowlam a central role in the talks that paved the 1998 agreement.

The former prime minister Tony Blair, Ireland's taoiseach, Leo Varadkar, and other politicians have also lauded the contribution of female negotiators.



Monica McWilliams, co-founder of Northern Ireland Women's Coalition (NIWC) political party, Bronagh Hinds Women's Coalition, Anne Carr from Women Together and Susan McCrory, Falls Women's Centre, at a new exhibition hosted by the Irish president Michael D Higgins at Aras an Uachtarain in Dublin, highlighting the role women played in the Northern Ireland peace process. Photograph: Niall Carson/PA

“What’s hit me recently is that we’re getting more attention now 25 years later than we were at the time,” said Monica McWilliams, who co-founded the Northern Ireland Women’s Coalition and was a delegate at the multiparty talks in Stormont in 1998.

Female participants confronted sexism and scorn, said McWilliams. “There was huge condescension. The title of my book is [Stand Up, Speak Out](#) because I was told on a regular basis to shut up and sit down. We did call it out before the #MeToo movement.”

The coalition helped to secure the agreement by winning the confidence of republican and loyalist paramilitary groups, said McWilliams. “We knew that leaving people out in the cold would cost us all a lot. Now we know the value added that women bring to the table.”

Women also successfully lobbied to include clauses about victims’ rights and integrated education, she said. “We brought solutions when a lot of parties were bringing problems.”



Professor Seán Farren (Foundation Chair, former Minister for Higher & Further Education, and Finance, Northern Ireland Executive), Brid Rodgers (Former Executive member of NICRA, Deputy Leader SDLP and Minister for Agriculture Northern Ireland Assembly. Brid was a leader of the SDLP team in the talks that led to the Good Friday Agreement), Kevin Murphy (Playhouse CEO), Mark Durkan (The John & Pat Hume Foundation, Former deputy First Minister NI Executive, Member of Parliament and SDLP Leader), Professor Monica McWilliams (Emeritus Professor at Ulster

University and Chairperson of Interpeace, an international NGO working on peace-building) Photograph: The Playhouse Derry

Bríd Rodgers, a founding member of the Social Democratic and Labour party who was part of the talks, said it was understandable that party leaders such as John Hume, Gerry Adams and David Trimble, as well as Blair and the then taoiseach Bertie Ahern, were garlanded after the deal.

However the impact of women such as the Progressive Unionist party's [Dawn Purvis](#) or Mowlam had been overlooked, said Rodgers. Mowlam was Northern Ireland secretary from 1997 to 1999 and died in 2005.

“Mo Mowlam was absolutely brilliant,” said Rodgers. “She connected with ordinary people. She got the trust of the paramilitaries, she went into the Maze [prison]. She had a human touch and didn’t stand on ceremony. I’ve never met a politician like her. She was instrumental in setting an ambience that was conducive to reaching agreement. I don’t think her role was recognised at the time.”

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Former secretary of state for Northern Ireland Mo Mowlam says goodbye to staff at Stormont in Belfast Friday 12 October 1999 as she hands over to Peter Mandelson Photograph: Paul Faith/PA

In a 2018 Guardian article Mowlam's stepdaughter Henrietta Norton [upbraided Blair](#) for omitting his former minister in a speech marking the agreement's 20th anniversary, and said her "absence was everywhere" in media coverage.

In an interview with PA Media last week, Blair lauded Mowlam's "liberating energy" in the peace process. "I chose Mo because I thought she was completely different, because she would be a complete breath of fresh air, and she was, and also because she was a very clever politician," he said.

Hilary Clinton said the awards at Queen's will recognise those who broke the glass ceiling and made sacrifices for peace. "For a long time, we saw politics being played out by men, and men only. When I visited in 1995, I saw at first-hand how the women on the ground were making an indelible mark and helping shape the peace process in a variety of ways."

Last month Varadkar quoted the former politician and civil rights leader Bernadette McAliskey who said the real problem was not that women were written out of Irish history but that they were never written into it in the first

place. “We can have no meaningful commemoration of the Good Friday agreement unless the role of women is properly recognised and applauded,” the taoiseach said.

Naoimh McNamee, who heads Ireland’s [Glencree Centre for Peace and Reconciliation](#), said women who were often unpaid and underfunded were today holding communities together in the [absence of a functioning government at Stormont](#). “Younger women need to take up the mantle now, while we wait for politics to function again. We must champion and support these women, so they may pass on their hard-won learnings to the next generation.”

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Former prime minister Sir Tony Blair and then taoiseach Bertie Ahern sign the Good Friday agreement 25 years ago. Photograph: John Giles/PA

[Good Friday agreement](#)

[Explainer](#)

How did the Good Friday agreement come about and why is it so significant?

Held up as a model for peace, the historic agreement ended decades of violence in Northern Ireland over 58 tense hours

[Lisa O'Carroll](#)

[@lisaocarroll](#)

Fri 7 Apr 2023 03.45 EDTLast modified on Fri 7 Apr 2023 16.54 EDT

The historic [Good Friday agreement](#) that ended three decades of the Troubles, brought peace to Northern Ireland and saw the Irish Republican Army and others lay down their arms, is 25 years old this Easter.

It was signed on 10 April 1998, which fell on Good Friday that year, and led to a joint Nobel peace prize for [David Trimble](#) and [John Hume](#), leaders of the Ulster Unionist party and the SDLP.

Although the power-sharing government it established is suspended over a Brexit row, it is seen as such a diplomatic achievement that the anniversary is being marked by visits from [US president, Joe Biden](#), former president Bill Clinton, King Charles, former prime minister Sir Tony Blair and former taoiseach Bertie Ahern.

Getting [Sinn Féin](#) and unionists in the same building was a feat in itself.

“The level of hatred was a shock to me,” Ahern recently told Oireachtas TV.

“I mean these people had never dealt with each other; they refused to share TV studios, radio studios, that they had no knowledge of each other.”

Why is the Good Friday agreement/Belfast agreement so significant?

The Americans have long hailed the agreement as a model that has yet to be bettered to end conflict between opposing ethnicities or communities.

But they are not the only ones.

John Taylor, now Lord Kilclooney, Lord Trimble’s deputy and a key member of the peace talks, recently recalled: “I remember bringing the [Belfast](#) agreement to Ramallah to give a copy to Arafat. I said, ‘Here’s the basis on which you should get an agreement between Palestine and Israel’.”

But the main reason some of the most important political figures are gathering in Belfast is to try to re-assert the narrative for [Northern Ireland](#) after the turbulent Brexit years. The big prize has been enduring peace, they will say. And there is unfinished work to ensure the peace process continues, particularly in relation to endemic paramilitary activities in drug wars and illegal moneylending.

What was the Good Friday agreement?

Signed on 10 April 1998, the Belfast agreement was a pact by unionist and nationalist leaders to share power in Northern [Ireland](#) through a new devolved government.

It was a masterclass in constructive ambiguity, allowing all sides to agree to disagree and maintain their opposing goals, albeit through peaceful means.

It also set up the process for the later decommissioning of arms and the controversial release of prisoners, including killers of police officers, from prisons as a means of persuading the [IRA](#) to swap the Armalite for the ballot box.

It was seen as a huge diplomatic feat and the culmination of a week of knife-edge negotiations led by Blair, Ahern and US senator [George Mitchell](#), with Lord Trimble representing the unionists. The DUP did not participate in the talks.

A host of other officials and politicians, including former Labour Northern Ireland secretary Mo Mowlam, Sir Reg Empey, Sir John Holmes, Lord Murphy and SDLP's Mark Durkan, played critical parts too, with the steely determination of SDLP leaders Lord Hume and Seamus Mallon widely recognised as pivotal.

Three sleepless nights to get the deal over the line

All-party talks, chaired by Mitchell, began in 1996, and collapsed a year later. But they established a process and the six Mitchell principles that eventually brought Sinn Féin in, committing to democracy through exclusively peaceful means, total disarmament and the renunciation of the use of force and an end to punishment beatings.

In April 1998, with a draft agreement to negotiate and talks back on, the effort was to keep the unionists in the room.

Lord Kilclooney recalled last month how he pulled the unionists out of talks just moments after they started when an Irish minister objected to an agenda

point centring on the legitimacy of Northern Ireland's right to be in the United Kingdom.

This was a huge issue at the time because Ireland's territorial claim to the six counties was written into its constitution.

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“I told George Mitchell, ‘I’m now taking the unionist delegation out of the talks,’” Taylor recalled. “That was very serious on the first day of the talks ... and Mitchell said, ‘Right, but stay in the building’. So we stayed in the building all day from 10am until 5pm, when Mitchell called us back, and he said, ‘Dublin have now reconsidered the position.’”

In due course Ireland changed its constitution to remove the 62-year-old territorial claim on the six counties of Northern Ireland after a referendum.

Talks lurched from crisis to crisis with parties barely getting any sleep in the 58 hours between Wednesday 8 April and the historic announcement on 10 April.

Clinton was available by phone on demand to keep the talks alive. So critical were the hours between 8 April and 10 April that Bertie Ahern [helicoptered back to Belfast](#) after his mother died, returning a few hours later to Dublin

for her funeral and flying back up to Northern Ireland after her burial to rescue the talks, which were once again near collapse.

Ahern recalls that talks on the release of prisoners went from 2am to 6am on Good Friday, with a last-minute letter of comfort to the unionists from [Tony Blair](#) that would come back years later to haunt him.

Did all parties agree to the pact?

No, the Democratic Unionist party, headed by Ian Paisley, was opposed to the pact, and even protested outside Stormont while negotiations took place.

And while the UUP signed up to the agreement, the deal sparked bitter divisions in the party that was to later cost Trimble his job as leader.

How did it pass into law?

By two referendums. In Northern Ireland, 71.12% voted in favour while south of the border, 94.39% voted in favour of the pact.

Has the Good Friday agreement worked?

It took more than 18 months to get the devolved government up and running and at times [the outlook for the peace process seemed bleak](#).

In the 25 years since peace, Stormont has been out of action for at least nine years.

Many have asked whether the consociational government created by the agreement has passed its sell-by date, including former Northern Ireland secretary Brandon Lewis who described the deal as “fraying if not outright broken”.

Ahern [agrees that the agreement](#) should be an evolving agreement but has urged patience, arguing reform talks can only happen once Stormont is restored.

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Mike Waite, 63, found a great fox-spider – thought to be extinct – on a Ministry of Defence training ground in Surrey in 2020. Photograph: Jill Mead/The Guardian

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

‘I still can’t handle the big ones’: the new wave of spider hunters scouring Britain’s heaths

Having already discovered the presumed extinct great fox-spider, Mike Waite goes hunting on MoD land armed with a pair of his wife’s tights, an old medicine syringe and plastic cups

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[Phoebe Weston](#)

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As a spider-hunting specialist, Mike Waite's artillery of choice is a pooter. It's a homemade sucking contraption made from his daughter's old Calpol syringe and a pair of his wife's tights ("I like to think they were old ones"), which he uses as a filter so he doesn't inhale any spiders.

I'm with Waite, from Surrey Wildlife Trust, on Brentmoor Heath, which is partly owned by the Ministry of Defence (MoD) and managed by the trust. It sounds like New Year's Eve, with continuous bangs from the shooting range. We're in the buffer zone, on lowland heathland, where the public are allowed and spiders are just waking up from their winter slumber. We see a wolf spider, a gorilla jumping spider, and a raft spider (which recently featured on [David Attenborough's Wild Isles](#)) all in a single morning.



A female raft spider, which catches its prey in ponds. Photograph: Jill Mead/The Guardian

Arachnids are creative hunters – some use speed, others webs, while the raft spider catches its prey in a pond. “You don’t get any vegetarian spiders,” says Waite.

This may seem like an odd way to spend a morning but more citizen scientists are getting involved in spider hunting, and the areas of MoD shooting sites where the public are allowed are among the best places in the UK to do it.

The MoD is [one of the country’s largest landowners](#), owning [169 sites](#) of special scientific interest, which means they have the highest protections for nature, as on Brentmoor Heath. Many of these sites are heathland habitats because the land is open and not suitable for agriculture but lends itself to combat simulation.

The habitat is kept low and scrubby, with relatively few trees and strips of bare soil, called “waffle lines”, made using a digger, which means wasps and bees can bury themselves in the ground. The aim is to have as many niche habitats in as small a space as possible.



Mike Waite demonstrating his 'Pooter' with a male wolf-spider on Brentmoor in Surrey. Photograph: Jill Mead/The Guardian

An aroma of coconut is released by the gorse as it wakes up to spring with its bright yellow flowers. The chiffchaffs – which have flown here from Africa – are sussing out breeding spots. We spot Dartford warblers, brimstone butterflies and the season's first slow worm, bathing under a tin sheet as it warms itself into the new year. On this single site, Waite thinks there are “multiple millions of spiders”, with between 250 and 300 species.

Surrey is a great place to be an arachnid enthusiast. There is a diversity of habitats that suit them here ([13% of the UK's lowland heathland](#) is in Surrey) and, historically, Surrey has been home to idle rich hobbyists and rural clergymen with time to count them, says Waite.

Spider hunting is having something of a renaissance. The British Arachnological Society (BAS) has already been sent 57,000 records of spider sightings this year.

We're here finding as many of them as possible using a series of “pitfall” traps, which Waite set up overnight. These are just plastic cups wedged into the ground – the spiders fall into them, and in the morning we come around

to identify them before releasing them. “I still can’t handle the big ones,” says Waite.



A male wolf spider (*Trochosa terricola*), identified by its black front legs. Photograph: Jill Mead/The Guardian

In one of the plastic cups, we find the wolf spider (*Trochosa terricola*), named after its hound-like hunting techniques. We know this one is a male because it has black front legs, which they use to appease females. “They are such fearsome predators they have to be careful with courtship,” Waite says. “Larger females often see males as prey so as they approach them they wave their front legs, as if to say, ‘I’m a male of your species, don’t eat me.’”

We also find a gorilla jumping spider (*Evarcha arcuata*), which looks like a tiny silverback with big forearms and pale abdomen. “When they look at you, they’re absolutely stunning,” he says. True to their name, they leap on prey, and their family name, *Salticid*, comes from the Latin for gymnast or dancer.

Many of the spiders we see are considered nationally rare, partly because we are on a very specialised habitat, but also because there are fewer eyes on the ground looking for them compared with groups like birds and mammals.

“Spiders are not studied well – the status we give them is limited to what we know – but they’re actually everywhere,” says Waite.

You don’t get any vegetarian spiders

Mike Waite, Surrey Wildlife Trust

There are more than [650 kinds of spiders in the UK](#), with many discoveries probably still to be made. Waite’s biggest find came in 2020 when [he discovered a great fox-spider](#) (*Alopecosa fabrilis*), one of the largest spiders in Britain but presumed extinct having not been spotted since 1999. He found it on an undisclosed MoD site in Surrey after a two-year search. It is a night-time hunter, known for its speed, agility and eight eyes, which give it wrap-around vision.

He has since spotted the species again, this time in Dorset, on a site near Wareham, a sighting recently confirmed by the Natural History Museum. “I was even more excited to see it again,” says Waite, who has a picture of the spider printed on his credit card.

He has focused on spiders for the past five years, after “completing” more accessible groups, he says. “I’ve seen all the breeding birds, butterflies and dragonflies – they’re relatively small groups. With spiders, there are a huge number of species living in a large area, so I’d like to think I’ll make more discoveries.”



The great fox-spider is one of the largest arachnids in Britain. Photograph: Mike Waite/Surrey Wildlife Trust

Spotting spiders also has a serious side: as an indicator species, they can tell us about the overall health of the environment, or how it might be changing in response to the climate crisis. Increasingly, spiders are turning up in places where they have never been seen before.

“Without the dedication of these recorders we simply wouldn’t know how our spider fauna is doing,” says Richard Gallon, who is the spider recording scheme (SRS) national organiser at the BAS.

“There’s definitely been an increased interest in British spiders in the last few years,” he adds. This is partly due to the publication in 2017 of a user-friendly identification book called [Britain’s Spiders](#). Smartphones also have made recording spiders in Britain easier than ever because people can share photos on social media. “These online communities are very supportive helping with identifications,” says Gallon.

For Waite, his love of looking for spiders came later in life. Over the Easter weekend, he’ll be in Greece and will probably be hunting for the great fox-spider’s closest relative, the Easter fox-spider. “Thirty years ago, I wouldn’t have thought I had time. I’m 63 and I feel as if I’m on a busman’s holiday –

this is my life and I'm so lucky." he says. "When I go on holiday I'm just looking for wildlife."



Mike Waite using his sweep net to catch insects on Brentmoor in Surrey.
Photograph: Jill Mead/The Guardian

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Central Cee ... 'There's people who grew up on the same roads that have flown straight. But me, I was distracted by the hardship'. Photograph: Jimmy Fontaine

[Rap](#)

[Interview](#)

Central Cee, the UK's biggest rap star: 'I have survivor's guilt. I don't feel I deserve this'

[Sheldon Pearce](#)

He's gone from dealing drugs to having No 1 hits and vying with Harry Styles for Brit awards. As he gears up for his first US gig in New York, he explains his conflicted morality – and £3m house

Fri 7 Apr 2023 01.00 EDT

A writhing mass of arms and torsos, armed with cameraphones and the occasional vape, surge towards Central Cee as he takes on one of American hip-hop's rites of passage: a show in New York City's Irving Plaza. The London rapper's first two mixtapes – Wild West, from 2021, and 23, from 2022 – debuted at No 2 and No 1 in the UK, and he was nominated for British artist of the year at this year's Brits alongside Harry Styles and Stormzy. Cee specialises in expressive streams of consciousness that contain a matrix of paradoxes – romantic and realist, hard and unguarded, nostalgic and present – and, crucially, he's boyband-pretty. But while he has been a UK sensation for some time, this is his first concert in the US.

Help is on hand from the biggest rapper in the world, Drake, who sent his own tour technician to make sure Cee has a smooth stint on the road. "Drake said: 'Take care of him,'" the roadie says before the show, acknowledging the difficulties Cee faces. "In America, getting into UK hip-hop is tough, unless you're really into it." But the 24-year-old has made short work of any obstacles thus far; Cee refers to his music as "ignorantly conscious", and that clashing dichotomy is what has made it so infectious.

In the hours before Cee goes on, his team preps the backstage ambience to his liking, which includes a few unusual items for a rapper, most notably a Diptyque scented candle. (He loves candles.) Reclining on the sofa in a Yankees fitted cap, a puffer jacket and grey sweatpants, he does a lot of

talking with his hands, one of which is filled with overlapping script tattoos and the number 23 across his ring and little fingers. Removing his coat reveals a bulky, diamond-studded chain that says Live Yours. “I read the comments [online], but only because I’m stable enough,” he says at one point. “What they say matters, but it doesn’t really mean nothing to my ego. Music is not my life. I’ve recorded one song this year; we’re nearly three months in.”

Born Oakley Neil HT Caesar-Su to an Irish mother and a Guyanese father, Cee was raised in Shepherd’s Bush, west London. He says his mother’s parents were well off and that she went to boarding school, but she met Cee’s dad, a hustler, when she was 15, and started a relationship, rebelling against her parents’ wishes. The wealth she had once known quickly ran dry. “There’s people who grew up on the same roads and have flown straight, but me, I was distracted by the hardship,” Cee says. “I could see everything negative in front of me. And that’s what led me to rap.” He picked up writing poetry aged eight from his mum, prompted by his desire for the things he didn’t have: a phone, a bike, clothes. He remembers when £10,000 was a lifetime goal.

I’m telling all my people’s stories. They are just as important as me. You’re fascinated about my story, I don’t know why

At 13, he started making music with little outside influence beyond 2Pac’s Ghetto Gospel on MP3. He did regular jobs in the meantime, by which he mostly means dealing drugs. “When you’re coming from where I’m coming from, everybody from all walks of life, nine times out of 10, they had to do that. It’s like learning to ride a bike. In my little radius of Shepherd’s Bush, there’s like six, seven phones ringing all day long, making like £2,000 a day. Who do you think is making this money? It’s little kids,” he says, animated. “That’s why, this music thing, I find it quite strange. Because I’m telling my brothers’ stories. I’m telling all my people’s stories. They are just as important as me. You’re fascinated about my story. I don’t know why, because it’s all of ours.”

It wasn’t until he was a young adult that Cee started really studying rap, especially the science and commerce of it. “J Cole, Kendrick Lamar: I had to

go and listen to these people for the first time. Even Jay-Z. So that was a fun time, because everything was clicking. I just remember lightbulbs.”

Cee started putting out music in 2017, inspired by the melodious trapwave sound that was engulfing the UK rap scene at the time. Listening now, he sounds nearly unrecognisable, the drab Auto-Tune in his singsong flows worlds away from the brutalist nature of his music today. He was, he says, “on this ‘pretty boy’ ting, kind of. That’s how people was perceiving me. I was just trying to find a sound and make money.”

One of his brothers, who is also a rapper, helped set Cee on his current course. “He was jumping in my car and rapping on real rap beats; pain beats, like Mobb Deep beats. It took me back. ‘You sound harder than me right now,’ that’s what I told him.” Inspired, Cee made a freestyle about Covid on Akon’s Locked Up beat, and things started coming together. The music he released in 2020’s pandemic months embraced the skittering hi-hats and sliding basslines of UK drill, and his rapping turned austere and jagged. That June, he put out [Day in the Life](#), shedding his previous style. “Turn off the Auto-Tune, let’s hear how you really rap,” he quipped on the track. By October, there was [Loading](#), his announcement as a major player, and five months later, he had a No 2 album to his name and was [modelling for Drake’s Nike collection](#).

If Cee isn’t the biggest breakthrough UK rapper in the US, his rise is certainly the most meteoric. Some of it is serendipitous, the internet having collapsed the borders for K-pop idols, African giants and UK drill stalwarts alike. “I’ve definitely paid my forefathers their dues. They’ve come and bust down certain doors,” he says. “And the internet, TikTok – I can just reach so many people with just a click of a button. I was anxious about the American shows; I didn’t know what to expect. But I’m seeing the same characters in the crowd.”



Central Cee performs on BBC Radio 1Xtra stage at the Reading festival, 2021. Photograph: Joseph Okpako/WireImage

The clearer path notwithstanding, Cee has sprinted down it thanks to a drill-adjacent sound with eclectic, chart-friendly samples. His global popularity is such that four of his tracks have broken the 200m-stream mark on Spotify (for comparison with his UK rap peers, Stormzy and Dave only have three between them). The rapper also knows how to best structure his verses. “I’ll tell you this in a mathematical way: when I rap, I never really end my lyrics on a word that could be misconstrued through my accent. I’ll never end saying ‘matter’ like ‘matt-uh’. If you” – an American – “sang ‘bitch is gay’, it would sound the same way how I say it,” he says with a grin.

This is a reference to the line that opens his massive viral hit [Doja](#): “How can I be homophobic? My bitch is gay!” In a rap culture that isn’t always progressive on LGBTQ+ rights, this crude line may as well be a rainbow flag. Built on a sped-up flip of Eve and Gwen Stefani’s Let Me Blow Ya Mind, Doja went Top 5 in eight countries, the perfect powder keg for an explosive international breakout. With familiar production, cheeky lyrics, a celebrity namecheck (namely pop-rapper Doja Cat), it’s so absurd it’s funny, and just problematic enough to be gossipy and shareable.

Sudden success, especially sudden success based off selling the excess of a rap persona, can be overwhelming for a young artist, so how is Central Cee managing? “I think I’m level-headed, but recently I’ve been thinking maybe this is unhealthy. Maybe I’m really, really deluded,” he says with a laugh. “I’m about to buy a £3m yard like it’s nothing. But, bro, do you know what man was doing even a couple years ago? I ask myself: ‘Why am I not overwhelmed like everybody else seems to be?’ I think it’s because I think I deserve it.”

An opposing thought is often only seconds away, though, just as it is on his tracks. “That’s only one side of my mind. Because at the same time, I have a lot of survivor’s guilt where I don’t feel like I deserve anything that I have. I don’t know how I do it. I think it’s a survival instinct: what am I going to do, start going head over heels and lose this all? I just treat it as work.”

He compares his approach with that of the Louisiana rapper [NBA YoungBoy](#). “There’s a lot of people that will testify that he’s shit because there’s no science to his thing, musically. What I think sells is his personality and his vulnerability in the music,” he says, having an epiphany. “Actually, that probably influenced me a lot.” Even through a muted delivery, he can convey many things concurrently. “When I rap, I’m in a neutral mood and I can relate to everything, every emotion that I’ve ever felt.”

There is a moral panic surrounding drill music around the world: some see it as an accelerant to violence. Cee won’t defend it from the pearl-clutchers, but he does laud its liberatory power for those that make it. “I’m super aware of the blessing this is having on my little community,” he says. “Just me succeeding is opening many doors, many more opportunities for good for the people that’s around. It trickles down.”

My mum had a lot of bones to pick with Let Go but when we had a conversation about it, she had the wrong end of the stick

Before the show at Irving Plaza, the queue outside is wrapped around the block and full of Central Cee lookalikes. One nine-year-old fan named Ari – who is dressed the part in a black Jordan hoodie, an open-face balaclava and

a trio of gold chains – gets to meet his idol when a note he wrote for the rapper makes its way backstage: “You’re my favourite rapper. Hope we can meet in person. My favourite song is Doja.”

As long as rap has existed there have been questions about the misogyny of its lyrics, and the sway it has over young minds like Ari’s. On recent single [Me and You](#), Cee raps: “When I said that my bitch was gay, I didn’t mean that shit in a degradin’ way,” a clunky but earnest clarification, and he spares a few more words on the matter. “Rap can be very misconstrued by people who don’t relate to it. My mum will hit me, saying things like: ‘Why are you saying bitches?’ She had a lot of bones to pick with [Let Go](#).” This is one of Cee’s biggest hits, with a chorus that ends: “You said that pussy mine so why’d you let it go / You’re such a ho”, but elsewhere on the track, Cee is emotionally astute as he thrashes about in post-breakup pain. “When we actually had a conversation about it, she had the whole wrong end of the stick. She thought I was saying things that I wasn’t actually meaning.”

To Cee, it is possible to hold more than one idea at the same time, even if they are contradictory: an attempt to make sense of the chaos of his psyche, where intrusive thoughts can win and rise to the surface. Although the likes of Ari may not see the nuance, expressing and processing these thoughts doesn’t mean they’re validated. “I have a positive relationship with my mother, with all women,” Cee says. “But at the same time, I get angry at my mum, sometimes. I might say something rude to her, to my girl. It’s just a human thing. And it comes out in my music.”

If there is something Central Cee is considering changing, it’s his process. After his hit mixtapes, he envisions a more comprehensive, live-feeling setup for his debut album proper. “Let’s go to one room and just camp out and work. I know that’s how real musicians do it,” he says, before backtracking a bit. “At the same time I’m kind of nervous to do it, though. Because what I’m doing right now works for me.” It can be hard to argue that when you see the songs go off live: any questions seem to disappear into the squirming heap.

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Both Thelma and Louise (the hens) had been debeaked as chicks, a process that cuts the tip of a chicken's beak. Photograph: Tove Danovich

[Life and style](#)

**Want free eggs? Don't buy chicks –
rescue hens**

Soaring egg prices have fueled huge demand for backyard flocks, even as millions of ‘spent’ hens are killed yearly

[Tove Danovich](#)

[@TKDano](#)

Fri 7 Apr 2023 03.00 EDTLast modified on Fri 7 Apr 2023 12.50 EDT

First eggs became expensive and hard to find; now it’s the chicken’s turn. When the average price of a dozen eggs reached \$4.28 in January 2023, more than double the previous year’s price, and shortages due to avian flu were common, people rushed out in search of chickens. The sudden demand for backyard flocks has left many farm stores and hatcheries sold out for months.

But the cute baby chicks people turn to when starting their backyard chicken journey aren’t the only option for starting a flock. Every year, millions of hens are killed when the egg industry deems them “spent” or too old – and we could bring them into our yards instead.

“Adopt, don’t shop” has become normalized for most companion animals, and as more Americans list backyard chickens among their pets, there’s no reason we shouldn’t apply this to our flocks. When you adopt hens, I discovered, you get much more than eggs in exchange.

When I first brought Thelma and Louise home in 2020, they were two years old but had never seen the sky or touched grass. They’d hardly even had the chance to spread their wings. The two red hens had spent their lives in cages, crammed with other hens on a commercial egg farm. They were scraggly, and the feathers they had looked in need of a good preen – half broken and sticking out at strange angles. Both had been debeaked as chicks, a process that cuts the tip of a chicken’s beak so they can’t peck each other in their cramped quarters. Thelma’s had been done badly and the top of her beak stopped just after her nostrils.



One of the author's rescued hens. Photograph: Tove Danovich

They'd lived, in other words, the way roughly [70%](#) of all laying hens in the US live. But unlike most of their fellow birds, Thelma and Louise came home to a backyard coop instead of being killed. (The US typically keeps a flock of 300 million commercial egg layers, most of whom are killed and disposed of before their second hatchday.)

In the UK, organizations like the British Hen Welfare Trust have been rescuing hens from commercial egg farms and putting them into people's homes since 2005. Yet here in the states, people are more likely to buy chicks from a hatchery. We are missing out.

"We have to normalize the concept of chicken adoption as they've done for dog and cat adoption," said Ariana Huemer, director of [Hen Harbor](#), based in Santa Cruz, California. "There is an endless supply of hens," she added. "We just need to connect people with them." Since Huemer started rescuing hens in 2014, the organization has rehomed roughly 4,000.

Only a few organizations like Hen Harbor regularly rescue former commercial hens. It's easier to do this work in the UK, which is roughly the size of Oregon, where I live. Most hen rescues can only offer adoptions to people able to pick the birds up themselves. This is one reason Kelly

Rutkowski started [Adopt a Bird Network](#), a resource connecting willing adopters with hens (and roosters) in need of homes – birds from farms, backyards and shelters alike.

It took months for me to locate a pair within a day's drive. I finally found Thelma and Louise at a sanctuary in Washington that had rescued a few hundred. I drove six hours round trip to bring them home. Though I'd raised hens from chicks before, the transformation from baby to adult was nothing like what I found in these two. Stuck at home in lockdown, I watched Thelma and Louise regrow their feathers and get to be chickens for the first time in their lives. They jostled to nap in the best spots and were always curious about what I was doing. If I did yard work that involved digging, they were underfoot trying to Hoover up the worms and bugs I'd uncovered.

Right now, much like during the [Covid chick boom](#), people are rushing out to start backyard flocks. Yet the chicks people are buying won't be old enough to lay for six to eight months. Rescues are worried that another baby chick boom will mean more unwanted roosters in need of homes when they start crowing (most urban and suburban areas don't allow them). But these rescued commercial hens are all female and will lay almost immediately upon arrival.

“It's definitely therapeutic to see the condition that they start out in – then, a month or two later, they look like totally different birds,” said Erica Camp, founder of [Second Hen'd](#), an organization that rehomes commercial hens in Missouri. “You can say, ‘That's because of me.’”

I love all of my flock but there was something special about Thelma and Louise. They seemed determined to get the most out of their freedom. When I ate grapes, they fluttered up to peck one or two right from the bunch. They always seemed to know how to find the best patch of sun and lie in it, wings splayed to soak up the rays, making contented burbles. Sometimes they came close to me and let me hold them or give them a quick pet. Others, usually when I needed to put them back in the coop, they ran as fast as their little legs could carry them in the other direction.

These hens, deemed too old by the industry, laid over 500 eggs between them. By the time they passed on – both from cancer – they’d lived with me longer than they’d been in a cage. The cost of eggs may be rising, but watching them come into themselves is something I could never put a price on.

Tove Danovich is a freelance journalist and the author of [Under the Henfluence: Inside the World of Backyard Chickens and the People Who Love Them](#).

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2023.04.07 - Opinion

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- 30 under 30-year sentences: why so many of Forbes' young heroes face jail
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Illustration: Sébastien Thibault/The Guardian

[Opinion](#)[Artificial intelligence \(AI\)](#).

AI will end the west's weak productivity and low growth. But who exactly will benefit?

[Larry Elliott](#)



With swaths of white collar jobs at risk, the clock is ticking on the development of policy to meet this huge societal challenge

Fri 7 Apr 2023 01.00 EDTLast modified on Fri 7 Apr 2023 13.35 EDT

Elon Musk is not most people's idea of a classic technophobe, so when the owner of Twitter warns of the dangers of artificial intelligence, it is worth sitting up and taking notice. Fearful that a new generation of ever-smarter machines threatens life on Earth as we know it, Musk was one of many at the cutting edge of technological change calling for a [six-month timeout](#) in the training of new AI systems.

There is nothing new in the idea that the machines are coming, and they are out to get us. Techno-optimists are right to say that the same arguments were aired by Luddites in the early 19th century. By this token, the chatbot ChatGPT is to the [fourth industrial revolution](#) what the spinning jenny was to the first – a product that symbolises the dawning of a new era.

In the past, there has been a pattern to events. New technology has arrived on the scene and has offered the prospect of doing things quicker and better. Fears have been raised of mass unemployment as machines take the jobs

previously done by humans. Eventually, the pessimists have been proved wrong, and the new technology has led to higher levels of employment.

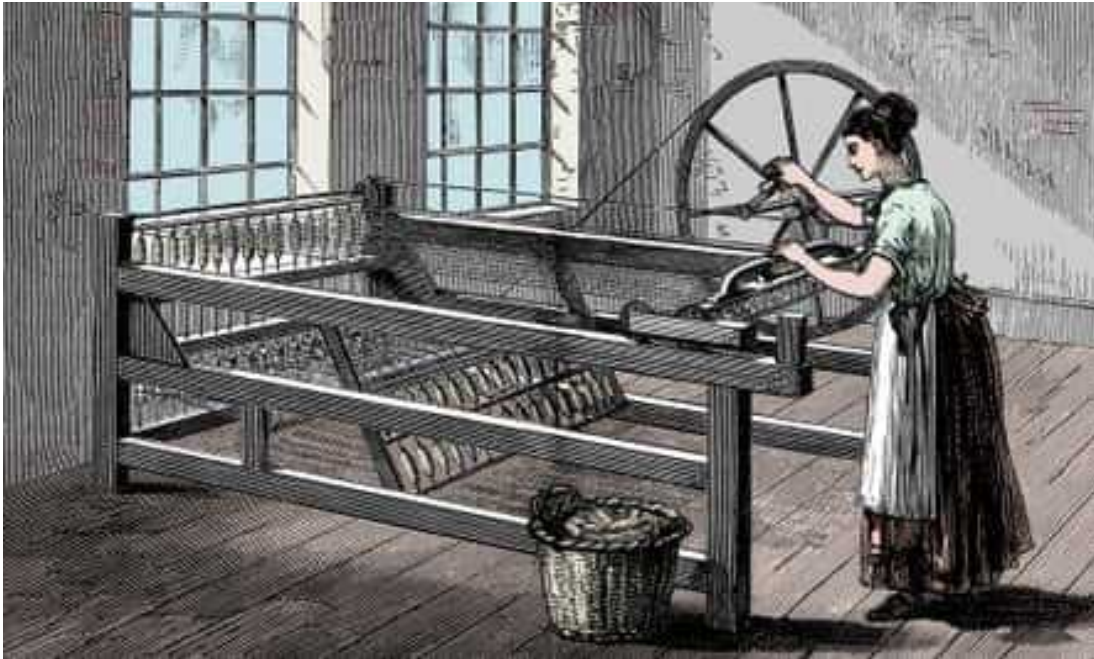
There is little doubt that AI will be a gamechanger that can bring to an end a long period of weak productivity and low growth common to western economies since the [global financial crisis](#) erupted 15 years ago. As was the case when tractors took the place of farm hands, a single machine will be able to do what countless workers formerly did. That's really not in question.

What *is* in doubt is who will benefit from the boost to productivity. What if all the gains are seized by a handful of tech giants? What if history fails to repeat itself, and AI destroys more jobs than it creates? What if AI does lead to a net increase in employment, but the new jobs are less well-paid than the old ones? Put simply, what if it is different this time? That may well be the case.

Much of the debate around the impact of AI is based on conjecture. There have been studies galore that have sought to estimate the number of [jobs that will be affected](#) – potentially running into the hundreds of millions globally – but nobody knows for sure. That said, certain conclusions can be drawn with a reasonable degree of confidence.

One is that the pace of technological advance will not slow down, and will probably continue to accelerate. ChatGPT was launched last November, and by March, [a new version was available](#). The call by Musk et al for a six-month moratorium has to be seen in the context of the geopolitical struggle between the US and China. Neither superpower wants to give the other the opportunity to forge ahead. The chances of Washington and Beijing getting together and agreeing to a joint pause seem remote.

Despite the speed at which the technology is advancing, a second conclusion is that there will be no immediate root-and-branch transformation of economies. Machines are expensive and workers cheap. Moreover, companies have invested heavily in their existing systems, and these sunk costs mean it will take time for the impact of AI to show up in investment, jobs and productivity figures.



‘The chatbot ChatGPT is to the [fourth industrial revolution](#) what the spinning jenny was to the first – a product that symbolises the dawning of a new era.’ Photograph: Print Collector/Getty Images

However, once the change does occur it is likely to be highly disruptive, because whole swaths of middle-class, white-collar jobs are at risk. This will be a break with the past, when earlier waves of technological advances made it possible for workers displaced from low-paid jobs to find better-paid employment in the new jobs created. People who were no longer needed as farm hands found work in factories.

AI poses a challenge to this model because of [Moravec’s paradox](#) – the notion that for robots, the hard problems are easy and the easy problems hard. Machines can wipe the floor with chess grandmasters, but have more trouble removing and cleaning the pieces at the end of the game: tasks that involve mobility and perception skills that have evolved in humans over millions of years.

But jobs that involve empathy and basic motor skills – social care work, for instance – tend to be poorly remunerated. That suggests the jobs most at risk from AI are likely to be higher paid than the ones created. There will be a boost to productivity and growth from the increased use of AI, but as things stand, the gains will be highly concentrated.

The final conclusion is that policymakers need to use the limited time available to them to respond to the obvious challenges. AI has the potential to bring great benefits, but also has risks that go beyond economics into the realms of privacy and ethics.

Launching the government's [white paper](#) last week, the science and technology secretary Michelle Donelan said she wanted AI to be used to make the UK the “smarter, healthier and happier place to live and work”. All of which sounds marvellous, with echoes of an essay John Maynard Keynes [wrote in 1930](#), predicting that within 100 years, increased prosperity would allow people to work 15-hour weeks.

Keynes's vision has yet to materialise, and nor will Donelan's unless urgent attention is paid to the 3Rs of AI: a system of global regulation that sets common standards for the use and development of AI; retraining to prepare the workforce for the inevitable change; and redistribution to ensure that the economic benefits are spread around. As with the climate crisis, the other existential threat of our time, the clock is ticking.

- Larry Elliott is the Guardian's economics editor

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Charlie Javice leaves Manhattan federal court on Tuesday. Photograph: Lawrence Neumeister/AP

Business

30 under 30-year sentences: why so many of Forbes' young heroes face jail

[Arwa Mahdawi](#)



Ex-CEO Charlie Javice, 31, is just the latest from the magazine's list to see criminal charges

Fri 7 Apr 2023 01.00 EDTLast modified on Fri 7 Apr 2023 11.25 EDT

Just a few years ago, Charlie Javice was riding high. In 2019 the tech CEO landed a spot on Forbes's [30 Under 30 list](#) for her work on a startup called Frank, which she described as "[Amazon for higher education](#)". What does that catchy but completely empty phrase mean? It means Frank helped students navigate the financial aid process. It was apparently so successfully at doing this that JPMorgan Chase acquired the company for \$175m in 2021 and Javice was made a managing director at the bank. The entrepreneur shared the [news on LinkedIn](#), boasting that in just four years Frank had grown to serve "over 5 million students at over 6,000 colleges".

Turns out those numbers might have been just a teeny bit exaggerated. On Tuesday Javice, 31, was [charged by the justice department](#) with "falsely and dramatically inflating the number of customers of her company" in order to get JPMorgan Chase to buy it. According to the lawsuit, Frank only had about 300,000 clients and fabricated data to show a larger customer base. She enlisted a data scientist to make up a few million customers, basically,

and JPMorgan, which has about 240,000 employees and pays its CEO \$34.5m for his expertise, didn't seem to spot this in its due diligence.

Javice has been charged with separate counts of conspiracy to commit wire and bank fraud, each of which carries a maximum sentence of 30 years in prison. Javice has denied all the allegations against her.

Javice, as [eagle-eyed Twitter users were quick to note](#), is not the first Forbes 30 Under 30 alum to suddenly be looking at decades in jail. In [2021, Sam Bankman-Fried](#), a self-described “effective altruist”, made the list. Following the dramatic collapse of his former crypto exchange FTX, he's facing a [litany of charges](#) ranging from bribing a foreign government to money laundering to making unlawful political contributions. His colleague Caroline Ellison, the former co-CEO of Alameda Research, [made the list in 2022](#). In December, Ellison pleaded guilty to [seven criminal charges](#) carrying a maximum sentence of 110 years in prison – her cooperation means she'll likely get a far more lenient punishment.



Sam Bankman-Fried made the 30 Under 30 list in 2021. Photograph: Bloomberg/Getty Images

Another embarrassing Forbes alum is Martin “Pharma Bro” Shkreli, who was in the finance category of the [list in 2012](#). He was sentenced to [seven](#)

[years in prison](#) in 2018 for securities fraud but got out of prison last year and immediately [launched an investing newsletter](#).

While Elizabeth Holmes never actually made the 30 Under 30 list, she did headline the Forbes Under 30 Summit, [so she gets an honorary mention](#). So does Trevor Milton, the founder of a hydrogen-powered truck company called Nikola, who was on a 2020 Forbes list called [12 under 40](#), listing the youngest billionaires on the Forbes 400. “Trevor Milton, the 38-year-old college dropout behind zero-emission truckmaker Nikola Motor, joins the ranks of America’s richest millennials after tripling his net worth in less than a year,” the piece gushed. You know how he got rich so quick? You guessed it: with just a little sprinkling of crime. Perhaps most notably, Nikola [made a demo video](#) showing its non-functional truck rolling downhill but tilted the camera to make it look like it was traveling under its own power on a flat road. Milton has been [convicted of fraud](#) and is awaiting sentencing in June. No doubt if he does go to jail he’ll get out after a few months and start a green energy podcast.

“The Forbes 30 Under 30 have collectively raised \$5.3B in funding,” the tech entrepreneur [Chris Bakke tweeted on Tuesday](#). “The Forbes 30 Under 30 have also been arrested for frauds and scams worth over \$18.5B. Incredible track record.” The first number comes from Forbes and the second is Bakke’s own back-of-an-envelope calculation, but you get the gist: the line between innovator and fraudster seems to have become alarmingly thin.

The problem here isn’t Forbes, of course; the problem is the vision of success that we’ve been sold and the fetishizing of youth. 30 Under 30 isn’t just a list, it’s a mentality: a pressure to achieve great things before youth slips away from you. The pressure can lead certain ambitious people to take shortcuts. And, in fact, shortcuts are encouraged: millennials, after all, grew up being told to “fake it till you make it”, cash in now until you become a withered, irrelevant, 30-year-old prune. If you exaggerate a little bit, that’s not fraud, that’s hustle! Until, of course, the justice department comes knocking.

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A stock image. A New Zealand Greens MP shocked her colleagues by apparently calling another MP a ‘crybaby’ in the wrong group chat. Photograph: Ivan Chiosea/Alamy

[OpinionNew Zealand](#)

With a text message sent to the wrong group chat, New Zealand’s Greens have never been so relatable

[Elle Hunt](#)



We can all learn from an episode in which one MP allegedly called another a ‘crybaby’ and parliamentary TV caught the reactions

Thu 6 Apr 2023 23.44 EDTLast modified on Fri 7 Apr 2023 19.03 EDT

It has been [described](#) as “everyone’s worst nightmare” and a “wrong group-chat horror”, which you might think a bit melodramatic – only if you’ve never experienced it yourself.

As it is, political scandals are rarely so relatable. New Zealand’s Green party [is in highly public turmoil](#) after one politician sent a message seeming to criticise a colleague to a group of their other colleagues, apparently by mistake.

While the Greens’ Chlöe Swarbrick was speaking in the House on Wednesday, her fellow MP Elizabeth Kerekere texted a group of Green politicians and staff: “omg what a crybaby” – seeming to refer to Swarbrick’s failed amendment bill, aiming to reduce harm from alcohol.

After a colleague responded with “I think this is the wrong chat ...?” – which ranks alongside “We need to talk” in its ability to instantly strike fear

into the heart of its recipient – Kerekere deleted the text, then apologised for the “inappropriate message ... which was not meant for this thread”.

The full exchange was leaked to Radio New Zealand, which reported the story on Thursday, along with Kerekere’s denial of “calling Swarbrick a crybaby” – but [subsequent analysis](#) of Parliament TV shows two Green MPs seated behind Swarbrick looking at their phones, seemingly responding to the texts with apparent horror.

Green MPs Golriz Ghahraman and Julie Anne Genter, who sit behind Swarbrick, could be seen on Parliament TV apparently reading, reacting to, and discussing the texts.

At one point, Ghahraman clasped her hand to her mouth, and shook her head. <https://t.co/Eldmsh8Lzr> pic.twitter.com/o4UPtouXHg

— RNZ (@radionz) [April 6, 2023](#)

The Greens’ co-leaders, Marama Davidson and James Shaw, have condemned Kerekere’s message as inappropriate and going against the party’s values, and said it would be fully investigated. In the meantime, there are lessons here for all of us.

The obvious one might be “if you can’t say anything nice, don’t say anything at all” – but that’s never been a realistic expectation of human nature, let alone now.

In the age of social media, the line between our having a passing, perhaps uncharitable thought and sharing it with an audience is perilously thin; while any attempt to limit its spread (say, by sharing with “close friends only” or on a pseudonymous Twitter account) is fraught and highly fallible.

With a screen grab or forward, a message shared with a few trusted confidants can easily become a public broadcast – as Kerekere found, too late.

There are a few takeaways from this undignified saga. From a pragmatic standpoint, clearly distinguishing your group chats with names and images

provides a helpful visual cue. If you simply must trash-talk someone remotely, voice notes are less easily circulated (and emojis harder to interpret).

It's also never a good idea to conduct sensitive conversations when you are tired or distracted: the risk of sending a message *to* someone whom you mean to message *about* is just too high.

One underused strategy I'd like to advocate for is simply saying less. It's only in the recent past that people have had the means to share whatever idle thought occurs to them, almost instantaneously – but all of us are weathering the toll.

Just look at Twitter, compelling some people to voice statements of such staggering banality they can't be of interest to anyone, even the individuals themselves. I am stricken by the memory of two in particular, one along the lines of “Just missed a bus, and the next one's not for seven minutes. Gah!” and another: “Time for lunch”.

I'm not saying that my every missive is a banger – but who would take the time to type this out?

This message from Kerekere is different, being “mean and not with good heart” (to give Davidson's preliminary read) rather than inane – but the fact of it reflects the same impulse: that your thought (“I feel irritated by my colleague”; “I am inconvenienced by the bus”) is not complete until it is articulated.

It's as if, in this attention economy, some people have come to feel that they are shortchanging themselves if they don't convey their emotions or experiences to a broader audience – whether a friend on WhatsApp or their followers on Twitter.

Comparisons with “the past” are nearly always reductive, not least because there's no bundling social media back into Pandora's box now – but they can be illustrative in showing just how far our understanding of public and private, personal and professional has been derailed.

For instance, had she not had a seemingly private means of voicing it, would Kerekere have felt frustrated enough with Swarbrick to shout out “what a crybaby!” in the House? Or would she have sat through it in silence and perhaps – if still gripped by irritation after she got home – vented about it then?

Sadly, in this contemporary, personality-driven, digital news cycle, such gripes have become everybody’s problem – perhaps at the expense of faith in politics as a means for effecting change.

Leaking to the media is, of course, one way of indirectly sanctioning such behaviour; and it’s arguably in the public’s interest to be made aware of ruptures within a party seeking power.

But though Swarbrick has risen above it, saying, effectively, that she has been called much worse – the saga benefits only the Greens’ political opponents, able to point to it as a sign of juvenile in-fighting and incompetence, and to coast while the news cycle is distracted.

It also speaks to the loss of perspective on what politicians exist to do: serve.

That’s not to say that our elected representatives should sit there thinking only worthy thoughts, about how best to give the taxpayer bang for their buck and save the Earth. It’s a demanding job, and people are people: contradictory, impulsive, irritable, hungry.

But it’s in those demanding jobs, working under intense pressure and scrutiny, that learning how to manage our emotional responses and retain perspective – or at least think before we tweet – becomes all the more useful.

In his coming book *Order Out of Chaos*, the kidnap negotiator Scott Walker talks about the importance of learning to master your own mindset (and your ego in particular) in order to communicate effectively, and achieve your own goals.

All politicians, everywhere, could do well to think of their job as a high-stakes negotiation with real-life consequences, rather than a TV show that

they're keeping one eye on as they text their friends.

But if that is too much to ask for, they could do worse than to follow the advice of Alice Roosevelt Longworth: "If you don't have anything nice to say, come sit next to me". At least then it can't be screenshotted.

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‘Breastfeeding has felt miraculous, and I have come to understand that old religious fervour for it, felt flickers of divinity and of reverence.’
Photograph: Eva Blanco/Getty Images/EyeEm

[Republic of Parenthood](#)[Breastfeeding](#)

Stopping breastfeeding my baby offers a bittersweet relief

[Rhianon Lucy Cosslett](#)



My journey through mixed feeding has been painful and beautiful in equal measure

Fri 7 Apr 2023 03.00 EDTLast modified on Fri 7 Apr 2023 12.51 EDT

It's more than a year since I had my baby and I'm still breastfeeding. If you read [my first, furious column](#) about it, you might be surprised: nursing was a challenge. We both cried for weeks. Sometimes I screamed in pain. The guilt I felt for using formula – despite my hungry pre-term baby's need for it – was matched only by the fury I felt at the professionals who treat exclusive breastfeeding as worth the sacrifice of a mother's mental health.

My mind boggles at some of the advice I was given: how I was instructed to pump after every feed, but no one thought to tell me that I needn't continue this indefinitely, compounding my distress and exhaustion; the lactation-promoting drug – which I did not take because one of the side-effects was depression – I was prescribed despite my milk coming in as normal on day three; the NCT breastfeeding “expert” who said that the pain was because we were doing it wrong; my tiny baby who had not been in the womb long enough to fully develop his feeding reflex, with his tied tongue and his minuscule mouth opening and closing like a baby bird's as he struggled to latch, and I, his mother, bruised and bleeding. I finally had to steel myself to

firmly tell the health visitor that exclusive breastfeeding was no longer realistic or desirable for either of us.

The benefits of breastfeeding are often overstated. A new [University of Glasgow study](#) may have made those who couldn't breastfeed feel even worse. The study has found that compared to formula-only feeding, breast- and mixed-fed babies are at a lower risk of having special educational needs. "Yet," says Dr Danya Glaser, visiting professor at UCL, and honorary consultant child and adolescent psychiatrist at Great Ormond Street children's hospital, "correlation does not equal causation. The study has not been adequately controlled for the role of low socioeconomic status in both breastfeeding and SEN prevalence." (It also struck me that babies who are premature or have undergone difficult births are at greater risk of learning disabilities. Establishing breastfeeding can also be more challenging with such babies.)

Research is to be welcomed, of course. As Joanna Wolfarth points out in *Milk: An Intimate History of [Breastfeeding](#)*, we have more scientific research on tomatoes than we do on breast milk. Many studies should be taken with a pinch of salt, nevertheless. And I would like to say, clearly and definitively to any new mother, read the chapter on breastfeeding in Eliane Glaser's *Motherhood: Feminism's Unfinished Business*, and liberate yourselves from it.

Another thing that can go to hell alongside guilt is the myth of nipple confusion. Mixed feeding is the reason that I am still breastfeeding. No one talks about it because new mothers are so infantilised that we are considered better off not hearing about it, in case we get any ideas. I'm sure I'd have given up sooner had my husband not shared the work of infant feeding, forming a wonderful bond with the baby in the process. Mixed feeding has enabled me to work, socialise, go to galleries, and most importantly, sleep. It has helped me live a full life while breastfeeding. It has been, for my family, the best of both worlds.



‘Wolfarth writes of the Tintoretto painting *The Origin of the Milky Way*, based on a Roman retelling of the Greek myth of Hera, whose milk splatters across the sky and creates the stars.’ Photograph: Classic Collection 3/Alamy

There have been moments this past year when the baby’s need for my milk has felt annihilating, when my blood-sugar level has dipped so low I have almost lost consciousness. I have felt at times, to quote Elena Ferrante, “like a lump of food ... a cud made of a living material that continually amalgamated and softened its living substance to allow two greedy bloodsuckers to nourish themselves”.

At others, breastfeeding has felt miraculous, and I have come to understand that old religious fervour for it, felt flickers of divinity and of reverence. In periods of illness, he has taken the breast where he would take no other sustenance, and I have felt pride and relief in his return to health, and in our bond. I can see why people get romantic and emotional, why Wolfarth cried in front of Louise Bourgeois’ sculpture *The Good Mother* – I stood in the same spot weeks after giving birth and cried too. Like her, it made me think of the bonds that nursing can create with the wider community. I will always feel a warm glow when I think of Karen, from Islington Breastfeeding Support, of my cousin Emily, who gave me 24/7 text advice while tandem

feeding her children, and of Sue, the lactation consultant who changed everything.

Thirteen months on, and this morning, as I held my son to my breast, I felt a wave of love and loss. I am in the process of cutting down the feeds – slowly, to avoid too much of a hormone drop – and it’s by no means emotionally straightforward. “No one tells you how to stop,” my sister-in-law said, wryly, as she tried to wean her three-year-old. I do not want to breastfeed for that long – the baby has started nursery and besides, I’m going to Glastonbury without him – but there will be a mourning process.

Everywhere I look I seem to see mothers nursing their newborns, and I try not to stare, but I feel something akin to a craving, to be feeding a baby that small again, to be, in those short – or interminable – moments, his world. In Milk, Wolfarth writes of the Tintoretto painting [The Origin of the Milky Way](#), based on a Roman retelling of the Greek myth of Hera, whose milk splatters across the sky and creates the stars (the cosmic dust of which is contained within all of us, an apt metaphor). The idea moves me. It makes me want to pay tribute to my own milk and the body that made it. Although it is time my son and I both looked outwards, for our universes to expand, I feel wistful. Despite its challenges, nursing him has been a privilege and a gift.

What’s working

One of the funniest books we own is John Burningham’s Avocado Baby, about a baby who grows so strong from eating avocados that he can fight burglars and bullies and push the car when it breaks down. Our baby is already a bruiser, but another benefit is that after eating a whole one for supper, he proceeded to sleep for almost 10 hours.

What’s not

Although I don’t regret recommending the Little Sock Company to readers, my tenacious son has finally worked out how to remove their baby-proof socks, so we are now back to bare feet. At least the weather is getting better, so his toes won’t get so cold.

- Rhiannon Lucy Cosslett is a Guardian columnist and author

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Israel launches airstrikes in Lebanon and Gaza Strip – video

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Israel launches airstrikes in Lebanon and Gaza Strip after ‘biggest rocket salvo since 2006’

Rocket fire from Gaza and Lebanon and second Israeli raid on al-Aqsa mosque stoke fears of further escalation

Staff and agencies in Jerusalem

Fri 7 Apr 2023 06.54 EDTFirst published on Thu 6 Apr 2023 18.19 EDT

Israeli jets hit sites in [Lebanon](#) and Gaza early on Friday, in retaliation for rocket attacks it blamed on the Islamist group Hamas, as tensions following police raids on the al-Aqsa mosque in Jerusalem this week threatened to spiral out of control.

Two explosions were heard in Gaza late on Thursday. It was not immediately clear what had been targeted but [Israel](#) said its jets hit targets including tunnels and weapons manufacturing sites of Hamas, the Islamist group that controls the blockaded southern coastal strip.

“Israel’s response, tonight and later, will exact a significant price from our enemies,” prime minister Benjamin Netanyahu said following a security cabinet meeting to discuss what the [Israel](#) Defence Forces (IDF) described as [the biggest rocket salvo since the 2006 war](#) into northern Israel. Most of the 34 projectiles were intercepted, but there were two minor injuries and a fire.

As the Israeli jets struck in [Gaza](#), salvoes of rockets were fired in response and sirens sounded in Israeli towns and cities in bordering areas. The IDF

also said it had launched strikes in Lebanon hitting “targets including terrorist infrastructures belonging to Hamas”.

AFP reported at least three explosions in southern Lebanon’s Tyre region with at least two shells falling near a Palestinian refugee camp near Tyre city. One missile fell on a farmer’s house near the camp, causing material damage, an AFP correspondent in the area said.

The pro-Iranian Hezbollah channel Al-Manar reported that the shelling had targeted three areas in southern Lebanon, including the refugee camp area.

NEW - after a night of strikes on [#Hamas](#) positions in [#Gaza](#), [#Israel](#) has now launched several airstrikes on targets in southern [#Lebanon](#), mostly in the vicinity of the Rashidiyeh camp, south of [#Tyre](#). [@IDF](#) has confirmed. More strikes in [#Gaza](#) now too. pic.twitter.com/jGGKO8nLPX

— Charles Lister (@Charles_Lister) [April 7, 2023](#)

“We hold the Zionist occupation fully responsible for the grave escalation and the flagrant aggression against the Gaza Strip and for the consequences that will bring onto the region,” Hamas said in a statement.

With tensions running high on Friday, two Israeli sisters were killed and their mother seriously injured in a shooting attack in the occupied West Bank. The Israeli military said it was searching for those behind the attack. No militant group immediately claimed responsibility but a Hamas spokesman praised the attack.

The marked uptick in violence during the Muslim holy month of Ramadan and the beginning of the Jewish Passover holiday comes after a year of increasing bloodshed in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. It also carried echoes of 2021, when clashes at al-Aqsa during Ramadan helped start an 11-day war between Israel and Hamas. Thursday’s events have led to fears of a wider conflagration around the region.

Although Israel blamed Hamas for Thursday’s attack, which took place as Hamas head Ismail Haniyeh was visiting Lebanon, security experts said

Hezbollah, the powerful Shia group which helps Israel's main enemy Iran project its power across the region, must have given its permission.

Hezbollah and its allies have faced extensive attacks by Israeli jets in Syrian territory over the last week, striking at what Israel believes to be sites to manufacture drones. At least two members of the organisation are believed to have been killed during night raids that levelled several hangars at Syrian airbases.

The militant group has vowed to strike back at its arch foe whenever its members are killed, but, like Hamas in the [Gaza](#) Strip, remains wary of an escalation. Though Palestinian groups operate in the south of Lebanon, none do so without the knowledge of Hezbollah.

The raid on Palestinians [by Israeli police inside al-Aqsa mosque](#) could have offered a pretext for a limited rocket strike, which served both the Palestinians and Hezbollah and gave the latter at least some deniability.

-

Early on Thursday, Palestinian militants in Gaza launched about nine rockets into Israel in the early hours, setting off air raid sirens across the south of the country but causing no casualties or damage. Most of the rockets exploded before impact, the Israeli army said, and none of Gaza's militant groups claimed responsibility.

Two rockets were fired just before the second incident at the holiest Jerusalem site late on Wednesday and early on Thursday, in which police using stun grenades and rubber bullets entered the compound to remove worshippers. Six people were injured, according to the Palestinian Red Crescent.

The latest flare-up followed a large [Israeli police raid on al-Aqsa](#) the day before, in which at least 12 people were injured and more than 350 arrested. That raid also triggered rocket fire from the Gaza Strip, which was countered with Israeli airstrikes on alleged military sites belonging to Hamas, the Islamist movement in control of the strip.

Quick Guide

Where is al-Aqsa mosque and why is it significant to Muslims?

Show

Al-Aqsa mosque sits at the heart of Jerusalem's Old City, on a hill known to Muslims as al-Haram al-Sharif, or the Noble Sanctuary, and to Jews as the Temple Mount.

Muslims regard the site as the third holiest in Islam, after Mecca and Medina. Al-Aqsa is the name given to the whole compound and is home to two Muslim holy places: the Dome of the Rock and al-Aqsa Mosque, which was built in the 8th century AD.

The compound overlooks the Western Wall, a sacred place of prayer for Jews, for whom the Temple Mount is their most sacred site. Jews believe biblical King Solomon built the first temple there 3,000 years ago. A second temple was razed by the Romans in AD70.

Israel captured the site in the 1967 Middle East war and annexed it with the rest of East Jerusalem and adjoining parts of the West Bank in a move not recognised internationally.

Jordan, whose ruling Hashemite family has custodianship of the Muslim and Christian sites, appoints members of the Waqf institution, which oversees the site.

The compound has long been a flashpoint for deadly violence over matters of sovereignty and religion in Jerusalem.

Under the longstanding "status quo" arrangement governing the area, which Israel says it maintains, non-Muslims can visit but only Muslims are allowed to worship in the mosque compound.

Jewish visitors have increasingly prayed more or less openly at the site in defiance of the rules, and Israeli restrictions on Muslim worshippers' access to the site have led to protests and outbreaks of violence. **Reuters**

Was this helpful?

Thank you for your feedback.

The first raid, in which disturbing footage of soldiers beating Palestinians with batons and the butts of rifles emerged, drew widespread condemnation in the Muslim world and concern from the White House over the possibility of escalation.

Both the UN and US called for calm on Thursday after the rocket fire, while the Lebanese government said it would coordinate with Unifil, the UN force on the Israeli-Lebanese border, to prevent an escalation.

Elsewhere on Thursday, clashes broke out overnight between protesters and police in the Arab-majority town of Umm al-Fahm in northern Israel and a Palestinian teenager was shot and wounded by an Israeli civilian in Jerusalem's Old City.

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The rapper's children plan to honor their father in future documentary and film projects. Photograph: Image Press Agency/NurPhoto/REX/Shutterstock

[US news](#)

Coolio died from fentanyl overdose, manager says

Grammy-winning rapper was found dead six months ago at friend's home in Los Angeles

Reuters

Fri 7 Apr 2023 05.51 EDTFirst published on Thu 6 Apr 2023 17.37 EDT

Grammy-winning rapper Coolio died from a fentanyl overdose, his manager said on Thursday, six months after the musician was found dead at a friend's home in [Los Angeles](#) at the age 59.

Born Artis Leon Ivey Jr, Coolio was best known for his 1995 single Gangsta's Paradise, from an album of the same name.

That song, a massive hit featured in the film *Dangerous Minds*, won a Grammy Award for best rap solo performance the following year.

Coolio's manager, Jarez Posey, said the rapper's family had been informed on Thursday by the Los Angeles county coroner's office that the singer had died from a fentanyl overdose.

The coroner's office did not immediately respond to a request for comment from Reuters.

Posey said the rapper's children planned to honor their father in future documentary and film projects.

Born in Pennsylvania in 1963, Coolio began performing as part of the West Coast hip-hop scene after moving to Compton, [California](#).

He released his debut album, *It Takes a Thief*, in 1994, scoring a Top Ten hit with the single *Fantastic Voyage*.

Fentanyl is a synthetic opioid that has been blamed for about 70,000 overdose deaths a year in the US. The singer [Prince died after an accidental overdose of the drug](#) in 2016, and it was [found in Tom Petty's system](#) following the death of the rock star in 2017.

This article was amended on 7 April 2023. The single from *It Takes a Thief* that gave Coolio a Top Ten hit was *Fantastic Voyage*, not *Lakeside* as an earlier version said. The track sampled the earlier single of the same name by the group *Lakeside*.



Tourists visit the crucifixion site in Cutud on Thursday. Photograph: Sherbien Dacalanio/Pacific Press/Shutterstock

[Philippines](#)

Eight Filipinos nailed to crosses as Easter crucifixion re-enactments resume

Tourists gather in Philippines for cross nailings north of Manila despite church leaders frowning upon the tradition

Associated Press in San Pedro Cutud

Fri 7 Apr 2023 11.21 EDTFirst published on Fri 7 Apr 2023 02.52 EDT

Eight Filipinos have been nailed to crosses to reenact Jesus Christ's suffering in a gory Good Friday tradition that draws thousands of devotees and tourists to the [Philippines](#) despite being rejected by the Catholic church.

The real-life crucifixions in the farming village of San Pedro Cutud in Pampanga province north of Manila resumed after a three-year pause due to the coronavirus pandemic. About a dozen villagers registered, but only eight

men participated, including 62-year-old sign painter Ruben Enaje, who was nailed to a wooden cross for the 34th time in San Pedro Cutud.

In a news conference shortly after his brief crucifixion, Enaje said he prayed for the eradication of the Covid-19 virus and the end of Russia's invasion of Ukraine, which has contributed to gas and food prices soaring worldwide.

"It's just these two countries involved in that war, Russia and Ukraine, but all of us are being affected," said Enaje, who appeared to be well and showed his two bandaged hands to journalists.

The father of four said he wanted to end his extraordinary penitence because of his age but would decide with finality before Lent next year. While the pain from the nailing was not as intense as anticipated, he said he always felt edgy before each crucifixion.

"To be honest, I always feel nervous, because I could end up dead on the cross," he told the Associated Press before Friday's procedure. "When I'm lying down on the cross, my body begins to feel cold," he said. "When my hands are tied, I just close my eyes and tell myself: 'I can do this. I can do this.'"



A Filipino penitent is nailed to a wooden cross in Santo Tomas, Pampanga province, on Good Friday. Photograph: Mark R Cristino/EPA

Surviving nearly unscathed when he fell from a three-storey building in 1985 prompted Enaje to undergo the ordeal as thanksgiving for what he considered a miracle. He extended the ritual after loved ones recovered from serious illnesses, one after another, turning him into a village celebrity as the “Christ” in the Lenten re-enactment of the Way of the Cross.

Ahead of their crucifixion on a dusty hill, Enaje and the other devotees, wearing thorny crowns of twigs, carried heavy wooden crosses on their backs for more than a kilometre (0.6 miles) in the scorching heat. Village actors dressed as Roman centurions later hammered 10cm (4in) stainless steel nails through his palms and feet, then set him aloft on a cross under the sun for about 10 minutes.

Other penitents walked barefoot through village streets and beat their bare backs with sharp bamboo sticks and pieces of wood. Some participants in the past opened cuts in the penitents’ backs using broken glass to ensure that the ritual was sufficiently bloody.

The gruesome spectacle reflects the Philippines’ unique brand of [Catholicism](#), which merges church traditions with folk superstitions. Many of the mostly impoverished penitents undergo the ritual to atone for sins, pray for the sick or for a better life, and give thanks for miracles.

Church leaders in the Philippines have frowned on the crucifixions and self-flagellations, saying Filipinos can show their deep faith and religious devotion without hurting themselves and by doing charity work instead, such as donating blood.

Robert Reyes, a prominent Catholic priest and human rights activist in the country, said the bloody rites reflect the church’s failure to fully educate many Filipinos on Christian tenets, leaving them on their own to explore personal ways of seeking divine help for all sorts of maladies.



A bloodied flagellant is carried away after fainting during Maundy Thursday rites in San Fernando, Pampanga province. Photograph: Ezra Acayan/Getty Images

Folk Catholicism has become deeply entrenched in the local religious culture, Reyes said, citing a chaotic procession of a black statue of Jesus Christ called the Black Nazarene each January, which authorities say draws more than a million devotees each year in one of Asia's largest religious festivals. Many bring towels to be wiped on the wooden statue, believing it has powers to cure ailments and ensure good health and a better life.

"The question is, where were we church people when they started doing this?" Reyes asked, saying the clergy should immerse itself in communities more and converse regularly with villagers. "If we judge them, we'll just alienate them."

The decades-long crucifixion tradition, meanwhile, has put impoverished San Pedro Cutud — one of the more than 500 villages in the rice-growing Pampanga province — on the map.

Organizers said more than 15,000 foreign and Filipino tourists and devotees gathered for the nailings in Cutud and two other nearby villages. There was

a festive air as villagers peddled bottled water, hats, food and religious items, and police and marshals kept order.

“They like this because there is really nothing like this on earth,” said Johnson Gareth, a British tour organiser, who brought 15 tourists from eight countries, including the United States, Canada and Germany, to witness the crucifixions. “It’s less gruesome than people think. They think it’s going to be very macabre or very disgusting, but it’s not. It’s done in a very respectful way.”

In the past, Gareth said tourists were “genuinely inspired and I think they left with a newfound respect for people’s beliefs”.

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Chinese coastguard vessels patrol in the central and northern waters of the Taiwan Strait after President Tsai Ing-wen met US House speaker Kevin McCarthy Photograph: Maritime Safety Administration of Fujian/Reuters

[China](#)

China sanctions US figures after Taiwan president's talks with House speaker

US thinktank and Reagan Foundation targeted, as well as Taiwan's de facto ambassador to the US, in row over President Tsai Ing-wen's trip

- [China–Taiwan tensions explained in 30 seconds](#)

[Helen Davidson](#) and agencies

Fri 7 Apr 2023 01.43 EDTFirst published on Thu 6 Apr 2023 22.01 EDT

China has imposed sanctions on US figures linked to the [Taiwan](#) president's visit to the US this week, as well as further restrictions on Taiwan's de facto ambassador to the United States.

The sanctions targeted the Ronald Reagan library which hosted the meeting between Tsai and US House speaker [Kevin McCarthy](#), and the Hudson Institute which hosted Tsai in New York and presented her with an award.

Four US nationals were listed, including the chair and director of the Hudson Institute, and the current head and former director of the Reagan Foundation.

A second round of sanctions was also unveiled against Hsiao Bi-khim, Taiwan's de facto ambassador to the US.

The moves come after Tsai met the US House speaker during a stopover in LA.

The sanctions prohibit the targets and their family members from entering the mainland, Hong Kong and Macau, state media reported on Friday. They also prohibit investors and firms related to the targets from cooperating with mainland organisations and individuals.

In August last year, [China](#) imposed sanctions on seven Taiwanese officials and lawmakers including Hsiao whom it accused of being “independence diehards” after then-US House speaker Nancy Pelosi's visit to Taiwan.

Beijing considers Taiwan to be Chinese territory, to be “reunified” by force if necessary. Tsai has said Taiwan is a sovereign nation and its future is up to its people to decide.

On Friday China's Taiwan affairs office accused the US institutions and executives of “provid[ing] a platform and convenience for Tsai Ing-wen to engage in ‘Taiwan independence’ separatist activities”.



Hsiao Bi-khim, Taiwan's de facto ambassador to the US. Photograph: Tyrone Siu/Reuters

It also announced “punishments” on a Taiwanese organisation, the Prospect Foundation, which counts former Taiwanese ministers and executives on its board, and the regional Council of Asian Liberals and Democrats, accusing them of having “gone all out to ingratiate themselves with anti-China forces”.

Chinese sanctions will have little practical impact on Hsiao as senior Taiwanese officials do not visit China, and Chinese courts do not have jurisdiction in Taiwan.

Wow, the PRC just sanctioned me again, for the second time.
pic.twitter.com/vojyhFB5RK

— Bi-khim Hsiao 蕭美琴 (@bikhim) [April 7, 2023](#)

It is the latest move after China deployed People's Liberation Army (PLA) warships through waters around Taiwan and vowed a “firm and forceful” response to Tsai meeting McCarthy.

China had repeatedly warned both sides that the meeting should not take place, and deployed an aircraft carrier strike group through waters south-east of Taiwan hours before the talks.

Three additional PLA warships, one fighter jet, and one ship-launched anti-submarine helicopter were detected near Taiwan inside its air defence identification zone on Thursday, Taiwan's defence ministry said. A spokesman told the Guardian the ships were ones "that are normally around the Taiwan Strait".

Japan's ministry of defence also reported a Chinese intelligence gathering ship on Thursday, sailing between Japan's Okinawa and Miyakojima islands, northeast of Taiwan. It also reported the return journey of a PLA Navy guided-missile frigate detected about 100km off Taiwan's coast on Wednesday.

China also deployed coastguard vessels for unusual "board and inspect" patrols that triggered a protest from Taiwan. Taiwan's defence ministry instructed Taiwanese vessels, including cargo and ferry services, not to cooperate with attempts by the patrol to board and inspect them.

The US called on China "to cease its military, diplomatic and economic pressure against Taiwan and instead engage in meaningful diplomacy".

"We remain committed to maintaining open channels of communication so as to prevent the risk of any kind of miscalculation," a state department spokesman, Vedant Patel, said on Thursday.

Tensions flared around the island last August, following a visit to the island by Pelosi. China then deployed warships, missiles and fighter jets into the waters and skies around Taiwan, its largest show of force in years.

Its response to the McCarthy meeting has so far been on a much lower level, but still left Taiwan on high alert.

Tsai said face-to-face meetings with US officials were important for "regional peace" and called on Beijing to remain calm.

“I also hope the Chinese side can exercise self-restraint and don’t overreact,” she said at a pre-departure press briefing in Los Angeles.

With Agence France-Presse and Reuters

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Clarence Thomas with Donald Trump at the swearing-in of Amy Coney Barrett in October 2020. Photograph: White House/Zuma/Rex/Shutterstock

[Clarence Thomas](#)

Clarence Thomas faces impeachment calls after reports of undisclosed gifts

Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez condemns ‘shocking corruption’ after ProPublica report details luxury items from top Republican donor

[David Smith](#) in Washington
[@smithinamerica](#)

Thu 6 Apr 2023 13.46 EDTLast modified on Thu 6 Apr 2023 16.27 EDT

Clarence Thomas, the most conservative justice on the [US supreme court](#), is facing renewed calls for impeachment after it was reported that for two decades he has accepted undisclosed luxury gifts from a Republican mega-donor.

Thomas may have violated financial disclosure rules when he failed to disclose travel on yachts and jets and other gifts funded by the property billionaire Harlan Crow and uncovered by [ProPublica](#).

It found that Thomas flies on Crow's Bombardier Global 5000 jet and holidays on Crow's 162ft super-yacht. He has enjoyed holidays at Crow's ranch in Texas and joined him at an exclusive all-male California retreat. The justice usually spends about a week each summer at Crow's private resort in the Adirondack mountains in New York.

The revelations prompted sharp criticism by Democrats of Thomas, who after 31 years is the longest-serving justice and an influential voice in the rightwing majority that last year ended the right to abortion.

Dick Durbin, a Democrat from Illinois and chair of the Senate judiciary committee, said: "This behavior is simply inconsistent with the ethical standards the American people expect of any public servant, let alone a justice on the supreme court.

"Today's report demonstrates, yet again, that supreme court justices must be held to an enforceable code of conduct, just like every other federal judge. The ProPublica report is a call to action, and the Senate judiciary committee will act."

[Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez](#), a progressive congresswoman from New York, tweeted: "This is beyond party or partisanship. This degree of corruption is shocking – almost cartoonish. Thomas must be impeached. Barring some dramatic change, this is what the [chief justice John] Roberts court will be known for: rank corruption, erosion of democracy, and the stripping of human rights."

Impeachment remains unlikely, even given [other calls](#) regarding the pro-Trump activities of Thomas's wife, the rightwing activist Ginni Thomas, and not just because Republicans hold the House. Only one supreme court justice has ever been impeached: Samuel Chase, [in 1804-05](#). He was acquitted in the Senate.

Thomas, 74, has made his humble origins a central part of his identity. He was born in Savannah, Georgia, and learned [Geechee](#), a Creole language spoken by the descendants of slaves, before standard English. He was abandoned by his father but says his grandfather instilled his work ethic.

In a documentary which Crow helped finance, Thomas described no-frills tastes: “I prefer the RV parks. I prefer the Walmart parking lots to the beaches and things like that. There’s something normal to me about it. I come from regular stock, and I prefer that – I prefer being around that.”

ProPublica told a different story, drawn from flight records, internal documents and interviewees ranging from super-yacht staff to members of the secretive Bohemian Club to an Indonesian scuba-diving instructor.

It found that Thomas’s friendship with Crow has enabled him to experience luxuries he would never have been able to afford on his salary of \$285,000. For example, in 2019, Thomas and his wife flew on Crow’s jet to Indonesia for nine days island-hopping on Crow’s yacht. The trip would have cost more than \$500,000.

ProPublica also noted that each summer Thomas spends about a week at Camp Topridge, Crow’s Adirondacks resort. The 105-acre property offers boathouses, a clay tennis court, a batting cage and a replica of Hagrid’s hut from Harry Potter. [A painting](#) there shows Thomas enjoying a cigar alongside Crow and talking with influential rightwingers including the legal activist [Leonard Leo](#).

ProPublica said: “The extent and frequency of Crow’s apparent gifts to Thomas have no known precedent in the modern history of the US supreme court.”

It said the trips do not appear in Thomas’s financial disclosures and cited two experts saying that appears to violate a law that requires justices, judges, members of Congress and federal officials to declare most gifts.

[In a statement](#), Crow denied seeking to influence supreme court decisions. The Dallas businessman said he and his wife, Kathy, had been friends with the Thomases since 1996 and “the hospitality we have extended ... is no

different from the hospitality we have extended to our many other dear friends”.

Crow added: “Justice Thomas and Ginni never asked for any of this hospitality. We have never asked about a pending or lower-court case, and Justice Thomas has never discussed one, and we have never sought to influence Justice Thomas on any legal or political issue.

“More generally, I am unaware of any of our friends ever lobbying or seeking to influence Justice Thomas on any case, and I would never invite anyone who I believe had any intention of doing that. These are gatherings of friends.”

ProPublica said it reviewed a record showing that “during just one July 2017 trip, Thomas’ fellow guests included execs at Verizon and PricewaterhouseCoopers, major GOP donors, and one of the leaders of the conservative American Enterprise Institute thinktank”.

Sarah Lipton-Lubet, president of [Take Back the Court Action Fund](#), said: “How many of Crow’s pet interests have had business in front of the court while Thomas was enjoying the lifestyle of the rich and famous on the right-wing mega-donor’s dime?

“Thomas’ repeated mockery of basic ethical standards calls into question every decision he has imposed on millions of Americans.”

Meagan Hatcher-Mays, of the grassroots movement Indivisible, called for the Senate judiciary committee to investigate “Thomas’s reported ethical lapses, and move quickly to hold hearings and votes on the Supreme Court Ethics, Transparency, and Recusal Act.

“The American people want to believe that the court is fair, that the justices behave ethically, and that their decisions are free from undue political influence.”

Carl Tobias, a law professor at the University of Richmond, Virginia, said the “alleged failure to report Harlan Crow’s substantial expenditures ...

could further undermine public trust in the supreme court and Thomas specifically.

“This is especially important now, when public trust in the court has plummeted in light of Dobbs overruling of Roe v Wade and the leaked opinion.”

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Farah Naz, the aunt of the murdered aspiring lawyer Zara Aleena, at a Million Women Rise march against male violence in central London last month. Photograph: Helen William/PA

[UK criminal justice](#)

Raab urged to fast-track plans to force criminals to attend sentencing

Aunt of murdered lawyer Zara Aleena says criminals should receive longer sentences if they refuse to face families or victims

[Jessica Elgot](#) *Deputy political editor*

[@jessicaelgot](#)

Tue 4 Apr 2023 04.44 EDT Last modified on Tue 4 Apr 2023 18.30 EDT

Dominic Raab has been urged to fast-track [plans to force criminals to attend their sentencing](#) after the murderer of nine-year-old Olivia Pratt-Korbel refused to leave his cell to be sentenced on Monday.

The aunt of [Zara Aleena](#), who was murdered while walking home in June 2022, said allowing convicted criminals to avoid facing the court meant the “convict actually exercises their bit of power”.

Aleena, a 35-year-old aspiring lawyer, was sexually assaulted and murdered by the serial offender Jordan McSweeney, who also refused to attend court for sentencing.

Aleena’s aunt Farah Naz told BBC Breakfast criminals should have their sentence extended if they refused to face victims or their families.

She added: “Surely the judgment is part of the punishment ... we need to see that the process will deter further crime and how can the process feel like a punishment if the convict actually exercises their bit of power? It’s the last bit of power that needs to be taken away, certainly in our eyes.

“I think there are other ways to make the convict come to face their judgment and that would be to add time to their sentencing or there can be other ways. Otherwise we don’t have people deterred from committing crimes, if they are just moving from cell to cell there’s no sense of punishment. I would like [Dominic Raab](#) to move forward with developing this law.”

Raab said after McSweeney’s sentencing that he was looking into whether the law could be changed to compel offenders to attend their sentencing, including granting judges powers to impose longer prison sentences if convicts refused.

On Monday, Thomas Cashman was [sentenced to life imprisonment](#) with a minimum of 42 years for the murder of the nine-year-old girl. He had opened fire while chasing Joseph Nee, who had sought refuge inside after seeing that the door to Olivia’s home was open. She was fatally struck by a bullet that went through the door and the hand of her mother, Cheryl Korbel.

A source close to Raab said he was committed to making the changes. “Olivia Pratt-Korbel and her family [weren’t able to hide from Thomas Cashman’s crime](#) – so he shouldn’t be able to hide from justice.

“This is exactly why the deputy prime minister is committed to changing the law so that offenders are forced to face the consequences of their actions.”

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The shadow justice secretary, Steve Reed, said: “It’s an absolute scandal that the Tory government has stood by while killers, rapists and terrorists pick and choose whether they turn up to face justice.

“It is disrespectful and grossly offensive to victims that criminals can refuse to face the consequences of their crimes in court. For victims and their families, this can be a vital part of seeing justice done.

“Labour called for new laws on this back in April last year but the Conservatives have dragged their feet and failed to act. Labour will always put victims of crime first and give judges the power to force offenders to face the consequences of their actions in court. Victims deserve nothing less.”

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[Business live](#) [Virgin Media](#)

Virgin Media restores internet service after outages across UK – as it happened

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The cause of the Virgin Media outages was not immediately clear.
Photograph: Rafael Henrique/Sopa Images/Rex/Shutterstock

[Virgin Media](#)

Thousands of Virgin Media customers in UK hit by outages

Provider said most problems were resolved but customers reported continuing glitches with internet, phone and TV

[Kalyeena Makortoff](#) and [Alex Hern](#)

Tue 4 Apr 2023 14.21 EDT First published on Tue 4 Apr 2023 03.33 EDT

Thousands of [Virgin Media](#) customers across the UK experienced widespread internet, telephone and TV outages throughout Tuesday.

[Downdetector](#), which tracks outages, said around 50,000 people had reported problems with their services at one point, with the glitch first noticed by some customers shortly after 1am BST.

The cause was not immediately clear but wreaked havoc for customers, including those relying on internet and phone connections for work. By late morning the worst of the issues had been resolved.

Looks like [#virginmedia](#) is having issues nationwide. One of those rare instances where working from home becomes problematic

— Chris Scullion (@scully1888) [April 4, 2023](#)

“Looks like Virgin Media is having issues nationwide. One of those rare instances where working from home becomes problematic,” one Twitter user said.

“I’m self-employed and work from home. Who at your company shall I invoice for the money I will lose today while your internet service is down?” another tweeted.

Hi [@virginmedia](#) , I'm self employed and work from home. Who at your company shall I invoice for the money I will lose today while your Internet service is down?[#VirginMediaoutage](#) [#WFH](#) [#broadband](#)

— James Moriarty (@Editor_James) [April 4, 2023](#)

However, by the afternoon there were reports the service was down again. In a statement, a Virgin Media spokesperson said: “Unfortunately, we have seen a repeat of an earlier issue which is causing intermittent broadband connectivity problems for some Virgin Media customers.

“We apologise again to those customers impacted and our teams are continuing to work flat out to find the root cause of the problem and fix it.”

The outage was widespread enough that [Virgin Media](#)’s corporate website was unavailable for several hours on Tuesday morning. Even after it was restored, the company had to serve all users the mobile version of the site, which was apparently being rebuilt on the fly.

The company's online FAQ promises customers compensation for total outages but only on a per-day basis, suggesting it may be at Virgin Media's discretion as to whether to pay out for a sub-day failure.

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Some users reported being able to reconnect to the internet after a reboot of their router or modem, while others found their connection could be restored by connecting through a virtual private network.

That workaround may point to where the wider problems lie, since it is similar to glitches such as [those that knocked Facebook offline in 2021](#), and were the result of a flaw in the deep-level routing systems that allow internet services to connect to each other.

Adding to the pain, the outage comes just three days after Virgin Media hit customers with a 13.8% price rise, adding almost £7 to the cost of a typical £50 broadband and TV package.

The increase, which is above inflation, is typical for the broadband sector, which has been criticised by the consumer rights group Which? and is the focus of an Ofcom investigation.

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Donald Trump arrives at Manhattan criminal courthouse on Tuesday. The judge has ruled cameras will not be allowed in the courtroom. Photograph: Eduardo Muñoz/Reuters

[Donald Trump](#)

Trump surrenders in New York following hush money indictment

Extraordinary scene in Manhattan will mark the first time a former US president has faced criminal charges

- [Donald Trump indictment live updates](#)

[Lauren Gambino](#) in Washington

[@laurenegambino](#)

Tue 4 Apr 2023 13.44 EDTFirst published on Tue 4 Apr 2023 05.00 EDT

Donald Trump turned himself in at a Manhattan courtroom on Tuesday, an extraordinary scene that marks the first time in American history a former

US president has faced criminal charges.

Trump, the leading contender for the 2024 Republican nomination, arrived at the lower Manhattan courthouse at about 1pm, escorted by Secret Service agents. Trump was set to be arraigned, fingerprinted and possibly photographed. Though defendants charged with felonies are typically handcuffed, Trump's legal team has said he would not be.

The unprecedented proceedings, including a booking and court appearance before Judge Juan Merchan, were slated to be brief but remarkable, as the twice-impeached former president learns the indictment against him, and, as expected, enters a plea of not guilty to charges related to his role in a hush-money payment to the adult film star Stormy Daniels, made days before the 2016 election. Court access will be limited: Merchan ruled late on Monday night that TV cameras would not be allowed in the courtroom.

“There’s a lot of mystery here because we’re doing something that’s never been done before,” Joe Tacopina, a Trump lawyer, [told](#) ABC’s Good Morning America on Tuesday.

After the arraignment, Trump plans to return to Mar-a-Lago, his Florida estate, where his campaign has scheduled a primetime news event with hundreds of high-profile supporters and possibly some of his most loyal allies on Capitol Hill.

Trump, who was indicted by a Manhattan grand jury last week, has cast himself as a “completely innocent person” and denounced the charges as part of a broader conspiracy designed by Democrats to damage his political prospects. Prosecutors say the case against Trump has nothing to do with politics.

[For weeks](#), a grand jury heard evidence related to a \$130,000 payment to Stormy Daniels, who says [she had an extra-marital affair](#) with Trump in 2006, something the former president has denied. Michael Cohen, Trump’s former lawyer and fixer, made the payment to Daniels in the waning days of the 2016 presidential campaign to keep her from going public about the alleged encounter. He was later reimbursed by Trump, by then the president.

The payments to Cohen were recorded by the Trump Organization as legal expenses. Cohen pleaded guilty in 2018 to federal tax evasion and campaign-finance violation charges.

Since news of the indictment, Trump has [escalated his attacks](#) on the Manhattan district attorney, Alvin Bragg. He has also assailed Merchan, the judge in the case and an acting New York supreme court justice. In a social media post, Trump claimed Merchan “hates me”. The judge presided over a criminal trial last year that resulted in conviction of Allen Weisselberg, the former chief financial officer of the Trump Organization, as well as the criminal fraud case involving Trump’s former White House strategist Steve Bannon.

Security is tight ahead of Trump’s return to [New York](#), where he built his brand as a real estate mogul and launched his bid for the presidency in 2016, riding a golden escalator into the atrium of Trump Tower on Fifth Avenue.

Arriving in the city on a private jet emblazoned with his name, the former president spent the night in his Trump Tower penthouse on Monday, as he prepared to turn himself in to New York authorities.

Donald Trump arrives in New York ahead of his appearance on Tuesday in a Manhattan court – video

With the violence of the January 6 Capitol attack still fresh, barricades have been erected around Trump Tower and the Manhattan criminal court building downtown, ahead of expected demonstrations. Allies of the president have urged supporters to remain “peaceful”, despite a warning from Trump that an indictment against him could result in “potential death and destruction”.

The New York case is just one of the many legal challenges posing a threat to Trump as he mounts a third run for president. A prosecutor in Georgia is investigating Trump’s efforts to reverse his 2020 election defeat in the state. At the same time, the US justice department is investigating Trump’s attempts to cling to power in 2020 that culminated in the deadly assault on the US Capitol by his supporters, as well as his retention of classified documents after leaving the White House in 2021.

Nevertheless, the indictment has appeared to boost his support among Republicans, which had softened since he left office. Recent polling shows Trump [widening his lead](#) over the notional Republican field of candidates, with his challengers and potential rivals rallying to his side. The campaign has also touted [record](#) fundraising.

Yet several surveys, all taken in advance of the charges being made public, indicate that a [majority of Americans](#) agree with the grand jury's decision and support the indictment.

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New York state court officers outside Manhattan criminal court at 100 Centre Street in New York. Photograph: Erik Pendzich/Rex/Shutterstock

[Donald Trump](#)

[Explainer](#)

Trump is being arraigned – here's what that means, and what happens next

Former president will answer criminal charges related to alleged hush money scheme in Manhattan

[Joan E Greve](#)

[@joanegreve](#)

Tue 4 Apr 2023 05.00 EDTLast modified on Tue 4 Apr 2023 10.23 EDT

Donald Trump will appear in court on Tuesday afternoon to formally respond to charges over his involvement in a hush-money scheme, marking the first time in US history that a former president will face criminal charges.

The court appearance comes five days after a [New York](#) grand jury voted to indict Trump as part of a years-long investigation spearheaded by the Manhattan district attorney's office.

On Monday, the former president and current presidential candidate traveled from his Florida home of Mar-a-Lago to New York, where he spent the night at Trump Tower. Trump's arraignment is scheduled to take place at 2.15pm ET at a courthouse in lower Manhattan, which has been heavily secured amid concerns about potential unrest or violence in response to the indictment.

Here's everything you need to know about Tuesday's proceedings:

Why is Trump appearing in court?

A grand jury voted to indict Trump last Thursday over allegations that he illegally reimbursed his former attorney, Michael Cohen, for a \$130,000 payment to Stormy Daniels, an adult film star who claims to have had an extramarital affair with the former president beginning in 2006. Cohen paid Daniels in the final days before the 2016 presidential election, as she was preparing to go public with her story about the alleged affair. (Trump has said the affair never took place.)

Trump has acknowledged reimbursing Cohen, but he denies any illegal wrongdoing. The office of the Manhattan district attorney, Alvin Bragg, has been investigating the matter for months, and Bragg confirmed on Thursday that he was working with Trump's team to coordinate his surrender.

What is an arraignment?

An arraignment is a court procedure wherein a judge reads formal charges against a defendant. This will be the first time Trump hears exactly what charges he is facing.

What charges is Trump facing?

That remains unclear. As of Tuesday morning, the indictment remains under seal, but the document will probably be released to the public after Trump is formally arrested and appears at his arraignment.

According to [NBC News](#), Trump is facing about 30 charges related to document fraud in the hush-money scheme. Trump's lawyer, Joe Tacopina, has already started challenging the charges, accusing Bragg of having "taken a misdemeanor and tried, cobbled together, to make it a felony by alleging a violation of federal campaign violations".

How will Trump surrender to authorities?

Some of the decisions over how to formally arrest a former president appear to be up in the air. Tacopina has said he does not expect officers to put Trump in handcuffs, but the former president is likely to be fingerprinted and get his mugshot taken once he surrenders.

"I honestly don't know how this is going to go – hopefully as smoothly as possible, and then we begin the battle to right this wrong," Tacopina told CNN on Sunday.

What is the security situation in New York?

As they brace for potential unrest in response to the indictment, officials have closed roads around the courthouse and Trump Tower to heavily restrict access to the buildings. Barricades have also been erected at both sites, and the courthouse plans to shut down some courtrooms as the arraignment takes place, [Reuters reports](#). Last week, the New York police department asked all officers to report for duty in uniform as a "precautionary measure". Trump will travel with Secret Service officers, who protect all former US presidents.

The New York Young Republican Club has already announced it will hold a rally at a park near the courthouse to protest against Bragg's "heinous attack" on Trump. The far-right congresswoman Marjorie Taylor Greene plans to travel from Washington to speak at the rally.

“We will not live in fear and we will lawfully stand against tyranny and corruption while we show our support for President Trump,” Greene said on Sunday.

How will Trump respond to the charges?

Tacopina has indicated that Trump will plead not guilty to all charges, and the former president’s legal team is expected to fight the prosecution tooth and nail on every motion.

“I very much anticipate a motion to dismiss coming because there’s no law that fits this,” Tacopina said on Sunday.

What happens next?

Once Trump enters a plea, the judge will set a schedule for next steps in the pre-trial process. The trial itself is not expected to start for months. Once the arraignment comes to a close, Trump will almost certainly be released and allowed to return to Florida.

Trump has already announced that he will deliver remarks at his Mar-a-Lago resort in Palm Beach, Florida, at 8.15pm ET on Tuesday night to defend himself against the charges.

Even though the trial is probably still months away, Trump is already planning for a guilty verdict. In a message posted to the social media platform Truth Social on Friday, Trump attacked the judge assigned to his case, the New York State supreme court justice Juan Merchan, and pledged to appeal the ruling.

2023.04.04 - Spotlight

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‘Seeing my children living in a house like that – I can’t put that into words’
... Kevin and Dee outside their new £3m house. Photograph: Mark Field
Photography/Omaze

[Homes](#)

Too good to be true? What it is really like to win a £3m dream home

Companies that offer lottery-like wins – houses, cars and cash prizes – have taken off recently. Is their success connected to the cost-of-living crisis?

[Andy Welch](#)

Tue 4 Apr 2023 01.00 EDTLast modified on Tue 4 Apr 2023 07.22 EDT

If someone approached you on the street and told you that, for just a tenner, you could win the kind of house that would cause Kevin McCloud to collapse into a puddle of adjectives and help raise millions of pounds for charity, you would probably ask what the catch was. But that improbable offering is Omaze's core business.

Since launching in the UK in April 2020, the organisation has been running prize draws in which, for a relatively small amount of money, you can be in with the chance to win a multimillion-pound dream house. When the draw ends, a chosen charity partner gets the lion's share of the profits.

The exact odds of winning are unclear – Omaze doesn't publish precise figures, and the odds get worse as more people enter – but people do win big, and that has kept me interested enough to enter every competition since it first popped up on my Instagram feed. While I have only won a £10 Amazon voucher, it hasn't stopped me dreaming about what my life would be like if my ticket was drawn – I'd probably rent out the house as a luxurious holiday home, giving family and close friends free usage (off-peak weekends only – I'm not made of money), before eventually selling it.

The popularity of these draws – each receives hundreds of thousands, if not millions of entries and it's still growing – tells us a few things about the UK. Namely that, as a nation, we love escapism and the thought of a big win transforming our lives; look to the tradition of doing the pools, having a flutter on the Grand National and getting a ticket for the national lottery.

From another angle, it illustrates the sheer ridiculousness of the housing market, where the greatest prize we can comprehend is a roof over our head, albeit a fancy one. It is certainly why, as I approach my 25th year as a renter, I have been so committed to entering these giveaways. There is very little chance of me winning, but, while the cost of living crisis continues, interest rates push 5% and inflation remains double that, there is little chance of me being able to afford to buy a house in London, either. The average property price based on sales in the capital last year was just over [£730,000, according to Zoopla](#). Alternatively, renting has cost me the best part of £150,000 since I moved to London in 2006. Who wouldn't dream of a golden ticket out of that scenario?

I'm far from the only person daydreaming in this way. "I want to help my granddaughters get on the property ladder," says one Omaze Trustpilot reviewer. "People like me can't afford to get on the property ladder. This is maybe my only opportunity to own my own house," says another.

Until recently, Kevin Johnson, a 34-year-old carpenter from north London, was also prone to daydreaming about life as the owner of a luxury home. But he no longer has to wonder – he has just won a £3m house in an Omaze prize draw.

Johnson and his wife, Dee, along with their four kids, will soon be moving into a beautiful four-bed Victorian semi just 15 minutes from where they now rent a three-bed flat. As part of the prize, as well as any fees and stamp duty being covered, they have also won £100,000 to help them settle in. "I don't think it's ever going to sink in, to be honest," says Dee.

Johnson has been entering the dream-house competition for about two years and never really thought he would win, but was happy to be giving money to charity. More recently, he says, he had been practising a more positive approach, going as far as cutting out a photograph of the London house from an Omaze newspaper advertisement and showing it to his youngest, telling him it is where the family would be moving to.

"The parking permit for my van is running out at our current address, so I said I wasn't going to replace it until the house had been drawn because I had a feeling I was going to win," he says.

On the day of the draw, Johnson received a call from the Omaze team telling him he had won something, but not exactly what, and that they were on their way to his house. He immediately called his wife, who works in childcare and education part-time and in healthcare at a hospital. She was sceptical. “As no one was in, they went to the pub around the corner to wait for Kevin to get home. I thought: ‘Who does that?’ It definitely sounded like a scam.”

But Johnson recognised the Omaze presenter’s voice from the TV adverts, and he and the children were soon greeted by the team, complete with a mock key to hand over, and a camera and lighting crew ready to film a reaction video. Johnson later called Dee to tell her the news. On her way home from work on a packed train, she took the video call, but couldn’t find her headphones to take it in private.

“He was using this voice I’d never heard before, he was shaking,” she says. “The whole carriage heard what had happened and they all cheered and applauded,” she says. “I got off at my stop, but sat on the platform for 20 minutes to take it in.”

Apart from looking forward to having more space, the couple, who have been married for almost 13 years, say that very little about their day-to-day lives will change – they will be staying in their jobs, which they love, and, as the new house is so close to their old one, their children can still go to the same schools. In the short term, aside from starting their mortgage-free lives, Johnson is excited about kitting out the annexe in the garden – “a big TV and a sofa, nothing crowded,” he says – but the longer term is packed with freedom and opportunity.

“We have dreams and desires about setting up our own business, so we have flexibility with that because of this win,” says Dee. “And the children definitely have more security, too. It’s a big win for them.”

“Seeing the children living in a house like that ... I can’t put that into words,” says Johnson.



Omaze's prize house in Cornwall. Photograph: Omaze

What winners do with the houses, which have been all over the UK, from the Lake District and the Cotswolds to Kent and – the current prize – Cornwall, is entirely up to them. It is roughly a three-way split between those who move in to the new house, those who sell it and those who rent it out, according to James Oakes, Omaze's chief international officer, who is based in the UK. [Winners have just 96 hours](#) to claim their winnings and agree to the terms and conditions. If they don't respond in that time, they forfeit the prize, which actually happened to one cash-prize winner.

Omaze started life in the US in 2012, founded by Ryan Cummins and Matthew Pohlson, two graduates of Stanford University. Believing the traditional charity fundraising model to be broken, they founded Omaze after attending a charity auction in which they witnessed very wealthy people bid upwards of \$15,000 to sit alongside Magic Johnson at an LA Lakers game. What if, they thought, they could organise a prize draw with a much lower price to attract a greater number of entrants?

It took off, with money-can't-buy experiences as the main attraction – Omaze's Star Wars prize, offering the chance to be in Episode VII: The Force Awakens, raised more than \$4m for Unicef and received entries from all over the world.

It wasn't without criticism, with some in the charity world expressing concern over the strategies, while a class-action suit was filed in the US in April 2021, alleging Omaze had violated various California laws. [This was mostly dismissed by a judge in February 2022](#), and appeared to centre on an argument over whether or not the draw was a legal lottery. Perhaps it's unrelated, but from January this year, Omaze has paused its future US operations.

Omaze's UK launch, just as the pandemic was kicking off in 2020, was met with similar cynicism, which, according to Oakes, has been a big hurdle for the company. (Anecdotally, about half the friends and colleagues I told about writing this piece had assumed the draws were somehow illegitimate. The other half enter each one.)



James Oakes, Omaze's chief international officer.

“When you buy from Omaze, you are not buying a tangible product, but you have to trust that we have registered your entry, that the draw is taking place fairly, that the money really is going to the charity and you will really get the house if you win,” says Oakes. “So there’s a real premium on doing things properly and establishing trust, which is why we have registered with the regulator and abide by the fundraising code of practice.”

It wasn't just the public he had to convince. The first draw was for a house in Cheshire, worth about £1m. The brief was clear – Omaze bought the house, would recoup the money from ticket sales and, once the books were balanced, would give 80% of any profit to a chosen charity partner ([the company has yet to make a profit itself](#), despite taking 20% of net proceeds). It just needed a charity, but, with reputation at stake, none were interested.

The reticence was understandable. “We hear from lots of different types of startups with great ideas,” says Paul Glazier, head of corporate partnerships at Alzheimer’s Research UK. “I’d say 99% of them don’t come off or we just can’t partner with them.”

“We went down on our hands and knees and begged a charity to work with us on that first one,” says Oakes. Teenage Cancer Trust was the first to say yes. It received £250,000 on the back of the first draw, and jumped at the chance to work with Omaze for a second time on a house in Marbella last year. Since launching in the UK, Omaze has given more than £11m to some of the UK’s biggest charities, including the British Heart Foundation, the NSPCC, Great Ormond Street hospital, Dog’s Trust and, after Glazier and his colleagues had done their due diligence, Alzheimer’s Research UK. There is now a bidding process in which charities pitch their case.

“We got £1m from the draw for the Lake District house,” says Lucy Squance, director of supporter-led fundraising at Alzheimer’s Research UK. “For a charity of our size to get that sort of figure is completely transformational.” And it wasn’t just the money. “We were on primetime TV adverts for two or three months over Christmas. We just don’t have that kind of advertising power and as a result gained more than 1,500 direct supporters and were able to engage with the public in a way we would never be able to otherwise. It was worth so much more than the £1m.”

Now established, Oakes says the hardest thing is finding suitable houses to give away. “It’s absolute murder. We’re now buying houses six or seven competitions in advance. We used to take houses that were already pristine, but as we’re now able to prepare more, we are looking at houses where renovation is required and we can tailor them. Who knows, in the future we could end up building them.”

If Omaze and houses aren't your thing, there are alternatives. [BOTB](#) has been running since 2000. If you have ever seen a supercar in an airport or a shopping centre with someone selling tickets to win it, there's a very high chance it was BOTB. Since early 2020, it has been an online-only business in which you can win anything from a Mini to a Lamborghini, depending on which price ticket you buy; they start at 30p.

"We have all sorts of people enter," says Rupert Garton, the company's commercial director. "They're not gamblers, but car-loving people who want to have a go. We've had people for whom winning a car is a very nice thing, to people whose lives will be completely changed for ever." Winners can also choose a cash alternative – 80% of the car's value – and about half do just that. [Aspire Competitions](#) is another company offering luxury prizes for a relatively small cost. Since launching in March 2020, it has become synonymous with giving away VW campervans, but also TVs, consoles, motorbikes and vintage scooters, camping equipment, power-tool bundles and expensive grooming products.

It buys all the prizes up front, sells a limited number of tickets and guarantees there will be a winner, even if there are still tickets remaining. There has been a slight dip in entries since November's disaster budget, says James Ovenden, founder and director of Aspire, but things remain steady. "I think it's about giving people a bit of hope. We have lowered our ticket prices accordingly but increased numbers, so your money will go further without significantly lowering the odds."

While our interest in winning things lays bare the housing crisis, the Johnsons' London home also demonstrates the imbalance of the country's property market. Win a £3m house in the Lake District, as Catherine Carwardine of Telford did in April 2022, and you get a six-bedroomed palace complete with a cinema room, sauna, steam room, gym, multiple gardens and a workshop. Win a similarly valued property in London and you get a semi-detached house in which your kids might still have to share a bedroom.

For now, I'm going to adopt Johnson's positive mental attitude and imagine my life in a luxury home of my own. He and Dee also said they would invite me to their housewarming. "A quiet gathering – we don't want to upset our

new neighbours,” says Dee. “And you’ll have to take your shoes off at the door.”

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How Deborah Levy can change your life

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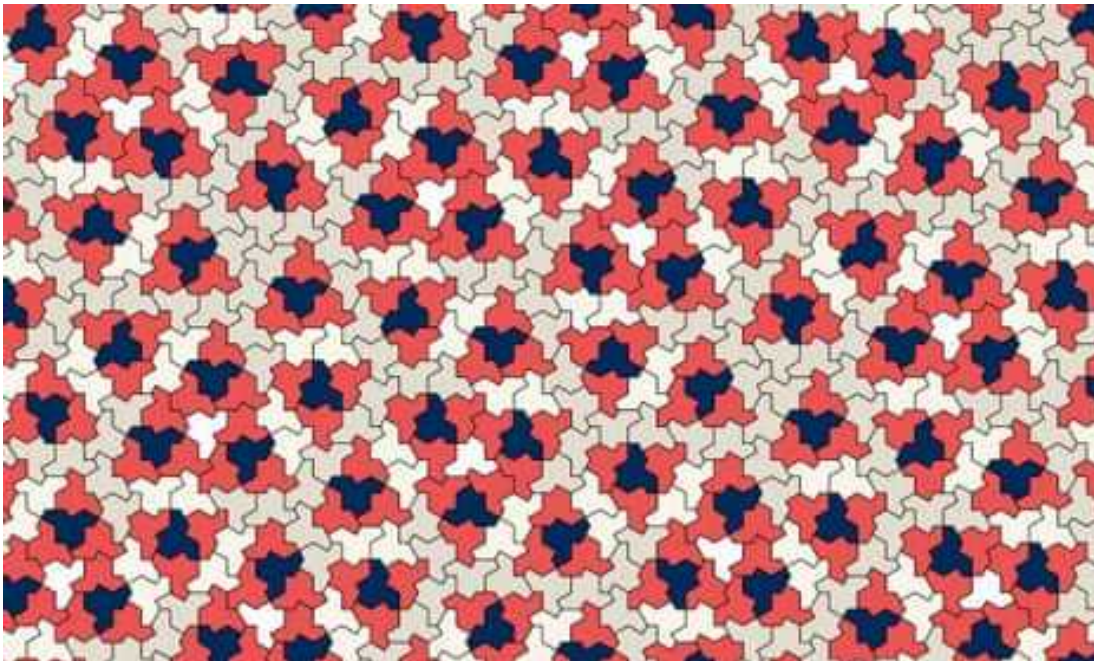
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An aperiodic monotile never repeats a formation, no matter how long the pattern. Photograph: David Smith, Joseph Samuel Myers, Craig S. Kaplan, and Chaim Goodman-Strauss, 2023

[Mathematics](#)

‘The miracle that disrupts order’: mathematicians invent new ‘einstein’ shape

Called ‘the hat’, the 13-sided shape can be arranged in a tile formation such that it never forms a repeating grid

[Matthew Cantor](#)

[@CantorMatthew](#)

Tue 4 Apr 2023 01.00 EDT Last modified on Tue 4 Apr 2023 19.27 EDT

One of mathematics’ most intriguing visual mysteries has finally been solved – thanks to a hobbyist in England.

The conundrum: is there a shape that can be arranged in a tile formation, interlocking with itself ad infinitum, without the resulting pattern repeating over and over again?

In nature and on our bathroom walls, we typically see tile patterns that repeat in “a very predictable, regular way”, says Dr Craig Kaplan, an associate professor of computer science at the University of Waterloo in Ontario. What mathematicians were interested in were shapes that “guaranteed non-periodicity” – in other words, there was no way to tile them so that the overall pattern created a repeating grid.

Such a shape would be known as an aperiodic monotile, or “einstein” shape, meaning, in roughly translated German, “one shape” (and conveniently echoing the name of a certain theoretical physicist).

“There’s been a thread of beautiful mathematics over the last 60 years or so searching for ever smaller sets of shapes that do this,” Kaplan says. “The first example of an aperiodic set of shapes had over 20,000 shapes in it. And of course, mathematicians worked to get that number down over time. And the furthest we got was in the 1970s,” when the Nobel-prize winning physicist Roger Penrose found pairs of shapes that fit the bill.

Now, mathematicians appear to have found what they were looking for: a 13-sided shape they call “the hat”. The discovery was largely the work of David Smith of the East Riding of Yorkshire, who had a longstanding interest in the question and investigated the problem using an [online geometry platform](#). Once he’d found an intriguing shape, he told the [New York Times](#), he would cut it out of cardstock and see how he could fit the first 32 pieces together.

“I am quite persistent but I suppose I did have a bit of luck,” Smith told the Guardian in an email.

Once he had landed on the hat, he contacted Kaplan, an associate professor of computer science at the University of Waterloo in Canada. Together they worked to confirm that the hat was indeed an einstein shape, and early this year they enlisted the help of two others – Dr Chaim Goodman-Strauss, a University of Arkansas mathematician, and Dr Joseph Myers, a software developer in Cambridge, England.

Kaplan and Smith had gotten about “halfway through the problem”, and Goodman-Strauss and Myers “were able to sort of fill in the rest of the puzzle and provide the rest of a proof”, Kaplan says. One proof was more traditional, hinging on demonstrating that the shape behaved according to a certain set of rules. The other, which Myers came up with, is more “esoteric”, Kaplan says: it “follows a brand new line of attack that we haven’t seen before. And we’re particularly excited about that.”

That second proof was fueled by another stunning finding: after discovering “the hat”, Smith landed on another shape that did the same job and looks a bit like a turtle. Myers found that the turtle and hat were geometrically linked and led to a whole family of einstein shapes, the Times reported.

The four men are co-authors on a paper, not yet peer-reviewed, [detailing their findings](#).

“The miracle is that this little tile disrupts order at all scales,” Goodman-Strauss says. “These tiles are just sitting next to each other and somehow have these effects at any length scale: miles, 10 miles, 100bn light years,

these little guys are somehow causing effects at these arbitrary long distances.”

Cookies. I will put a cutter on Printables a bit later.
pic.twitter.com/hH2E8BH7zY

— Nikolay Tumanov (@ntumanov_Xray) [March 28, 2023](#)

It’s unclear what the discovery could lead to outside the world of mathematics, but “there are lots of great real-world applications in art, design, architecture”, says Kaplan. “The race is on to be the first person to take a photo of their bathroom floor tiled in hats.” Smith says it could help in studying structures known as [quasicrystals](#). And outside interest in the finding has ballooned.

“I’ve just been blown away by the outpouring of interest and people making their own tiles, their own drawings – somebody made cookies in the form of this thing and quilts,” Goodman Strauss says. “To me, the human aspect of this is really incredibly gratifying, that there’s all these people coming together and enjoying this thing, and it really means that this thing is gonna live for quite a long time.”

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‘I’m waiting for a klaxon to go off and my unholy trinity of family-size Pantene, Soltan and Listerine, plus assorted cosmetics – but nothing happens.’ Photograph: Graeme Robertson/The Guardian

Travel

‘Much less stressful’: London City airport ends 100ml liquid rule

Upgraded scanners allow travellers to bring containers of up to 2 litres in hand luggage



[Zoe Wood](#)

[@zoewoodguardian](#)

Tue 4 Apr 2023 02.00 EDT

There's a litre of water plus big bottles of shampoo, sun lotion and mouthwash sloshing around next to the clothes and laptop in my green wheelie case, which has just disappeared into the mouth of the scanner at [London](#) City airport. I had even recklessly bunged in my makeup bag.

After years of being conditioned to travel with micro toiletries, my heart is beating faster. I'm waiting for a klaxon to go off and my unholy trinity of family-size Pantene, Soltan and Listerine, plus assorted cosmetics, to be unceremoniously dumped in one of the sin bins that have been stationed by security lanes since the mid-2000s.

But. Nothing. Happens. Apart from some raised eyebrows at the vat of mouthwash.

The east London hub has from Tuesday officially become the first mainstream UK airport to end the tyranny of tiny toiletries that has held sway since 2006 when the 100ml limit on liquids, pastes and gels in hand

baggage [was first introduced](#), after [a foiled transatlantic bomb plot](#) to use explosive liquids disguised as soft drinks.

Now passengers flying out of the Docklands airport can carry liquids and gels in containers of up to 2 litres in their hand baggage after it upgraded its baggage screening system to the latest CT (computed tomography) scanners, which provide a 3D image of the contents of passenger's bag.

The technology also works for electronics, meaning the slow process of depositing belongings on to multiple trays has gone. Instead security staff cheerfully tell passengers to "leave everything inside your bags" , enabling people to file through at a much faster rate.

City [announced the planned changeover last year](#), beginning with a trial security lane before gradually switching the rest over. With all four now upgraded, the airport claims to have "London's fastest security experience".

Waiting for her morning flight to Ibiza, Lynne Schey has just breezed through. "It was gorgeous, a morning present. I asked for a plastic bag to put things in but they said I didn't need one. Phenomenal."

Like the rest of us Schey had got used to the strict rules, with travellers "all part of the same army" carrying their makeup and medicines in a little plastic bag for all to see. "You started being more discerning, with no makeup and lots of little containers with little bits of this and that in," she says. "Occasionally you would forget though and cause a pile up with a bottle of water."



Sisters Laura and Ruth Stephenson were ‘amazed’ how quickly they had got through security. Photograph: Graeme Robertson/The Guardian

It’s the end of miniature toiletries, agrees Alison FitzGerald, the airport’s chief operating officer. The long-running restrictions resulted in a “very tense environment” in the security area. “It makes it really stressful. You’ve got to get all this stuff out of your bag and feel under pressure to be quick.” People were also upset at being made to throw away expensive items such as perfume or face cream.

Staff were always saying “you can’t take that, you can’t do that”, FitzGerald says, but now the conversations are more positive. With the new scanners able to process up to 550 trays an hour each lane, passengers are moving through the airport more quickly.

“We are getting 30% more passengers through [an hour],” says FitzGerald. “It’s much less stressful from a passenger point of view. The information that’s provided to the security officer is much more enhanced so the threat detection has improved significantly.”

With nearly 4 million passengers expected to pass through this year, London City is the first major UK airport to be able to fully relax the liquid rule.

Smaller rival Teesside International [dropped it in March](#) after it replaced its two scanners. Trials are under way at other airports including Heathrow.

However, other hubs stressed that for now, [current restrictions](#) remain in place, and passengers must still remove tablets, laptops and liquids from their cabin baggage, with the usual 100ml limit and plastic bag rules. At peak travel times, like this weekend's Easter getaway, travellers are greeted with bins overflowing with bottles of water and outsized toiletries from those who forgot the rules, perhaps because Covid stopped them from travelling for so long.

In the UK the government has set a deadline of June 2024 for large airports to install the new screening equipment, spelling the eventual end to the 100ml rule. To date Australia and the Netherlands are the only other countries to have mandated the upgrade, although trials are taking place around the world.

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This extended timeframe for introduction across the UK and world means a period of confusion for travellers who may encounter different security regimes on the flight out and on the way home, says Nicky Kelvin, head of travel advice website The Points Guy.

“Anybody traveling with hand baggage will need to check what the current trial or rule is for the place they are travelling from and to,” he says. “If you are a transit passenger you will need to be even more careful. Of course you can still check a bag in if you need to, but it’s expensive.”

Sisters Laura and Ruth Stephenson are eating breakfast in the City departure lounge, waiting for their flight to Florence to be called. Laura says she was “amazed how quickly” they had got through security. Ruth used to travel with a “massive bag” of makeup and skincare but is more restrained these days. The world may be changing again but for this trip anyway her beauty essentials still fit into the “smallest bag known to man” she says, waving an airport issue plastic bag that is barely a quarter full.

During the pandemic, hand sanitiser shot to the top of the list of confiscated items. Weirdly, Marmite and snow globes are a big problem, too, says FitzGerald. Marmite counts as a paste under the liquid regulations, while snow globes are not marked with a volume measure. “We always had to confiscate them even if they were small,” she says.

Both the old and new generation of scanners use X-ray imaging, but the camera in the older machines is stationary, resulting in a 2D image, whereas in a CT scanner it spins.

“It takes a number of photos in a very short amount of time of your cabin baggage so we can create a 3D image but also do a bunch of detection to look for bad things,” says Jonathan Stone, aviation solutions division manager at the US firm Leidos, which supplied the new scanners at London City. The new machines also put “detection capability into the hands of algorithms and science as opposed to relying solely on humans”.

The new scanners come at a price, with an estimated 10,000 to 15,000 scanners to replace globally at a cost of about £200,000 a machine. However, the investment should be recouped through higher takings in airport shops and lower staffing costs as the new systems require fewer security workers to monitor the equipment and herd passengers.

“It’s making the traveling public much safer, number one, and number two, offering our airport customers the ability to modernise and optimise their

security operations,” says Stone. “There will be a return on that investment as passengers spend more on duty free and less time in line for security.”

For me, there was no Ibiza or Florence It was just a dummy run. However, it did provide a salutary reminder of why leaving liquids at home can be no bad thing: something blue leaked all over my clothes.

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2023.04.04 - Opinion

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- Every indictment will make Trump stronger – and Republicans wilder
- Putin doesn't want the war to end – he wants to blast us back to the 40s Soviet era
- Why do so many romcoms go wrong? It's down to a problem I call 'the Minnie Driver'



Carol Vorderman at the Cheltenham Festival earlier this month. Photograph: Max Mumby/Indigo/Getty Images

[Opinion](#)[Carol Vorderman](#)

Carol Vorderman's later-life renaissance gives us just the kind of political hero we need

[Gaby Hinsliff](#)



Compared with the insecurities of her 30s, the broadcaster's 60s have given her a confidence we could all learn from

Tue 4 Apr 2023 01.00 EDTLast modified on Tue 4 Apr 2023 04.43 EDT

Carol Vorderman is, rather appropriately for a mathematician, currently in her prime. The former Countdown presenter has lately enjoyed an unexpected late renaissance as the kind of fearless public figure she arguably couldn't have been when she was younger: politically engaged, unembarrassed and trusted to speak up on issues ranging from financial probity in government to menopausal health, with all the authority born of having lived a bit. (Vorderman had severe [depression](#) herself in her early 50s, and was audibly [incensed](#) when the equalities minister, Kemi Badenoch, [dismissed calls](#) to outlaw workplace discrimination on the grounds of menopause, comparing the idea to seeking legal protection for having ginger hair.)

Unlike her fellow broadcaster Gary Lineker, she isn't politically constrained by working for the BBC. But perhaps more importantly, at the age of 62, Vorderman is evidently experiencing something of a personal liberation. Her two children have grown and gone, and her elderly mother – whom she looked after for years – has died. Twice divorced, the presenter is gloriously

unabashed about maintaining a roster of what she calls five [“special friends”](#) with benefits, instead of seeking a partner to settle down with, and has bought a campervan in which to take herself off hiking and paddleboarding at weekends.

Her goal in life now is to be happy rather than to be in love, she explained in an interview at the weekend, and she has simply stopped caring what other people think about any of it. “I’ve got nothing to apologise for, so I live without apology. And where I feel a sense of right or wrong – as opposed to right or left – I call it out.” That this flattering interview appeared in the Mail on Sunday, not normally known for its glowing coverage of people who embarrass Conservative ministers, is testament to her pulling power.

Carol Vorderman 'absolutely disgusted' by ministers' attitude to menopause – video

Obviously it’s preposterous to claim, as the academic [Matthew Goodwin](#) recently did in a series of essays to promote his new book on rightwing populism, that the likes of Vorderman and Lineker are part of a liberal “new elite”, secretly controlling the country in defiance of the popular will, as if a Conservative party that has been in power for nearly 13 years was somehow helpless in the face of a couple of TV presenters. But if she doesn’t have power, a woman like Vorderman undeniably does wield influence, and a less brittle or paranoid rightwing establishment would be trying to understand why that is, rather than furiously attacking it.

Vorderman does seem to have given voice to a broad female irritation with shoddy, sleazy politics, but her appeal arguably has less to do with political partisanship than with something to which millions of women instinctively respond – which is a defiant refusal to go quietly after a certain age. Above all, she embodies the intoxicating idea that getting older might not be so terrifying after all.

She’s lucky in having the money, the professional clout and the good health to ease her passage into what can be a difficult decade, of course. But she is also more broadly part of a generation that often has more options than their

own mothers did; women who worked all their lives, grimly hanging on in there through the sleepless years with small children or in workplaces often overtly hostile to them, who are now reaping the rewards in their late 50s and early 60s of a financial independence older women have not always enjoyed.

The women Vorderman speaks to may well have weathered health scares and bereavements, professional setbacks and transitions, the stormy business of raising teenagers and the painful period of marital adjustment that often follows an empty nest. They didn't survive all that just to be patronised to death now by younger women or hustled out of sight by older men, and they rightly expect more from life than a descent into unloved hagdom.

If 60 still looks frightening from a distance, the generation approaching it now is not easily scared, and there's a vicarious thrill to be had from watching them rip into what looks suspiciously like a paper tiger. As Vorderman says herself, in her 30s there was always someone she felt beholden to; always someone she was trying to please, or to look after. Only now does she finally feel free to suit herself, and shrug off whatever criticism comes her way as a result. Compared to the paralysing insecurities of being half her age, frankly that looks like nirvana to me.

- Gaby Hinsliff is a Guardian columnist

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Donald Trump speaks in Waco, Texas, last month. Photograph: Brandon Bell/Getty Images

[OpinionDonald Trump](#)

Every indictment will make Trump stronger – and Republicans wilder

[Sidney Blumenthal](#)

Rupert Murdoch, the Koch network and other rightwing power brokers know the monster they created is now out of control

Tue 4 Apr 2023 02.15 EDTLast modified on Tue 4 Apr 2023 16.26 EDT

The indictment of Donald J Trump has not driven a wooden stake through his heart. He has risen, omnipresent and ominous again, overwhelming his rivals, their voices joined into his choir, like the singing January 6 prisoners, proclaiming the wickedness of his prosecution. As he enters the criminal courthouse to pose for his mugshot and to give his fingerprints, evangelicals venerate him as the adulterous [King David](#) or the martyred [Christ](#).

Trump does not have to raise his hand to signal to the House Republicans to [echo](#) his cry of “WITCH-HUNT”. He owns the House like he owns a hotel.

“I keep him up on everything that we’re doing,” [says](#) Marjorie Taylor-Greene, who serves as one of his agents over the House speaker, Kevin McCarthy. Nine of the 25 Republicans on the House judiciary committee and 11 of the 26 on oversight have [endorsed](#) him. Elise Stefanik, chair of the House Republican Conference, has pledged her allegiance. Jim Jordan, who refused to honor a subpoena from the January 6 committee, now issues flurries of subpoenas as chair of the Orwellian-named subcommittee on the weaponization of the federal government, to obstruct investigations of Trump, and not incidentally into Jordan’s and other House Republicans’ roles in the insurrection. But not even a subpoena to the New York district attorney, Alvin Bragg, or any other prosecutor, could command the tide of indictments.

Between the motion of Trump’s first indictment and the act of the last Republican primary, more than a year from now, on 4 June 2024, the shadow will fall on the only party with an actual nomination contest. Trump’s pandemonium will only have an electoral valence for the foreseeable future in its precincts. His damage to the constitution, the national security of the United States and the rule of law will be extensive, but his most intense and focused political destruction will be circumscribed within the Republican party.

From the report of every new indictment to its reality, Republican radicalization will accelerate. Every concrete count will confirm every conspiracy theory. Every prosecution and trial, staggered over months and into the election year, from New York to Georgia to Washington, will be a shock driving [Republicans](#) further to Trump. Every Republican candidate running for every office will be compelled to declare as a matter of faith that Trump is being unjustly persecuted or be themselves branded traitors.

Profession of the holy creed of election denial has already been broadened to demand profession of the doctrine of Trump’s impunity. Every Republican attempting to run on law and order will be required to disavow law and order in every case in which Trump is the defendant. Trump’s incitement to

violence will not have an exception of immunity for the Republican party. Beginning in the Iowa caucuses, the confrontations may not resemble New England town meetings. If Trump were to lose in the first tumultuous caucuses, can anyone doubt he will claim it was rigged? Was January 6 a preliminary for the Republican primaries of 2024?

The death watch of Trump is a cyclical phenomenon. After each of his storms, the pundits, talking heads and party strategists on all sides emerge from their cellars, survey the latest wreckage and check the scientific measurements of the polls to give the “all clear” sign that the cyclone had passed. When Trump lost to Joe Biden in 2020, [thoughtful analysts](#) assured that Trump’s time was gone, he would fade away and his comeback in 2024 was an impossibility, just “not going to happen”. Everyone should “relax”. Then came January 6. When Trump’s endorsed candidates in the 2022 midterm elections, a gaggle of election deniers and conspiracy mongers, were ignominiously rejected, last rites were pronounced. Trump was dead again.

Murdoch, Koch et al should have grasped the dangerous fluidity of the extremism they financed and organized for decades

“We want to make Trump a non-person,” Rupert Murdoch said after the January 6 insurrection. Trump’s image was virtually banished from his bandbox of Fox News. He would be airbrushed out of the next episode of history.

“The best thing for the country would be to have a president in 2025 who represents a new chapter,” wrote Emily Seidel, chief executive of the Koch network’s Americans for Prosperity, in a [memo](#).

On 5 February, the Koch dark money syndicate held a conference of its billionaire donors and key activists at Palm Springs, California, to lay the groundwork for the dawning of the post-Trump age. There it was decided to swing its enormous resources behind the candidacy of [Ron DeSantis](#), the governor of Florida, who they had originally cultivated as one of their Tea Party hothouse congressmen.

The wishful thinking that Trump would magically disappear, however, ignored the omens of Liz Cheney's purging, the victories of his candidates in the midterm Republican primaries over blanching "normies", and the corrupt bargain that McCarthy was forced to make to secure his speakership. The implacability of Trump's political base's attachment was discounted.

Murdoch, Koch et al should have grasped the dangerous fluidity of the extremism they stoked, financed and organized for decades, which metastasized into Trump. Their approach to Trump was not dissimilar to that of Vladimir Putin, treating him as their useful idiot. Putin's purpose was and is to use Trump to destroy Nato and the western alliance, and as an agent of chaos within the US of a magnitude that no KGB agent could have recruited during the cold war.

The Koch network contentedly used Trump to pack the courts with Federalist Society stamped judges, deregulate business and thwart policy on climate change. But despite delivering those goods, Trump was ultimately uncontrollable. The problem with Trump was not his wildness and lawlessness. They were willing to tolerate him so long as his administration produced for them. Trump's foibles were the cost of business. His liability was that he was not their kind of Republican, at heart a laissez-faire free market libertarian. Trump hated international trade and opposed slashing entitlements, particularly social security and Medicare, which they have long tried to hobble and privatize. In 2018, he [tweeted](#) his contempt for the "Globalist Koch Brothers, who have become a total joke in real Republican circles ... I never sought their support because I don't need their money or bad ideas. They love my Tax & Regulation Cuts, Judicial picks & more. I made them rich." But his worst debit for them was that he lost. With DeSantis, they thought they could finally move on. Without Trump, they could wipe the slate clean, restore the past and return to the glory days when the Tea Party militants besieged town hall meetings to shriek against Obamacare. The undercurrent of the oligarchs' romance with DeSantis is a strange nostalgia.

Trump's announcement on 18 March that he would be arrested and charged in New York three days later, born of a combination of panic and seizing an opportunity for grift, was not a deliberate strategic masterstroke, though it had that effect. In February, DeSantis led Trump by 45% to 41% in the

[Yahoo/YouGov poll](#). In the poll taken just after Trump said he would be arrested, Trump shot into the lead 47% to 39%. After he was indicted, he left DeSantis in the dust, 57% to 31%.

DeSantis's rhetorical lawlessness in tribute to Trump only enhanced Trump's pre-eminence over him

Trump had already sent Murdoch's and Koch's presumptive candidate reeling. DeSantis has positioned himself as a cultural warrior but Trump smashed into his vulnerable flank. Before he adopted his gay bashing and race- and Jew-baiting persona, DeSantis was a cookie-cutter Tea Party congressman who voted several times to cut social security and Medicare. When Trump slammed him for his votes in early March as "a wheelchair over the cliff kind of guy", DeSantis renounced his position, saying he would not "mess" with social security. Even before the indictment, Trump had Il Duce of the Sunshine State dancing like Ginger Rogers backwards in the Cuban heels of his cowboy boots. Trump has not relented. The day after he was indicted, his [Make America Great Again](#) political action committee broadcast an [ad](#) ripping DeSantis: "President Trump is on the side of the American people when it comes to social security and Medicare. Ron DeSantis sides with DC establishment insiders ... The more you see about DeSantis, the more you see he doesn't share our values. He's not ready to be president." On the right that Trump has made, national socialism beats laissez-faire.

DeSantis reacted to Trump's indictment by stating that he would not extradite him from Florida to [New York](#), which nobody had asked him to do. His empty gesture as a two-bit secessionist would be in defiance of the constitution's article IV extradition clause. Between the emotion and the response falls the hollow man. His rhetorical lawlessness in tribute to Trump only enhanced Trump's pre-eminence over him.

If anyone should have known better, it was Murdoch. His media properties now veer from slavishly outraged defense of the accused Trump on Fox News ("Witch-hunt!") to trashing him in the [New York Post](#) ("Bat Hit Crazy!") to puffing DeSantis in the Times of London, not widely read in

Iowa or New Hampshire. The ruthless operator has been outplayed. Murdoch, who takes no prisoners, is Trump's prisoner.



Donald Trump speaks to Rupert Murdoch in Aberdeen, Scotland, in June 2016. Photograph: Carlo Allegri/Reuters

Murdoch profitably buckled in for the Trump ride all the way to January 6. His decision not to jump off for the crash has now landed him in his biggest scandal, thrusting him in the middle of the Trump debacle with a January 6 trial of his own. After the 2020 election, following the lead of Trump and his attorneys, Fox News broadcast that Dominion Voting Systems had changed or deleted votes to help steal the election. The Fox chief executive, Suzanne Scott, wrote in an email shutting down the fact-checking of Trump falsehoods: “This has to stop now ... this is bad business ... the audience is furious and we are just feeding them material.” On 5 January, the eve of the attack on the Capitol, Murdoch [discussed](#) with Scott whether the network should report the truth: “The election is over and Joe Biden won.” He said those words “would go a long way to stop the Trump myth that the election stolen”. Scott told him that “privately they are all there” but “we need to be careful about using the shows and pissing off the viewers”. On 12 January, Murdoch emailed the Fox board member Paul Ryan that he had heard that the Fox host Sean Hannity “has been privately disgusted by Trump for weeks, but was scared to lose viewers”.

Fox was terrified of its own audience, the Trump base it had whipped up day after day, fearful it would defect to a more pro-Trump site, Newsmax or One America News Network. Instead of broadcasting the facts, its executives ordered conspiracy theories and lies be aired to satisfy voracious demand. Murdoch admitted in an email that Trump's claims of voter fraud were "really crazy stuff". But the show must go on. Dominion is now [suing Fox News](#) for \$1.6bn for defamation.

Much of the material in the discovery documents reads like dialogue from a bad French farce.

"I hate him passionately," wrote a histrionic Tucker Carlson about Trump. Murdoch told Scott about Giuliani's and the others' lies: "Terrible stuff damaging everybody, I fear." On 21 January 2021, Murdoch [called](#) Trump "increasingly mad". Murdoch wondered, after serving as Trump's chief enabler, "The real danger is what he might do as president." *Quelle surprise!*

Of course, the specific falsehoods Fox recklessly and maliciously broadcast about Dominion were of a piece with those the network has been pumping out for years. That Murdoch is *shocked, shocked* is worthy of Capt Renault discovering there is gambling in the backroom of Rick's Café in Casablanca. "Your winnings, sir."

The day after Trump was indicted, Judge Eric Davis ruled that the Dominion case would go to trial.

"The evidence developed in this civil proceeding demonstrates that [it is] CRYSTAL clear that none of the [Fox News] statements relating to Dominion about the 2020 election are true," he [wrote](#). That trial will begin in mid-April and will probably last for weeks with major Fox personalities and Murdoch called to the stand. The very bad news is that in Delaware, where the trial will take place, unlike in New York, where the Trump trial will be held, television cameras are allowed in the courtroom. Undoubtedly, Fox will not be airing the humiliation of its stars and executives, but it is certain that CNN, desperate for ratings, and MSNBC will happily fill schedules with a Fox cavalcade.

Fox's propaganda was intimately linked to the January 6 coup, but could not be investigated by the January 6 committee. Murdoch's desperate desire to separate himself from Trump will be impossible when Fox's lies for Trump in the subversion of constitutional democracy are on full display. The Dominion trial will provide a necessary complement to the trials of Trump, more than an atmospheric touch of political theater, but bearing on politics moving forward. Murdoch, chained to his service to Trump, will not escape a judgment any more than Trump.

The response of Fox's audience to Fox in the dock will inevitably be to rally around Trump. Murdoch may be finished with Trump but Trump is not finished with him. Murdoch's trial will contribute to the tightening of support for his object of contempt.

"I am your retribution," Trump promises. He rages against DeSantis and Fox as "Rinos" – Republicans In Name Only, which is to say Republicans. In the courtroom drama ahead, Trump will flail against his host of prosecutors, but his retribution during his battle for the nomination will be levied against the Republican party.

- Sidney Blumenthal, former senior adviser to President Bill Clinton and Hillary Clinton, has published three books of a projected five-volume political life of Abraham Lincoln: [A Self-Made Man](#), [Wrestling With His Angel](#) and [All the Powers of Earth](#)



A protest near the Russian embassy in Kyiv, Ukraine, February 2022.
Photograph: Sergei Chuzavkov/Sopa Images/Rex/Shutterstock

[This is EuropeUkraine](#)

Putin doesn't want the war to end – he wants to blast us back to the 40s Soviet era

[Georgi Gospodinov](#)



Populism and nationalism create their own version of the past, and Russia is harking back to the glory days of WWII

- Georgi Gospodinov is the author of *Time Shelter*, which has been longlisted for the [2023 Booker International prize](#)

Tue 4 Apr 2023 03.00 EDTLast modified on Tue 4 Apr 2023 23.20 EDT

Four years ago, I wrote a [novel](#) in which the feeling that there was a “deficit of future” was so acute that every nation in Europe wanted to hold its own referendum on the past. Until then, referendums had always been about the future. But the moment arrived when the horizon closed, and we started to only look back towards the past. A referendum on the past would involve choosing to return to the happiest decade or year from the 20th century in each nation’s history. A deficit of future always unlocks huge reserves of nostalgia for the past: which decade would nations choose? Germany picks the very end of the 80s, a perpetuum mobile of 1989 in which the wall is constantly falling. Italy goes back to the 60s. It’s as if the map of Europe shifts from territorial to temporal, and nations close themselves up – for a very short while – inside their own happy past.

We are seeing this model – this strong pull backwards – being played out now. In short, time has replaced space. The world has been parcelled out, more or less explored and familiar. We are left with an immense ocean of time, which is really an ocean of the past.

The very idea of nostalgia has changed. No longer focused on a place or home (*nostos*), as the etymology of the word suggests, nostalgia now is for a different time. Perhaps we should use some other term – *chronostalgia*, for example. And in this sense, our wars have become wars for the past.

When the novel came out, at one reading the audience asked me: OK, but what would Russia choose? At the time, I wasn't sure. I would like to think it would be the [Gorbachev years](#), the time of perestroika. The answer came on [24 February last year](#). In this invisible referendum on the past, Russia chose the years of the second world war; the last time they enjoyed the recognition of a world prepared to forget Stalin, the gulags, the [Holodomor](#) and the cruelties of the Soviet system.

Putin has chosen, understandably, to return to the early 1940s. Russia's current unhappiness and isolation have made it turn back towards the “happy” and powerful times of the Soviet Union.

In Russia they never did the hard work around the memory of the second world war that Germany did

What Putin wants is not to win this war, but to make it chronic, to force us all to live in that regime. His goal is to bombard and raze the present (and the future) with all its infrastructure and everydayness – so that there is no water, no warmth, no light. To destroy everyday life, and from there existence as well, to literally an-nihil-ate the Ukrainian nation.

An aggressive project to revive the past, especially an unprocessed, forgotten or rewritten past, is the perfect breeding ground for populism and nationalism. We saw this under Trump, and now it is coming true in an even more sinister guise under Putin.

Memory and culture are part of Europe's immune system. It must recognise and disarm the viruses of collective blindness, loss of reason, nationalistic madness, and the birth of new dictators. But the [Ukraine](#) war has broken out as those who carry the living memory of the second world war are no longer with us. We are on that generational precipice when the last of the participants who kept that memory alive, the last concentration camp prisoners, the last soldiers, are passing away. I hope we are not heading towards some strange collective Alzheimer's.

Because when the flame of memory goes out, the beasts of the past close the circle around us. The less memory, the more past. We remember so as to hold the past at bay – in the past.

It is no longer a question merely of memory, but of what we remember and how. Because Putin, too, swears by memory. Populism and nationalism also create their own version of memory. In Russia they never did the hard work around the memory of the second world war that Germany, for example, did: the painful work that penetrates all layers of society, enters into institutions, schools and history textbooks. Its absence keeps alive Russia's status as the great victim: an alibi for new sacrifices it feels it deserves.

One of the most disturbing things now is the erasure of the boundary between truth and fakeness. This fakeness not only rewrites the past but predetermines the future. It grounds itself in a revised past precisely to justify current aggressions and infamies.

Throughout my entire childhood and youth in [Bulgaria](#) I was taught in school that Russia was our big brother whom we could not do without (like all older brothers, he could beat up the bad kids in the neighbourhood who bullied us). Of course, my generation secretly dreamed of other nations, of those yearned for foreign lands to the west of us. And this is some small justice – the USSR never became a dream destination, despite the propaganda; instead it remained a place we held in awe. And this has consequences for the current situation.



Ukrainian protesters seen setting up symbolic grave crosses with the inscription 'Russian occupier' in Kyiv during February. Photograph: Sergei Chuzavkov/Sopa Images/Rex/Shutterstock

In Bulgaria today, pro-Russian propaganda works easily on various levels. From feelings of gratitude to our two-time liberators (and, as it turns out, our two-time enslavers), through veneration for Russian culture (as if Putin and Chekhov were twin brothers), to statements by high-ranking politicians who refuse to unambiguously take the side of the victim.

A Eurobarometer poll from May of last year, indicates that [public opinion in Bulgaria](#) is closer than that of other EU countries to the Russian position on the war. Bulgaria is also in last place in the EU for media literacy. Facebook remains the most influential social media in Bulgaria: more than 95% of our traffic is there. The problem is that propaganda from the internet has penetrated official and serious media as well.

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Bulgarian society is savagely split in two. I don't think the country has seen such disintegration and polarisation – made worse by social networks and public figures – in decades. It may sound too harsh, but sometimes I get the feeling that we are on the verge of a quiet civil war.

This part of [Europe](#) has not been on the crest of the wave of history since 1989. But it has never ceased through its literature, and stories, to offer warnings about what has already happened and could happen again. It seems to me that these stories have not been heard well enough. Here, we can clearly sense that history is not yet finished. Now we know and can formulate it: as long as there is a single bleeding wound of history on the continent, the entire continent bleeds. No one, no matter how many kilometres to the west they may be, can rest easy. The centre of Europe is not something static, stuck in Berlin or Paris. The centre of Europe is that mobile point of pain. Where it hurts and bleeds. Today it is in the east, in proud Ukraine.

In one of the most beautiful essays about Europe, [A Kidnapped West](#), written during the cold war (1983), Milan Kundera begins with a final, desperate telex message sent by the director of the Hungarian news agency in 1956, while the building itself was under artillery fire. His message read: “We are going to die for Hungary and for Europe.” In those critical minutes, he wanted to communicate something. The Russian army's invasion of Hungary was an invasion of Europe; don't wait, react. Did Europe (or the west back then) receive and decipher the message?

This time we know for whom the bell tolls. People in Europe understood immediately. Kundera's essay ends with the bitter conclusion that after the second world war, the west turned away from central Europe and simply thought of it as a satellite of the Soviet empire, without its own identity. This inertia, I dare say, continued even after 1989.

The war in Ukraine has actually returned central and eastern Europe to Europe. From the periphery there is a hypersensitivity to what is impending, an ability to pick up the scent of alarm in the air. Eastern Europe has learned to sense danger with its skin. For this reason, I will allow myself to put it this way: don't underestimate the books, essays, and poems from this corner of Europe. Decode the symbols in them. Words don't stop tanks and don't down drones. But they can (can't they?) stop, delay or at least cause those in the tanks who make war on innocent people hesitate, at least for a bit. Words can help those who are deluded by fake news and propaganda.

This war will not end with the last bullet fired. It began years before the first shot and is likely to end years after the final one. But literature has a role: at the very least it can teach us resistance and empathy; it can offer us the tools with which to identify propaganda lies; it can preserve personal stories from the epicentre of pain, generate memory that will not be violated, and, if possible, console. No propaganda should be stronger than the memory of a [little boy fleeing from war](#) with a telephone number scrawled on his arm.

- Georgi Gospodinov is a Bulgarian novelist and the author of *Time Shelter*, which has been longlisted for the [2023 Booker International prize](#). This article is adapted from an address given at [Debates on Europe 2023](#) and published in collaboration with [Voxeurop](#). It was translated from Bulgarian by Angela Rodel
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She stole his heart – and his wife's ... David Duchovny and Minnie Driver in *Return to Me*. Photograph: Pictorial Press Ltd/Alamy

[OpinionMovies](#)

Why do so many romcoms go wrong? It's down to a problem I call 'the Minnie Driver'

[Zoe Williams](#)



Romcoms can be fantastic – but the pitfalls are always the same. Will the release of *Rye Lane* solve the issues once and for all?

Tue 4 Apr 2023 02.00 EDTLast modified on Tue 4 Apr 2023 14.42 EDT

When I was 12, I did *Guys and Dolls* for a school play. It didn't leave some massive, psyche-reshaping mark – I don't fly to it like a homing pigeon every time there's a production – I just went to the one at the Bridge theatre in London because [it sounded good](#). And it *is* good; it is tremendous. But apparently the work did reshape my psyche after all, if only because I have so much of it stashed in my memory that I came out reeling from the thought of all the things I might be able to do, if I'd managed to displace one stanza of *Marry the Man Today*. Maybe I'd be able to speak German.

Look, for 12-year-olds, it was an interesting choice; I was in the chorus, for which a near-perfect song is crafted – *Take Back Your Mink* – to give an urgent narrative necessity for the chorus girls to strip to their underwear. First they give that rotter back his mink, then his gloves, then his pearls, then all his clothes – the ones they're wearing. There's quite a bit of developmental variation at 12 or 13 years old, so half of us looked like burlesque dancers and the other half were basically naked before we started

because we had nothing to keep our corsets up. My tits weren't even the same size; I can still remember *which one* I flashed at the audience.

“Guys,” you want to ask the past, “is this your best ever idea? Have you considered doing Oklahoma! instead?” “Relax, dolls, the guys will remain fully clothed at all times.”

Structurally speaking, this romcom is flawless. Two love stories play out simultaneously; there's an external jeopardy that cuts straight to the separate anxieties in each relationship; their fates dovetail in evanescent, strategic solidarity, before shaking down to something that looks like a replication of social norms (it's nice when people get married) but is actually a subversion. Not everyone wants the same thing. Under the umbrella of romance, very different people can take their own idiosyncratic shelter. That's normally the problem with romcoms, especially when there are two plots going on at once: everyone, racked by the same homogeneous emotion, becomes the same, and the only way to distinguish them is that the A couple are better-looking and the B couple make more jokes.

The other problem I think of as “the Minnie Driver”, which is pretty unfair, as she appeared in plenty of love stories that were not ridiculous. But at the turn of the century, when the appetite for nice, sane people falling in love (post *You've Got Mail*) was almost limitless, she made a film with David Duchovny called *Return to Me*. The problem with nice, sane people, in peacetime, absent a domineering dynasty or terminal illness, is that it's hard to throw a spanner in their works. You can do it with comedy, misunderstanding, uselessness, Hugh Grants – but if you want full-beam sincerity, if you want anything that could remotely be accompanied by lush violins, you have to invent obstacles more and more ridiculous until you finally arrive at the Minnie Driver. She falls in love with Duchovny, a widower. He falls in love with her. It's sad that he's sad but it looks like he might be healing, except: his dead wife was an organ donor, and Driver – it's a bit of a reach but stay with it – got her heart. Now he has to “decide which woman it is who holds his heart”.

Plainly, the only contested heart here is the deceased wife's, which remains in use. He should be gaping at his good fortune to have fallen in love with the donor-recipient; otherwise his late wife's heart would end up going out with someone else. But there is no gaping, only soul-searching, until about a thousand years later he reaches the obvious conclusion: that grief hurts but hearts are essentially mechanical.

The new British romcom [Rye Lane](#), I think, could solve these problems once and for all, with its handbrake turn back to the screwball gold standard: 80 minutes, unless there is singing, is perfect. It's only when love stories get too long that they end up mad, with hearts everywhere.

- Zoe Williams is a Guardian columnist
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House Speaker Kevin McCarthy will meet Taiwan's president in California on Wednesday Photograph: J Scott Applewhite/AP

[Taiwan](#)

US house speaker Kevin McCarthy confirms he will meet Taiwan president in California

China previously warned McCarthy he is 'playing with fire' over the meeting and risks 'serious confrontation'

- [China and Taiwan tensions explained in 30 seconds](#)

[Helen Davidson](#) in Taipei and Agence France-Presse

Mon 3 Apr 2023 19.01 EDT First published on Mon 3 Apr 2023 18.07 EDT

Taiwan's president Tsai Ing-wen will meet with US House speaker Kevin McCarthy on Wednesday, the Republican's office has confirmed, in defiance of warnings from Beijing that such a meeting would be a "provocation".

Tsai is scheduled to make a stopover in California after state visits to Belize and Guatemala, Taiwan's last remaining Central American diplomatic allies. McCarthy's office said on Monday the "bipartisan" meeting would take place at the Ronald Reagan Presidential Library, outside Los Angeles.

In response, China's LA consulate on Tuesday said that it "firmly opposed" Tsai's US transits, and that the meeting was "not conducive to regional peace, security and stability".

The meeting will "greatly hurt the national feelings of 1.4 billion Chinese people" and undermine "the political foundation of China-US relations," a consulate spokesperson said in a statement.

The spokesperson said China would "resolutely and vigorously defend national sovereignty and territorial integrity".

As speaker of the House of Representatives, McCarthy is the most senior Republican lawmaker and is second in line to the US presidency, after vice-president Kamala Harris.

McCarthy had previously voiced his intention to visit Taiwan, following the example of his House Speaker predecessor, Democrat Nancy Pelosi. [Pelosi's visit in August](#) last year prompted China's military to encircle Taiwan's main island with days of intense live-fire exercises.

A meeting with Tsai on US soil during her stopover in the country had been interpreted as an attempt to avoid a repeat of that situation, but Beijing has reacted with fury to the news, and promised to "resolutely fight back".

Last week Xu Xueyuan, the charge d'affaires of China's embassy to the US, told reporters that Washington risked ["serious confrontation"](#) no matter whether US leaders visited Taiwan or the reverse. The ministry of foreign affairs said such a meeting would be considered a "provocation".

The US – which supports Taiwan's defence but does not recognise it as a country – has said Tsai's stopovers are normal and warned Beijing not to use it as a pretext for [hostile behaviour](#).

On Friday 10 Chinese warplanes flew across the median line, the de facto border with China in the Taiwan Strait. On Monday another [10 planes made the crossing](#). Flights over the median line used to be rare but have become more frequent since the Pelosi visit.

Beijing claims Taiwan is a province of China, and has sworn to annex it under what it terms “reunification”. Tsai maintains Taiwan is a sovereign nation, and its future is for its people to decide. Polling released on Monday by Taiwan’s National Cultural Foundation Policy Center found that more than 60% of the country believes that Tsai’s visit will help improve Taiwan’s international status. More than half of respondents believed Beijing was undermining cross-strait peace, and 73% opposed Xi Jinping’s plan of “reunification”.

Beijing has not ruled out using force to achieve its aims, and in recent years has greatly increased military and diplomatic pressure on Taiwan in an effort to encourage a peaceful surrender.

Since Tsai became president in 2016, nine diplomatic allies have [cut ties with Taiwan](#) in favour of China, which does not allow its allies to recognise both governments. The most recent switch came last month, with [Honduras severing relations with Taiwan](#) and signing on to Beijing’s claim that it is a part of the People’s Republic of China.

Tsai’s 10-day trip to Belize and Guatemala aimed to shore up relations with the two governments. On Monday Belize’s prime minister, John Briceno, reaffirmed his nation’s support for Taiwan.

“Belize welcomes you into our home with open arms,” Briceno told Tsai during a joint session of the national assembly in Belmopan, the capital of the small Central American country of 400,000 people.

Briceno ticked off some of Taipei’s largesse, thanking it for scholarships, farming programs and a \$16.5m grant to build a hospital in the island town and popular tourist hub of San Pedro.

As Tsai listened, Briceno applauded a declaration lawmakers passed last month reaffirming Belize’s formal recognition of Taiwan as a sovereign and

independent country.

In her remarks, Tsai spoke of “expansionist threats from authoritarian regimes”, adding that “the people of Taiwan face constant threats from the neighbour on the other side of the Taiwan Straits,” referring to China. Tsai thanked Belize for its diplomatic support amid “constant threats and pressure” from Beijing.

While in Guatemala, Tsai was accompanied by president Alejandro Giammattei on a visit to a hospital which Taiwan had helped finance. During a photocall with Tsai at a Maya civilisation citadel, [Giammattei](#) called Taiwan “the one and only true China”.

Beijing has sought to lure away Taiwan’s diplomatic allies – predominately through promises of investment, loans or aid, which Taiwan cannot match. However, retaining Belize and Guatemala as allies enables Taiwan’s leadership to make informal visits to the US.

“There is an instrumental value in Taiwan’s diplomatic relationships in enabling the president to travel internationally as a head of state, with ‘stop-overs’ being used to bend the rules by the US,” said Dr Mark Harrison, an expert on China and Taiwan from the University of Tasmania in Australia.

“Taiwan’s de facto independence can be seen in forms other than diplomatic relations, especially trade, but relations do confer legitimacy on Taiwan’s sovereignty.”

Additional research by Chi Hui Lin

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'It's all over': huge fire rips through Dhaka clothing market – video

[Bangladesh](#)

Bangladesh fire: 600 firefighters tackle blaze in huge Dhaka clothing market

Bongo Bazar and three adjacent markets said to be gutted, as 11 people reported injured

Agence France-Presse

Tue 4 Apr 2023 08.28 EDTFirst published on Tue 4 Apr 2023 01.41 EDT

Hundreds of Bangladeshi firefighters have battled an inferno that raged through a popular clothing market in the capital, Dhaka, and covered the city's oldest neighbourhoods in black smoke.

No deaths have been reported, but shop owners and fire officials told reporters that the famous Bongo Bazar and three adjacent markets had been gutted in the dawn fire.

Tempers flared as the morning wore on, with a group of shop owners hurling rocks at firefighters, angered by the time it was taking to bring the blaze under control.

“We dispersed them,” said a police spokesperson, Faruq Ahmed, adding that about 450 officers had been deployed to keep order and stop looting.



The blaze broke out in a clothing market in Dhaka early on Tuesday. Photograph: Abdul Goni/AFP/Getty Images

The fire services head, Main Uddin, told reporters that 600 firefighters from across the city had brought the blaze under control after battling it for more than six hours, while hundreds of people watched from a nearby overpass. “An enthusiastic crowd and a lack of water” along with high winds had made it difficult to combat the fire, he said.

Uddin added that Bongo Bazar, built mainly from timber and tin to house hundreds of small stalls, had been designated a fire risk in 2019 and had been repeatedly issued warning letters since then.

Police inspector Bacchu Mia said at least 11 people had been injured in the fire, including five firefighters, but that none were in a critical condition.



A firefighter runs towards the inferno. Photograph: Abdul Goni/AFP/Getty Images

Owners said the four markets housed thousands of clothing shops in one of Dhaka's busiest precincts, home to its most prestigious university and the national police headquarters.

Built in the 1980s, Bongo Bazar is a popular destination for cut-price western fashion brands such as Tommy Hilfiger, selling clothes that were produced in the city's garment factories but failed to meet export standards.

Distraught shop owners told reporters the blaze had left them destitute before Eid, the Muslim festival marking the end of Ramadan and the country's biggest religious celebration. "I borrowed 1.5m taka (\$14,200) to buy Eid clothing," one business owner said. "I've lost everything."



Firefighters attempt to extinguish the blaze from a nearby overpass.
Photograph: AFP/Getty Images

Building fires and explosions caused by leaking gas cylinders, faulty air conditioners and bad electrical wiring are frequent in Bangladesh.

Last month, at least 23 people were killed in an explosion at a central Dhaka market later blamed on a bad gas line. A [fire and subsequent explosions](#) at a container depot in the port city of Chittagong last year killed more than 50 people.

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The Credit Suisse chair, Axel Lehmann (left) and its chief executive, Ulrich Körner, during a short break at the annual general meeting. Photograph: Fabrice Coffrini/AFP/Getty Images

[Credit Suisse](#)

Furious Credit Suisse investors say bank's board should be 'put behind bars'

Shareholders lash out during final AGM as boss apologises for crisis that led to takeover of lender by UBS

[Kalyeena Makortoff](#), *Banking correspondent*

[@kalyeena](#)

Tue 4 Apr 2023 12.06 EDTFirst published on Tue 4 Apr 2023 05.45 EDT

Furious [Credit Suisse](#) investors at its final ever annual meeting blocked executive pay plans and called for board members to be “put behind bars”, as the Swiss lender’s chair said he was “truly sorry” over the bank’s demise.

Shareholders used most of the nearly five-hour annual general meeting in Zurich – the last in the 167-year-old bank’s history – to voice fury over poor management, hitting out at excessive pay for “incompetent and greedy” bankers who they said took too many risks and endangered Switzerland’s economic prosperity.

Board members were also criticised for being too quick to agree to [its takeover by UBS last month](#) and striking a bad deal for investors, although bosses said the only alternative was bankruptcy. “This is a dishonourable day for Switzerland,” one investor said. “I believe we have basically lost trust in the Swiss financial sector.”

Another lamented the collapse of its shares, which he said were now worth no more than a “sack of walnuts”, and offered some shells as a gift to the chair, Axel Lehmann. Another said it meant livelihoods of pensioners who relied on Credit Suisse stock had “gone up in smoke”, and warned that people “might even think of killing themselves because they no longer have any money left”.

He said the board needed to be held responsible for the many scandals that plagued the bank, including tax evasion and fraud. “These people should be taken to court, should be put behind bars, and should no longer be allowed to practise their profession,” the shareholder said.



Shareholders at the AGM in Zurich. Photograph: Michael Buholzer/AP

Investors still narrowly approved the re-election of a slimmed-down board, as well as any pay they are due for helping UBS absorb its Swiss rival. That includes Lehmann, who gained approval for re-election from nearly 55.7% of shareholders.

However, executives were not so lucky. In a final rebellion, 48.4% of shareholders rejected a proposal to collectively pay executives up to 34m Swiss francs – £30m – over the next year, including for any work involving the merger. Only 48.2% approved the plan.

It was not immediately clear whether that would mean remaining executives having to work for free. “The board will assess this result and will determine potential further measures,” Credit Suisse said in a statement.

The investor anger came despite apologies from Lehmann, who insisted bosses had had legitimate plans to turn the bank around but had been “thwarted” by market panic over the wider health of the global banking sector, after the [collapse of the US tech lender Silicon Valley Bank](#) days earlier.

He said the bank had “fought hard to find a solution” but had ultimately been left with two options: either strike a deal with UBS or declare

bankruptcy.

“We wanted to put all our energy and our efforts into turning the situation around,” Lehmann said. “It pains me that we didn’t have the time to do so in that fateful week in March our plans were thwarted. And for that I am truly sorry.”

He added: “I apologise that we were no longer able to stem the loss of trust that had accumulated over the years and for disappointing you.”

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Credit Suisse was sold to UBS through a Swiss government-orchestrated emergency takeover on 19 March as panic over the health of the financial system swelled after the collapse of SVB that month.

The Swiss lender had long been struggling to keep customers and turn profits after a prolonged series of scandals, compliance problems and bad financial bets. However, confidence was almost wiped out in mid-March after its largest shareholder, the Saudi National Bank, [ruled out providing further funding](#) because of regulations that in effect capped its investment.

The Swiss authorities stepped in, originally offering a 50bn Swiss franc (£45bn) line of credit, and eventually ushering in a takeover by Credit

Suisse's larger domestic rival UBS four days later.

Credit Suisse's chief executive, Ulrich Körner, told shareholders he understood their disappointment. "After 167 years, Credit Suisse is giving up its independence."

However, Lehmann said the only other option would have been bankruptcy. "This would have led to the worst scenario: namely a total loss for shareholders, unpredictable risks for clients, severe consequences for the economy and the global financial markets," he said.

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Lachlan Murdoch's barrister has told the federal court in Australia that Crikey's attempt to add documents from the Dominion lawsuit in the US to its defamation defences is 'not rational' and a waste of time. Photograph: Steven Saphore/AAP

[Australian media](#)

Lachlan Murdoch 'culpable' for January 6 insurrection because of Fox News 'lies', Australian defamation case hears

Murdoch permitted channel to peddle lie that 2020 US election was stolen, publisher of Crikey claims in its defence in court

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Australian Associated Press

Tue 4 Apr 2023 02.02 EDT Last modified on Tue 4 Apr 2023 02.03 EDT

Media mogul [Lachlan Murdoch](#) was culpable for the violent insurrection of the US Capitol after the 2020 presidential election because of lies told through Fox News, a judge has heard.

In the federal court on Tuesday, barrister Michael Hodge KC said that while many media sources fuelled a conspiracy theory that Joe Biden stole the election from Donald Trump, Murdoch could still be held responsible.

“He controls Fox Corporation. He permitted for the commercial and financial benefit of Fox Corporation this lie to be broadcast in the United States,” Hodge told Justice Michael Wigney.

“We say that gives rise to culpability where you are allowing and promoting this lie and that lie is the motivation for the insurrection.”

Hodge is representing Private Media, which publishes Crikey, as well as political editor Bernard Keane, editor-in-chief Peter Fray, chairman Eric Beecher and chief executive Will Hayward.

They are seeking additional time to file their defences to Murdoch’s defamation suit over an opinion piece published in June last year and reposted in August referring to him as an “unindicted co-conspirator” with Trump over the false election claims.

The publisher is seeking to add a contextual truth defence on top of its already pleaded defences of public interest and qualified privilege.

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The proposed defence, yet to be approved by the federal court, includes personal communications between the Murdoch family revealed via [separate US defamation proceedings](#) brought against Fox by voting equipment

company Dominion which claims it was falsely accused of conducting mass voter fraud.

In one SMS, [Rupert Murdoch](#) tells his son Lachlan and Fox board member Paul Ryan about Trump's "conspiracy nonsense" and refers to Fox talk show host Sean Hannity.

"Wake up call for Hannity who has been privately disgusted by Trump for weeks but has been scared to lose viewers," Rupert Murdoch wrote.

Lachlan Murdoch, in the defamation case against Crikey, claims the articles conveyed a meaning that he illegally conspired with Trump to "incite a mob with murderous intent to march on the Capitol" in Washington DC on 6 January 2021.

Murdoch's barrister Sue Chrysanthou SC called the proposed contextual truth defence vague, saying it did not say how her client was culpable for the state of mind of about 2,000 people who stormed the Capitol building on 6 January.

Other Murdoch-owned publications, including the Wall Street Journal, New York Post and even Fox itself had reported that Biden won the election and had disagreed with Trump's claims.

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“This defence is not rational, it is not arguable, it’s a waste of everyone’s time and it serves no legitimate end in the litigation,” the barrister said.

She accused Crikey of including masses of material from the Dominion case in the Australian defamation lawsuit purely as part of its “Lachlan Murdoch campaign”.

The media executive has previously alleged that Crikey has run this campaign against him to boost subscribers and gain financially.

“They are happy to martyr themselves in this litigation to seek more money on the GoFundMe me campaign ... to turn the case into something that resembles an inquiry and they don’t care if they win or lose,” Chrysanthou said.

She urged the judge to reject the defence, saying it would mean a three-week trial scheduled to begin 9 October would have to be vacated.

Wigney was due to deliver his judgment on Tuesday afternoon.

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Former New Zealand prime minister Jacinda Ardern has accepted a new job combating online extremism as special envoy for the Christchurch Call. Photograph: Hagen Hopkins/Getty Images

[New Zealand](#)

Jacinda Ardern to tackle online extremism in new role as special envoy for Christchurch Call

Former New Zealand prime minister will push initiative she created in wake of 2019 terrorist attack

[Tess McClure](#) in Wellington

[@tessairini](#)

Tue 4 Apr 2023 02.00 EDTLast modified on Tue 4 Apr 2023 16.39 EDT

Former New Zealand prime minister [Jacinda Ardern](#) will take on a new role working alongside international governments and social media companies to target extremism and terrorist content online.

Prime minister Chris Hipkins announced on Tuesday evening that he had appointed Ardern as special envoy for the Christchurch Call, a newly created position.

The Christchurch Call [was created by Ardern](#) in the wake of the 15 March 2019 mosque shootings, in which a white supremacist killed 51 people during [an attack on two mosques in Christchurch](#).

The attack was livestreamed and broadcast on a number of social media platforms, and in the months that followed, Ardern created the initiative to push companies like Facebook, YouTube and Twitter to put in place stronger protections against the spread of extremist violent content.

“I ... still feel a duty at a personal level to the community who are affected by this tragedy,” Ardern said in an interview on Tuesday evening, her first since her resignation in January. “I knew that I would have the time to do it. And I certainly have the passion for it,” she said.

“The March 15 terror attacks on Christchurch masjidain were a defining moment for our country and Jacinda Ardern’s leadership and the Christchurch Call is part of our response to those attacks,” Hipkins said.

“Jacinda Ardern’s commitment to stopping violent extremist content like we saw that day is key to why she should carry on this work. Her relationships with leaders and technology companies and her drive for change will help increase the pace and ambition of the work we are doing,” he said.

The Christchurch Call project calls on signatory nations to adopt and enforce laws that ban objectionable material, and set guidelines on how traditional media can report acts of terrorism without amplifying them.

In her first substantial media appearances since stepping down as prime minister, Ardern said that she believed her resignation could lower the temperature in New Zealand’s political discourse after deep divisions emerged around vaccination, the country’s Covid response, and her as a figure.

“It did occur to me that my departure might just take a bit of heat out,” Ardern said in one of two Tuesday night television appearances.

“If it did, that would be good for New Zealand,” she said. “I knew I was a flashpoint for some people, and again [while] that wasn’t the basis of my decision, I hoped it would be a consequence of my decision.”

“When I’ve watched on, I’ve felt like, yeah, I feel like I was right.”

Particularly in the final year of her tenure, Ardern became a lightning rod for anti-government, anti-vaccination and far right groups, with a number of men prosecuted for making threats against her and her family.

Asked whether her leaving had benefited her party, Ardern said. “I didn’t think about it as a party political person, I thought about whether or not that would just be good for New Zealand as a whole – I do think that taking a pause, taking a breath, reminding each other that we’re all just humans. If my departure has given people a bit of time to step back from some of those extreme emotions, that’s not a bad thing.”

Overall, Ardern said, her positive interactions with New Zealanders far outweighed the negative. “Of course I experience people’s thoughts and feelings face to face, and I could see there were people on both ends of the extreme ... some I absolutely am aware, felt very strongly in a negative way about me and my leadership,” she said, whereas others were highly positive, sending cards, letters, and cups of tea.

Ardern also announced she would be joining the board of trustees of Prince William’s Earthshot Prize, which awards five £1m prizes each year for work providing solutions to major environmental problems.

Ardern said she “believed Earthshot’s power to encourage and spread not only the innovation we desperately need, but also optimism”.

Prince William said that Ardern would “bring a rich infusion of new thinking to our mission”.

“Four years ago, before The Earthshot Prize even had a name, Jacinda was one of the first people I spoke to, and her encouragement and advice was

crucial,” he said.

With her time as member of New Zealand’s parliament coming to an end this week, the [former prime minister’s exit](#) has been a quiet one: refusing all interviews since her resignation. Ardern was due to make a television appearance – her first since her shock resignation in January – later on Tuesday, and will make her valedictory speech to the House on Wednesday.

The newly created special position will “represent New Zealand’s continued commitment to push for greater protection online from terrorist and violent extremist content,” the prime minister’s office said in a statement. In the new position, Ardern will report directly to the prime minister, and will work closely with France as co-leaders. She will begin her duties later this month, on 17 April. She will not accept remuneration for the role.

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- Live Four in five allegations of sexual or domestic violence by police officers need reassessing, says Met chief
- Mark Rowley We've been 'too permissive' about police with criminal records
- Metropolitan police Rowley vows to clean up force
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Rowley revealed the force had found that four out of five past allegations of violence against women by officers and staff did not result in the correct action. Photograph: James Manning/PA Media

[Metropolitan police](#)

Met chief: we've been 'too permissive' about police with criminal records

Mark Rowley says he was shocked by officers' offences and law needs to make it easier to dismiss people from force

[Emily Dugan](#)
[@emilydugan](#)

Thu 6 Apr 2023 05.06 EDTLast modified on Thu 6 Apr 2023 07.11 EDT

The commissioner of the [Metropolitan police](#) says his force has “been too permissive” in allowing officers to serve with serious criminal records and that legislation is needed to make it easier to dismiss them.

Commenting in the wake of a [review that found 161 officers in his force have criminal convictions](#), including for sex offences, Sir Mark Rowley told BBC Radio 4's Today programme: "I think we've been too permissive. That's very, very clear."

Scotland Yard has been reviewing its handling of serious allegations against its own force after the scandal of [David Carrick](#), who raped and assaulted at least 12 women.

Rowley [revealed on Thursday](#) that the force had found that four out of five past allegations of violence against women by officers and staff did not result in the correct action and should be rechecked. In all, 1,131 cases were examined in the decade to April 2022 and hundreds of officers are likely to lose their jobs.

Rowley said he had been shocked by the seriousness of the offences committed by serving officers. "There's certainly some people when I looked at the list, I thought, crikey, that's not right." When asked to give examples, he said: "Some sex offence cases, some serious partner violence cases."

Disciplinary issues in the police are dealt with under regulations that operate outside normal employment law, which Rowley said meant it was hard to dismiss problematic officers. He said the police regulations meant some sacked officers had been reinstated after legal action and that it was hard to dismiss staff who had been re-vetted.

"I think those regulations over time have become byzantine and complex and so not having clear provision to dismiss people who have failed a re-vetting process is crazy," he said.

"People will be shocked. Some of the people on that list of criminal convictions are people that the Met has sacked, and an independent lawyer has reinstated ... The commissioner doesn't have the final say on who's in his or her organisation."

The commissioner said legislation was needed to speed up and simplify a disciplinary process that allowed Carrick to stay in his job despite multiple allegations of misogynistic abuse over two decades. The home secretary [launched a review](#) of the Met's dismissal processes in January that Rowley said he hoped would result in urgent change.

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“I’m hoping they will put in place pretty urgently some more rapid mechanisms,” he said. “Because whilst we’re doubling down and doubling the impact we’re having, this is taking much longer than I would like and it’s much more difficult than I would like and if they can move the regulations in a way that, of course is still fair for officers but helps us go faster, that’ll be in everyone’s interest.”

Rowley also said police needed to lower the threshold for taking disciplinary action against officers with problematic behaviour, as they were preoccupied with whether an allegation was criminal.

“I think the issue for policing is to not get drawn into whether the only test is whether someone reaches a criminal standard, because we’re involved in a criminal investigation, which other employers aren’t,” he said. Giving the example of domestic violence, he said that just because the Crown Prosecution Service did not think there was merit in a case, “that doesn’t

mean we should assume therefore that there isn't material in the file which still gives a level of concern which might need to lead to action".

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The Metropolitan police is the UK's largest force. Photograph: Sinai Noor/REX/Shutterstock

[Metropolitan police](#)

Commissioner vows to clean up Met as force faces biggest crisis since 1970s

Sir Mark Rowley vows to 'lift the stone' – but says rooting out every unfit police officer could take years

[Vikram Dodd](#) *Police and crime correspondent*

Wed 5 Apr 2023 19.01 EDT

Scotland Yard is battling its biggest corruption crisis since the 1970s, its commissioner has warned, as new evidence emerged of the widespread bungling of sexual and domestic abuse claims against officers.

The review of past allegations was triggered [by the David Carrick scandal](#), where the force missed repeated clues that the Metropolitan police firearms

officer was a threat to women, while he attacked at least 12 victims over a 20-year period, committing 85 serious crimes.

In a letter released on Thursday to the home secretary and to the [London](#) mayor, the commissioner – Sir Mark Rowley – revealed that the force examined 1,131 past allegations of sexual or domestic violence by officers and staff against women from the last decade.

Only in a minority of instances (246) were police chiefs satisfied the right decisions had been made to leave those accused in the force.

But in 78% of past allegations there were concerns, while 689 cases – 61% – need further work as there were “new or missed lines of inquiry”.



Sir Mark Rowley.

In a further 196 instances from 2012 to 2022, there were concerns serious enough that these officers will be re-vetted and the danger they could pose freshly assessed. Potentially they could be forced out.

Experts have warned the real figures could be even higher, with many women never reporting attacks in the belief nothing would be done.

Rowley said the mission to root out wrongdoing would take “years” and described the findings as “troubling”. He revealed the force’s [revamped effort to investigate itself had seen detectives drafted in](#) from fighting serious and organised crime and terrorism.

He vowed to “lift the stone” and said the majority of officers backed the efforts: “The most urgent thing is to remove the cancer from the body,” he said.

Rowley is trying to show he accepts the Met’s severe problems and is making progress tackling them six months into his commissionership so the force can avoid being split up.

His vow to clean up the Met comes after [officer Wayne Couzens was found guilty of kidnapping, raping and murdering Sarah Everard](#) and [Carrick was revealed to be one of the worst serial sex attackers in British history](#).

In both cases it was later revealed they could have been identified much earlier as dangers to women.

Rowley, who came out of retirement to apply to become commissioner in September 2022, said his challenge was so severe that it was on a par with the challenge faced by [Sir Robert Mark](#) when he became commissioner in 1972, and tackled deep-seated financial corruption.

Rowley said: “In my interviews with the home secretary and mayor last summer for this post, I was talking about the need to do the most serious of doubling down on standards that we’ve done in 50 years. That was clear to me from outside the Met ...”

Asked whether he was referring to the challenge [facing Mark](#), Rowley said: “Yes exactly, in terms of the scale of it.”

A series of reviews and investigations only bolster Rowley’s view that there are several hundreds officers in the Met who need ousting. He added he wanted to make it quicker and easier to remove suspect officers.

One in every 200 officers has a criminal conviction, with all bar eight having received them before they joined. Three were for sexual offences after they

joined, while 49 were for crimes of dishonesty or violence.

Other crimes include drug possession, criminal damage and public order offences. All those with convictions will be reviewed to see if they are fit to serve.

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Rowley said he supported a ban on officers with convictions and cautions for violence against women, and said the force may unilaterally ban virtually anyone with a conviction from joining.

In his letter and a briefing to reporters, the commissioner revealed:

- Checks on 10,000 of the Met's 50,000 officers and staff against police databases showed 38 cases of possible misconduct and 55 cases of a potential association with a criminal, all of which will be investigated further.
- Gross misconduct investigations, which can lead to sackings have risen 62% to 431, with such hearings taking less time to be held.

- A total of 144 officers were suspended from duty, double that from September 2022, with 701 on restricted duties.
- There has been a 70% increase in those dismissed – or leaving before they could be sacked – in the last six months.

Last month Louise Casey’s report for the Met found the force rotten and broken, riven with institutional bias and with public trust broken.

Harriet Wistrich of the [Centre for Women’s Justice – which battled police to tackle wrongdoing](#) – said the figures on officers unfit to serve and those who are a danger to women may be an underestimate.

“It explains how an abuser like Carrick was able to remain in the police for so long despite multiple reports against him,” she said.

“We know that many women are too fearful to report police officers and can therefore assume there may be many more abusing police officers who have never been subject to investigation.”

Both the home secretary, Suella Braverman, and London mayor [Sadiq Khan](#) came out in support of Rowley’s efforts.

Braverman said: “Sir Mark’s update on the work to root out unfit officers demonstrates the scale of this challenge but I have confidence in his plan to turn around the Met and ensure the force is delivering for the public.”

Khan said the findings were disturbing but showed Rowley was serious.

“This is an important first step towards rebuilding public trust and confidence, which is so vital to policing by consent, but there is still a lot more to do,” he said.



Sir Robert Mark talks to police officers on the corner of Balcombe Street, Marylebone. Photograph: PA Photos/PA Archive/Press Association Images

[Metropolitan police](#)

[Analysis](#)

Mark Rowley aims to reform the Met on the scale of Robert Mark in the 1970s

[Vikram Dodd](#) Police and crime correspondent

The London police commissioner faces a battle to clean up a force where the same cultures tackled by his predecessor 'are alive and well'

Wed 5 Apr 2023 19.01 EDTLast modified on Wed 5 Apr 2023 19.36 EDT

The Britain of today shares some similarities with the country of the 1970s: then the country was debating its relationship with Europe, flares were in and frequent strikes disrupted everyday life. And then, as now, standards in policing in the capital were so dire that a new broom had to be brought in to clean up the [Metropolitan police](#).

[Sir Robert Mark](#), the legendary reforming commissioner of the Met from 1972, said this about the force he battled to reform: “I had served in provincial forces for 30 years, and though I had known wrongdoing, I had never experienced institutionalised wrongdoing, blindness, arrogance and prejudice on anything like the scale accepted as routine in the Met.”

More than 50 years on, Louise Casey’s [excoriating report into the cataclysmic failings](#) in the Met used that quote from Mark to highlight how bad the modern day force was, adding: “The Met is a very different organisation today. But we have found those cultures alive and well.”

The current commissioner says Britain’s largest force is back in that same scale of mess again, which he too is vowing to sort out. Sir Mark Rowley, commissioner since September 2022, like Mark five decades earlier, served largely in “provincial” forces – the West Midlands and Surrey where he was chief – before coming to the Met in 2011.

Rowley left in 2018, and came out of “comfortable retirement” perturbed by what former colleagues still in the Met were telling him about the force’s descent under [Cressida Dick](#), who had beaten him to the commissionership.

The corruption Mark faced in the 1970s centred on backhanders and ties to criminals, as were purges in the mid 1990s under the commissionership of Paul Condon. Efforts then were spearheaded by the “ghost squad” of corruption hunters known as CIB3. That effort had mixed results.

In the modern day, the corruption admitted is less about bribes and cash in brown envelopes, and more about behaviour that threatens the force’s integrity. Rowley likened it to a “cancer” and while it is several hundred – by his estimate – out of 35,000 officers, the Met has let fester to the point it threatens its very existence.

Lady Casey raised the prospect of the dismemberment of the Met if it fails to reform and win back public confidence. She warns police cannot reform themselves – they need external pressure. Rowley worries if he cannot, the politicians of the day will devise some botched solution.

Rowley's letter, released on Thursday and updating the home secretary and [London](#) mayor on progress, sets out one part of his reform plan – targeting the officers, staff and behaviours few will argue against excising.

He pledges a tougher system to hunt down wrongdoing and encouragement to officers that when they whistleblow they will not be punished. He has to overcome internal and public scepticism that other commissioners have said this before and little change lasted, if happened at all.

Rowley writes: “I recognise the scale of the damage to public trust that has taken place and the significant work we still have to do in order to restore it. I have been impressed by the determination and support of the tens of thousands of women and men who work in the Met ... to deliver the change we need.”

For Rowley to stand a chance of succeeding, he will need the support of the vast majority, time for reforms to work and events to go his way. As well as rooting out the poor behaviour, he will try to improve the actual policing London sees. Attending every burglary, and another promise that the Met will have proper neighbourhood policing.

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Because he knows that bleak news about the Met will continue, with “years” of two to three officers a week appearing in court on criminal charges to come.

This year alone has seen three stunning bombshells to the Met’s reputation, all self inflicted, with the worst price born by the public, and one more to come.

The first was the public finding out the scale of [David Carrick’s prolific offending](#) and how the Met’s blunders shielded him from discovery for so long, the second was again, the public finding out that chances to identify Wayne Couzens as a danger to women before he murdered Sarah Everard were missed. Casey’s review was the third, and late summer or autumn will come the fourth predictable bombshell, when a government ordered inquiry into the Couzens scandal is expected to report.

If Rowley wants to know how hard it can get turning the Met around, then his predecessor Mark summed up his ordeal in his autobiography by borrowing from Hamlet: “The time is out of joint/ O cursed spite that ever I was born to set it right.”

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2023.04.06 - Spotlight

- [Good Friday skipping English Heritage aims to jump-start neglected Easter tradition](#)
- [My week with ChatGPT Can it make me a healthier, happier, more productive person?](#)
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Easter skipping in Alciston, East Sussex, in 1952. Photograph: Mirrorpix/Getty Images

[Heritage](#)

Good Friday skipping: English Heritage aims to jump-start neglected Easter

tradition

‘Long rope day’ endured for hundreds of years but is now largely forgotten, says charity

[*Esther Addley*](#)

Thu 6 Apr 2023 02.00 EDTLast modified on Thu 6 Apr 2023 02.15 EDT

For centuries in some parts of England, people would get together on Good Friday – to skip. Men, women and children would mark the start of the Easter weekend by jumping over long lengths of fishing rope or washing lines, sometimes aiming to jump for the entirety of what became known as “[long rope day](#)” or “skipping day”.

Almost – but not quite – everywhere, the custom has been all but forgotten. This Easter, however, English [Heritage](#) hopes to revive it, hosting skipping events at eight of its sites across the bank holiday weekend.

At [Bolsover Castle](#) in Derbyshire, [Audley End](#) in Essex and six other sites, visitors will be invited to join in with skipping games whose origins are murky but which may be very ancient indeed.

“It is traditions like these that add so much colour to our social history,” said the heritage charity. “We aim to bring history to life for our visitors and I think helping traditions like this live on is a really important part of doing that.”

Amy Boyington, senior historian at English Heritage, said: “During the 20th century, whole families would try to skip all day on Good Friday, eating hot cross buns to keep them going. They believed skipping would bring good luck and guarantee good harvests or catches of fish in the coming year.”

Though Easter skipping was a popular pastime in a number of towns and villages across England, by the pre-second world war years it had come to be particularly associated with fishing communities in Sussex. Sean

Goddard, an amateur historian from [Brighton](#), said his father had recalled communal skipping events in a local park.

Before that, fishers and their families would skip beside the beach, said Goddard, “but they would also do the long rope skipping a few streets in from the beach, where the fishermen lived. They would have put a long rope across the street [where] it was all narrow cottages.”

Like many folk traditions, the origins of festive skipping are uncertain. The custom is at least four centuries old, according to English Heritage, but may be considerably older.

One leading folklorist [speculated in the 1950s](#) that the then lingering association of skipping with bronze-age barrows on the South Downs suggested the activity was “the far-off descendant of the sports and games played at burials and ... possibly at barrow funerals”.

If so, Good Friday would have been a much more recent association, with some [later speculating](#) that the long rope was associated with the legend that Judas hanged himself after betraying Christ. (In Scarborough, community skipping [has taken place since the early 1900s, but on Shrove Tuesday.](#))



‘It’s great fun,’ said Gill Phillips, whose all-female morris group revived the skipping tradition in 1981. Photograph: Mirrorpix/Getty Images

“We would love to hear from anyone who remembers – or has a relative who remembers – skipping on Good Friday,” said Boyington.

“The rhymes that would have undoubtedly accompanied these [Easter](#) games are largely forgotten too, which is such a shame as oral tradition is so important in our understanding of social history.”

Almost forgotten as it may be, Good Friday skipping has not quite died out. Goddard is a member of the [Chanctonbury Ring Morris Men](#), and on Friday they and two other morris groups will perform [outside a pub in Ringmer in Sussex](#) before hosting a community skip for all comers.

“We have very long ropes, enough to get eight to 10 people skipping at a time,” he said. “The morris people do it; anybody can do it.”

Also present will be Gill Phillips, whose all-female morris group [the Knots of May](#) revived the Good Friday tradition in 1981.

“It’s not really associated with morris dancing at all,” she said, “but if we don’t do it, what’s going to happen? It’s going to die and it’s great fun. It’s nice to have something the general public can join in.”

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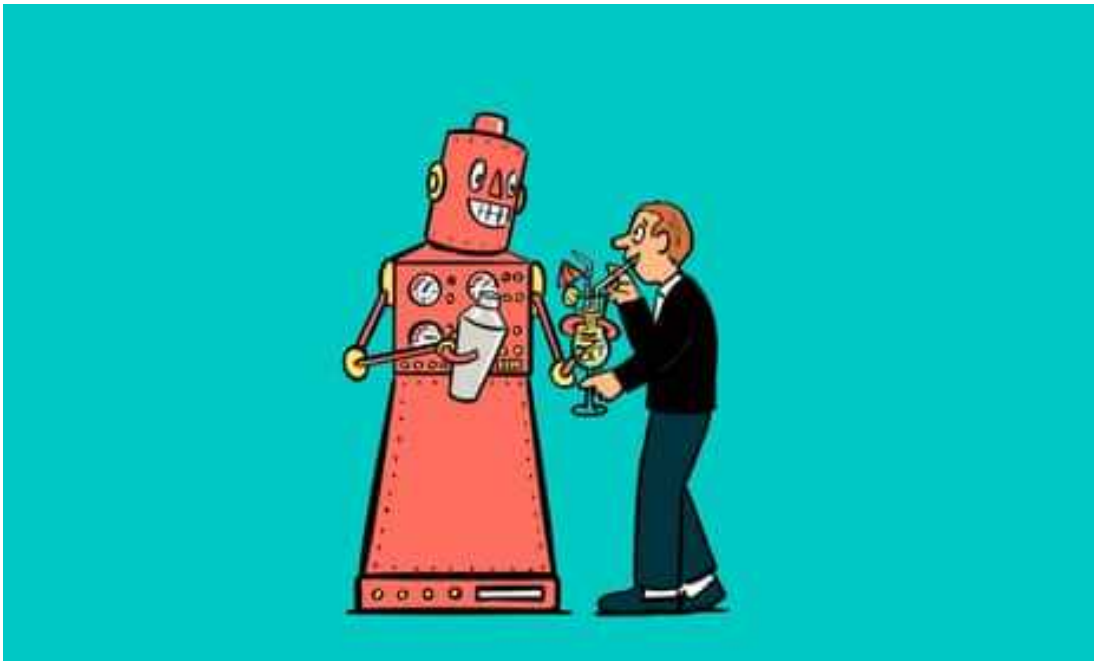
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The cocktail it comes up with is not bad, though I will admit my recall is hazy. Illustration: Mark Long/The Guardian

[ChatGPT](#)

My week with ChatGPT: can it make me a healthier, happier, more

productive person?

I've never had an assistant, a life coach or a personal trainer – perhaps AI is just what I'm looking for. I tried it on everything from cocktail-making to holiday-planning to health advice



[Alex Hern](#)

[@alexhern](#)

Thu 6 Apr 2023 01.00 EDTLast modified on Thu 6 Apr 2023 09.31 EDT

According to a recent open letter, society needs to [immediately_pause development](#) of “giant” AI models, or risk apocalyptic outcomes. Massive job losses, the destruction of consensus reality and even the end of all organic life on Earth have all been mooted as risks of pressing forward with development of these systems before we understand their intricacies.

The high-water mark of these is GPT-4, the snappily named AI that underpins the latest version of the breakthrough [ChatGPT](#) service. Creating anything more powerful than GPT-4, before we spend at least six months working out its limits and risks, would be too dangerous, more than 1,000 AI experts say.

I decided to spend some time with the new ChatGPT myself. Not just to find out about its risks to civilisation, but also to see what it could and couldn't do to help me with my life. I've never had an assistant, a life coach, a chef or a personal trainer – could ChatGPT be all those things for me? I gave it a week to find out.

Monday

Can it give me basic information without lying?

The odd thing about being handed a tool of unimaginable complexity and potential is that the blinking cursor stares at you just like any other, daring you to find something interesting to type. I feel as if I'm on a bad blind date where I'm expected to ask all the questions.

Throughout the day I pepper the service with queries, trying to use it instead of Google when I want to find out a basic fact, but I quickly hit upon the problem with that approach: ChatGPT's habit of "hallucinating". The system will, on occasion, just make things up, things that feel true but aren't grounded in, well, reality.

To win an argument with a friend, for instance, I ask how many drivers there are in Sunderland (my friends are cool). "Around 67% of people in Sunderland used a car or van to travel to work, according to the 2011 UK census," ChatGPT merrily tells me. Great! But wait. I can't find that statistic anywhere in the actual UK census, and it's an alarmingly specific number for ChatGPT – which isn't able to look up information online – to have memorised.

Sure enough, if I phrase the same question a different way, it tells me: "I cannot provide real-time data, and as an AI, I cannot access the internet to find specific numbers from the 2011 UK census." Scratch that then.

Tuesday

Can it tell me why my neck feels funny?

I decide to try to focus on queries that ChatGPT might do better at than Google – the sort of things you would expect someone with broad expertise to be able to answer off the top of their head.

Also, everything in my household is falling apart and I need help. I slept funny (I think?), and now my left arm just ... doesn't really work. I turn to ChatGPT, first to find out how to describe where the pain is. "What's the name of the muscle that runs down the side of your neck to your shoulder – the one that stands out when you grimace," I ask, and it gives the right answer: the sternocleidomastoid muscle. I tell it that I slept funny, and ask if there's anything I can do to ease the pain. It gives me a few neck exercises, but warns that "I'm not a healthcare professional".

Which is true enough, though just like my interactions with real physiotherapists, I promptly forget about the exercises in the afternoon when the pain goes away and do absolutely nothing to prevent a recurrence. One improvement on a real physio, though: ChatGPT doesn't arrange a follow-up session to scold me for my laziness.

Wednesday

Can it tell me what's wrong with my sick child?

Overnight, my baby son vomited five times. He seems fine, promptly falling back to sleep each time while his mother and I groggily change his sheets again. In the morning, I turn to ChatGPT while we wait for the GP appointment the following day, and I'm surprised by how forthcoming it is with advice.

Yes, it prefaces anything it says with "I'm not a doctor", but then it merrily continues on its way, recommending generic advice such as keeping my baby hydrated, burping him regularly and feeding him smaller amounts more frequently. I prompt further, bringing up a specific rare condition that can cause frequent vomiting in babies, and ChatGPT again says: "I'm not a doctor" before launching into a description of the symptoms.

"It is crucial to consult with a healthcare professional if you suspect your baby has this, as it requires medical intervention," it concludes. I push it

further, describing symptoms of serious dehydration and asking for advice, and again it begins its answer: “I’m not a doctor” before reciting a long list of things “you could consider doing”.

The system’s training data is bulging through here, I think. There’s a certain point where the correct answer is simply: “I’m not a doctor; you need to call an ambulance”, and my fictionalised description, of a child who is floppy and lethargic, with no wet nappies for days and regular vomiting, is well past that. But you won’t find many websites (which is where ChatGPT got its knowledge from) that say this, because the economic model of health advice requires enough text on a page to sell adverts next to it.

My son is fine, by the way, and my partner spends the next day vomiting instead, which solves that mystery.

Thursday

Can it invent a new Ottolenghi recipe?

It’s meal-planning night, and I’ve decided to start getting creative with my prompts. I’m not going to just ask it to give me a recipe; that would be too easy. Instead, I pull the full list of every Guardian recipe I’ve ever bookmarked – 350 in all – and paste the names of each one into the chat window, telling it to suggest another 10.



Illustration: Mark Long/The Guardian

Some of its suggestions are a little generic (“Thai basil chicken stir-fry”) and others sound overly similar to ones I’ve already had (ChatGPT’s sweet potato gnocchi with sage brown butter sauce sounds a bit derivative of Ottolenghi’s [squash gnocchi with caraway and black garlic](#)), but there are a few mouthwatering suggestions.

I ask it to expand on two, turning them into full recipes: roasted red pepper and aubergine risotto with mint yoghurt drizzle, and warm lentil salad with caramelised onion and goat cheese. And to make sure it gets it right, I ask the system to do it “in the style of Yotam Ottolenghi”.

The recipes that come out are ... good. Really good, actually. Even my sceptical partner overcomes her resentment at being forced to let an AI feed her. There are a few notes to feed back – the AI’s suggested portion sizes are miserly, and it loves throwing oodles of herbs at the problem – but the two meals turn out to be perfect for shoving in a lunchbox and taking to the office. It’s weird to save them in my recipe folder but I’ll end up cooking ChatGPT’s aubergine risotto for years to come (*see full recipe at the bottom*).

Friday

Can it mix me a kumquat cocktail?

Buoyed up by Thursday's success, I give it another challenge: I have a drinks cabinet full of spirits, but no mixers. I do, however, have some white wine, cocktail cherries and two kumquats. What should I drink?

Its first suggestion, which involves mixing white wine and sugar syrup together with lemon juice and a cocktail cherry, sounds awfully dull. But I prod away, asking it for more interesting (OK, and stronger) drinks, and it comes up with the kumquat cherry smash: gin, Cointreau, sugar syrup, lemon juice, bitters, cocktail cherries and my two precious kumquats.

It's not bad, though I will admit my recall is hazy, since the system definitely paid attention to the "strong" request. I send the recipes over to Felix Cohen, award-winning bartender at [Margate's Daisy](#). "These are perfectly fine recipes," he agrees. "The drinks will taste good! I'm particularly impressed that it knew to double strain when you added the kumquat pulp. But making palatable food and drink is kind of easy – making stuff that people will pay for and talk about and come back for is a lot of work and knowledge and inspiration, and it isn't doing that for me with these drinks."

Saturday

Can it help me defend my pub table, in a British way?

Emboldened by the successes, I try to use ChatGPT more casually. It goes poorly.

Some friends come over to play a game. I hate explanations of rules – sitting in front of people reading out long reams of text is never fun. I see if ChatGPT can generate a succinct version of the rules, snappy enough to give a brief overview so that we can all agree "we'll pick the rest up as we go".

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And, well, it can't. I bash my head at the system trying to find the perfect prompt, but it veers between far too curt – the equivalent of giving the rules of Monopoly as “you buy houses and hotels” – and being overly verbose when I try to encourage it to be bold and fun. Worse, the hallucinations come out. It frequently gives rules that are similar to, but not exactly the same as, the ones that have been summarised. The experience of playing a game where the host pipes up halfway through with some rules clarification that mysteriously benefits them and only them is not a good one, but it's one that ChatGPT nearly forces on my pals.

In the end, I give up and read out the rulebook.

That's not as bad as its attempts in the pub later, though. As the heavens open, I suddenly become the holder of the most valuable real estate in the area: an indoor pub table. Desperately hoping to ease the awkwardness of having to fend off advances as I sit alone, I turn to ChatGPT for advice, and it responds in the tone of an American who has had too much therapy: “Hi there, I apologise for any inconvenience, but I've reserved this bench for my group of friends who are presently in the beer line. They should be back soon. Thanks for your understanding!”

Hateful stuff. I try again, asking it to be more British, and get the same basic script read by a Hugh Grant impersonator: “Hello, I hope you don't mind, but I've actually kept this bench free for my chums who are in the beer queue. They'll be with us in just a jiffy. Much obliged for your consideration!”

I do not succeed in defending the table.

Sunday

Can it plan my holiday to Japan?

“Prompt engineering” is the name of the new skill these chatbots engender: the idea that there’s a particular technique to be learned with making requests of a generative AI. You *can* ask questions the way you would another person, but you’ll do better if you remember that it isn’t a person. So you need to ask questions in the right way to get the answers you want.

I decide to really get into prompt engineering on Sunday. I’m planning a holiday to Japan, and I want ChatGPT to be actually useful. Earlier, I had tried Google’s competing chatbot, Bard, and it had been woefully generic while also suggesting activities that hadn’t been possible for three years.

For ChatGPT, I ask it a detailed question, listing every circumstance of my trip that I think is relevant – the size of my family, my daughter’s Down’s syndrome, where in Tokyo we would be staying, and so on – and then ask it to answer each question three times, from the point of view of a British tourist, a British expat and a Tokyo native, explaining after each answer which parts of my own circumstances make it a relevant answer.

It’s a horribly wordy question, and constructing it feels like trying to trick an evil genie into letting you wish for more wishes. But it really worked. I had built a robot tour guide, who would give me specific suggestions down to neighbourhood level, detailed advice on how to eat well with two kids, and even recommend which traditional Japanese sweets might be nicest to eat on a hot summer’s day: the tourist suggests *kakigōri*, while the Tokyoite plumps for *anmitsu*.

One last question

One more prompt remains. I paste the above into ChatGPT and ask it for a pithy summary for a newspaper article about using AI as a personal assistant.

It says: “In a week with ChatGPT, I’ve experienced its remarkable capabilities and limitations. It can create recipes and offer tailored advice,

yet struggles with social situations and reliability. As we adapt to communicate with AI, the question arises: will AI eventually grasp our nuances, or will we continue adjusting to accommodate its imperfections? While helpful, ChatGPT cannot replace the depth and authenticity of human interaction.”

It’s not quite what I’d focus on – the “making things up” stuff feels more alarming – but not bad, bot. Not bad.

ChatGPT’s kumquat cherry smash

Ingredients

60ml gin (or substitute with rum, brandy, whisky, pisco, cachaca or vodka, based on your preference)
15ml Cointreau (or another orange liqueur)
15ml simple syrup (1:1 sugar-to-water ratio)
30ml freshly squeezed lemon juice
2-3 dashes of aromatic bitters (eg Angostura bitters)
1-2 cocktail cherries
2 kumquats
Optional: mint sprig or lemon twist for garnish

Instructions

Slice the kumquats into thin rounds, removing any seeds. In a cocktail shaker, muddle the sliced kumquats and cocktail cherries to release their juice and oils. Add the gin (or your preferred spirit), Cointreau, simple syrup, lemon juice, and aromatic bitters to the shaker.

Fill the shaker with ice, and shake well for about 15-20 seconds or until well chilled. Double strain the mixture into a rocks glass filled with fresh ice to remove any kumquat and cherry pulp. Garnish with a mint sprig or lemon twist, if desired. Enjoy your kumquat cherry smash!

This cocktail is a refreshing and strong drink that combines the flavors of kumquats, cherries and your choice of spirit. The Cointreau adds a sweet citrus touch to balance the flavors. Feel free to adjust the simple syrup and lemon juice to your desired level of sweetness and tartness.

ChatGPT's roasted red pepper and aubergine risotto with mint yoghurt drizzle

Ingredients

1 medium aubergine, cubed
2 large red bell peppers, roughly chopped
1 large onion, finely chopped
2 garlic cloves, minced
300g arborio rice
1 litre vegetable broth, warmed
125ml dry white wine
50g grated parmesan cheese
12g chopped fresh mint
12g chopped fresh parsley
12g chopped fresh basil
35g pine nuts, toasted
2 tablespoons olive oil
Salt and pepper, to taste

Mint yoghurt drizzle

250g Greek yoghurt
12g chopped fresh mint
1 tablespoon lemon juice
1 tablespoon olive oil
Salt, to taste

Instructions

Heat the oven to 200C (400F, 180C fan). Place the aubergine and red bell pepper on a baking sheet, drizzle with one tablespoon of olive oil, and season with salt and pepper. Roast in the oven for 25-30 minutes, or until the vegetables are tender and slightly caramelised.

In a large, deep frying pan, heat the remaining tablespoon of olive oil over medium heat. Add the onion and garlic and cook for five to six minutes, or until the onion is soft and translucent.

Stir in the arborio rice and cook for one to two minutes, until the rice is well coated in the oil and slightly toasted. Pour in the white wine and cook until the liquid has been absorbed.

Gradually add the warmed vegetable broth, one ladleful at a time, stirring constantly and allowing the liquid to be absorbed before adding more. Continue this process until the rice is cooked through and creamy, about 18-20 minutes.

Gently fold in the roasted aubergine and red bell pepper, parmesan cheese, mint, parsley and basil. Adjust the seasoning with salt and pepper, if necessary.

For the mint yoghurt drizzle, whisk together the yoghurt, mint, lemon juice, olive oil and salt in a small bowl until smooth.

To serve, spoon the risotto into bowls and drizzle with the mint yoghurt. Garnish with toasted pine nuts and additional chopped herbs, if desired.

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Friends of Dorothy ... members of three Golden Girls tribute acts pose together at Golden-Con. Photograph: Laura McDermott/The Guardian

[Television](#)

‘Betty White was an angel!’: my wild weekend with the Golden Girls’

superfans

More than 1,000 people gathered in Chicago last week to pay tribute to the 80s sitcom. With its message of self-acceptance, the show feels more relevant than ever



[Nancy Jo Sales](#)

Thu 6 Apr 2023 05.00 EDTLast modified on Thu 6 Apr 2023 05.18 EDT

In the ballroom of the Sheraton Grand Chicago Riverwalk, beneath the glitter of a disco ball, a DJ is spinning Sisters Are Doin’ It for Themselves while hundreds of people dressed as sitcom characters laugh and scream.

It’s the costume competition at [Golden-Con](#), a convention for fans of The Golden Girls, the Emmy-winning 80s show about the lives and loves of four women of a certain age living together in Miami in a house beset with rattan furniture. The “Blanches” are slinking across the stage in floral leisurewear and pastel negligees, doing their best impressions of the highly sexed fiftysomething southern belle played by Rue McClanahan, a woman who loves to draw attention to her “perky bosoms”.

The competition is fierce. “This is a bloodbath!” exclaims Jason B Schmidt, a member of the drag comedy troupe the Golden Gays, hosting the night’s event. Dressed in a voluminous green velvet skirt suit for his impersonation of Dorothy – the tall, stern teacher played by Bea Arthur – Schmidt barks at a contestant, “Just punch her in the face and she’ll leave!” It is flawless Golden Girls shtick – outrageous and comically offensive.

More than 1,000 people have come from as far away as Australia for these three days of celebration and homage. On the opening night, they enjoy a performance by another Golden Girls drag troupe – the Golden Gals Live!, starring Ginger Minj of RuPaul’s Drag Race – that is so funny you wish the youth of Tennessee could see it, and cheer a rousing duet of the show’s theme tune, Thank You for Being a Friend. For this, Cynthia Fee, the bluesy original singer, is joined by Aaron Scott, the young man who in 2017 became a social media sensation with his [passionate gospel version](#).



The original Golden Girls, from left: Rue McClanahan, Bea Arthur, Estelle Getty and Betty White. Photograph: NBC/Allstar

Mingling with the fans are many of the show’s writers, producers and cast – though, regrettably, none of its leads. The death in 2021 of Betty White, who played the lovably empty-headed Rose, means they have all gone to the

great houseshare in the sky: Estelle Getty, who played Dorothy's mother, Sophia, in 2008, Arthur in 2009 and McClanahan in 2010.

This is the second Golden-Con. Last year, most of the attendees were women in their 40s and 50s, "and then of course gay men", says the organiser, Zack Hudson, and this year's demographic seems very similar. Hudson, 45, originally envisioned the event as a smallish gathering for superfans like himself and co-founders Brendan and Brad Balof, but after he sent out a press release, he says, "it went viral." With tickets ranging from \$35 to \$400, and with the entire convention costing about \$200,000 to put on, Hudson said he'll be surprised if they break even this year, but "it was a labour of love."

The Golden Girls was ahead of its time. It's all about acceptance and being who you are

"The Golden Girls was ahead of its time," says Peter Ower, 38, a Chicagoan who has come to Golden-Con with friends. "It's all about acceptance and being who you are, and as a gay man growing up in the 90s, you didn't get that message a lot. So it felt like the recognition we needed." The show "was kind of queer-coded," agrees David Cerda, 61, the artistic director of Chicago's Hell in a Handbag theatre company and a member of yet another Golden Girls-inspired drag comedy group.

The Golden Girls famously tackled controversial subjects – homophobia, gay marriage, Aids, ageism, sexism, slut-shaming, single motherhood, erectile dysfunction and sexual assault, to name a few – with storylines that showed its characters sometimes being the victims of bias and other times confronting their own bigotry and overcoming it. Nevertheless, "we always maintained the mandate of being funny," says Terry Hughes, who directed 108 of the show's 180 episodes, on the phone from his home in California. "Susan Harris, the creator, gets all the credit for that."

The Golden Girls wasn't always as great in its representation of people of colour, however – not least in the 1987 episode The Housekeeper, in which the "girls" believe that a Black housekeeper that they fired has put a curse on them. "They had some highs and some lows," agrees Catrina Parker, the

Black host of the Quirky Pop podcast. “Like how they made Marguerite [the housekeeper] a voodoo priestess.” But as a fan she is willing to cut the show some slack. “You know,” she says, “it was the 80s, and I think we’ve learned a lot since then.”

Parker has come to Golden-Con in costume, as Rose, along with her three sisters as Blanche, Dorothy and Sophia. “We grew up watching The Golden Girls with our mother,” she says. “For her it was like a comfort watch.” (Speaking of which, in the month of April 2020, at the height of Covid-19 anxiety, Hulu reported that The Golden Girls was one of its most streamed shows, with nearly 11m hours of views.)



Left to right: Jeanette Schliesser, Ann Moreno, Rebecca Motter-Thiel and Sydney Schliesser at Golden-Con. Photograph: Laura McDermott/The Guardian

There are many mother-daughter pairs in the crowd, such as Jeanette and Sydney Schliesser, who have come from Bryan, Ohio, and are dressed as Dorothy and Rose. “I love how the characters talk to each other,” says Jeanette, 45. “They say mean things to each other, and they say the nicest things, and that’s real, because people love and hate each other.”

“I’ve been watching them my whole life, and I’ll watch them for ever,” says Sydney, 25.

The four stars would be so, so gratified to see what they have wrought and the lovefest they inspired

How would the stars of *The Golden Girls* have viewed their enduring appeal? “They would be so, so gratified to see what they have wrought and the lovefest that they inspired,” says Dinah Manoff, who starred in *The Golden Girls* spin-off *Empty Nest* (as well as *Soap* and *Grease*, in which she played Pink Lady Marty Maraschino). “They would just love this,” agrees Kristy McNichol, Manoff’s *Empty Nest* co-star. “Bea Arthur seemed so stoic but she was really a teddy bear, and Betty White was like an angel.”

But did Bea and Betty like each other? Maybe not so much, according to the gossip at Golden-Con. “Those two couldn’t warm up to each other if they were cremated together,” says Marsha Posner Williams, *The Golden Girls*’ co-producer.

When it came to their work, however, they impressed everyone. “To watch those ladies between the two tapings every Friday night was to watch real talent,” says Isabel Omero, the show’s script supervisor (then credited as Robert Spina). “The number of adjustments the writers made in the two hours between the tapings [which were later edited together] was extraordinary, and the women processed the changes so quickly.”

“We knew if those ladies couldn’t make a joke work, drop it,” adds Stan Zimmerman, who was hired as a writer on the show when he was just in his 20s. “We knew we had the best of the best in comedy.”

Every *Golden Girls* fan seems to have their favourite line or scene, and for me it’s when the “girls” are in a pharmacy buying condoms. Dorothy and Rose are mortified when the cashier asks for a price check on the loudspeaker and the other shoppers start to snigger. “Haven’t you ever seen three vibrant, healthy, sexually active women before?” Blanche asks indignantly, grabbing the microphone. “We are embarking on a weekend

cruise with some gentlemen friends and we will be prepared! ... We will walk out of here with our heads held high, knowing that we have been morally and socially responsible!”

“I have no idea who this woman is,” Dorothy mutters before turning and leaving the store.

The winners of Golden-Con’s costume competition are three women dressed up as those same boxes of condoms. The crowd goes wild when they realise what they are. For these three days, it’s all about the inside jokes, and the feeling of camaraderie. In the world outside, hostile forces are mobilising to try to further restrict the freedom of women and LGBTQ+ people, but here there are no haters, and men in dresses are boogieing to Dancing Queen.

“The Golden Girls is about found family,” says Parker, “and that doesn’t have to be the people you’re related to – it’s the people who show up for you when no one else will.”

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Trump supporters rallying outside Mar-a-Lago, Florida, 4 April. Photograph: Orit Ben-Ezzer/Zuma Press Wire/Rex/Shutterstock

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The big surprise when the Trump circus came back to town? How boring he has become

[Emma Brockes](#)



The old showman was angry, dull and mired in grievances when he went to court. His supporters had to supply the fun

Thu 6 Apr 2023 01.00 EDTLast modified on Thu 6 Apr 2023 18.45 EDT

It is a mark of Donald Trump's enduring grip on our nightmares that in the run-up to his [court appearance](#) on Tuesday the dominant conversational tone in New York wasn't one of schadenfreude, but anger – and not exclusively towards Trump. On public radio that morning, pundits speculated that publicity around the case had re-energised Trump's base.

I found myself muttering that this whole thing was a mistake. Alvin Bragg, the Manhattan district attorney, had brought charges that were too thin, too obscure, too trivial in comparison with the real harm done by Trump. By summoning the circus back into town, Bragg had, effectively, said Beetlejuice three times, and now we would all have to suffer the consequences.

The first surprise, then, was how anticlimactic it all was. I don't think anyone really expected busloads of Trump supporters to fill lower Manhattan, but the presence of Marjorie Taylor Greene, the far-right

congresswoman from Georgia, threatened to stir things up – and if there is one thing we know about Trump, it's that you never know until you know.

'It's a circus': Outside Trump's surreal day in court – video

As it turned out, scenes outside the court house on Centre Street had the comic air of journalists stepping over each other to seize on the few likely protesters, such as the guy with the “stop hating each other because you disagree” sign and – a gift – the guy with the massive flag reading “Trump or Death”.

There were surprises in the details of the unsealed indictment, chiefly that the 34 felony counts seemed to suggest a more solid line of attack through tax evasion than election fraud. But the most striking thing about Trump's appearance on Tuesday was how boring it – or rather, he – was.

Leaving Trump Tower in the morning, the former president raised a fist in the air, and gave a muted wave when he entered the court building. But although there was a camera crew in the hallway, Trump made no remarks inside, no impromptu rallying cry or verbal defiance. That night, he delivered a [speech](#) in front of a crowd at Mar-a-Lago, and for once appeared less than Houdini-like in his powers of revival. His jaw was clenched. His lips were pursed. He was visibly angry. He was also very, very dull, deep in the weeds of his ongoing grievances.

What's surprising about this is that it should surprise us at all. Trump is facing multiple legal challenges, huge financial strains, and a situation in which the only credible delaying tactic is a run for president. That this should cause the 76-year-old some mental strain is inevitable.



Trump arrives at his Mar-a-Lago estate on 4 April after being arraigned in New York City. Photograph: Evan Vucci/AP

And yet, I think that at some point many of us stopped thinking of Trump as a person with access to any of the standard human responses. Of all his current difficulties, it may be that the two years of lean press attention, social media bans and waning interest even from his own supporters have weighed on him more heavily than his legal exposure. Nonetheless, on Tuesday night, he was not the buoyant, ebullient Trump I expected.

Or perhaps his performance edged closer to strategy. For all his unruliness, Trump's self-preservation instincts are incredibly strong, and for much of the speech he avoided direct reference to the day's events. In court, Judge Juan M Merchan had [asked Trump](#) to "please refrain from making statements that are likely to incite violence or civil unrest", and, with a few exceptions – Trump insulted the judge and his family, and called the arrest "an insult to our country" – he abided by this, focusing instead on the FBI raids on his home in pursuit of classified documents.

As a result, for long, rambling stretches of the speech, it felt as if Trump had wholly lost his audience. The room came briefly to life when he did a weird impression of Letitia James, the attorney general for the state of [New York](#), who is bringing a civil fraud case against him, calling her a "racist in

reverse”. There were brief flashes of the old Trump in his reference to “this Jack Smith lunatic”, the special prosecutor investigating him for his conduct after he lost the election. The baffling phrase “more than any other nation times two” was very Trumpian and in praising his children – Trump had to double back to remember Tiffany – he said of Baron “he’s tall, he’s smart”, and suddenly the old buffoon was back in the room.

The crowd clapped, but Trump didn’t linger. He left the podium an aggrieved, unsmiling man who, giving millions of Americans more pleasure than might reasonably be expected on a Tuesday night, will have been informed that none of the major TV networks had broken into programming to broadcast the speech.

- Emma Brockes is a Guardian columnist

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This specific wrinkle – the invention of sources – is particularly troubling for trusted news organisations. Photograph: Nicolas Economou/NurPhoto/REX/Shutterstock

[Opinion](#)[Artificial intelligence \(AI\)](#)

ChatGPT is making up fake Guardian articles. Here's how we're responding

[Chris Moran](#)



The risks inherent in the technology, plus the speed of its take-up, demonstrate why it's so vital that we keep track of it

- Chris Moran is the Guardian's head of editorial innovation

Thu 6 Apr 2023 03.00 EDTLast modified on Thu 6 Apr 2023 13.56 EDT

Last month one of our journalists received an interesting email. A researcher had come across mention of a Guardian article, written by the journalist on a specific subject from a few years before. But the piece was proving elusive on our website and in search. Had the headline perhaps been changed since it was launched? Had it been removed intentionally from the website because of a problem we'd identified? Or had we been forced to take it down by the subject of the piece through legal means?

The reporter couldn't remember writing the specific piece, but the headline certainly sounded like something they would have written. It was a subject they were identified with and had a record of covering. Worried that there may have been some mistake at our end, they asked colleagues to go back through our systems to track it down. Despite the detailed records we keep

of all our content, and especially around deletions or legal issues, they could find no trace of its existence.

Why? Because it had never been written.

Luckily the researcher had told us that they had carried out their research using [ChatGPT](#). In response to being asked about articles on this subject, the AI had simply made some up. Its fluency, and the vast training data it is built on, meant that the existence of the invented piece even seemed believable to the person who absolutely hadn't written it.

Huge amounts have been written about generative AI's tendency to manufacture facts and events. But this specific wrinkle – the invention of sources – is particularly troubling for trusted news organisations and journalists whose inclusion adds legitimacy and weight to a persuasively written fantasy. And for readers and the wider information ecosystem, it opens up whole new questions about whether citations can be trusted in any way, and could well feed conspiracy theories about the mysterious removal of articles on sensitive issues that never existed in the first place.

If this seems like an edge case, it's important to note that ChatGPT, from a cold start in November, [registered 100 million monthly users in January](#). TikTok, unquestionably a digital phenomenon, took nine months to hit the same level. Since that point we've seen Microsoft implement the same technology in Bing, putting pressure on Google to follow suit with Bard.

They are now implementing these systems into Google Workspace and Microsoft 365, which have a [90% plus share of the market](#) between them. [A recent study](#) of 1,000 students in the US found that 89% have used ChatGPT to help with a homework assignment. The technology, with all its faults, has been normalised at incredible speed, and is now at the heart of systems that act as the key point of discovery and creativity for a significant portion of the world.

Two days ago our archives team was contacted by a student asking about another missing article from a named journalist. There was again no trace of the article in our systems. The source? ChatGPT.

It's easy to get sucked into the detail on generative AI, because it is inherently opaque. The ideas and implications, already explored by academics across multiple disciplines, are hugely complex, the technology is developing rapidly, and companies with huge existing market shares are integrating it as fast as they can to gain competitive advantages, disrupt each other and above all satisfy shareholders.

But the question for responsible news organisations is simple, and urgent: what can this technology do right now, and how can it benefit responsible reporting at a time when the wider information ecosystem is already under pressure from misinformation, polarisation and bad actors.

This is the question we are currently grappling with at the Guardian. And it's why we haven't yet announced a new format or product built on generative AI. Instead, we've created a working group and small engineering team to focus on learning about the technology, considering the public policy and IP questions around it, listening to academics and practitioners, talking to other organisations, consulting and training our staff, and exploring safely and responsibly how the technology performs when applied to journalistic use.

In doing this we have found that, along with asking how we can use generative AI, we are reflecting more and more on what journalism is for, and what makes it valuable. We are excited by the potential, but our first task must be to understand it, evaluate it and decode its potential impact on the wider world.

In the next few weeks we'll be publishing a clear and concise explanation of how we plan to employ generative AI. In the simplest terms, we will continue to hold ourselves to the highest journalistic standards and remain accountable to our readers and the world for the journalism we publish. While so much has changed in the last six months, in this crucial respect, nothing has changed at all.

Chris Moran is the Guardian's head of editorial innovation

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Never surrender ... symbols for the quiet zone on a train. Photograph: Asvolas/Getty Images/iStockphoto

[OpinionRail transport](#)

**We must defend the quiet coach – it is a
bastion of silence in a deafening world**

[Joel Snape](#)



Even the train conductors seem to have given up trying to enforce the rules. With antisocial noise increasing everywhere, let's save our serenity

Thu 6 Apr 2023 02.00 EDTLast modified on Thu 6 Apr 2023 12.48 EDT

Is there a better place in the world to work than the quiet coach? I'm going to say it: there is not. Between an ever-shifting view of the English countryside, wifi too patchy to do any serious procrastinating, and the perfect amount of access to tea, it's my own little version of productivity paradise. Biohackers can have their standing desks, Superman can keep his fortress of solitude – I just need a window seat and a power socket.

Or at least, I did. Because these days, the last bastion of silence that public transport's supposed to afford seems to be under threat. Even the train conductors seem to have given up on it. "Please try to keep the noise to a minimum," they murmur over the intercom, like beleaguered supply teachers. "Or, I don't know, at least don't let your child watch Thor: Ragnarok at *full* volume."

I mention this because, everywhere else, we quiet types have already surrendered. There have always been antisocial sorts for whom the

intrusiveness of playing music aloud is the whole point – you’d need conductors with stun guns and a much more draconian government to deal with them, and I’m prepared to concede that might be worse than the alternative. The problem is everyone else: the commuter watching football highlights on the tube, the teens mainlining TikTok on the bus, the business-casual bro taking a call with his phone on speaker like he’s in *The Apprentice*. Disapproving glances are *déclassé*, audible tuts stopped working in the 90s, and deliberate coughs went out of fashion with Covid. I could wear headphones, of course, but that’s what Big Headphone *wants*: half of every train carriage in chunky noise-cancellers, the other half filling the air with tinny electronica.

And so, the quiet coach is where we have to make our stand. A crying baby? Listen, nobody wants to make a new parent’s life any harder. A coachload of Liverpool fans? We’ve all got our own comfort level with confrontation. But if it’s some Zoom call bants, I promise, I will be the first person there with an extremely British: “Er, I don’t know if you noticed the sign ...?” And if a train company comes along offering to enforce the rules with an iron fist or a carriage that’s one big Faraday cage, I’ll be there to vote with my wallet. I won’t applaud them, of course: it’s not the quiet coach respecters’ way.

- Joel Snape is a writer and fitness expert

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Illustration: Harriet Lee-Merrion Illustration: Harriet Lee-Merrion/The Guardian

[OpinionAssisted dying](#)

**My mum's death was slow and painful –
she deserved the choice to end her life**

[Ella Creamer](#)



Assisted dying is illegal in the UK, yet putting difficult choices in the patient's hands is the only ethical approach

- This article has won The Guardian Foundation's 2023 Hugo Young award, which champions political opinion writing among 19- to 25-year-olds

Thu 6 Apr 2023 04.00 EDTLast modified on Thu 6 Apr 2023 11.59 EDT

“Desperate for mum to die,” I texted my boyfriend in early March 2020. By then my mother, Mary-Anne, had spent months in a nursing home after two years of hospital treatments, surgeries, a ketogenic diet and a daily melange of drugs – all attempts to beat her brain cancer.

As her mobility decreased, my family were grateful to be allocated NHS funding for a bed in a local nursing home. Yet we soon discovered the lousy realities of end-of-life services in England: nursing homes are vastly ill equipped to administer palliative care, and patient decision-making about death is hamstrung by the UK's restrictive laws on assisted dying.

Though the care workers in Mum's home were fantastic, staffing levels were too low to allow for sufficient patient check-ins. Mum got frequent headaches, but the cancer's progression meant she couldn't remember to press her buzzer for help – instead, she would silently raise her fingers to her temple and frown deeply. Fearful of leaving her lying in pain for hours, my family decided that one of us would need to stay in the room at all times to call for assistance on her behalf.

Five of us set up a rota system around our work commitments, covering 24 hours a day, seven days a week, and laid an air mattress by her bed to sleep on. Though being in the room helped, we weren't allowed to administer medication ourselves – only to press the buzzer – meaning Mum would often experience an hour-long wait for paracetamol to treat crushing head pain.

My family's story isn't a one-off. In the last Office for National Statistics [survey of bereaved people](#), from 2015, only 43% of respondents whose relatives died in care homes said that pain was always relieved in the patient's final three months. A 2018 [academic review](#) highlighted that fractured communication between care homes and external healthcare professionals, such as GPs and district nurses, means care staff are often unsure of who is responsible for providing certain aspects of end-of-life care. These problems are only exacerbated by staff shortages and [high turnover](#) in care homes.

Expanded specialist palliative community services are one solution. However, the government has historically been reluctant to pay for high-quality [end-of-life care](#), covering just 37% of hospice bills and leaving the rest to charity fundraising. Yes, specialist care is expensive, but the government is shooting itself in the foot by failing to invest in it: inadequate end-of-life services can mean patients are [unnecessarily hospitalised](#), with the government left to pay the high costs of acute NHS care.

Mum's end-of-life phase was made worse by a lack of communication about the dying process. In July 2019, when she was hospitalised after a seizure, doctors told her that death would come within weeks and be gentle: she would get more and more tired until she eventually slipped away. By the time she did die, on 30 March 2020, she had endured eight months of pain,

seizures, confusion, increasing paralysis and other challenging symptoms, compounded by a decreasing – and eventually nonexistent – ability to communicate how she felt.

The possibility that she might have such a distressing end-of-life phase was never mentioned. This conversation may have been skirted because UK patients facing this scenario have few options: assisted dying is illegal here. If the reality of Mum's death had been discussed frankly, and the option of assisted dying been made available, I have almost no doubt that she would have chosen that path.

A recent [YouGov poll](#) shows that 64% of adults believe UK law should be changed to permit assisted dying for terminally ill patients. Last December, MPs [launched an inquiry](#) to look at the ethics of assisted dying and lessons from countries that have legalised the practice. Indeed, assisted dying is rapidly [gaining support worldwide](#), and is now legal in several jurisdictions including Australia, the Netherlands and parts of the United States.

One of the major ethical concerns surrounding assisted dying is that vulnerable individuals, such as some people with disabilities, may [end their lives](#) for fear of being a burden to others. However, evidence [from the US and the Netherlands](#) suggests that the legalisation of assisted dying has had no disproportionate impact on vulnerable groups. Moreover, a 2019 poll found that 86% of people with a disability support terminally ill adults [being given the choice](#).

The irony is that when the patient cannot choose their end-of-life pathway, decision-making falls to others. In the final months of Mum's life, she ate only because we woke her up to feed her, which often felt like the wrong thing to do because food made her cough incessantly. "I've basically stopped feeding her cos seems like torture," I wrote in another message to my boyfriend in mid-March 2020.

At that point, we sought guidance from a hospice, which advised us to stop giving her food and water; this is in line with [General Medical Council legal guidance](#) to withdraw nutrition and hydration based on what the patient's "best interests" are believed to be. But should this have happened months earlier? Should the nursing home or GP have suggested we stop sooner?

And, crucially, where is the line between stopping feeding somebody and helping someone die? In my view, my family, with the advice of the hospice, made a decision for Mum to die at that arbitrary point in time – we could have withdrawn food sooner, avoiding months of pain, or later, further prolonging her suffering. Dying is rarely a simple process; often difficult decisions must be made by someone, at some point. Putting those choices in the hands of the patient is the only ethical approach.

My worst memory from the nursing home was when the laundry room caught fire. Staff and visitors evacuated, but it was policy to leave patients in their beds, so I abandoned Mum as the earsplitting alarm blared on. From the garden, as we waited a long while for the fire engine to arrive, I looked up to the window of her room and pictured her there – lying alone, probably fearful, perhaps in pain – and thought how this could have all been different, if only she had been able to choose how to die.

- Ella Creamer is a freelance politics and culture journalist
- ***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](#).***

2023.04.06 - Around the world

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- [India Government accused of rewriting history after edits to schoolbooks](#)
- [Australia Outcry as opposition refuses to back constitutional recognition of Indigenous people](#)

US House speaker McCarthy stresses urgency of arms sales after meeting Taiwan president – video

[Taiwan](#)

Taiwan monitoring Chinese strike group off the coast after president meets US speaker

China has said it would take ‘resolute’ measures to defend sovereignty, after denouncing Tsai’s meeting in California with McCarthy

- [China–Taiwan tensions explained in 30 seconds](#)

[Helen Davidson](#) in Taipei, and [Amy Hawkins](#)

Wed 5 Apr 2023 23.39 EDTFirst published on Wed 5 Apr 2023 18.13 EDT

Taiwan authorities are monitoring Chinese military activity including a carrier strike group about 200 nautical miles (370km) off the main island’s coastline, after the Taiwanese president, Tsai Ing-wen, met US House speaker [Kevin McCarthy](#) in Los Angeles.

In the meeting, held at the Ronald Reagan Presidential Library, McCarthy stressed the urgency of arms deliveries to [Taiwan](#), while Tsai praised the “strong and unique partnership” with the US..

Taiwan’s defence minister, Chiu Kuo-cheng, said on Thursday that the island’s military was studying the carrier group, led by the Shandong aircraft carrier. Chiu said the group – a fleet of navy vessels led by an aircraft carrier – appeared to be on a training exercise and no planes had been detected taking off from the ship, but the timing was “sensitive”. He later confirmed that the US aircraft carrier Nimitz, which had been participating in joint drills with Japan and Korea in the East [China](#) Sea this week, was also in the same area as the Shandong on Thursday.

The carrier group was sent to waters south-east of Taiwan's main island on Wednesday, shortly before Tsai and McCarthy met in Los Angeles.

Japan's defence ministry confirmed it was also monitoring the strike group, which it detected 300km from Okinawa on Wednesday evening. The ministry said the Shandong was accompanied by the People's Liberation Army Navy (PLAN) frigate Liuzhou and a fast combat support ship as it travelled east towards the Philippines Sea, entering the Pacific Ocean for the first time.

Separately, Japan said a PLAN guided-missile destroyer had been detected sailing between Taiwan and the Japanese island of Yonaguni, about 100km off Taiwan's coast on Tuesday. Taiwan's defence ministry would not confirm or comment on the detection.

Taiwan's defence ministry also reported three additional PLAN vessels and one anti-submarine helicopter operating near Taiwan in the 24 hours to Thursday morning.

Chiu said a separate patrol of the Taiwan Strait announced by Chinese maritime authorities on Wednesday was not a military exercise, but appeared to be Beijing attempting to set a "new normal" in terms of enforcing their domestic law in wider maritime spaces. China's coastguard, which comes under the command of the central military commission, claims authority to stop and inspect vessels in the area under a controversial 2021 law, though it is not believed to have done so before. The Taiwan defence ministry has instructed Taiwanese vessels, including cargo and ferry services, to not cooperate with attempts by this patrol to board and inspect them.

Beijing has reacted angrily to the meeting between Taiwan's leader and McCarthy, who is the second in line to the US presidency, accusing the pair of undermining its claim over Taiwan, conniving on "separatist" aims, and degrading China-US relations.

McCarthy, a Republican who became the most senior figure to meet a Taiwanese leader on American soil in decades, was joined by a bipartisan

group of US politicians who voiced support for dialogue with Taiwan amid simmering tensions with China.

“We must continue the arms sales to Taiwan and make sure such sales reach Taiwan on a very timely basis,” McCarthy said at a news conference after the meeting, adding that he believed there was bipartisan agreement on this. “Second, we must strengthen our economic cooperation, particularly with trade and technology.”

Beijing quickly denounced the meeting. Its foreign ministry said in statement that China will take “resolute and effective measures to safeguard national sovereignty and territorial integrity.”

A China defence ministry spokesperson called on the US to “stop its blatant interference in China’s internal affairs”.

“We firmly oppose all forms of official interaction between the United States and Taiwan and any visit by leader of the Taiwan authorities to the United States in any name or under whatever pretext,” it said in a statement.

China claims democratically governed Taiwan as its own territory, a position the government in Taipei strongly contests. Tsai says they are already a sovereign nation, and Taiwan’s future is for its people to decide.

It is the second time Tsai has met the holder of the high-ranking office in less than a year, having [welcomed McCarthy’s predecessor, Nancy Pelosi, to Taiwan in August](#). That visit, which took place on what China considers to be sovereign soil, [provoked a stronger reaction from Beijing](#), including days of live-fire military exercises around Taiwan.

So far, the reaction to the California meeting is far more muted. It is understood the McCarthy meeting was held on US soil instead of in Taiwan as McCarthy originally wanted, at least in part to reduce its provocativeness. On Thursday, Taiwan’s national security chief also noted the [presidents of France and the European Union](#) were currently visiting China, and “China must practice peaceful diplomacy”.

McCarthy told Tsai a shared belief in democracy and freedom formed “the bedrock” of their enduring relationship.

“The friendship between the people of Taiwan and America is a matter of profound importance to the free world, and it is critical to maintain economic freedom peace and regional stability,” he said.

While stressing that there was no need for retaliation from China after the meeting, McCarthy also said he looked forward to, “more meeting like this in the future”.

Republican Mike Gallagher, chair of the House Chinese Communist party committee, responded to China’s objections to the meeting, saying: “If the duly elected leader of one of our most important democratic partners can’t meet with American leaders on American soil, then we are merely feeding the crocodile that will eventually eat us.”

Tsai’s US stops have been attended by crowds of pro- and anti-Taiwan protesters. The opposing groups scuffled outside the Ronald Reagan library, and were separated by police. Wednesday’s meeting was also attended by more than a dozen Democratic and Republican lawmakers, highlighting the bipartisan consensus in Congress when it comes to supporting Taiwan.

Tsai thanked them for their “unwavering support”, which she said “reassures the people of Taiwan that we are not isolated and we are not alone”.

Since 1979, the US has officially recognised the People’s Republic of China as the sole government of the “one China” that is mainland China and Taiwan. But the US also sells arms to Taiwan to deter any military advances from Beijing, something that McCarthy said should continue.

He drew an explicit comparison between [Hong Kong](#) and Taiwan, saying that when China “reneged” on its promise to allow Hong Kong autonomy for 50 years after the handover to Chinese rule, “that harmed [Beijing’s reputation] around the world”.

Michael Swaine, a senior research fellow at the Quincy Institute for Responsible Statecraft, a thinktank, warned that the meeting could accelerate

[the downward spiral of US-China relations](#). He warned that it could trigger a “show of resolve” from Beijing, which could itself “drive Washington to move even closer to Taiwan in order to demonstrate its own resolve”.

On Wednesday the US secretary of state, Antony Blinken, told [Euronews](#) that a move by China to annex Taiwan would have far reaching repercussions “for quite literally every country on Earth”.

Chi Hui Lin and Reuters contributed to this report

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Iran's foreign minister, Hossein Amir-Abdollahian (left) and his Saudi counterpart, Prince Faisal bin Farhan Al Saud (right), with China's foreign minister, Qin Gang, in Beijing. Photograph: Ho Str/Saudi Press Agency/AFP/Getty Images

[Middle East and north Africa](#)

Saudi Arabia and Iran work to restore relations as foreign ministers meet

Faisal bin Farhan and Hossein Amir-Abdollahian in Beijing for talks after Chinese-brokered agreement

[Amy Hawkins](#)

[@amyhawk](#)

Thu 6 Apr 2023 04.50 EDTLast modified on Thu 6 Apr 2023 07.16 EDT

The Saudi and Iranian foreign ministers have met for the first time in seven years, weeks after the two countries came to an agreement, brokered by Chinese officials, to restore diplomatic relations.

Saudi Arabia's Prince Faisal bin Farhan Al Saud and Iran's Hossein Amir-Abdollahian met in Beijing to discuss the reopening of embassies, the appointment of ambassadors and a planned visit to [Saudi Arabia](#) by Ebrahim Raisi, Iran's president. They also discussed resuming flights between the two countries and issuing travel visas for each others' citizens.

The regional rivals cut ties in 2016 after thousands of demonstrators stormed the Saudi embassy in Tehran, protesting about the execution in Saudi Arabia of the prominent Shia Muslim cleric Sheikh Nimr al-Nimr.

Riyadh and Tehran have vied for dominance in the Middle East and been on opposing sides of various regional conflicts, including civil wars in Yemen and Syria.

But on 10 March the two countries issued a surprise joint statement, co-signed with China, to [restore diplomatic relations](#). The announcement came after days of negotiations in Beijing and both Saudi Arabia and Iran thanked China for its role in sponsoring the talks.

The deal was seen as a diplomatic coup for Xi Jinping, China's leader, as he tries to position himself as a global statesman and peacemaker, particularly with regards to the conflict in Ukraine.

The US tried to downplay any suggestion that the Beijing-brokered agreement represented a blow to Washington's influence in the Middle East. But it has also been sidelined in subsequent regional negotiations, such as Russian-mediated talks between Saudi Arabia and Syria.

William Burns, the director of the CIA, was in Saudi Arabia this week, where he reportedly expressed his frustration that Riyadh was reopening dialogue with countries – Iran and Syria – subject to US sanctions.

Xi has proposed hosting a summit for Gulf Arab leaders and Iranian officials later this year.

Agencies contributed to this report

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Israeli border police taking position near al-Aqsa mosque. Photograph: Ammar Awad/Reuters

[Palestinian territories](#)

Rocket fire from Lebanon and Gaza hits Israel after second al-Aqsa mosque raid

Israeli army says salvo fired from Lebanese territory, after officers entered religious compound to remove worshippers

[Bethan McKernan](#) in Jerusalem and [Martin Chulov](#) in Beirut

Thu 6 Apr 2023 17.02 EDTFirst published on Wed 5 Apr 2023 17.17 EDT

Rocket fire from Gaza and [Lebanon](#) and a second Israeli police raid on Jerusalem's al-Aqsa mosque in as many nights have stoked fears of further escalation in the region during a sensitive period of overlapping religious holidays.

On Thursday afternoon, the [Israel](#) Defence Forces (IDF) said the biggest salvo of rockets since the 2006 war had been fired from Lebanese territory

into northern Israel. Most of the 34 projectiles were intercepted, but there were two minor injuries and a fire.

Later on Thursday, Israel's prime minister, Benjamin Netanyahu, pledged to retaliate. "As for the aggression aimed at us from other fronts – we will hit our enemies and they will pay a price for every act of aggression," he said, before a meeting with the security cabinet.

There was no immediate claim of responsibility, but the launches came just hours after the Iran-backed Lebanese militant group Hezbollah said it would support "all measures" taken by Palestinians to defend the sacred al-Aqsa compound.

However, the Israeli army blamed Palestinian groups. "We know for sure it's Palestinian fire," army spokesperson Lt Colonel Richard Hecht told reporters. "It could be Hamas, it could be Islamic Jihad. We are still trying to finalise, but it wasn't Hezbollah.

"We assume Hezbollah knew about it, and Lebanon also has some responsibility. We are also investigating whether Iran was involved," he continued.

Lebanon's caretaker prime minister Najib Mikati said he rejected any "escalation" from his country.

The marked uptick in violence during the Muslim holy month of Ramadan and the beginning of the Jewish Passover holiday comes after a year of increasing bloodshed in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. It also carried echoes of 2021, when clashes at al-Aqsa during Ramadan helped start an 11-day war between Israel and Hamas. Thursday's events have led to fears of a wider conflagration around the region.

Eyewitnesses in south Lebanon told the Guardian that counter artillery fire hit the rocket launching sites within seconds, while Hezbollah-affiliated media retracted a claim that Israel had shelled the southern town of al-Qlaileh in response. The Israeli military denied that it had retaliated "thus far".

Hezbollah and its allies have faced extensive attacks by Israeli jets in Syrian territory over the last week, striking at what Israel believes to be sites to manufacture drones. At least two members of the organisation are believed to have been killed during night raids that levelled several hangars at Syrian airbases.

The militant group has vowed to strike back at its arch foe whenever its members are killed, but, like Hamas in the [Gaza](#) Strip, remains wary of an escalation. Though Palestinians groups operate in the south of Lebanon, none do so without the knowledge of Hezbollah, and a large scale rocket strike would almost certainly be coordinated.

The raid on Palestinians [by Israeli police inside al-Aqsa mosque](#) could have served as a pretext for a limited rocket strike, which served both the Palestinians and Hezbollah and gave the latter at least some deniability.

In the early hours of Thursday, Palestinian militants in the blockaded Gaza Strip launched about nine rockets into Israel in the early hours, setting off air raid sirens across the south of the country but causing no casualties or damage. Most of the rockets exploded before impact, the Israeli army said, and none of Gaza's militant groups claimed responsibility.

Two rockets were fired just before the second incident at the holiest Jerusalem site late on Wednesday and early on Thursday, in which police using stun grenades and rubber bullets entered the compound to remove worshippers. Six people were injured, according to the Palestinian Red Crescent.

The latest flare-up followed a large [Israeli police raid on al-Aqsa](#) the day before, in which at least 12 people were injured and more than 350 arrested. That raid also triggered rocket fire from the Gaza Strip, which was countered with Israeli airstrikes on alleged military sites belonging to Hamas, the Islamist movement in control of the strip.

The first raid, in which disturbing footage of soldiers beating Palestinians with batons and the butts of rifles emerged, drew widespread condemnation in the Muslim world and concern from the White House over the possibility of escalation.

[Map of Jerusalem](#)

Both the UN and US called for calm on Thursday after the rocket fire, while the Lebanese government said it would coordinate with Unifil, the UN force on the Israeli-Lebanese border, to prevent an escalation.

Elsewhere on Thursday, clashes broke out overnight between protesters and police in the Arab-majority town of Umm al-Fahm in northern Israel and a Palestinian teenager was shot and lightly wounded by an Israeli civilian in Jerusalem's Old City.

The Palestinian foreign ministry said the UN security council would hold a closed-door session on Thursday to discuss the violence since Wednesday's raid on al-Aqsa, which Israeli authorities said was an attempt to prevent clashes by clearing groups barricaded inside with weapons, rocks and firecrackers planning to breach the peace.

The Jordanian organisation that manages the site, known as the Waqf, said along with witnesses that police entered the mosque before prayers were over.

Quick Guide

Where is al-Aqsa mosque and why is it significant to Muslims?

Show

Al-Aqsa mosque sits at the heart of Jerusalem's Old City, on a hill known to Muslims as al-Haram al-Sharif, or the Noble Sanctuary, and to Jews as the Temple Mount.

Muslims regard the site as the third holiest in Islam, after Mecca and Medina. Al-Aqsa is the name given to the whole compound and is home to two Muslim holy places: the Dome of the Rock and al-Aqsa Mosque, which was built in the 8th century AD.

The compound overlooks the Western Wall, a sacred place of prayer for Jews, for whom the Temple Mount is their most sacred site. Jews believe

biblical King Solomon built the first temple there 3,000 years ago. A second temple was razed by the Romans in AD70.

Israel captured the site in the 1967 Middle East war and annexed it with the rest of East Jerusalem and adjoining parts of the West Bank in a move not recognised internationally.

Jordan, whose ruling Hashemite family has custodianship of the Muslim and Christian sites, appoints members of the Waqf institution, which oversees the site.

The compound has long been a flashpoint for deadly violence over matters of sovereignty and religion in Jerusalem.

Under the longstanding "status quo" arrangement governing the area, which Israel says it maintains, non-Muslims can visit but only Muslims are allowed to worship in the mosque compound.

Jewish visitors have increasingly prayed more or less openly at the site in defiance of the rules, and Israeli restrictions on Muslim worshippers' access to the site have led to protests and outbreaks of violence. **Reuters**

Was this helpful?

Thank you for your feedback.

Nabil Abu Rudeineh, a spokesperson for the Palestinian president, Mahmoud Abbas, said: "Israel's raid into al-Aqsa mosque, its assault on worshippers, is a slap to recent US efforts which tried to create calm and stability during the month of Ramadan."

Abu Obaida, a spokesperson for Hamas's military wing, said: "The patience of the resistance forces in Gaza is running out. We won't leave the worshippers at al-Aqsa mosque alone."

The Temple Mount in occupied East Jerusalem, known to Muslims as al-Haram al-Sharif or as al-Aqsa, is holy to Jews and Muslims and is regularly the scene of violence.

Muslims often spend the night in the mosque compound during Ramadan, but the Waqf agreed this year that worshippers would not be allowed to stay in the house of prayer overnight for at least the first 20 days of the holiday.

Under a longstanding compromise implemented after the Israeli occupation began in 1967, Jews are allowed to visit but not pray at the site, and any perceived attempt to alter the arrangement acts as a lightning rod for violence. In recent years Jewish visitors have increasingly prayed more or less openly in the compound, sometimes under police protection.

Netanyahu said on Wednesday that the state would uphold the delicate status quo at the compound.

“Israel is committed to maintaining freedom of worship, free access to all religions and the status quo on the Temple Mount and will not allow violent extremists to change that,” he said.

Events in Jerusalem and tit-for-tat cross-border fire add to an already tense political atmosphere in Israel, which is reeling from weeks of protests, which have included large numbers of military reservists, over the government’s plans to [limit the powers of the supreme court](#).

Netanyahu publicly fired his defence minister, Yoav Galant, two weeks ago for voicing opposition to the judicial overhaul, but did not follow up with the required formal written notice.

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The education authority said it removed some of the content to help students catch up after disruption caused by Covid. Photograph: Noah Seelam/AFP/Getty Images

[India](#)

Indian government accused of rewriting history after edits to schoolbooks

References to Muslim rulers, deadly riots connected to PM and Gandhi's dislike of Hindu nationalism removed

[Hannah Ellis-Petersen](#) in Delhi

Thu 6 Apr 2023 05.54 EDTLast modified on Thu 6 Apr 2023 16.25 EDT

The Indian government has been accused of rewriting history to fit its Hindu nationalist agenda after school textbooks were edited to remove references to Mahatma Gandhi's opposition to Hindu nationalism, as well as mention of a controversial religious riot in which the prime minister, [Narendra Modi](#), was implicated.

Textbooks were also revised to remove chapters on the history of the Mughals, the Muslim rulers who controlled much of [India](#) between the 16th and 19th centuries.

The ruling Bharatiya Janata party (BJP), which has pursued a Hindu nationalist agenda that has moved India away from its secular foundations, has been open about its desire to rewrite the country's history and break away from what it describes as the "slave mentality" of colonial oppressors. "It is our responsibility to write our history," said the home affairs minister, Amit Shah, in a 2019 speech.

Since the BJP came to power in 2014, there have been multiple amendments to textbooks, with critics alleging a "saffronisation" of the curriculum in schools and universities, a reference to the colour favoured by Hindu nationalists.

In recent years, references to the Mughals, whom Hindu nationalists consider to be Muslim oppressors, have been repeatedly removed or amended, while references to the hardline Hindu nationalist ideologue Vinayak Damodar Savarkar as a "most celebrated freedom fighter" and a "great patriot" have been added.

The new editions of political science and history textbooks published by the National Council of Educational Research and Training (NCERT) drew controversy over the amendments, some of which were introduced quietly and without the usual public notifications.

Among the changes to the political science textbook for 17- and 18-year-olds was the removal of a reference to the dislike Hindu nationalists had for Gandhi, India's famed freedom fighter, and how they made multiple attempts to assassinate him.

Gandhi was killed by a Hindu nationalist, Nathuram Godse, in 1948. Gandhi is still reviled by some Hindu nationalists for his views on Hindu-Muslim unity, and since the BJP came to power, there has been a [growing reverence among hardliners for his killer](#).

The amended textbooks softened mention of Godse and also removed reference to the ban faced by the militant Hindu organisation Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) after Gandhi's assassination.

The BJP is seen as the political wing of the RSS and they remain ideologically aligned. Several BJP leaders, including Modi, were members of the RSS.

According to scrutiny of the textbooks by the Indian Express newspaper, which revealed the amendments, multiple references to the Gujarat riots have also been purged from textbooks by NCERT.

The riots, which took place in 2002, are a particularly sensitive topic for Modi, who was chief minister of Gujarat at the time and was accused of being complicit in the violence, which involved brutal attacks on Muslim families and the deaths of more than 1,000 people, mostly Muslims. A BBC documentary exploring Modi's role in the riots [was recently banned by the government](#).

After the recent revisions, references to the riots have now gone from all social science textbooks for those aged between 11 and 18.

NCERT has also removed chapters relating to the Mughal courts from history books for 17- and 18-year-olds, under measures to "streamline" the curriculum and reduce the workload of students after the Covid-19 pandemic.

Historians and opposition politicians widely condemned the textbook revisions. "You can change the truth in books but you cannot change the history of the country," said Mallikarjun Kharge, the president of the opposition Congress party.

Aditya Mukherjee, a professor of contemporary Indian history at Jawaharlal Nehru University, said the removal of Mughal history from the textbook was an attempt to "weaponise" and "erase" history to suit the government's political agenda. "Whenever we have witnessed erasure of a particular

community from our history, it is usually followed by a genocide of the community,” Mukherjee told the news channel NDTV.

The NCERT chief, Dinesh Saklani, said the changes should not be “blown out of proportion” and all changes had been made by an “expert panel”.

The BJP’s national spokesperson, Gopal Krishna Agarwal, said it was “not rewriting history” but instead a way to rebalance the “biased approach” of some historians. The ministry of education did not respond to a request for comment.

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If passed, the referendum would give constitutional recognition to Australia's Indigenous people, who, after generations of genocide, dispossession, and displacement, track below national averages on most socio-economic measures. Photograph: Loren Elliott/Reuters

[Australia news](#)

Outcry as Australian opposition refuses to back constitutional recognition of Indigenous people

Leaders condemn the Liberal Party over 'Judas betrayal' after it said it would campaign against establishing an Indigenous 'voice to parliament'

- [What is the Indigenous voice to parliament?](#)

[Ben Doherty](#) in Sydney

[@bendohertycorro](#)

Thu 6 Apr 2023 01.08 EDTLast modified on Thu 6 Apr 2023 07.30 EDT

Indigenous Australian leaders have condemned the country's main opposition party for their "Judas betrayal" of the nation, after the Liberal Party declared it would [campaign against](#) a proposal for constitutional recognition for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

Later this year, Australians will vote in a compulsory referendum on whether they support an alteration to the constitution to establish an Indigenous "voice to parliament", a committee to advise the parliament on matters that affect the lives of Indigenous people.

The conservative Liberal Party, cast into opposition last year after nine years in government, announced on Wednesday it would campaign for a "no" vote against the voice proposal.

The Liberals' position, announced by party leader [Peter Dutton](#), has dashed hopes that the Voice referendum might have become a campaign of national unification and reconciliation, instead setting the stage for a bruising partisan battle.

On Thursday Noel Pearson, a Bagaarmugu-Guggu Yalanji leader, said he had a sleepless night after learning of the opposition's decision.

"I was troubled by dreams and the spectre of the Dutton Liberal party's Judas betrayal of our country," he told the national broadcaster. "It is a sad day for the country."

Pearson described Dutton as "as an undertaker preparing the grave to bury [the Uluru statement, the document which first proposed the Voice in 2017]."

If passed, the referendum would give constitutional recognition to Australia's Indigenous people, who, after generations of genocide, dispossession, and displacement, track below national averages on most socio-economic measures and suffer disproportionately high rates of suicide, domestic violence, and imprisonment.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, about 3.2% of Australia's population of nearly 26m, are currently not mentioned in the country's constitution.

But Australia has a tepid record of constitutional reform. Of 44 proposals put to the Australian people since federation, only eight have passed. The last successful referendum was in 1977.

The constitution also requires a so-called 'double majority' for a referendum to succeed: the support of a majority of voters nationally; as well as being carried in a majority of Australia's six states.

A lack of bipartisan support for the voice is seen as a devastating impairment for the yes campaign.

Dutton said the "Canberra-based Voice" would not deliver real benefits for Indigenous communities.

"As people in Indigenous communities have said to us, they just don't want city-based academics who are pretending to represent their views," he said.

But the decision to oppose the Voice has already had a political cost.

Former minister for Indigenous affairs, Ken Wyatt, quit the Liberal party over its voice opposition. .

"I still believe in the Liberal party values but I don't believe in what the Liberals have become," Wyatt told the West Australian newspaper.

Uluru Dialogue spokesperson and Indigenous leader Pat Anderson rejected the Liberal Party proposal of legislated local and regional Voices.

"Legislative bodies have come and gone; only constitutional enshrinement will guarantee First Nations peoples will have an enduring say and ultimately improve First Nations lives," she said.

A coalition of 13 regional Indigenous leaders said Dutton had "chosen to spread misinformation, confusion and ignore the support of the vast majority of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people".

“We called for bipartisan support for the referendum, but political games are being played with our lives and futures, and the future of the entire nation.”

Prime minister Anthony Albanese, who has [staked significant political capital on the Voice referendum](#) succeeding, described the opposition stance as “divisive” and “opportunistic”.

“This is about whether we as a country can be optimistic, can be enlarged, can come to terms with the fullness and richness of our history, can express our pride in sharing this continent with the oldest continuous culture on earth, or whether we shrink in on ourselves.”

This article was amended on 6 April 2023 to clarify that the Liberal Party was in government until 2022 for nine years, not 12, as an earlier version stated.

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2023/apr/06/outcry-as-australian-opposition-refuses-to-back-constitutional-recognition-of-indigenous-people>

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- [US Teens’ Pythagorean proof gains compelling evidence](#)
- [Money Co-op Bank customers threaten to quit as app goes down again and again](#)
- [SNP Party facing its biggest crisis in 50 years, says party veteran](#)



Part of the first advert published by Labour on Thursday. An accompanying caption reads: 'Labour is the party of law and order.' Photograph: Labour party

[Labour](#)

Emily Thornberry defends 'legitimate question' in Labour's Sunak attack ad

Shadow attorney general admits some people 'very uncomfortable', while David Blunkett calls ad 'deeply offensive'

[Jane Clinton](#)

Sat 8 Apr 2023 05.17 EDTLast modified on Sat 8 Apr 2023 07.05 EDT

Emily Thornberry has defended a widely criticised [Labour advert](#) that claims Rishi Sunak does not think adults convicted of sexually assaulting children should go to prison.

Thornberry, the shadow attorney general, was asked on BBC Radio 4's Any Questions on Friday if she believed that Sunak held such views, and replied :

“If he believes that everyone responsible for child abuse should get a custodial sentence, why are so many not getting a custodial sentence? He is the prime minister and that is a legitimate question for the opposition to ask.”

However, the Labour former home secretary [David Blunkett](#) said he had been left “close to despair” by the “deeply offensive” advert, which he said marked a descent into “gutter” politics.

In a comment piece for the [Daily Mail](#), he wrote: “Once you resort to personal abuse, you create the risk that Britain’s public discourse will degenerate even further – to the levels that we have seen recently in the US.

“When baseless allegations and spurious slurs replace fair and robust political debate, not only is the standing of our leaders undermined, the very foundations of our democracy are compromised.”

Lord Blunkett said he found it “impossible to believe” that Keir Starmer, the party leader, “would endorse publishing this kind of material during a local election campaign”, and he called on him to act.

He said Starmer should take steps to ensure that “unacceptable language and imagery of this sort are never used again, and that the people responsible for it are properly dealt with.”

The senior Tory MP Tobias Ellwood called the advert “appalling”, and the former shadow chancellor John McDonnell called for it to be withdrawn, tweeting: ‘We, the [Labour](#) party, are better than this.’

The shadow culture secretary, Lucy Powell, [refused to endorse](#) the advert, admitting it was “not to everybody’s taste”. However, she said she stood by the party’s campaign.

Thornberry, acknowledging that some people had been critical of the advert, said: “Some felt very uncomfortable about it; some thought that it was racist – and I have to say I think they are wrong. I think that the truth is that we do need to have a debate in this country and [Rishi Sunak](#) in this country is the prime minister and he is responsible for a broken justice system.”

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The advert, posted on social media on Thursday, uses a photo of Sunak with a mock signature from the prime minister, and the words: “Do you think adults convicted of sexually assaulting children should go to prison? Rishi Sunak doesn’t.”

An accompanying caption reads: “Labour is the party of law and order.”

The pensions minister, Laura Trott, who was also on Any Questions, called the ad a “desperate stunt”. The Lib Dem MP Munira Wilson said she was “disgusted” by it, adding: “This is not an attack ad my party would use.”

Despite the fallout, Labour continued its attack on the Tories as the parties approach the local elections in May. On Friday, it tweeted a second advert with a similar format, accusing Sunak of being soft on gun crime. The advert asks: “Do you think an adult convicted of possessing a gun with intent to harm should go to prison? Rishi Sunak doesn’t.”

Citing data from the Ministry of Justice, the advert adds: “Under the Tories, 937 adults convicted of possession of a firearm with intent to harm served no prison time.”

Blunkett said it was “absurd to argue that the prime minister must take personal responsibility for the sentencing policies of judges”.

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Russia-Ukraine war – as it happened: Ukraine to boost defences along border with Belarus

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New Orleans students Ne'Kiya Jackson, left, and Calcea Rujean Johnson say they have found a new way to prove the Pythagorean theorem using trigonometry. Photograph: WWL-TV

[New Orleans](#)

New Orleans teens' Pythagorean proof gains compelling evidence

Calcea Rujean Johnson and Ne'Kiya Jackson's achievement was not the first time trigonometry has been used to prove the theorem

[Ramon Antonio Vargas](#) in New Orleans

Sat 8 Apr 2023 01.00 EDT

Compelling evidence supports the claims of [two New Orleans high school seniors](#) who say they have found a new way to prove Pythagoras's theorem by using trigonometry, a respected mathematics professor said, even if the students' "really important and fantastic" achievement is not the first time

trigonometry has been used to prove the theory, as their school apparently touted.

Álvaro Lozano-Robledo, of the University of Connecticut, spoke this week in a series of [TikTok videos](#), addressing international reports about Calcea Rujean Johnson and Ne’Kiya Jackson.

Johnson and Jackson, students at St Mary’s Academy, recently gave a presentation at a regional meeting of the American Mathematical Society outlining their discovery.

The 2,000-year-old Pythagorean theorem states that the sum of the squares of a right triangle’s two shorter sides is the same as the square of the hypotenuse, the third side opposite the right angle. The notation associated with the theorem – $a^2+b^2=c^2$ – is something encountered in many a geometry class.

For generations, mathematicians maintained that any alleged proof of the Pythagorean theorem based in trigonometry would constitute a logical fallacy known as circular reasoning: seeking to validate an idea with the idea itself.

In the abstract for their 18 March talk in Atlanta, at an event that drew presenters from prominent universities, Johnson and Jackson noted that the book thought to hold the largest known collection of proofs for the theorem, [The Pythagorean Proposition](#) by Elisha Loomis, “flatly states that ‘there are no trigonometric proofs because all the fundamental formulae of trigonometry are themselves based upon the truth of the Pythagorean theorem’”.

But Johnson and Jackson said they found a way to use the trigonometry law of sines to prove Pythagoras’s theory in a way “independent of the Pythagorean trig identity $\sin^2x+\cos^2x=1$ ” – without resorting to circular reasoning.

St Mary’s issued a press release about the findings that was reported out by a local television station, [WWL](#). Other outlets picked up the story, but skeptics

scrambled to check whether Johnson and Jackson had really done something many advanced mathematicians had not managed.

As of Friday, Johnson and Jackson did not appear to have widely released their proof. The American Mathematical Society has only said it has encouraged the pair to submit their work to a peer-reviewed journal. But a [YouTube account, MathTrain](#), reconstructed the proof using slides from Johnson and Jackson's presentation visible in the WWL report.

Lozano-Robledo reviewed MathTrain's reconstruction, broke it down in his own [video](#) and concluded that the students had done what they said.

In [a follow-up video](#), he summarized how the proof involved "a fractal of similar triangles" as well as "infinite series" to compute the shapes' sides.

"It's so ingenious," Lozano-Robledo said. "The proof itself is just so beautiful and so elegant."

But Lozano-Robledo also said people who pointed to at least one other trigonometric, noncircular proof of Pythagoras's theory were correct to do so.

Jason Zimba, then at Bennington College in Vermont, [established in 2009](#) that $\sin^2 x + \cos^2 x = 1$ could be derived independently of the Pythagorean theorem, though he took a different route.

In text under his video, Lozano-Robledo said it was not Johnson and Jackson's fault that people had the impression they were claiming to have done something not done in more than 2,000 years. He said the students did not say that in their abstract.

Johnson and Jackson's abstract said: "In the 2,000 years since trigonometry was discovered, it's always been assumed that any alleged proof of Pythagoras's Theorem based on trigonometry must be circular."

St Mary's Academy then issued a press release which led with that sentence, under a title containing the words "unprecedented research".

Nonetheless, Lozano-Robledo made clear that by all indications Johnson and Jackson had arrived at a valid new Pythagorean theorem proof, an accomplishment worthy of celebration. The eastern section of [New Orleans](#) often makes the news for reasons including deadly violence or political corruption, but now two children there have apparently made a discovery of which many researchers dream.

Lozano-Robledo said new proofs occasionally give mathematicians insights that can be applied in other settings or equip researchers with a tool to prove other theorems previously thought unprovable. One of the main points of teaching established knowledge, he said, is to inspire new solutions.

“It’s just so invigorating – it makes me so happy to see teenagers thinking about new math and coming up with something really important and something fantastic,” Lozano-Robledo said. “It’s just great.”

In an interview published on Thursday by [the Times-Picayune](#), Jackson said she and Johnson began plotting out their proof thanks to a math contest set for the Christmas break.

“We were the only students that answered the bonus question,” Jackson said. “It asked you to create a proof for the theorem and asked a bunch of questions about how you would move from one step to the next.”

Jackson said she planned to study pharmacy or anesthesiology at college. Johnson, who has more than 25 acceptance letters and about \$1.2m in scholarship offers, said she wanted to be an environmental engineer.

“I’ve always had a passion for problem solving,” she said.



The Co-op Bank's app stopped working on Friday 17 March, the following Friday and again on Friday 31 March. Photograph: M4OS Photos/Alamy

[Banks and building societies](#)

Co-op Bank customers threaten to quit as app goes down again and again

Thousands unable to access their accounts on three Fridays in a row because of problems

[Miles Brignall](#)

Sat 8 Apr 2023 05.00 EDT

Customers are threatening to quit the Co-operative Bank after its mobile app stopped working for three Fridays in a row – it was down for the whole of last weekend – and then went down again within hours of the bank declaring it was fixed.

The latest incident, which left thousands of customers effectively locked out of their accounts for about 48 hours, has, it seems, proved the final straw for some.

Customers – some of more than 20 years' standing – have been queueing up on the bank's [Facebook page](#) and other [social media](#) sites to declare they have run out of patience and will be switching to another bank.

“My switch went in to another bank this morning. It's a shame, but with no access to mobile, internet and phone banking (I tried everything) for days, plus no customer service available at weekends, it was time to go,” wrote one frustrated customer.

“App down again this weekend so couldn't move money. Had to call, was on hold for 35 minutes before cut off as offices shut. I'm moving accounts – I've complained to them too many times and they don't learn or understand customer needs,” wrote another.

The most recent problems with the app started on Friday 17 March. It then went down the following Friday. It was out of action again on Friday 31 March. It was reinstated at 11pm on Sunday, only to be taken down again for maintenance less than 24 hours later.

This is the latest problem to hit the bank. In August 2021, Guardian Money reported on claims that it had become almost impossible to get [through to anyone at the bank's call centres](#) because of a shortage of call-handling staff. The problem [persisted into 2022](#), when there were also problems with the app.

In recent years people have become increasingly reliant on mobile apps to carry out their basic banking needs on the move, and now many rarely carry the passwords and customer numbers that are required to log into internet banking.

The customer comments will make for grim reading at the bank's Manchester HQ.

It was once known for being the UK's most ethical bank, making it popular among Guardian readers. The bank is no longer part of the Co-operative Group after it was rescued by [international hedge funds after its much-publicised problems](#).

"I have had enough and will be joining the exodus," says Guardian reader Gary, from rural Lincolnshire, who got in touch with us.

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"I have been with the Co-operative for more than 20 years but I have had enough. The last time I had problems with the app, I opened a backup account at Santander, and I will now make that my main account. The Co-op shut my nearest branch, meaning I now have to travel more than 50 miles if I want to visit a branch. The app just can't be relied on. It's quite common to be frozen out of making online payments, at which point you have to ring up to get it unblocked, but the call centre isn't open after 6pm," he says.

A Co-operative Bank spokesperson apologised to affected customers.

"We are really disappointed to inconvenience our brilliant customers and are committed to providing the service our customers deserve. Our colleagues have responded rapidly to support our customers, and we have colleagues working hard to compensate customers for their inconvenience."

Customers who are out of pocket because of the problems making payments should contact the bank so it “can put that right”, they added.

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Mike Russell in 2018. He says a new Yes movement needs to be created before independence can be campaigned for. Photograph: Ken Jack/Corbis/Getty Images

[Scottish National party \(SNP\)](#)

SNP facing its biggest crisis in 50 years, says party veteran

Party president Mike Russell also says he does not think independence can be achieved ‘right now’

PA Media

Sat 8 Apr 2023 05.40 EDT

A senior figure in the Scottish National party has said the party faces its biggest crisis in 50 years, amid a police investigation into its finances.

Mike Russell, the SNP’s president and a former minister, also said he did not think independence could be achieved “right now”.

On Wednesday, the party's former chief executive [Peter Murrell](#) was arrested by police investigating the spending of about £600,000 that was earmarked for an independence campaign.

Murrell, the husband of the party's former leader Nicola Sturgeon, was released on Wednesday evening without charge pending further investigation.

Police searched the couple's home in Glasgow for more than a day, and uniformed officers also searched the SNP's headquarters in Edinburgh.

In an interview with [the Herald newspaper](#), Russell said recent weeks had been "wearing" for the SNP, which recently selected Humza Yousaf to succeed Sturgeon as party leader.

He said: "In my 50-year association with the party, this is the biggest and most challenging crisis we've ever faced, certainly while we've been in government. But I have an obligation to this party and the movement for [Scottish independence](#) that's been such a massive part of my life for so long."

He continued: "I don't think independence can be secured right now; we need to work towards some coordinated campaigning. But I think this is achievable. My main focus is how we can create a new Yes movement that allows for different visions but conducted in an atmosphere of mutual trust."

Russell said there would be a wide-ranging review of the SNP's governance and transparency. This was promised by Yousaf, who was sworn in as first minister last week.

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On Friday, it emerged that the accountancy firm that audits the SNP's finances had resigned, after working with the party for a decade. The accountants Johnston Carmichael informed the party of the decision before Murrell's arrest.

The party's treasurer is now seeking another auditor in order to comply with Electoral Commission rules.

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2023/apr/08/snp-facing-biggest-crisis-in-50-years-says-party-veteran-mike-russell>

2023.04.08 - Spotlight

- 'I Googled "white guy" and there I was' Stock photo models on seeing their faces in everything from ads to ridiculous memes
- 'This is where people with staggering wealth end up' Who will buy Britain's most expensive house?
- Murdoch's change of heart Was marriage called off over a religious or succession issue?
- Tina Turner 'I always had a crush on Mick Jagger. I loved touring with the Rolling Stones'

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From left: Shubnum Khan, Reed Kavner, Andi Dean, Kyle Craven, Niccolò Massariello and Adriana Rodriguez. Photographs: Christopher Lane, Hisashi Murayama, Casey Rearick, Paola de Grenet, Victoria Holguin, all for the Guardian

[Life and style](#)

‘I Googled “white guy” and there I was’: stock photo models on seeing their faces in everything from ads to ridiculous memes

Some of them posed for photos – and before they knew it they had become the face of skin lightening, bad boyfriends, penis disorders and Canadian immigration. What’s it like when your image goes around the world?



[Michael Segalov](#)

Sat 8 Apr 2023 05.00 EDTLast modified on Sat 8 Apr 2023 14.26 EDT

Stock images are everywhere, and you probably rarely notice them: on billboards and websites, plastered across adverts, groceries and print media. Shooting original photography takes time and money. Stock-image banks – which contain existing images that can be licensed for use in a flash – make for a cheap, easy alternative. When stock-image libraries first opened in the 1930s, customers, often magazines, would have to wait 24 hours for a physical image to be found in an archive and delivered. The internet

catapulted this demand sky- high. Websites need a constant stream of content. Memes are an unregulated stock-photo market of their own.

Now, [stock-photo websites collate millions of images](#), with almost any picture you can imagine available instantly. Urgently need a lonely Santa, a flying baby or a man dressed in a suit sitting in a bath with a rubber duck on his head? A couple of clicks and it's yours.

By design, the models who populate stock photos are anonymous; figures on to whom all manner of messages and meaning can be projected. Here, six people – from professional posers to those who were shocked to discover they had become stock-photo models – explain how their pictures ended up in the archives.

‘I studied the blurry picture: surely it couldn’t be me?’

Shubnum Khan



Shubnum Khan, who was shocked to find herself in an ad promoting immigration to Canada (below). Photograph: Christopher Lane/The Guardian



I was a fresh-faced 24-year-old master's student at the University of KwaZulu-Natal in Durban, South Africa, when I heard about a photographer who was offering students free portraits. A friend heard it was for his art project. I thought he was expanding his portfolio. Either way, it meant free pictures. What was there to lose?

We went along, were welcomed and asked to sign a form. It felt pretty standard. I assumed I was giving him permission to use the pictures for his own purposes, so happily scrawled down my name. We'd been told to come in normal clothes; no makeup. One by one, attendees were called into the studio. When it was my turn, it was quick and straightforward: I was asked to do three simple expressions – happy, straight and “crazy” – then was on my way. A few weeks later I received my portraits via email. They weren't exactly flattering. I closed my inbox and carried on with my day.

Two years later, in 2012, I was teaching at the same university when, out of the blue, a friend messaged telling me to check my Facebook. An acquaintance had posted a photo on my wall, asking: “Is this you?” Alongside it was a picture of a newspaper advert promoting immigration to Canada. I studied the blurry picture: surely it couldn't be. When I looked closer, there was no doubt – it was me.

I panicked. How could this have happened? It was a well-respected publication. They wouldn't have stolen my image. Then another friend commented: "Wait, doesn't this look like the picture from that student photoshoot?" She tagged the photographer, who responded, in essence saying: "What's the big deal? You signed a release form, I've been selling those pictures as stock photos."



I don't know how widely the images have been used, but I know it's extensive. I'm still not sure whether to laugh or cry

Shocked, I reverse-image searched the picture on Google, and was stunned. There I was, in all corners of the web and all around the world. I was the face of eye cream, skin-lightening, makeup, laser treatments, dentistry. I was in ads for banking, insurance, teaching and management. There were magazine covers; a textbook; a Moroccan dating website. I sold carpets in New York, travel packages in Cambodia and, yes, promoted immigration in Uruguay and Canada.

My name, nationality and race were altered at whim. I was Bonney Seng; Phoebe Lopez; Chandra; Kelsie from Florida. In an Instagram advert for skin-lightening pills, my skin has been Photoshopped from dark to fair. Until then, I had absolutely no idea any of this was happening.

I didn't know how to feel. Should I be scared, alarmed, outraged, or find it funny? It made no sense. I contacted the photographer and asked him to remove my images. Initially he resisted, arguing that I'd signed away all the rights. I kept up the pressure and finally he agreed, adding, however, that rights already sold could not be rescinded. In short, my images could for ever be in use.

Over the following years, my face would be used occasionally. A few months ago, I was plastered across highways in India. When I looked online, I found other women of colour who had been treated the same. I decided to write about it in my last book – to encourage other people to be conscious of what their pictures might be used for and read the paperwork first. And to take control of my story.

I still don't know how widely the images have been used – the photographer doesn't keep a record of individual sales – but I know it's extensive, and I'm not sure whether to laugh or cry. It's still unbelievable to me, but because I've never seen a physical ad in person, I can almost pretend it's not real.

Shubnum Khan's novel The Djinn Waits a Hundred Years will be published by Oneworld in February 2024.

‘I was shocked to discover I had become the face of generic white men’

Reed Kavner



Reed Kavner and (below) an alter ego. Photograph: Christopher Lane/The Guardian



The comedy community in New York has been the centre of my social life since I moved here in 2015. Many of my friends are building careers for themselves as standups, writers, actors or producers. Nobody too famous, but I'll occasionally see a buddy in a yoghurt commercial.

A few friends write for Reductress, the humour website that parodies the style of women's magazines ("How to love your boyfriend even if he's not Mark Ruffalo"). It pairs its articles with images, often pulled from its own collection. Over the years, more and more friends modelled for Reductress's photos, and I found myself getting jealous. I wanted in on the fun.

Then, in 2018, I got a text from a friend who writes for the site, asking if I'd be in a photoshoot. I've never responded to a text so quickly. A week later, I was on my way to Reductress's Manhattan office with a fresh haircut. It was an informal setup. One of the site's founders wielded a cheap digital camera and led me and the dozen or so other volunteer models from location to location. I sat on the stoop of an apartment building; stared straight down the camera; poured coffee in the office kitchen.

I waited eagerly for my face to appear on an article. As a feminist satire site, it often writes about fictional men being awful, so I knew what to expect. Would I be a shitty boyfriend? A condescending colleague? Hopefully both. I couldn't wait to find out.

Finally, a few months later, I saw my photo. I was the face of a man who had supposedly written a [comment piece](#) titled: "Most guys just want sex, but I would be OK with hand stuff." Perfect. I was thrilled, and still have a screenshot of that article on my dating profile today. Every few months, I'd see another. It never got old. There was: "White guy excited to burn down the system and also control the rebuilding effort"; "Man stops touching women he doesn't know because of coronavirus, yep, just coronavirus." Soon, I started to see myself less often. Perhaps the website replenished its bank of pictures. Or perhaps a new editor thought I was too good-looking to portray gross creeps.



Would I be a shitty boyfriend? A condescending colleague? I couldn't wait to find out

In the summer of 2021, more than a year since I had last seen my photo in Reductress, I received a notification from a follower on TikTok. They tagged me in the comments for a video, so I watched it.

In the clip, a young guy was acting out a story of a time he hit on a woman, only to be interrupted by her white boyfriend. The clip ends with a full-screen photo that is supposed to represent the boyfriend. It was a photo of me. I was perplexed. Of course, I knew these pictures were online, but there are endless photos available. How did he choose me?

When I asked that on Twitter, someone pointed out the obvious. He didn't choose a picture of me specifically. He chose a picture of a generic white guy. On a hunch, I Google image-searched "white guy" and there I was, with deadpan face and striped blue T-shirt.

Once I figured out what was happening, I made my own TikTok video. I explained how I was shocked to discover I had become the face of generic white men, and how bizarre it was to have strangers on the internet commenting on my appearance. That video quickly gained millions of

views, inspiring more people to find my photo by searching for “white guy”, driving my picture to the top of the results. I saw it being used as people’s profile photos on TikTok and LinkedIn. Someone said they’d seen my face on a dating app. Another person got in touch to say they’d used my picture in a school project. I hope they got a good grade.

For many people, Google image search is their stock-photo library. If it’s on Google, it’s ending up somewhere. There are so many contexts in which someone might search for and grab an image of a “white guy”. In some, I imagine I’d be fine with how they’re using my face. But I’m sure there are others where I’d be far less pleased.

If you’d asked me whether I wanted my face to appear whenever someone was looking for a “white guy”, I’d have politely declined. Still, it’s a good story to tell on stage – and provides more exposure than a yoghurt commercial.

‘A mate in Australia left me a voice note: I think I just saw you on the side of a bus’

Niccolò Massariello



Niccolò Massariello in real life and (below) in an ad. Photograph: Paola de Grenet/The Guardian



In 2016, I had just been through a breakup and was feeling self-conscious. I had this friend, a photographer, who took pictures for a stock-images website. I asked: can you take some pictures that make me look good? I had no photos to use for online dating, and I needed a bit of an ego boost.

The shoot itself was fun. We did all sorts: I wore a suit, played with his dog, got angry at an iPad. It turned out I'm fairly good at making weird faces on cue. I signed some paperwork to allow my friend to use the images. A few days later, he sent me a few straight ones to use on my CV. I hadn't thought much about what might happen after. I had no reason to think anyone would be interested in pictures of my face.

Less than a week later, my friend told me that someone had already used the image. It was on a strange website about men being the superior sex. It was weird, but I assumed it was a one-off incident. And it was a pretty niche website: who would ever know?

However, over the following months my face kept appearing in more and more places. I hadn't realised just how widely stock images are used. I was flogging gluten-free options for a horchata brand, and encouraging people to

drink Colombian liquor. I was in Germany, Saudi Arabia and the Netherlands. I was the lead picture on all sorts of online articles: “How to mindfully deal with jerks” (I was the jerk); “The vindictive ex: when hate comes before children”; and one on catcallers.

How To Encourage Your Girlfriend or Wife To Lose Weight – Without Getting Slapped!

By Coach Samir · August 10, 2016 · 41 Comments

Yes I know, this is a sensitive topic that most wouldn't touch with a 10 foot pole.

Especially in this day and age when gluten free vegan feminists start rampaging on Twitter the moment you even mention “women” and “weight” in the same sentence.



In an online article on ‘How to mindfully deal with jerks’ I was the jerk

Then a girl I knew in Colombia WhatsApped me a page from a national newspaper. It turns out I’d recently become the face of [paraphimosis](#) – a highly unpleasant and painful-sounding medical issue with the penis. For good measure, the newspaper [tweeted it](#) as well. Then a mate in Australia left me a voice note: “I think I just saw you on the side of a bus.”

Friends asked if I was worried or scared, but I wasn’t. The only thing I wondered was whether I could get paid. Turns out that wasn’t the case. If anything, I became addicted to people telling me they’d spotted me: on huge screens at conferences, plastered over metro stations, or on an in-flight brochure encouraging people not to get drunk. Two years later, when my image started to pop up less regularly, I even organised a fresh photoshoot with the same friend in the hope that my new pictures would take off in the same way. They were a total flop.

‘Over the years I’ve been Santa’s wife, a chef, a vet, a hotel maid, milkmaid, butcher, baker’

Adriana Rodriguez



Adriana Rodriguez, who is a stock-image model by profession. Photograph: Victoria Holguin/The Guardian



I'm a stock-image model by profession. I've been doing it for the past 11 years. But starting was an accident. In 2005, my brother – a graphic designer – was designing websites in London. It was during the early years of stock images being used online. He realised there might be an untapped market and uploaded some images to a stock-photo platform. One time he was back home in Colombia for a few months and asked if some friends and I could model in his shoots.

The setup was fairly basic: a white sheet hanging from a curtain rail acted as a backdrop in our living-room studio. We made it up as we went along: random poses and strange scenarios. Over the years, I've been Santa's wife, a chef, a vet, a hotel maid. I've milked cows, worked at a (bloody) butcher's shop and been a baker.

The images did well. We decided to see how far it could go. He invested in lights and equipment; I learned how to do makeup properly. We focused on education, medical and business imagery at first: the stats suggested they would sell. I would sit behind a desk, dress as a doctor or stand by a whiteboard; we would re-enact everything and anything we imagined might happen in these worlds.

When we started, there wasn't much diversity: most stock models were European and American, with lots of blond Caucasians. We were something fresh. Soon my face was everywhere: Australia, Israel, Jordan, on TV shows and on a fake advert in a Netflix drama. A picture of me dressed as a stewardess was used in a comedy segment on The Daily Show with Trevor Noah.



Some pictures have been used in a way I find uncomfortable – for diet pills and by a political party I don’t agree with

Measuring the scale is impossible. There must be at least 5,000 pictures of me in our database. We don’t get told who purchases our images, or how they’re used. But I get sent at least three messages a week from people flagging where they’ve seen me. I’ve started a “highlights” section on my Instagram to keep tabs on it: I’m in Miami shopping malls, on Spanish ATMs and on giant Portuguese roadside billboards. I sell credit cards in Mexico, air travel in Brazil and glasses in Greece.

Occasionally, the pictures have been [used in a way I find uncomfortable](#) – say, for diet pills. But there’s nothing I can do about it, and people who know me realise it’s not a reflection of who I am. I’m a professional model and have made a career from it. Actors don’t worry about playing different characters in movies.

One of the main stipulations is that my pictures can’t be used for political purposes or for anything related to pornography. Here in Colombia my face was used by a political party I don’t agree with and we made sure those images were taken down – we own them, so we can assert some control.

Today, my brother works from the UK and comes to Colombia for shoots when necessary. I model and handle the back-office work. I also keep an eye on trends and what's happening in the news. When virtual reality started being talked about, we did a shoot with headsets; when ride-sharing apps became popular, we needed pictures of people ordering their cars. We respond to what's needed and get the images online as quickly as we can.

‘My face became one of the most widely used memes in the world’

Kyle Craven



Kyle Craven and (below) his face on a T-shirt. Photograph: Casey Rearick/The Guardian



Through high school, I was always the class clown; a comedian. I took very little seriously and was far more interested in pranks and jokes. I went to a Catholic school – they were very strict about the clothes we wore. That’s why I always looked forward to yearbook photo day: it was a chance to see what trouble I could cause.

When that day came round in my junior [third] year in 2007, I’d purchased a tartan sweater vest. I asked for a purple background; everyone else chose simple blacks and greys. I rubbed my eyes to make them all puffy, and when my photograph was taken I did this gawky grin. I thought the result was a masterpiece. It got a big laugh when the picture was handed out in class. The school principal, however, was less impressed. They insisted I retake my picture. With the original destined to never be published, I uploaded it to Facebook.

Fast forward to 2012 and I was in my final year of college at Kent State University, Ohio. Ian Davies, my best friend from high school, was living in LA. We were both really into Reddit and one morning I woke up to a voicemail from Ian: “No big deal, have made you internet famous, check the link.” The night before he’d been messing around on the Advice Animals Reddit page – one of the earliest spaces on the internet for viral memes. Posters would upload a simple image of a person or animal in the hope of

turning them into a meme. It's how some of the biggest [memes in internet history](#) were created.

Ian wanted a piece of the action, too. He had pulled my dumb picture from Facebook and posted it to Reddit. He needed to name it, but Bad Luck Kyle didn't quite have a ring to it. He thought some alliteration might be more catchy. And, with that, [Bad Luck Brian was born](#).

It took a couple of months for the momentum to pick up, but then it was all over Reddit. It happened organically, I'm still not totally sure how. Meme culture was in its infancy. I found it very funny, but assumed it would last a week or two, then die off. Instead, it got bigger and bigger. My face became one of the most widely used memes around the world.



You have to embrace it. Once you're going viral, you're in the passenger seat

When brands asked to license the image, I spotted an opportunity. I had no issue with people using my picture for their own purposes for free, but if companies wanted to profit from it, why not make some cash? I did a McDonald's campaign to promote a new competition they were running (with 1-4 odds of winning, even Bad Luck Brian can win).

We licensed the original image for T-shirts in Walmart and to be used in Volkswagen's 2014 Super Bowl advert. My image has been used in more than 35 board and card games. I've been invited to make appearances all over the world; my face is in a museum in Berne, Switzerland. It's a stock image, really. The photo is free to internet users, and to corporations at cost. Now it's a side project that gives me all sorts of opportunities – something different from my nine to five in our family construction business.

People get in touch to say something similar has happened to them. I always give the same advice: you just have to embrace it. There's nothing else you can do. Publicly resist and the trolls will find a way to keep on pushing it. Once you're going viral, you've been placed in the passenger seat. And the internet is going to take you on a ride.

'My face is a blank canvas. People do with it whatever they please'

Andi Dean



Andi Dean in real life and (below) on screen. Photograph: Hisashi Murayama/The Guardian



When I was an 18-year-old student in North Carolina, I did a few shoots for free with photographers hoping to build their portfolios. I wanted to see if modelling could be a hobby, or even a side hustle to help me pay my way through college. Then a woman messaged me to ask if I'd be interested in a paid stock-photography gig.

She lived about 45 minutes away, in the middle of the forest. I packed various outfits and drove out to meet her, slightly nervous about heading alone to a stranger's house. Thankfully it was all legit – she took me into her garage studio and we got to it. I spent a lot of that day jumping in the air while wearing long dresses. We did holiday-themed shoots. I put on Christmas jumpers and unwrapped presents, then quickly switched to Valentine's Day, with red clothes and boxes of chocolate. For a few hours' work, I earned a couple of hundred bucks. That felt like a lot to my student self.

I can't quite remember when I first heard my picture was being used. Slowly but surely, people would get in touch out of the blue and tell me where they'd seen it. I started a list of all the locations: a Mexican-English language school running a campaign for online classes. A billboard in Liechtenstein. China Airlines. Facial hair removal in Tokyo. An endless stream of social media ads.



You don't know how many stock images you're exposed to: on social media, YouTube, apps ...

For the next five years, I did a shoot with the same woman annually. I stopped only because I relocated to Japan. Now I work in marketing, I understand the value of stock photos. I like that I'm helping others to make that conversion or sale. Stock images are integral to so many industries, mine included. You probably don't even know how many you're exposed to: on Reddit, social media, YouTube, apps, in newspapers. You name it.

Yes, my face is almost famous – it has been seen by millions. Yet I'm also entirely anonymous: nearly everyone who uses or consumes my image projects whatever they wish on to it. My face is a blank canvas. People do with it whatever they please. But, for me, every shoot has a special spot in my mind – each captured a moment in my early adulthood. Living so far away from North Carolina now, I enjoy seeing those photos and being reminded of my life back home.

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‘This is where people with staggering wealth end up’: who will buy Britain’s most expensive house?

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Rupert Murdoch has been married four times. Photograph: Jewel Samad/AFP/Getty Images

[Rupert Murdoch](#)

Murdoch's change of heart: Was marriage called off over a religious or

succession issue?

The engagement of the billionaire media titan and Ann Lesley Smith was reported to be off after just two weeks

[*Edward Helmore*](#) in *New York*

Sat 8 Apr 2023 03.30 EDTLast modified on Sat 8 Apr 2023 19.02 EDT

Rupert Murdoch's summer wedding to Ann Lesley Smith was called off last week, barely two weeks after it had been announced, upon the arrival of spring, in the pages of the New York Post. "We're both looking forward to spending the second half of our lives together," Murdoch, 92, said of the union, three days after he'd put a \$2m Asscher-cut diamond solitaire engagement ring on Smith's wedding finger during St Patrick's Day festivities in New York.

Smith, 66, a former San Francisco police chaplain whose late husband was the country singer Chester Smith (who also founded the Spanish language media giant Univision), told the Post that the union "a gift from God".

But scarcely two weeks later, [Vanity Fair](#) revealed a source close to the media titan told the publication the billionaire had become "increasingly uncomfortable" with Smith's "outspoken evangelical views" and the wedding was off. A spokesman for Murdoch acknowledged to the New York Times that it would not be a "great leap" to say that the relationship was over.

Smith had raised some eyebrows with how strongly she expressed her religious views at a party in Barbados that she and Murdoch attended over Christmas, a source familiar with the Murdoch social scene told the Guardian.

Smith, who had also once been married to Michael Carabello, percussionist in the acid psychedelic rock band Santana, has spoken publicly in the past about the powerful way that religion changed her life. "The Lord gave me thirst and a hunger for Him, and I actually replaced the things of the world

with the Scriptures,” she [told](#) the Christian Broadcasting Network in 2013. “As I began to walk with God, the things of the world just seemed pointless to me.”

The would-be Murdoch bride may also have been uncomfortable with the recent media attention – including [reports](#) of a dispute Smith had with three stepchildren from a previous marriage over a trust. A court found it “lost all confidence in her ability to administer the trust other than for her own benefit”. The dispute was settled in 2010, and Smith admitted no wrongdoing.

But does this fully explain the abrupt change of direction for the couple? Murdoch watchers, often barely divisible from fans of the fictionalized, high-end HBO drama Succession, speculated that the cold feet may also have been influenced to some extent by the heirs – James, Elisabeth, Lachlan and Prudence – with votes in the trust that will some day determine who runs the company. “Whenever you have a patriarch, a family legacy and money, there’s going to be a power struggle. It’s surprising how much the children are in thrall to him and how much they don’t want to share him,” said one person familiar with the family dynamics.

Murdoch’s fourth wife, Jerry Hall, found that, while she was at first welcomed into the fold, she was later iced her out when she enforced a strict pandemic lockdown around her 89-year-old husband at their country home in England. Hall later got an email reportedly informing her the marriage was over.

Lachlan and James reportedly tried to talk their father out of marrying Wendi Deng in 1999. A divorce in 2013 was accompanied by a dispute over whether their two children, Grace and Chloe, would receive voting rights. Deng’s exit from the family was also accompanied by an [unfriendly](#) article in the Wall Street Journal, another Murdoch title.

The latest drama, too, arguably has hallmarks of an effort to ringfence the four-times wed patriarch.



Jerry Hall, Murdoch's fourth wife. Photograph: Danny Moloshok/Reuters

One person with connections to the family said they detected the hand of the four central offspring in Smith's exit. "Her devout religious views may have been the thorn that drew blood," they said, adding that some resistance may have come from Elizabeth, 54, and Prudence, 65, rather than James, 50, or Lachlan, 51.

Murdoch and Smith met last September at his Moraga Vineyard in Bel Air, California (Smith, too, had owned a vineyard 300 miles north in Escalon). Others contend they met at Murdoch's Montana ranch a year before his split from Hall last summer, when the former dental hygienist was said to have offered to check his cavities, claims one Manhattan friend of Hall.

Murdoch of course also has other stresses in his life, including an imminent [defamation trial](#) against Fox News in Delaware. Dominion Voting Systems, a company that produces voting machines and tabulators, claims Murdoch's Fox News and Fox Corporation knowingly spread false information about the 2020 US elections or did so with reckless disregard for the truth. Fox has said the case "is and always has been about the first amendment protections of the media's absolute right to cover the news".

Last week, a judge ruled that the case was robust enough to conclude that [Fox](#) hosts and guests had repeatedly made false claims about Dominion's machines and their supposed role in a fictional plot to steal the election. Judge Eric Davis rejected arguments that Murdoch's age and location, "far-removed from the events in dispute" while under Covid-19 lockdown in England, should absolve him from testifying in person – if attorneys for Dominion subpoena him.

Davis said he had heard Murdoch, chairman of Fox Corporation, publicly discussed his plans to travel with Smith (the couple said they'd spend their time between California, the UK, Montana and New York). "That doesn't sound like someone who can't go from New York to Wilmington," he said.

Unless it's settled, jurors will be asked to decide if Fox News's false claims were made despite the network knowing they were untrue, and to assess damages that could run as high as \$1.6bn. Fox News, as a cable news outlet, cannot be stripped of a FCC broadcast license but could have to fend off shareholder complaints.

"If Fox's reputation is damaged such that it loses money, management is going to be accountable to shareholders," said the corporate governance expert Charles Elson. "But the difference between news and opinion is so clouded, it's questionable how much damage a trial can do."

David Folkenflik, author of Murdoch's World: The Last of the Old Media Empires, reckons the reports of marital litigation from a previous relationship that have emerged about his ex-fiancee "would be troubling for any media magnate seeking a relatively smooth family control of his public companies and probably even more troubling for his adult children".

Perhaps, though, the union just did not seem like a good mix. "Murdoch likes to have companionship, and who can blame him?" said Folkenflik. If this was the drama Succession, he added, "this would seem like a character with attributes you wouldn't want inside the tent no matter how charming she might be."

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Tina Turner: 'Love feels like a dryer going off in your stomach.'
Photograph: Shutterstock

[The Q&A Tina Turner](#)

Tina Turner: 'I always had a crush on Mick Jagger. I loved touring with the

Rolling Stones'

The singer on starting out as a tomboy, her horror movie marathons and a secret love of McDonald's

Sat 8 Apr 2023 04.30 EDT

Born in Tennessee, Tina Turner, 83, started performing with Ike Turner's band Kings of Rhythm as a teenager. She had two sons, one with Ike whom she married in 1962. As a duo, Ike and Tina's hits included Proud Mary and Nutbush City Limits. In 1984, Turner released her multi-platinum solo album Private Dancer; her single What's Love Got to Do With It topped the charts and won three Grammys. In 2018, she received a Grammy lifetime achievement award. This month is the fifth anniversary of [Tina: The Tina Turner Musical](#) is now booking to spring 2024 at the Aldwych theatre, London. Turner lives in Switzerland with her second husband, Erwin Bach.

What is your greatest fear?

I never want to go back; I fought so much through my life, that I have to keep going forward.

What is your earliest memory?

Playing on my favourite tree. I was a tomboy and I'd always be tearing my clothes, messing up my hair.

What is the trait you most deplore in yourself?

I don't deplore anything about myself, but I am a perfectionist.

What is the trait you most deplore in others?

Too many times I had people try and make decisions for me. The assumption that I needed that was a big mistake!

Describe yourself in three words

Honest, feisty, fun.

What would your superpower be?

Maybe all those solo concerts I did in 6in heels!

What makes you unhappy?

I have lost people close to me, too soon.

What do you most dislike about your appearance?

Nothing. Women are forced to look far too closely and be critical of their appearance. Men don't.

Who would play you in the film of your life?

Angela Bassett has already done that. Plus I have a team of "my Tinas" playing me in our musical.

What is your most unappealing habit?

Watching horror movies back to back.

What scares you about getting older?

Nothing. This is life's full adventure and I embrace and accept every day with what it brings.

Who is your celebrity crush?

I always had a crush on Mick Jagger. I loved when we toured with the Rolling Stones.

Would you choose fame or anonymity?

I wanted fame and I achieved it. Now, I enjoy anonymity in my retirement.

What does love feel like?

Like a dryer going off in your stomach.

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Have you ever said ‘I love you’ and not meant it?

Not unless I was scared for mine or my children’s lives.

If not yourself, who would you most like to be?

Oprah.

When’s the last time you changed your mind about something significant?

When I first met my producers, I told them I didn’t want a musical to be made. I changed my mind – and that was definitely the right decision!

Would you rather have more sex, money or fame?

At my age, is there another option?

How would you like to be remembered?

As the Queen of Rock’n’Roll. As a woman who showed other women that it is OK to strive for success on their own terms.

Tell us a secret

I love McDonald’s. After the first preview of my musical in London, I made Erwin take a detour on the way back to our hotel.

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The Republic of Ireland's taoiseach Garret FitzGerald and Margaret Thatcher after signing the Anglo-Irish agreement at Hillsborough House near Belfast, 15 November 1985. Photograph: Peter Kemp/AP

[OpinionGood Friday agreement](#)

**Thatcher was the accidental midwife of
peace in Northern Ireland – today's
partisan leaders, take note**

[Rory Carroll](#)



25 years on from the Good Friday agreement, the Iron Lady's implacability and its unintended consequences are a lesson in humility

Sat 8 Apr 2023 04.00 EDTLast modified on Sat 8 Apr 2023 06.30 EDT

Seldom did a nickname feel so apt. [Margaret Thatcher](#) bent her foes – Tory sexists, trade union leaders, Argentine generals, Irish republicans, Soviet premiers – to her will. Armoured with a conviction she was right, she charged into one battle after another, slaying orthodoxy and precedents. What was this if not the work of an Iron Lady?

Thatcher unleashed a revolution in the 1980s that transformed Britain's political economy, jolted Europe's left-leaning consensus and emboldened her great ally Ronald Reagan. She widened the Great Man theory of history to include women, and fortified it. Epochal events bore her stamp.

But 10 years after her death on 8 April 2013, and 25 years on from the [Good Friday agreement](#), these overlapping anniversaries illuminate a different Thatcher. A politician of steely resolve, yes, but who ended up a plaything of unintended effect.

Landmark policies that once clanged with certainty in Ireland in hindsight resemble leaves on a swirling breeze, their consequences scattered over unexpected resting places. Britain's first female prime minister had conviction and clarity, but history spiralled around her legacy with twisting ironies. Today's crop of [ideological leaders should take note](#).

After her election in 1979 Thatcher did not seek a political solution to the Troubles. She sought to smother the Irish Republican Army's violent campaign with security measures – more police, better intelligence, tougher prisons. She let 10 republican prisoners starve themselves to death in 1981 rather than cede political status to men she considered terrorists and criminals.

This made her a hate figure across Ireland, north and south, a fate she accepted. What she did not anticipate was [Gerry Adams](#) channelling this anger to steer Sinn Féin towards electoral politics.

Until then, Irish republicans had viewed politics as a trap, a path to compromise and sellout. But partly to spite Thatcher, they rallied behind a campaign to elect Bobby Sands and other hunger strikers to Westminster and the Dáil, setting a precedent that let Adams run other candidates and build a serious political party.

Sinn Féin's "ballot box and Armalite" strategy had an expiry date. Eventually the movement would have to choose between [IRA](#) violence or electoral victories. Adams made sure it would be politics. Thatcher's hawkishness opened the path.

In October 1984 the IRA exacted revenge for the dead hunger strikers by blowing up the Grand Hotel in Brighton, where Thatcher and her cabinet were staying during the Conservative party conference. Five died, dozens were injured. It was the most audacious attack on the British state since the 1605 Gunpowder Plot.

Thatcher escaped, and to her immense credit did not lash out with a security force crackdown. Instead, a year later, she made a bold act of statesmanship: with the taoiseach, Garret FitzGerald, she signed the Anglo-Irish agreement.

It recognised that Catholics in [Northern Ireland](#) considered themselves Irish and gave Dublin, for the first time, a limited say in the region.

The treaty infuriated Northern unionists and some of Thatcher's closest allies, such as Ian Gow. It was all the more startling given her own antipathy to Irish nationalism. She absorbed the denunciations in hope of achieving two goals: stopping Sinn Féin eating into the support of John Hume's Social Democratic and Labour party; chivvying Dublin into improving border security and extraditing IRA suspects.

Her reward? Continued Sinn Féin ascent and negligible security improvements. Thatcher subsequently cooled on the agreement, her signature achievement in Ireland, but it was too late. Two parallel processes were unspooling that would change everything.

Adams, recognising the conflict was a futile stalemate, began secret talks via mediators with Irish and British government contacts. Irish and British officials, meanwhile, were getting to know and trust each other through operating the Anglo-Irish agreement. Eventually the two processes intersected and birthed the peace process. Thatcher was the accidental midwife.

Economic policy proved equally unpredictable. Nigel Lawson, the "golden boy" architect of her government's success, ended up undermining her leadership.

After Thatcher resigned in 1990 the unforeseen consequences of her premiership gathered momentum. The IRA declared a ceasefire in 1994, paving the way for the Good Friday agreement in 1998. It was a leap of faith. Dublin got a greater role in Northern Ireland in return for dropping territorial claims. London promised to hold a referendum on Irish unity if a majority in Northern Ireland appeared to favour unification. Unionists and nationalists would share devolved powers in a Stormont assembly and executive.

The [Good Friday agreement](#) was imperfect and bequeathed political dysfunction, but in ending 30 years of conflict it was a thing of beauty.

Thatcher's courage and obduracy unwittingly helped to conjure it. She did not ask for, nor receive, plaudits.

For the retired prime minister there was an aggravating twist: the deal freed paramilitary prisoners, including [Patrick Magee](#), the IRA operative who had planted the Brighton bomb that almost killed her and did kill some of her friends.

There was one final irony. Thatcher's animus to Brussels outlived her and encouraged the [Euro sceptic strain in the Conservatives](#) that led to Brexit. That has destabilised Northern Ireland, [paralysed power-sharing](#) and emboldened advocates of a united Ireland.

"I am not a consensus politician. I'm a conviction politician," Thatcher once said. More pithily, she also said: "You turn if you want to. The lady's not for turning."

But no amount of resolve could control the zigzag flow of events, contradictions and surprises that shape human affairs, including Thatcher's legacy. This should be a lesson in humility for a polarised era. Hyper-partisans confuse zealotry with strength and certainty with consequence. They can be as righteous as they want. It guarantees nothing.

- Rory Carroll is the Guardian's Ireland correspondent and author of [Killing Thatcher](#): the IRA, the Manhunt and the Long War on the Crown (which in the US is titled *There Will Be Fire: Margaret Thatcher, the IRA and Two Minutes That Changed History*)



‘Quite how soon Keir Starmer will wish to emerge again after this ad is unclear – as is quite how much he will wish to bang on about decency for a bit.’ Starmer at Burnley College, Lancashire, 4 April 2023. Photograph: Danny Lawson/PA

[OpinionLabour](#)

What was that dreadful thud? The sound of Keir Starmer falling off his high horse

[Marina Hyde](#)



‘Civility in politics’? Starmer may have to stable that faithful nag after Labour’s awful ‘paedo protector’ attack ad on Rishi Sunak

Fri 7 Apr 2023 06.38 EDTLast modified on Fri 7 Apr 2023 13.33 EDT

Encouraging news for anyone who fears the next election might be some fight for the moral high ground, as Labour releases [a new attack ad](#). Have you seen this one? If not, do try to catch it before they take it down and tacitly blame someone nameless. It depicts a smiling Rishi Sunak next to the inquiry: “Do you think adults convicted of sexually assaulting children should go to prison? Rishi Sunak doesn’t.” Oh dear. In case that grim message was too opaque for you, Sunak’s famous signature is added, above the explainer: “Under the Tories, 4,500 adults convicted of assaulting children under 16 served no prison time. Labour will lock up dangerous child abusers.”

Labour is the party of law and order. pic.twitter.com/EP6VXToK9z

— The Labour Party (@UKLabour) [April 6, 2023](#)

Righto. Attempts to cast this ad as a “dog whistle” seem misplaced, affording its stunning crassness a kind of subtlety that it simply can’t carry off. I think that when everyone can hear the dog whistle, it’s just a whistle? If you can’t discern the shrill sound of something telling you [Rishi Sunak](#) doesn’t want nonces to go to prison, do consider booking a hearing test at your very earliest convenience.

The ad has drawn condemnation from across the political spectrum, so we merely await some genius turning up – off the record, of course – to explain that this was exactly what they were going for. The thing about political attack ads is that there will always be people, usually the ones who came up with them, who’ll sweep in to explain loftily that actually, the ad in question was a dark form of magic. “Hey, it’s not pretty, but politics is a bloodsport,” will be the position of some boring little inadequate whose other positions include banning bloodsports and having a number of views about where to get the best flat white in SW1.

One of the big impressions you keep hearing about [Keir Starmer](#) from the focus groups is that he doesn’t say what he really thinks. So perhaps this ad was an attempt to address this, a really confident and clear way of saying “Rishi Sunak is the paedo’s friend”. And yet, the irony of this particular ad is that Starmer doesn’t really think that Rishi Sunak thinks this – and consequently hasn’t even said what he thinks here.

The one thing you would hope the career lawyer would be across is that Sunak – who wasn’t even an MP for five years of the period gestured towards in the ad – was not responsible for sentencing or sentencing guidelines. The fact that Starmer was himself a member of the sentencing council for some of that period is another factor that places the ad firmly in the “audacious” category.

Primarily, though, this seems to be about decorum in politics, a beloved subject of the Labour leader. It was only a year or so ago that Boris Johnson was shamefully and bizarrely attempting to counter Partygate stories by [telling the House of Commons](#) that Starmer had failed to prosecute Jimmy Savile when he was director of public prosecutions, a gambit that also drew cross-spectrum political condemnation and at least [one angry mob](#) towards Starmer. At the time, the Labour leader drew himself up to his full height

and said that he had never before been called a “paedophile protector”. It was “a deliberate slur without any basis in fact,” Starmer [told the Times](#). “The PM knew exactly what he was doing ... It’s not about me, it’s about the way we conduct our politics. I don’t want to see us go down the route that this potentially takes us down.” Of the anti-vax crowd who had chanted paedo-protecting slurs at him, he reasoned: “That happened yesterday for the first time in my life. If others want to argue that this is unconnected with precisely what the PM said one week before, then let them make that case. But they’ll never persuade me that there is no link.”

Mm. But will Starmer be able to persuade himself that calling a political leader a paedophile protector is good and right when *he* does it, and somehow nothing to do with “the way we conduct our politics”? If the sole tenor of your current brand is that the Tories are morally degenerate and iniquitous and that decency and truth-telling matter, there are those nutters among us who would argue that sinking to the same level is not a brilliant 4D chess move, but simply ... sinking to the same level. Hypocrisy is arguably the hardest sell in politics, as Boris Johnson’s calamitous [standards committee appearance](#) recently showed, and it is certainly an area the self-sainted Starmer might sensibly be advised to avoid. Is this the sole occasion on which anyone could reasonably describe Starmer’s actions as “bold”? That in itself feels something of a problem.

At time of writing, the ad remained up, with the leadership of the Labour party apparently standing behind it. A glimpse of the excruciating contortions into which they are going to get themselves to defend it came courtesy of the shadow culture secretary, Lucy Powell, who emerged for a coach-crash interview with [BBC Breakfast](#) in which she flounderingly acknowledged that she could see it might not be “to everybody’s taste”. “But you know,” [she ruminated](#), “that is the sort of cut-and-thrust nature of politics.” Something for the ad-makers of the Conservative party to bear in mind, no doubt.

As for Starmer himself, he had only just given a tough-talking interview to [the Mirror](#) to round off a distinctly unedifying “crime week” for both Labour and the Tories. Quite how soon the Labour leader will wish to emerge again after this ad is unclear – as is quite how much he will wish to bang on about decency for a bit. Perhaps we’ll see him out and about with “real people” in

the days ahead. At least the advent of spring means his handlers can finally get him out of the knee-length black coat he favours on outside visits. Coupled with his perma-pained expression, this garment always makes Starmer look like a funeral director. You never quite know if he's going to say something about manufacturing jobs or murmur that the horse-drawn carriage is now ready to leave.

Staying with matters equine, perhaps after this unpleasant episode the deceased in question is Starmer's favourite hobby-horse: civility in politics. It's pretty hard to see that particular one being given a run-out in the near future, which will leave the [Labour](#) leader reliant on showing people what else he has back there in the stable other than taking the moral high ground and making holier-than-thou pronouncements. He hasn't been about that at all over the past 24 hours – so he must be about something else, something different, something more. Mustn't he ... ?

- Marina Hyde is a Guardian columnist
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Mine's a pint of cranberry juice: Edith Pritchett on the joy of UTIs – cartoon

[Edith Pritchett](#)

Sat 8 Apr 2023 01.00 EDT

[Urinary Tract Infection. 1 \(Supermarket, girl with flames coming from her crotch\). 'Excuse me, where can I find cranberry juice?' 2 \(Pours 3 glasses of juice.\) Time to enjoy a lovely gallon. My face when someone says ... 'Is that gonna work?' 3 \(Running between toilets.\) Leaving my flat \(which has a toilet\) to see a friend in a cafe \(which also has a toilet\). It's only 10 minutes away. Four if I sprint. 4 \(Sitting in cafe\) She's having a coffee. I fancy a cranberry juice. 'Ahaha, totally, totally. Hey - you know what might be nicer than this cramped little table? The lovely spacious bathroom.' \(Sitting on toilet talking to friend.\)](#)

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2023.04.08 - Around the world

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- [Fading glory The fight to save Hong Kong's beloved neon signs](#)



After years of dodging legal accountability, the former US president's reckoning is coming. Photograph: Joe Raedle/Getty Images

[Donald Trump](#)

The case(s) against Trump: New York charges only beginning of legal woes

Experts suggest the quantity and gravity of upcoming investigations could ultimately bury his electoral chances



[David Smith](#) in Washington

[@smithinamerica](#)

Sat 8 Apr 2023 04.00 EDT

It was the day that Donald Trump got mugged by reality. After years of dodging legal accountability, the former US president found himself being driven towards a New York courtroom where he would be [charged with a crime](#).

“WOW, they are going to ARREST ME,” he wrote on his Truth Social media platform, the true scale of his predicament finally dawning on him. “Can’t believe this is happening in America.”

But dramatic as the day was, as Trump [pleaded not guilty to 34 felony counts](#) of falsifying business records relating to hush money payments, it represented only the first drop of rain in what could be a legal thunderstorm. Several more cases are fast approaching and some are potentially far more devastating.

Whereas the ex-president has so far been able to spin the hush money indictment to his political advantage as he seeks to win back the White

House in 2024, experts suggest that the quantity and gravity of the upcoming investigations could ultimately bury him and his electoral chances.

Tuesday's court appearance, in which Trump – the first former US president in history to be arrested and arraigned on criminal charges – had to answer meekly to a judge and found there was no one to [hold doors open for him](#), was the humbling and sobering moment that he discovered his legal troubles are no longer theoretical.

[Michael D'Antonio](#), a political commentator and author of *The Truth About Trump*, said: “His attitude prior to this has always been obstinance and a chin-jutting pride and refusal to appear to be affected. But he sure appeared to be affected this time. There was a quality of a cow being led to the slaughter.”

He added: “He must realise that he's in trouble and that the situation is grave and that showed on his face. He doesn't care as much about the proceedings politically as he cares about the story that he can tell about them. He is a storyteller above all and a fabulist. If he can tell a story that motivates his base and also manage to stay out of prison, he will argue that it's a victory over a corrupt system.”

Trump himself will not be in jeopardy when Dominion Voting Systems' \$1.6bn defamation lawsuit against [Fox News](#) goes to trial, currently scheduled for 17 April. But the case, which could hear testimony from the Fox Corporation executives Rupert and Lachlan Murdoch and an array of Fox News hosts, could provide some deeply embarrassing details about how the ex-president is perceived by the network.

Then, on 25 April, a civil trial in a New York lawsuit involving Trump is scheduled to begin. E Jean Carroll, a former Elle magazine columnist, [accuses Trump of defaming her](#) by denying he raped her in New York's Bergdorf Goodman department store dressing room in late 1995 or early 1996. Carroll is seeking monetary damages and it is not known whether Trump will testify.

Another important trial is set for 2 October. Letitia James, the [New York](#) attorney general, is suing Trump and his Trump Organization for fraud. James has said her office found more than 200 examples of misleading asset valuations between 2011 and 2021, and that Trump inflated his net worth by billions of dollars.

James said the scheme was intended to help Trump obtain lower interest rates on loans and better insurance coverage. The civil lawsuit seeks to permanently bar Trump and three of his adult children from running companies in New York state, and recoup at least \$250m obtained through fraud.

Before then, there may have been developments in Georgia, where a prosecutor is investigating Trump's alleged efforts to overturn his 2020 election defeat in that state. Fani Willis, the Fulton county district attorney who will ultimately decide whether to pursue charges, told a judge in January that a special grand jury had completed its work and that decisions were "imminent".



Trump arrives at the courtroom at the Manhattan criminal court in New York. Photograph: Ed Jones/AFP/Getty Images

If convicted, Trump would not be able to seek clemency from a future Republican president since such pardons do not apply to state offences. [Barbara McQuade](#), a law professor at the University of Michigan, said: “The most perilous is probably the case out of Georgia because it relates to election interference and because there is no ability for Trump, if he becomes president again, to pardon himself.

“We know the grand jury foreperson said that they were recommending indictments of more than a dozen people and she strongly hinted one of those people was Trump. That one might pose the most danger to him at the moment.”

Meanwhile the justice department has investigations under way into both Trump’s actions in the 2020 election, including lies that led to the January 6 insurrection, and his retention of highly classified documents after leaving the White House in 2021. Both are overseen by [Jack Smith](#), a war crimes prosecutor and political independent.

When he returned to his Mar-a-Lago estate in Florida on Tuesday night and [hurled abuse at the investigators](#) one by one, Trump devoted the lion’s share of his comments – and [patent falsehoods](#) – to the classified documents case, implying that he recognises it as posing the maximum danger.

The FBI seized 13,000 documents from Mar-a-Lago last August; about 100 documents were marked classified and some were designated top secret. Earlier this week [the Washington Post newspaper reported](#) that investigators have fresh evidence pointing to possible obstruction of justice by the former president as he resisted a subpoena demanding the return of all classified documents.

As for the charges over hush money payments during the 2016 election campaign, Trump is expected back in court in New York on 4 December – about two months before the official start of the 2024 Republican presidential primary calendar.

It’s extraordinary. Outside of the mafia, it’s hard to find any American with such legal problems

Allan Lichtman

[Norman Eisen](#), a senior fellow at the Brookings Institution thinktank in Washington, said: “The moment he set foot into official custody in New York probably was a chilling realisation for him of the difficulties that lie ahead, and not just in this case, although it’s serious.

“It’s that feeling of the walls closing in from every direction. He’s got a lot of serious problems on his hands. Even in a Republican primary, the compound of all of these challenges will be very deleterious because Republican primary voters are going to ask: can he win?”

Asked if the 45th president could end up in prison, Eisen, author of *Overcoming Trumpery: How to Restore Ethics, the Rule of Law, and Democracy*, replied yes. “It won’t be easy, it may not be fast but it’s certainly possible,” he said.

Beneath the cries of a witch-hunt by Democrats and the “deep state”, and despite a bounce in primary polls as Republicans rally in his defence, Trump, 76, may no longer be sleeping easy at Mar-a-Lago. [Allan Lichtman](#), a history professor at American University in Washington, commented: “He looked like a man with pins sticking into his torso. He is scared stiff.

“Sure, he’s going to bluster and express bravado and confidence, but he is terrified of being confined. No doubt about that. This is the beginning of the first day of the rest of his life. The issues are just going to pile on. It’s extraordinary. Outside of the mafia, it’s hard to find any American with such legal problems.”

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Joe Biden speaks to reporters about anything but Donald Trump's legal troubles as he departs the White House on 31 March. Photograph: Abaca/Rex/Shutterstock

[Joe Biden](#)

Vow of silence: why Biden is saying nothing about Trump's indictment

Trump made history by becoming the first former US president to be criminally charged but his successor has studiously avoided the subject



[Chris Stein](#) in Washington

[@ChrisJStein](#)

Sat 8 Apr 2023 05.00 EDTLast modified on Sat 8 Apr 2023 05.35 EDT

The biggest news story in the US this week was Donald Trump's unprecedented appearance at the defendant's table in a Manhattan courtroom – an event that Joe Biden took pains to appear blissfully unaware of.

On the day Trump learned he was facing 34 charges related to falsifying business records in the first-ever indictment of a former American president, Biden spent his day talking on the phone with the French leader, Emmanuel Macron, and Britain's King Charles III, and presided over a meeting with his science and technology advisers at the White House. And, despite the best efforts of the reporters who follow him around on a daily basis, he ignored all questions about the allegations made by the Manhattan district attorney, Alvin Bragg.

“Look, our focus is going to continue to be the American people. What you all cover is up to all of you, but we’re going to do our best to stay the course, to talk about the issues that matter,” the press secretary, Karine Jean-Pierre, said on Wednesday when asked why the indictment appeared to be a verboten subject at the White House.

Observers of Biden’s administration say the strategy is probably a wise one as he heads into a potential rematch next year against Trump, the Republican opponent he bested in the 2020 election. Despite several legislative wins, Biden’s approval ratings have been underwater for months, and CNN on Thursday [released a survey](#) that found a majority of Democrats would prefer someone else as their nominee for president in next year’s election.

“I think that is sort of the intentional thing. I think they want to keep their distance from what they see as the chaos and divisiveness that Donald Trump creates,” said Navin Nayak, executive director at the Center for American Progress Action Fund and a former Democratic campaign staffer.

This strategy also gives Biden the opportunity to cast Trump as scandal-plagued and unfit for office, and himself as the competent alternative – a tactic he deployed to defeat him in 2020.

Biden has yet to say whether he’ll run for a second term, though people close to him have repeatedly said he will. “He says he’s not done,” the first lady, Jill Biden, [said in February](#). Reports from earlier this year indicated the president would announce his re-election campaign sometime after his February State of the Union address – a date that has come and gone. Trump’s prosecution could be one reason for the delay.

“Why compete with that?” said the Democratic pollster Carly Cooperman. “I don’t see any reason right now for him to announce that he’s running. He’s already the president, and there’s gonna be all this attention on Trump and his legal battles, at least in the short term. And so I think it’s definitely a reason to push that back a little bit, at minimum.”

The former president’s Tuesday appearance at the criminal court in Manhattan was covered by hundreds of journalists, some of whom waited overnight to be in the courtroom when details of the indictment centered on

facilitating hush money payments and running a “catch and kill” scheme to suppress negative news stories ahead of the 2016 election were relayed to a scowling Trump.

Trump could also soon find himself summoned to courtrooms elsewhere in the US. Fani Willis, the district attorney in the Atlanta-area Fulton county, is investigating Trump and his allies’ failed effort to overturn Biden’s election win in Georgia. In Washington DC, special prosecutor Jack Smith is in the middle of an inquiry into three sources of legal peril for the former president: the classified documents the FBI discovered at Trump’s Mar-a-Lago resort, his election meddling and the January 6 insurrection.

As serious as the allegations in Bragg’s case are – no current or former American president has ever been indicted – Eric Schickler, co-director of the Institute of Governmental Studies at the University of California, Berkeley, said the White House may view it as the sort of scandal Biden should stay away from.

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“It wouldn’t surprise me if his team just sees that as almost below the president or not what the president should focus on,” he said. But if Trump were to be charged over the January 6 insurrection or his attempts to

overturn the 2020 election, subjects Biden has spoken out against forcefully in the past, that might change the president's tone.

“That’s something where you need the president to be out front. Even if it doesn’t persuade a lot of people, that still is part of the president’s role, to defend the constitutional order,” Schickler said.

While Biden may have kept his thoughts about the Manhattan case to himself, Cooperman said the indictment is to the president’s benefit, in part because it serves as a distraction for the discontented public.

“By saying nothing, Biden is kind of saying everything,” Cooperman said. “Even if this might help Trump win his own party’s presidential [nomination], I think that from Biden’s perspective, less is more, and being able to say nothing and let that play out is the best thing that he could be doing.”

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A Marsican brown bear in Majella national park in Abruzzo, Italy. Brown bears were reintroduced to Trentino between 1996 and 2004. Photograph: Valerio Mei/Alamy

[The ObserverItaly](#).

Bear kills jogger on woodland path in northern Italy

Mauled body of Andrea Papi, 26, found overnight after he failed to return from run near his village

AFP in Rome

Fri 7 Apr 2023 15.02 EDTLast modified on Sat 8 Apr 2023 17.05 EDT

A bear attacked and killed a jogger on a woodland path in north-east [Italy](#), the first case of its kind, a source close to the case told AFP on Friday.

Andrea Papi, 26, was killed on Wednesday while out running in the mountainous region near his village, Caldes, in the Trentino region. His

family raised the alarm when he failed to return and a search team found his body overnight.

He had suffered deep wounds to the neck, arms and chest, and an autopsy carried out on Friday concluded that he had been attacked by a bear, the source added, confirming Italian news reports.

In March, a man was attacked by a bear in the same region, prompting a debate on the dangers posed by the animals, which were [reintroduced there between 1996 and 2004](#).

In 2014, a female brown bear known as Daniza mauled a man looking for mushrooms in the same region. The bear, transferred from Slovenia into the woodlands around Trentino in 2000, [died after being given an anaesthetic](#) during an attempt to capture her.

The local authority has decided to track and kill the animal, once it has been identified, Trentino region's president, Maurizio Fugatti, told reporters on Friday evening. The environmental group WWF had already acknowledged that it needed to be put down.

But Annamaria Procacci, a former ecologist deputy who now works with the animal welfare group ENPA, denounced the lack of precautions taken by local officials. Bears normally keep their distance from people, she argued.

The local authority had to ensure that people were kept away from zones where female bears were raising their cubs, she added.

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Fading glory: the fight to save Hong Kong's beloved neon signs

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- [NHS Backlog in genome service leaves families facing long wait for results](#)



Striking teachers march from Hyde Park towards Trafalgar Square in London last month. Photograph: Guy Smallman/Getty Images

Schools

Schools in England brace for more strikes as NEU rejects pay offer

Members overwhelmingly vote not to accept offer of £1,000 one-off payment and 4.3% pay rise for most teachers

- [Politics live - latest updates](#)

[Richard Adams](#) Education editor

Mon 3 Apr 2023 05.20 EDTFirst published on Mon 3 Apr 2023 04.09 EDT

Parents in [England](#) face another wave of strikes and school closures after teachers belonging to the National Education Union decisively rejected the government's pay offer.

NEU members voted by 98% not to accept the offer of a £1,000 one-off payment and a 4.3% pay rise for most teachers from September, triggering two further days of strikes in England on Thursday 27 April and Tuesday 2 May.

More than 195,000 members voted in the pay ballot – two-thirds of the union’s active membership - with only 2% voting to accept the government’s offer.

Kevin Courtney, the NEU’s joint general secretary, said in comments directed at the education secretary, Gillian Keegan: “We are saying to you that you need to make a better offer because this dispute is not going away.”

When the result was announced at the NEU’s annual conference in Harrogate, delegates broke into chants of “come on Gill, pay the bill”.

Mary Bousted, the union’s other joint general secretary, noted that the government’s offer was worse than pay deals that recently resolved disputes in other countries within the UK. “Gillian, why do you think that teachers in England are worth less than teachers in Wales or Scotland?” Bousted said.

“To parents we say that we have no wish to disrupt education, indeed our action is aimed at getting the government to invest in the education of this generation of children and the people who teach them. We are asking our school reps to plan with headteachers to ensure that year 11 and year 13 students have a full programme of education on the upcoming strike days”.

Students begin sitting A-level and GCSE exams from 15 May.

The NEU conference will this week debate an emergency motion to confirm the two further strike days, and to hold a fresh ballot next month that would authorise further strikes this summer.

Keegan said she was “extremely disappointed” by the NEU’s decision to reject her offer, and would refuse further negotiations until the Department for Education had received pay recommendations for 2023-24 from the independent School Teachers’ Review Body.

“The offer was funded, including major new investment of over half a billion pounds, in addition to the record funding already planned for school budgets. The NEU’s decision to reject it will simply result in more disruption for children and less money for teachers today. Pay will now be decided by the independent pay review body, which will recommend pay rises for next year,” Keegan said.

The rejection of the government’s offer, which could be followed by the other major teaching unions, is a setback for Keegan after she entered into six days of intense negotiations last month. The DfE’s offer also included the establishment of a new taskforce to reduce [teacher workload](#).

Keegan had said the offer was “final” and the one-off payment would be lost if teachers rejected the deal.

The DfE had procured additional funding for the one-off £1,000 payment that would have been on top of the 5% pay rise already set out for the current school year, while the 4.5% overall offer was an improvement on the 3% the government had originally put forward for 2023-24.

Three other unions, the NASUWT, Association of School and College Leaders and National Association of Head Teachers (NAHT) are also balloting members on the offer, with the NAHT also asking if they would take industrial action if it is rejected. NAHT members were balloted in January but failed to get over the 50% threshold of members’ voting required for industrial action.

The Institute for Fiscal Studies has said that even including the pay offer, salaries for experienced teachers would still be 13% lower than in 2010.

Last month unions in Scotland accepted a pay increase worth more than 14% for most teachers. In Wales the unions accepted an additional 3% pay rise for the current school year and a 5% increase for 2023-24.

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Rishi Sunak refuses to back Braverman's widely criticised claim about racial nature of grooming gangs – as it happened

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The NSPCC chief executive, Sir Peter Wanless, who says the initiative ‘must be backed up with funding for services to help child victims’. Photograph: NSPCC/PA

[Child protection](#)

NSPCC warns against framing grooming gangs problem as ethnicity-based

Sir Peter Wanless welcomes creation of taskforce but says ‘there must be a focus on more than just race’

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Mon 3 Apr 2023 04.22 EDTLast modified on Mon 3 Apr 2023 05.51 EDT

The NSPCC and experts on grooming gangs have warned ministers against framing the issue as one based on ethnicity, warning that this could hamper efforts to tackle a crime that a [Home Office](#) report said was carried out predominantly by white men.

One expert said Suella Braverman, who [has argued](#) that grooming gangs are “almost all” made up of British Pakistani men, appeared more focused on presenting “hard-right talking points” than tackling the wider issues over child sexual abuse.

Braverman, the home secretary, and Rishi Sunak are to [announce new efforts](#) to tackle grooming gangs on Monday, with the prime minister due to say that “political correctness” has for too long hampered efforts.

Citing high-profile mass cases of grooming in Rochdale and Rotherham, Braverman argued on Sunday that the crime was perpetrated almost exclusively by British Pakistani men against white girls, as happened in those instances.

However, a [Home Office report from 2020](#) on group-based child sexual exploitation found that the majority of offenders were young white men and it was not possible to conclude whether any particular ethnic group was disproportionately represented.

Sir Peter Wanless, the chief executive the NSPCC, said the children’s charity welcomed the planned creation of a grooming gang taskforce, but said this “must be backed up with funding for services to help child victims recover and support for a justice system that is struggling to cope”.

He said: “It’s also vital we remember that any child can be a victim of child sexual exploitation and adult perpetrators do not just come from one background. Sexual predators will target the most vulnerable and accessible children in society and there must be a focus on more than just race so we do not create new blindspots that prevent victims from being identified.”

Keir Starmer, who was director of public prosecutions when the Rochdale gangs were prosecuted, said that while he agreed that “political correctness

should not get in the way” of tackling the issue, it was also vital to rely on facts.

“The vast majority of sexual abuse cases do not involve those of ethnic minorities,” he told LBC Radio. “And so I’m all for clamping down on any kind of case. But if we’re going to be serious, we’ve got to be honest about what the overlook is.”

Dr Ella Cockbain, an associate professor of crime science at University College London who researches child sexual abuse and trafficking, said that while a better response on grooming gangs was needed, the Home Office report showed there was no evidence that one ethnic group was over-represented as offenders.

Braverman was “ignoring her department’s own evidence and the broader research base, and she’s choosing instead to mainstream hard-right talking points, and to push discredited stereotypes,” Cockbain told BBC Radio 4’s Today programme. “That’s really dangerous and reductive and it deflects attention away from the government’s own failings – it’s been systematically defunding core services that deal with child sexual abuse.”

Sabah Kaiser, who served as ethnic minority ambassador for the independent inquiry into child sexual abuse led by Alexis Jay, which [reported last year](#), said it was “very, very dangerous for the government to turn child sexual abuse into a matter of colour”.

She told Today: “Child sexual abuse does not have a skin colour, it doesn’t have a religion. It doesn’t have a culture. Child sexual abuse does not discriminate. And so therefore, it is really, really important that we as a nation have a singular societal response to this issue.

“It is really important that we do not turn this very, very important issue into an issue about colour. Because let’s be frank, let’s be serious: that grabs headlines, but that is not helpful for this topic.”

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The Genomics Medicine Service was launched in 2018 with the aim of bringing personalised medicine into the mainstream. Photograph: Danny Lawson/PA

[NHS](#)

Backlog in NHS genome service leaves families facing long wait for results

Exclusive: Experts say delays of more than a year risk children not getting relevant treatments or support

[Hannah Devlin](#) *Science correspondent*

[@hannahdev](#)

Mon 3 Apr 2023 05.41 EDT Last modified on Mon 3 Apr 2023 17.17 EDT

Families of children with rare genetic disorders are being made to wait more than a year for genome sequencing results under a flagship [NHS](#) programme, the Guardian has learned.

Senior doctors said worsening backlogs in the Genomics Medicines Service risked children not accessing treatments or support designed to give them the best outcomes. In other cases, parents wishing to know if their child has an inherited genetic condition in order to plan future pregnancies are being left in limbo for unacceptable time periods, experts said.

Many of the cases involve babies or children who have missed developmental milestones and whose doctor suspects an underlying genetic cause.

Prof Anneke Lucassen, the director of the Centre for Personalised Medicine at the University of Oxford, said: “Clinicians want to offer advanced technologies in the clinic, but the waiting lists have become too long to do this effectively. It’s not unusual for there to be more than a year between sending the sample and delivering the result to the patient.”

A senior consultant who wished to remain anonymous said “non-urgent” patients at her hospital – one of the UK’s largest – whose blood was sent for sequencing today would be projected to wait more than three years, based on current turnaround times and a backlog of 700 cases. “The system is in crisis for routine testing,” she said.

The Genomics Medicine Service, launched in 2018 by the then health secretary, Matt Hancock, aimed to bring personalised medicine into the mainstream by identifying genetic causes of rare diseases and cancer to allow more targeted treatments. A goal was set to sequence [500,000 patient genomes](#) over five years to form the basis of a DNA database that, it was hoped, would also become a valuable national asset for biomedical research and drug discovery. The government signed a £123m contract with the US company Illumina to deliver sequencing.

Lucassen said the government’s aim of widening access to genomics technologies was “laudable”, but the scale of ambition for the programme – and the 500,000 genome target – “seemed somewhat removed from the reality on the ground”.

She and other senior scientists say that while Illumina is delivering sequencing effectively, the service is being severely hampered by a lack of investment on the NHS side, citing an onerous, paper-based ordering system and shortages of scientists and clinical geneticists to carry out the detailed interpretation of sequence data and explain findings to patients.

Despite the extensive backlog, one clinician said doctors were being “bulldozed” into sending more samples for whole-genome sequencing when in some cases quicker targeted gene tests would be more clinically appropriate.

Urgent cases, such as critically ill patients or prenatal tests, are prioritised and results are typically delivered in weeks or days. However, there are long delays for non-urgent whole-genome sequencing, with an average turnaround time of 12 months at the South East Genomics regional hub and 314 days at the East Genomics service. The target time for these tests is 84 days.

Many cases involve babies or young children who have not met developmental milestones such as sitting, talking, walking and eating, where clinicians think there could be a genetic cause. Genome sequencing results often do not change the medical treatment, but a diagnosis can fast-track access to speech and language therapy or physiotherapy and be crucial for future reproductive choices. There are also some treatable conditions, including certain rare forms of epilepsy, where early intervention makes a significant difference.

“At the moment, the service is not set up to provide test results to families in a timely and consistent manner to families,” said Louise Fish, the chief executive of the charity Genetic Alliance UK. “You can’t have cutting-edge science and cut-price services.”

Fish said she was aware of a family who recently waited two years for a result. “That’s an unacceptably long wait if you’ve got a six-month-old and you’re not sure what’s wrong with them,” she said. “These are massive chunks of these tiny children’s lives.”

Some also expressed concern that the Genomics Medicine Service will not have the capacity to process the 300,000 genomes that the government has contracted Illumina to sequence over a five-year period, raising questions about whether the contract represents value for money. A freedom of information request showed that the NHS had sent just under 60,000 sequences to the company by the end of 2022, three years into the five-year contract.

An NHS spokesperson said: “The NHS is the first health system in the world to offer whole-genome sequencing as part of routine clinical care and has sequenced almost 50,000 entire genomes to date, helping transform the lives of thousands of patients and their families by providing a more accurate diagnosis, as well as more effective treatments.

“In October 2022, NHS England launched a rapid whole-genome sequencing service to provide results more quickly, diagnosing thousands of seriously ill children and babies with a likely monogenic [disorder] and providing them with the best treatment possible.”

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Razia Begum, who was attacked and raped by soldiers in 1971 and left for dead in a ditch. Photograph: Noor Alam/The Guardian

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‘We lay like corpses. Then the raping began’: 52 years on, Bangladesh’s rape

camp survivors speak out

In 1971, the Pakistan army began a brutal crackdown against Bengalis in which hundreds of thousands of women were detained and repeatedly brutalised. Only now are their stories beginning to be told

Warning: graphic information in this report may upset some readers

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[Thaslima Begum](#) in Dhaka

Mon 3 Apr 2023 03.00 EDTLast modified on Mon 3 Apr 2023 05.12 EDT

It was the summer of 1971, and the distant murmurs of a war that began months earlier had made their way to Rajshahi in [Bangladesh](#), across the north bank of the Padma River, to Noor Jahan's door. The 14-year-old was playing in the courtyard with her little sister when a loud military truck came to a halt outside the family's farmhouse.

Armed soldiers threw the two girls into the back of the truck, where they discovered several women sitting back to back with their hands tied. "They told us to look down and to remain silent," recalls Jahan, now 65. The truck continued through the small town, making several stops; each time loading

more women and girls into the back as if they were cattle. All the women were sobbing silently, Jahan describes, too afraid to make a sound.

“We had no idea where they were taking us. I watched from the corner of my eye as the marigold fields surrounding our home disappeared from sight,” says Jahan. “I remember clutching my sister’s hand tightly and being terrified the entire time. We had all heard about the Butcher of Bengal and his men.”



Noor Jahan: ‘The only time we saw daylight was when the door creaked open and the soldiers marched in. Then the raping would begin.’
Photograph: Noor Alam/The Guardian

The Butcher of Bengal was the nickname given to Pakistan’s military commander, Gen Tikka Khan, notorious for overseeing Operation Searchlight, a murderous crackdown on Bengali separatists in what was then East [Pakistan](#), which led to a genocidal crusade during the liberation war that followed.

But Jahan was about to become a victim of another brutal tactic of the Pakistani army. Alongside the killings, soldiers carried out a violent campaign of [mass rape against Bengali women and girls](#), in what [many](#)

[historians believe](#) amounted to a direct policy under Khan's command to impregnate as many women as possible with "blood from the west".

When the truck finally came to a stop, the girls found themselves in military barracks. The next few months were a blur for Jahan, who regularly passed out during her confinement. "We lay there like corpses, side by side. There were 20, maybe 30, of us confined to one room," she recalls tearfully. "The only time we saw daylight was when the door creaked open and the soldiers marched in. Then the raping would begin."

During the conflict that led to the birth of Bangladesh, military-style rape camps such as the one in which Jahan was held were set up across the country. Official estimates put the number of Bengali women raped at between 200,000 and 400,000, though even those numbers are considered conservative [by some](#).

Though ethnic rape was feature of Partition years earlier, what Bengali women experienced was one of the first recorded examples of rape being used as a "[consciously applied weapon of war](#)" in the 20th century. But despite its shocking scale, little remains known about it outside the region.

Ostracised

Within Bangladesh, widespread stigma led to the women being ostracised by their communities, and their horrifying accounts were often suppressed by shame. Today, a plaque on the wall of the Liberation War Museum in Dhaka says it all: "There are not many records of this hidden suffering." Yet in every corner of Bangladesh, there are survivors with terrifying testimonies.

In August 1971, Razia Begum had gone looking for her husband, Abu Sarkar, who had been missing for several days. She wandered anxiously through the abandoned streets of Tejturi Bazar in Dhaka, where Sarkar was a fruit seller, but he was nowhere to be found. Begum turned a corner, when she found herself face to face with a group of soldiers. She tried to run but was struck on the head with a rifle; a scar she still bears.

Begum was dragged to a nearby forest where she was raped repeatedly over a period of weeks. The soldiers were stationed close by and returned at

different times of the day. “They tied me to a tree and took turns raping me during their breaks,” says Begum, now 78. After they were done with her, the soldiers threw Begum into a shallow ditch.



Razia Begum: ‘I don’t like to think about what happened. But after all these years, it has been difficult for me to forget.’ Photograph: Noor Alam/The Guardian

A passerby eventually found her and took her to a shelter, which Begum describes as a lost-and-found for women who were abducted during the war. Such makeshift shelters had been set up in districts across the region for the many women who had been abducted and abandoned miles from their home.

“Women didn’t often leave the house during that time, so many of us didn’t even know our proper addresses,” says Begum. Begum’s husband tried four different shelters before he found her and took her home. “I don’t like to think about what happened,” says Begum. “But after all these years, it has been difficult for me to forget. I still have nightmares.”

On 16 December 1971, the war came to an abrupt end. Although independence had been won, thousands of Bengali women, such as Jahan and Begum, would be rescued from shelters and rape camps across the country.

Rescue mission

Maleka Khan, then secretary of the Bangladesh Girl Guides Association, was tasked with mobilising female volunteers to help with war recovery efforts. But after learning about the discovery of women who had been raped and held captive in underground bunkers near Jahangir Gate in Dhaka, Khan decided to lead the rescue mission herself.

When Khan arrived, she was shocked by what she saw. “There were women who were completely naked,” Khan, now 80, says. “They were abandoned in bunkers, where they had been kept and tortured during the war.” Khan bought the women clothes and, after helping them out, she describes carefully wrapping them in saris and blankets.

“They were in a state of shock and couldn’t speak,” says Khan. “Some had their hair chopped off, while others were heavily pregnant. There was an air of disbelief about the whole thing. It was all so horrific.”

The women were taken to safe houses provided by the government of the newly independent Bangladesh. In an effort to integrate rape survivors back into society, Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, the founding father of the nation, granted them the honorific of *Birangona* (war heroine) and [established a rehabilitation programme](#) for the women, of which Khan became executive director.



Maleka Khan: ‘There was an air of disbelief about the whole thing. It was all so horrific.’ Photograph: Courtesy of Khalid Hussain Ayon

“The rehabilitation programme provided shelter, counselling and training for survivors, while entrusting medical practitioners with the task of dealing with unwanted pregnancies,” Khan says. Two things then happened: temporary legislation to allow later abortions and an international adoption campaign for babies that had been abandoned.

Geoffrey Davis, an Australian doctor who specialised in late-term abortions, was brought in by the [World Health Organization](#) to oversee the high-risk procedures. He described how the Pakistani army would conduct their attacks on towns and villages during the war.

“They’d keep the infantry back and put artillery ahead and they would shell the hospitals and schools. And that caused absolute chaos in the town. And then the infantry would go in and begin to segregate the women,” Davis told Bina D’Costa, a professor at the Australian National University, in [his last interview](#) before he died in 2008.

“Apart from little children, all those who were sexually matured would be segregated,” he said. “And then the women would be put in the compound under guard and made available to the troops.

“Some of the stories they told were appalling – the women had it really rough. They didn’t get enough to eat. When they got sick, they received no treatment. Lots of them died in those camps.

“They all had nightmares. You never get over it. A lot of them had tremendous anxiety because we were foreign and they didn’t trust anybody who was foreign,” he said. “They didn’t know what we were going to do to them ... It was very difficult.”

The doctor also reflected on his conversations with soldiers who had taken part in the rapes but could not seem to understand what all the fuss was about.

We still haven’t received an apology from Pakistan for the horrendous war crimes it committed against the Bengali people

Saida Muna Tasneem

“They were in a prison in Comilla and in pretty miserable circumstances and they were saying: ‘What are they going on about? What were we supposed to have done? It was a war!’” said Davis. “The really disgraceful thing is that all these officers were trained in Sandhurst [Royal Military Academy] in England – and that was just not acceptable.”

Today, women in Bangladesh are finding ways to write Birangona women back into a history from which they had been largely erased. [Rising Silence](#), an award-winning documentary by the British-Bangladeshi playwright Leesa Gazi, preserves the testimony of some of those still alive.

Convictions

Uncovering the women’s stories left Gazi asking herself: “How can a woman’s body instigate so much hatred and violence? If we need to shame a family, we go after their daughters. If we need to shame a country, we go after their daughters. It’s the same mindset.”



Birangona women featured in the award-winning documentary *Rising Silence*. Photograph: Handout

Rape continues to be deployed in war as a tool of fear, a military strategy to terrorise communities and destroy their dignity. A recent [report](#) by the UN special representative on sexual violence in conflict listed 18 countries where women were being raped in war, and named 12 armies and police forces and 39 non-state actors.

“The repeated failure of the international community to bring perpetrators to account means these horrendous acts continue with impunity,” says Shireen Huq, co-founder of [Naripokkho](#), an activist group leading the fight for women’s rights in Bangladesh. Naripokkho was instrumental in supporting Rohingya [rape victims](#) in 2017, when Bangladesh once again found itself on the frontline of a rape epidemic, as more than 700,000 Rohingya Muslims crossed its borders to escape genocide in neighbouring Myanmar.

Among them were thousands of women and children who had suffered horrifying [sexual violence](#) at the hands of Burmese soldiers. Harrowing details emerged of women being tied to trees and subjected to rape for days, tortured by bamboo sticks and set on fire. Once again, in an echo of past

events, many of the women would also find themselves battling with the stigma of [unwanted pregnancies](#).



The hands of Razia Begum. Photograph: Noor Alam/The Guardian

“It has been 52 years and we still haven’t received an apology from Pakistan for the horrendous war crimes it committed against the Bengali people,” says Saida Muna Tasneem, Bangladesh’s high commissioner to the UK.

Bangladesh has already succeeded in getting genocide recognition from the Lemkin Institute for Genocide Prevention and Genocide Watch, and US Congress recently introduced a [historic resolution](#) recognising that a genocide occurred in 1971. The government is now lobbying for the UN and international community to recognise that a genocide was committed during the liberation war.

“Lack of recognition remains an open wound for the millions who were directly impacted by the atrocities that took place, many of whom are still alive today,” says Tasneem. “This dark chapter of history has been kept in the shadows for too long.”

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‘Identify how you want to identify, and God bless you!’: Michael Bublé on fans, faith and fitting in

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‘The natural world is alive and we are an intrinsic part of it’ ... John King
Photograph: Courtesy John King

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

A new start after 60: I found love after a painful divorce – and we moved to an

uninhabited island

John King retired early, and was teaching yoga when he met his partner Lynn. She opened up a spiritual path that led to three years off-grid in the beauty of the Inner Hebrides



[Emma Beddington](#)

Mon 3 Apr 2023 02.00 EDTLast modified on Mon 3 Apr 2023 11.41 EDT

As our video call struggles to find a connection, I see that John King's profile picture is Gandalf; his wife's sons called him that when they first met, he says. As a long-haired, white-bearded trainee druid, it probably comes with the territory.

It was actually Lynn, King's wife, who started him on the druidry path. They met at a yoga class that King was teaching, aged 61 (he had worked as an architect, retiring early). Smarting from a recent, painful divorce, he had no interest in a new relationship ("I didn't want anything to do with women; I'd had enough"). There was an attraction, though, and they started dating and talking about Lynn's interest in nature-based spirituality. King had had "a connection to the spirit" throughout his life, discovering Buddhism in his 30s, but was sceptical when Lynn mentioned druidry.

Gradually, though, something shifted. “I would think: ‘She’s ringing bells for me.’” They attended a druid gathering at Glastonbury. “It was such a lovely bunch of people. It’s very egalitarian – you get everyone from princes to paupers.” King began studying druidry. A year and a day after they met, they married in a handfasting ceremony (a register office one came later).

Ask how the Hertfordshire-based pair ended up moving to the tiny, virtually uninhabited Scottish island of Eilean Shona and they will answer: “A little bit of druid magic.” In 2014, when King’s centenarian aunt, whom he had cared for, died, it felt like the time for a new beginning. “Lynn said to me: ‘We have no need to live here; where do you want to live?’ King said New Zealand or Ardnamurchan in Scotland; Lynn vetoed New Zealand, so they set their sights on the remote Highland peninsula. Magic intervened at the festival of Imbolc, marking the start of spring. “It’s a time to plant seeds,” King says. “So I printed out a map of Ardnamurchan, folded it up and planted it during the ceremony, with an intent.” A few weeks later, King found a cottage on Eilean Shona, took Lynn to visit and quickly decided to take the plunge. “When we got back, I went on my computer and looked at the map that I buried; where I had folded it was Eilean Shona. There’s a synchronicity about the whole thing.”



John and his wife Lynn. Photograph: Courtesy John King

They moved in June 2014, knowing that they would be reliant on their own resources. The tiny stone cottage they rented was two miles from the island jetty down a stony track and a two-hour journey from the nearest shop. It had no electricity, central heating or phone line. “We had a fuel stove in the living room; we used candles; we had a gas cooker and gas-powered refrigerator.” Washing was done in plastic buckets: “I imported a mangle from the Amish in the US.”

Lynn, whom King teasingly called “five star” when they first met (“She was living a five-star life”), cooked; King would transport fuel by boat and quad bike to the cottage several times a year. “The first December, it was about -6C and I remember spending a day in wet snow bringing in half a ton of coal and thinking: ‘Bugger this for a game of soldiers!’”

Still, they were up for the challenge. King had a talent for logistics, honed in his architectural practice; the yoga meant he was “flexible and strong”. But it was his passion for climbing that made him think life off-grid was possible. “I climbed until I was 62. Climbing gave me the confidence to step into a space where I didn’t know if I could do it.”

His only struggle, he says, was the darkness: the north-facing cottage lost direct sunlight from the end of October to early March. For Lynn, it was the difficulty communicating with her elderly father: “There was at least a 20-minute walk to a mobile signal and a 40-minute walk to an internet terminal.”

Despite that, it was “a time of healing, renewal and personal growth”, King says. “An opportunity for us to step out of the normal world and do our own thing.” It was also an intensely spiritual experience, living enmeshed in nature. The one thing all druids agree on, explains King, is that “the natural world is alive and we are an intrinsic part of it. Interacting with nature in that visceral way, you saw the truth of that start to come out.” Life on Eilean Shona was governed by the tide, the light and the weather. “You’re intimately concerned with that: you watch the pattern of the waves, you see what the sunset is like, you walk outside and you sniff the air.” It allowed his perception of the natural world to broaden and deepen, he says.



‘Climbing gave me the confidence to step into a space where I didn’t know if I could do it’ ... John King. Photograph: Courtesy John King

The pair left the island in 2017 after three and a half years, conscious that their intensely physical island existence would not be possible for ever. They still live in remote Ardnamurchan, as closely connected to nature as ever. Their home borders an ancient oak wood; pine martens and red squirrels visit the garden; golden and sea eagles fly over and King has shared the nearby burn with an otter. Bathing in it is a vital daily practice. “You step out of the door, you’re stark naked, you’ve got bare feet. You immediately switch into what’s happened. This morning it was -3C, another day it’ll be hot or cold and wet; mud will squeeze up between your toes.” He swam in the darkness at 7am through this winter. “You look up and the moon is shining across the water at you; you look through the trees and all the stars are sprinkled above you. That’s when the magic happens.”

Now 73, King is continuing his druidry studies, which involve a three-grade mentored course of self-directed study, exploring the elements and connection to nature; he is in the third grade, considering how to engage more actively with society. [His blog](#) explores his druid life and “meeting nature on nature’s terms”.

The couple have no intention of moving again: Ardnamurchan allows them to live in harmony with their beliefs. “It’s a gentler life,” King says. He would like to be buried on their property. “But there’s not enough topsoil!”

Tell us: has your life taken a new direction after the age of 60?

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‘I hit bottom’ ... the star of Boom! Boom! The World vs Boris Becker in 1985, the year he won his first Wimbledon. Photograph: Andy Hayt/Courtesy of Apple

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‘Brutal monomaniac’: the gripping film about Boris Becker’s astonishing rise and spectacular fall

[Xan Brooks](#)

The tennis titan with a howitzer serve thought invincibility on the court meant impunity off it. Oscar-winner Alex Gibney reveals how he charted the star’s path from fortunes and trophies to squatters and prison



[@XanBrooks](#)

Mon 3 Apr 2023 01.00 EDTLast modified on Tue 4 Apr 2023 03.27 EDT

Boris Becker was the poster-boy of 1980s tennis, the 17-year-old upstart who turned Wimbledon on its head. He possessed a howitzer serve, a gambler’s swagger and a habit – at once exhilarating and alarming – of diving full-length in pursuit of seemingly irretrievable balls. No match was complete without the sight of Becker crashing to the ground like a cold-cocked prizefighter. Most times, he bounced straight back to his feet.

In 2018, the Oscar-winning film-maker [Alex Gibney](#) – a keen player himself – began preparing a documentary on Becker’s colourful life and times. He

envisaged the film as a celebration, a rollicking portrait of a sporting giant. But events intruded, the law intervened and his picture took a more dramatic route. “You never know what you’re going to find when you start to make a film,” Gibney says. “With a documentary, you write the script at the end not the beginning, based on what you discover along the way.”

In the film, Becker says he promptly acknowledged his daughter – whereas, at the time, he speculated that his sperm had been stolen by the Russian mafia

Above the doors to Centre Court sits the famous Kipling quote: “If you can meet with Triumph and Disaster and treat those two impostors just the same.” Fittingly, Gibney’s finished film, Boom! Boom! The World vs Boris Becker, arrives in two parts. The first, Triumph, spotlights Becker’s tennis heroics, charting his career-defining rivalries with the likes of Andre Agassi, Stefan Edberg and Ivan Lendl. But the second, Disaster, unfolds as grisly low comedy. It tackles his divorces, his paternity battles and the financial sharp practice that would finally land him in jail. This wasn’t the documentary that Gibney expected to make. I’m guessing it wasn’t the one Becker wanted either.

“To be candid,” says the director, “there is stuff in the film that Boris and I disagree about. He thinks I’ve portrayed an unnecessarily downbeat picture of his financial history and business forays. And obviously I don’t think I have. But that would be the one area of dispute. I think that, in the main, he believes it’s fair and truthful.”

Certainly, it makes for a more interesting ride, but then some of the best documentaries are the result of left-turns: [Capturing the Friedmans](#) began life as a tale of party entertainers; [The Thin Blue Line](#) as a portrait of a prosecution psychiatrist. Now we get Boom! Boom!, which frames the ignoble afterlife of a sporting immortal. On court in his prime, Becker was all but unplayable. Off it, he is revealed as a heedless man-child, his retirement awash with bad investments, tax evasion and insolvency. Last April, [he was convicted](#) of hiding assets valued at £2.5m and sentenced to 30

months in a British prison. “I’ve hit my bottom,” he tells Gibney through the tears. “I don’t know what to make of it all.”

Gibney won an Oscar in 2007 for [Taxi to the Dark Side](#), about the killing of a terrorist suspect at Bagram air base in Afghanistan. His other work has covered political scandal ([Client 9](#)), Scientology ([Going Clear](#)) and sexual abuse within the Catholic Church ([Mea Maxima Culpa](#)). But the film that Boom! Boom!’ most resembles is [The Armstrong Lie](#), his 2013 portrait of the cyclist Lance Armstrong, who was hailed for rebounding from testicular cancer only to be caught doping and subsequently stripped of his titles. Both films feature a charismatic, articulate athlete whose story doesn’t entirely add up.



Heyday ... Becker in 1986. Photograph: Action Press/Rex/Shutterstock/Courtesy of Apple

“Yes, but I think this is different from,” Gibney cautions. “Lance Armstrong prosecuted a lie in order to make himself more money. And that’s not really what Boris is doing. It’s more that he’s exaggerating the good parts while diminishing the parts of himself that are less flattering, just as we all do.” In the course of the film, Becker claims to have quit sleeping pills in 1990 when his own memoir states otherwise. He says he promptly acknowledged the daughter he fathered with a waitress at a London restaurant whereas, at

the time, he speculated that his sperm had been stolen by the Russian mafia. His story keeps changing; he's weaving a self-serving myth. But Gibney sensed that, in the moment, Becker believed every word that he said.

Maybe every sporting success is, by its nature, a tale of self-actualisation. Muhammad Ali was calling himself "the greatest" years before anybody else did, building a legend he would later inhabit and enhance. It's a confidence trick that athletes play on themselves – and if they play it well, the sky's the limit. "The stories that you have to tell yourself can then inspire you to great heights," Gibney says. "But those kinds of stories aren't so useful when dealing with personal or financial matters." Becker's current girlfriend, Lilian de Carvalho Monteiro, puts it more bluntly: "In order to be a champion, you have to believe you're invincible. That probably brings you to a level where you think you're untouchable in real life."

Gibney interviewed Becker at length back in 2019. He spoke with him again in April 2022, two days before he was sentenced. Poignantly, the film cross-cuts footage of the German star's youthful dash to a trio of Wimbledon titles with shots of him padding around the scene of past glories. He looks corroded and defeated, a latter-day Henry VIII. It's as though we are looking at two different men, but of course they are related and the film joins the dots. Triumph and Disaster aren't isolated impostors. The one points to the other as sure as night follows day.



‘There is stuff in the film Boris and I disagree about’ ... Becker and director Alex Gibney at the Berlin film festival. Photograph: Nadja Wohlleben/Reuters

“Match point at Wimbledon,” he says at one point with a sigh. “I can’t imagine such a high again.” And therein lies the problem. It was Becker’s fate to burn too brightly too soon; to be pitched towards obsolescence at the age of 31. Experience had taught him that whatever he touched turned to gold. So he blundered into ill-conceived business ventures and kept spending the millions he was no longer earning on court.

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To win at that level you have to be monomaniacal – what made him great as a player didn't serve him well in real life

The film shows his unseemly slide from the summit. His Mallorcan finca is overrun by hippie squatters. His diplomatic passport (which was meant to safeguard him against bankruptcy proceedings) turns out to be fake. He is befuddled and exhausted; the passport is the final straw. “I said, ‘God, why me?’” he complains to the director. “Why me *again*?”

In the event, Becker served eight months of his sentence. He is now out of jail and rebuilding his life. Gibney thinks prison time has given him some much-needed perspective. But the jury is still out and old stories die hard.



‘You have to be a little bit crazy’ ... Boom! Boom! The World vs Boris Becker. Photograph: Courtesy of Apple

Whatever his issues with the film, Becker duly showed up for its premiere in Berlin. Speaking at the press conference, he admitted he had made some mistakes in his life. He then went on to suggest that great men break the rules. “Look, it’s very difficult to win Wimbledon at 17,” he explained. “You

have to be a little bit crazy, borderline crossing the line, doing things nobody has ever done before in order to achieve what nobody has ever achieved before. You expect world champions to be like everybody else? Well, we are different.” It was a gallant defence. It was also baloney. Becker sounded as if he were making a case for moral exceptionalism, somehow equating historic tax fraud with an audacious dive volley.

“Yeah,” Gibney says, grimacing, “but I’m not sure he’d be aware of that. He wasn’t saying that consciously. He’s just saying that people like him behave differently. And I agree with him, insofar as what made him great as a tennis player didn’t serve him well in real life. Sometimes people find a way to channel what others might see as a vice, in a manner that’s extraordinarily valuable to themselves and society. Boris has an enormous appetite for risk. So how do you reckon with that? How do you balance all that with who you have to be off the court? To win at that level you have to be monomaniacal and brutal. You have to be extraordinarily bold and take enormous gambles. Boris is a particular case in that he went to prison, but those are the traits shared by many other great athletes. You have to be a little bit crazy to do what they do.”

One of Becker’s most famous victories came at the 1988 New York Masters. The final pitted him against Lendl, the five-time reigning champ, with the title decided in a tense fifth-set tiebreak. On match point, both men duked it out from the baseline, dragging each other through the longest rally of the contest until Becker gambled on a backhand that clipped the net and dropped dead. It was a shot of fine margins, an outrageous crowning winner; another piece of the legend slotting into place. The luck was with him that day. Afterwards not so much.

[Boom! Boom! The World vs Boris Becker](#) premieres globally on 7 April on Apple TV+

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2023.04.03 - Opinion

- As a journalist, my partner fought for the facts. Yet the truth of his own medical condition was kept from him
- In the post-Brexit wreckage, just one Tory strategy remains: the theatre of cruelty
- Can 'monk mode' help improve my productivity?
- I lead a litter-picking group, but I will always defend litterers. This is why



‘Henry McDonald stood up for those without a voice – the victims. In the UK, doctors are failing to do the same for patients: Henry was one of them.’

[OpinionHealth](#)

As a journalist, my partner fought for the facts. Yet the truth of his own medical condition was kept from him

[Charlotte Blease](#)



Most UK patients can't access their records online. As a result, the end of Henry's life was made needlessly traumatic

- Henry McDonald [obituary](#) – Northern Irish journalist and author

Mon 3 Apr 2023 01.00 EDT Last modified on Mon 3 Apr 2023 09.14 EDT

In February, my partner, [Henry McDonald](#), who wrote for this newspaper, lost his fight with cancer. I say “fight” because those were his words and, as a journalist, Henry chose them carefully. Reporting on the Troubles in Northern Ireland for more than two decades, and some of the worst atrocities that befell this part of the world, he knew more than most that words mattered. Above all, Henry stood up for those without a voice – the victims.

In the UK, doctors are failing to do the same for patients. Henry was one of them. Across this country, most patients still don't have access to their online medical records. Many doctors are [against allowing it](#). As part of the [new GP contract](#), NHS England announced early in March that all patients accessing primary care should be offered access to their online records, via the NHS app and other portals, by October. The British Medical Association opposes the move, marking yet [another delay](#) in an endless saga.

Doctors seem to think patients like Henry, who had survived multiple paramilitary death threats, lack the emotional fortitude or capacity to read about their own health. Despite progress in England, [four in five](#) primary care practices still fail to offer online access – and because few British hospitals have digitised their health records, online access to specialist care is beyond the realm of the possible.

GPs worry about this radical change, fearing additional burdens for their work and an onslaught of calls or emails from anxious and confused patients. They cite risks to patients' safety and legal woes as their reasons for resistance.

However, the experience in [other countries](#) challenges their concerns. Patients in Estonia, Finland, Norway and Sweden have been granted secure online record access for years – in some regions, for more than 15 years. In April 2021, the US followed suit: the 21st Century Cures Act mandated that all patients should be offered online access to their full clinical records without charge. Patients can now read their primary care and hospital records, and even test results, online. Doctors were cynical in these countries too, but after access the sky didn't fall in. Patients could be “trusted” to read their own information. Meanwhile, the [benefits to patients](#) are legion: better understanding and remembering what the doctor said – and feeling more engaged with, and in control of, their health.

Henry was first treated for stomach cancer in 2018. With each passing season, he seemed healthier and stronger, his febrile energy returning. He published a [second novel](#), completed a third, and ghostwrote a political memoir, all while continuing in frontline journalism. We dared to believe that he would soon achieve the milestone of being cancer-free for five years.

Last September, Henry's health took a serious downturn. He was admitted to hospital for what doctors believed was a gallbladder problem, then sepsis. Henry moved wards and then hospitals, and was seen by multiple teams and specialists. Although his care was truly excellent, in Henry's own words, “the communication was appalling”.

Some doctors seemed diffident about divulging the facts, preferring to speak in infantilising euphemisms. At one early visit, Henry – who quizzed

politicians and terrorists for a living – was informed by a specialist: “This could be a *bad* thing or a *very bad* thing.” At the other extreme was a tendency to hide behind impenetrable medical jargon. Of course, there were rare exceptions: Henry credited one of his doctors as particularly lucid in explaining complex medical facts and giving it to him straight. But even in this best-case scenario, the flow of information was spluttering and sporadic.

Throughout his illness, unlike patients in other countries, Henry never had immediate access to his numerous test results and what they meant. Since most clinical conversations took place when Henry was utterly exhausted after yet another night of broken sleep on the ward, he struggled to recall everything the doctors said. As a trained journalist, Henry could use shorthand, but life-or-death medical conversations are not the place for detached jottings. Because many of these meetings happened outside visiting hours, neither I nor Henry’s family could be there to take notes or ask questions.

The upshot was that Henry, and in turn, we – his loved ones – were often in the dark, struggling to piece together fragments of secondhand information. At an already stressful time, lack of access only exacerbated the distress.

Doctors seldom stop to consider the harms this way of working causes patients, preferring instead to overestimate their own priestly role in medical conversations. Studies of patient experience offer stark home truths. In countries that have made the transition, such as [Sweden](#), patients with cancer say transparency is crucial for their mental wellbeing and to help them prepare for appointments. In the US, a staggering [95% of patients](#) say they prefer bad news to no news – even if it means reading test results online before talking with a doctor.

Lack of access also created confusion. After weeks of medical examinations, one doctor told Henry he was “cancer-free”. Was this a medical miscommunication? Did Henry misinterpret what was said? Yet he was utterly adamant those were the words used. With online record access we might have been in a [better position to query this](#), or at least ask if all the test results were in yet, avoiding another rollercoaster of distress.

Two months before he died, Henry's medical team pulled the blue curtains round his hospital bed. The doctor spoke with compassion and candour, albeit within earshot of the other patients on the ward, to tell us Henry's stomach cancer had returned. It would not be treatable. Even in this – the worst of all possible scenarios – lack of access cast a shadow. "The present medical situation," we were told, "began in February." *February?* Was there a crucial test result we didn't know about? We were at a loss about what this meant.

Henry was angry. He was also stoical and practical, and exercised his legal right to request copies of his medical records to seek second opinions. The medical staff were amenable, but it took almost four weeks to obtain copies. Nor did we blame the clinicians: we recognised the pressures they worked under. We knew they could probably have done without our constant emails. Then again, how else were we to access Henry's records?

We finally obtained them – via post. As we did not own a scanner, a friend volunteered to convert them into pdfs so we could send them to other clinics via more modern but less secure methods – ie email. We immediately felt slightly more in control of an already dire situation. We pursued our medical contacts in the US and the Republic of Ireland. Nothing could be done. But we knew we'd tried everything.

Henry was intensely trusted as a journalist in our troubled corner of the world, because he stood up for justice and the facts, and didn't underestimate his readers. He never caved into tribalism or romancing about the past. If only the medical profession could be more like him.

- Charlotte Blease is a research affiliate in digital psychiatry at the Beth Israel Deaconess Medical Center, Harvard Medical School and at the Department of Women's and Children's [Health](#), Uppsala University

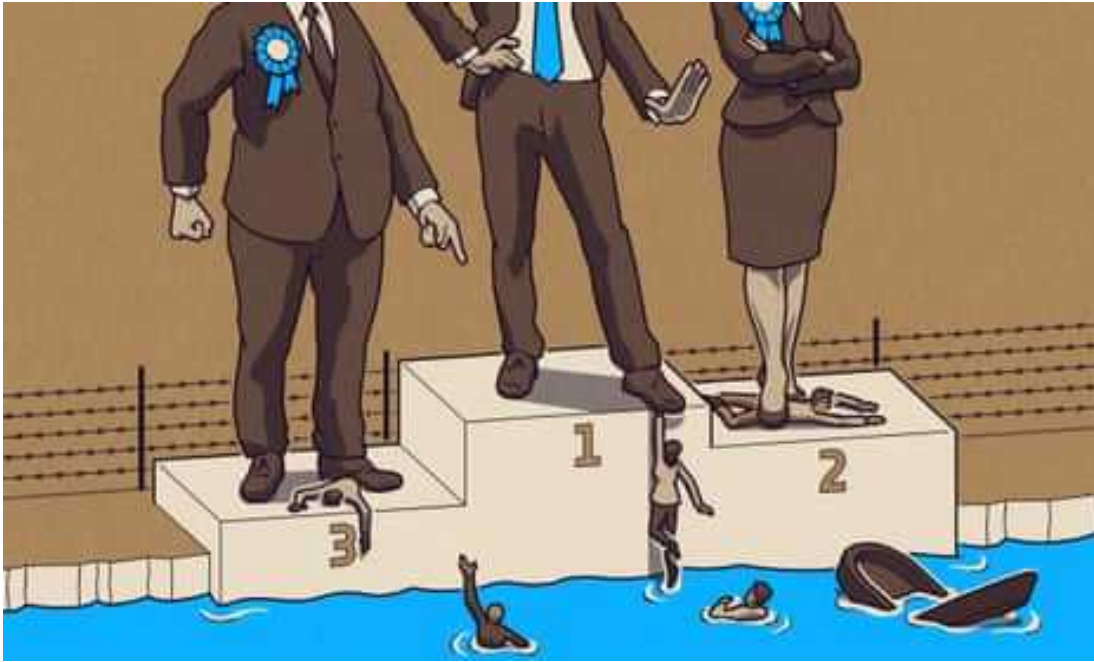


Illustration: Matt Kenyon/The Guardian

[Opinion](#)[Immigration and asylum](#)

In the post-Brexit wreckage, just one Tory strategy remains: the theatre of cruelty

[John Harris](#)



Ministers have abandoned even the patina of basic decency while targeting asylum seekers. Anything to distract from their failures elsewhere

Sun 2 Apr 2023 08.24 EDTLast modified on Sun 2 Apr 2023 13.14 EDT

Five years ago, I went to Coventry to meet a married couple from Sri Lanka who were stuck in the [UK's asylum system](#). Under the auspices of a deal between the Home Office and one of its favoured private contractors, they and their two children lived in a house just outside the city centre. Two of the rooms were riddled with damp. A faulty central heating system meant the house was either impossibly cold, or so hot that it inflamed their baby daughter's eczema.

Then, as now, the law dictated that neither parent could work, so the family were living on an allowance of just over £20 a day. "We worry about the kids' health," they told me: everything they said was full of dread and anxiety, thanks to a day-to-day existence that was seemingly going to grind on indefinitely.

I was introduced to that family by the pressure group Migrant Voice, which had just published a report about standards of accommodation for people

seeking asylum. The testimony it included painted the same awful picture: “One room is always wet when it rains, so no one sleeps there”; “Currently I am experiencing a horde of flies because of dead rats in the kitchen.” To make things even grimmer, there was an abiding sense of a system whose dysfunction and sclerosis were most of the way to being completely intentional, in keeping with the government’s “hostile environment” doctrine.

At that point, there were about 40,000 such people, housed by the Home Office and awaiting decisions on asylum claims. Now that number has ballooned to [more than 160,000](#), and the conversation about this area of policy has shifted to all that noise and controversy about hotels. Amid [accounts of people](#) – including children – staying in such facilities for well over a year, another report from Migrant Voice is due in about a fortnight. Though it will acknowledge that some just about meet the required standards, it will also describe people living and sleeping alongside complete strangers, with overburdened toilets and bathrooms, a complete lack of privacy and dignity, and security guards arbitrarily demanding to know the details of their hour-to-hour movements.

Meanwhile, the descent of Suella Braverman’s ministry speeds on. On Sunday, the home secretary – who says she wants to be “a doer, someone of action” – did a characteristically inflammatory [round of interviews](#), defending her intention to send people to Rwanda as she was reminded that only five years ago, 12 refugees were [killed by police](#) there in the midst of protests about their treatment (“I’m not familiar with that particular case,” she said, which is quite an answer).

Robert Jenrick: asylum seekers' housing to meet 'essential living needs and nothing more' – video

She was also asked about plans to house asylum seekers in requisitioned “barges” and disused military facilities. “We are looking at all sorts of lands [sic], sites and vessels,” she insisted. It all reflected a plain political fact – that as the illegal migration bill goes through parliament and asylum gives way to a policy of summary deportation, even the patina of basic decency has evaporated. “Accommodation for migrants should meet their essential

living needs and [nothing more](#),” said Braverman’s ministerial colleague Robert Jenrick last week. And this is the polite version.

Jonathan Gullis, the increasingly infamous Conservative MP for Stoke-on-Trent North, recently made a [speech in the Commons](#) that, in its own very small way, may well mark post-Brexit politics’ moral nadir. When it came to the future accommodation of asylum seekers, he said, “there are disused army bases, and I have no issue with the use of Portakabins or tents. They are perfectly acceptable short-term accommodation [sic], so long as we deliver on the policy of ensuring that people are removed after 28 days to a safe third country. Rwanda is perfectly safe.”

By way of constant mood music, there are the outpourings of Lee Anderson, a deputy chair of the Conservative party, the MP for a seat in the old Nottinghamshire coalfield, and a newly appointed presenter on GB News, which will be paying him [an annual £100,000](#) – in return, presumably, for continuing to insist that asylum seekers ought to be [“sent back the same day”](#), and that recent far-right protests outside some of the aforementioned hotels have been made up of [“normal family people”](#).

Which brings us to an integral element of modern politics: the idea that all this cruelty is simply what the public demand, not least in the fabled “red wall”. Clearly, some people have pungent opinions about refugees and the asylum system, and this is true in many of the post-industrial places that switched from Labour to the [Conservatives](#) in 2019. As ever, it is not hard to work out part of the reason why: if you have always had the sense of being neglected, and everyday life is often insecure and precarious, then hyped-up accounts of massed new arrivals (who are also said to be “illegal”) and clear evidence of a system in disarray will sound not just like the stuff of administrative chaos, but an indirect warning of even less housing, even lower wages and even more fragile public services.

That is not to claim that the nastiness of some people’s views is merely an expression of poverty and inequality, and thereby absolve them of responsibility. But it is also worth looking at all this from the other end of the moral telescope: if there were more homes and secure jobs, and we had seen even the beginnings of the rebalancing that was promised after the

[Brexit](#) referendum, does anyone think that these people and places would be nearly as irate as the Tories claim? I don't.

To understand the tensions within red-wall Conservatism, you have to keep an eye on two sets of headlines. One is all about the cynical blurring of issues relating to refugees and immigration, the government's appalling running down of its own asylum system, and legislation that has more to do with posturing than anything halfway practical, let alone ethical. The other is about a very different set of promises and pledges, and how few of them have been delivered.

The government has [spent less than 10%](#) of its £4.8bn levelling up fund since it was launched in 2020; even some of the most ambitious projects have barely been started. And however much money has been awarded for local regeneration bids, austerity goes on. In Gullis's home patch, the Tory council may have recently announced [big regeneration plans](#), but it is implementing a [cuts programme](#) that takes in mental health care, street lighting, libraries, transport for children with special needs, and more. On Anderson's home turf, the key grant the district council receives from Whitehall has [gone from £15m to £100,000](#) over the past 10 years.

As an election looms, a panicked government has a new strategy that is actually very old: kicking around some of the weakest and most vulnerable people, in the hope that organised nastiness might restore the air of effectiveness that its failures have fatally undermined. The Labour party is too nervous about the red wall to point out much of this. But it is there, as clear as day: politics as a constant theatre of cruelty.

Some people, it seems, must suffer trauma, intolerable living conditions, sleepless nights and what amounts to internment, so the voters who seem to have gone back to Labour might somehow change their minds. The morals that calculation reveals are obviously bankrupt: if there are any halfway decent Tories left, it might be time to finally speak up.

- John Harris is a Guardian columnist
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‘I’m a big fan of silence’ ... Photograph: Godong/Getty Images

[OpinionWork & careers](#)

Can ‘monk mode’ help improve my productivity?

[Emma Beddington](#)



On TikTok, thousands of men suggest monasticism will make us more effective human beings. But there is something melancholy about all the self-optimising

Mon 3 Apr 2023 02.00 EDT

They're hard at work in the [TikTok](#) productivity mines, which is more than can be said for me. Among the things I have done that were not my intended work recently, I listened to a podcast where I discovered a colleague writes more in a "bad week" than I manage in a month. It didn't make me work harder, but my inner critic redoubled its attacks: "[Nameless colleague] would have written 4,000 words in the time it took you to Google 'DIY skin tag removal', you dolt."

Time to dip back into Hack-tok, where the fire-emoji bros have rediscovered "monk mode". It's not a new idea – apparently people have been [Googling it since 2004](#) – but got a boost in 2020 from Jay Shetty's [How to Think Like a Monk](#), which applied the principles Shetty learned in his time as a novice monk in an ashram (meditation, visualisation, "transformational forgiveness") to contemporary capitalism.

The 2023 [#monkmode TikTokers](#) (28.3m views) are mainly men, urging us to apply monastic discipline to our working lives: routine and focusing on a single task with no technological or other distractions. Beyond that, it varies. One instructs me to meditate, cut out alcohol and “sleep eight hours every single night” – if I could do that, mate, I wouldn’t need #monkmode. Another sets out three pillars of TikTok monasticism – isolation, introspection and improvement – but then explains: “I really craved movement so I went to starbs [that’s Starbucks] for two hours, scheduling chats.” Basically, monk mode seems to be whatever you can sell with sufficient conviction in 45 seconds. It seems melancholy, all this joyless solo self-optimising, but who am I, a woman trying to remove her own skin tags, to judge? I’m a big fan of silence, and while I have all the spirituality of a Twix, if monasticism can up my godless productivity, I’m in.

I’m good with the kind of monks I vaguely know about from my history degree: western, pre-Reformation ones. I ask my friend F, who is writing a novel featuring a medieval contemplative order, for advice. “Write longhand in a ‘scriptorium’,” she orders me, before she gets distracted by aesthetics, telling me I need a tonsure (“Take [your wig](#) off!”), and to “wear something floaty with nothing underneath” (she’s never experienced a Yorkshire spring). Another friend asks what kind of monk I’m emulating. I fall deep into a Wikipedia monk hole comparing various orders, neatly illustrating exactly why I need #monkmode.

I wrench myself offline and try to write longhand. It’s fast, but I can’t tell if what I’m producing is any good and hate not seeing my word count (when I type it up, there’s way too much). Then I want a break, but don’t know what to do. Without Instagram to stare at, I practise a 16th-century mass we’re singing in choir – it seems appropriate – and illuminate my article with some monastic marginalia: a heron with a human face in a “fashionable hat” as doodled by [14th-century Worcester monks on Aristotle’s Physics](#).

By lunchtime I’m also “really craving movement”, so I head to the ruins of the local Benedictine order, St Mary’s Abbey. I wander round, imagining how cold and unpleasant it would have been to live there with 50 men. Then I sit on a stone, put my wig on backwards and take a tonsure-adjacent selfie to amuse F. Obviously I have to turn the internet back on to send it, which causes me to fall off the wagon entirely, scrolling feverishly amid the ancient

stones, gorging on internet arguments and pictures of cakes. This one-woman monastery is corrupt and lax; just dissolve me already.

I return home chastened and get back offline, replacing Twitter with staring out of the window at birds, which I expect bored monks did too, without the ability to Google: “Chiffchaff or willow warbler?” My mind, I find, fights terribly against just doing a single thing until it’s done. I already knew I hated multitasking, but I seem to be incapable of monotasking too. What’s left? Become a TikTok guru, I suppose.

- Emma Beddington is a Guardian columnist

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Leila Taheri at Welsh Harp (aka Brent reservoir) in north-west London.
Photograph: Alicia Canter/The Guardian

OpinionWaste

**I lead a litter-picking group, but I will
always defend litterers. This is why**

[Leila Taheri](#)



If any anger is justified, it should be directed at those who create our throwaway culture and make people's lives a misery

Mon 3 Apr 2023 03.00 EDTLast modified on Wed 5 Apr 2023 05.31 EDT

Rubbish seems to be everywhere you look. As one of the leaders of a community wetlands group in north-west London, I've witnessed a cormorant diving into a bobbing flotilla of plastic, shores made up of plastic and a heron starving to death due to red nylon tangled around its beak.

Last month, a new disease caused solely by plastics was [discovered](#) in seabirds. And in February, our group, [Friends of the Welsh Harp](#), removed *four tonnes* of rubbish from a river and the surrounding woodland. Our rivers are not only open sewers, they're also open dustbins that lead to the sea.

You'd think, based on this, that I'd feel angry at those who litter – that I'd resent them. But I don't. And I believe you should resist that temptation, too. Let me explain why.

I investigated why people litter as part of a psychoanalytic studies MA, and found that, on an individual level, littering is a kind of revenge on society – it's a litmus test of how people are feeling. And judging by what I see on a daily basis, many people are feeling alienated, disconnected and excluded. They are angry and are taking it out on the world.

Is that any surprise, when local communities are broken or nonexistent, their deep local knowledge lost and connection to nature severed? In a time of “polycrisis” (climate breakdown, cost of living crisis, assaults on democracy, threats to the NHS), negative feelings about the world and yourself have got to go somewhere. Nature – exposed, unprotected, wild and often neglected – is a perfect place to dump those rubbish feelings, whether that's doing it physically with litter, or going on a walk to destress.

The impulse to litter comes from a feeling that we cannot really affect the world, negatively or positively – after all, what impact can one individual have compared with a polluting company, let alone a whole polluting country? It comes from a lack of belief in the power of the individual to effect change, which in itself is rooted in feelings of despair and hopelessness. Such feelings are understandable when the scale of the environmental crisis is as staggering as it is now.



Volunteers clear litter off the beach and foreshore at Aberystwyth, Wales.
Photograph: aberCPC/Alamy

When we assume the moral fault lies only with the litterers, we let those creating the systemic problems off the hook. After all, littering exposes our economic model for what it is: profit-driven, unaccountable and amoral. Littering is fuelled by manufacturers that continue to push hard to generate waste for profit. In the 1950s, a speaker at a plastics conference announced to delegates that “your future is in the garbage wagon!” The public were actually taught by these profiteers to throw things away, so they keep making and selling. Fast forward to today, and plastic production is set to [triple](#) by 2060. If we really want things to change, if we want our green and blue spaces back, we need real legislative change on plastic packaging.

Yet as local authorities and government agencies become even more cash-strapped, it's convenient for them to ignore all this and blame the individuals who litter and flytip, then leave the cleanup to volunteer groups like ours. It suits them, too, to minimise the problem: the Canal and River Trust (CRT), which has guardianship of all of Britain's waterways including the Welsh Harp, played down the plastic pollution crisis by describing it as “unsightly rubbish”. Natural England, the government's adviser for the environment, supports our litter-picking efforts “to improve the aesthetic” of these areas.

What can be done? Shaming and denouncing litterers' attitudes does not work. It leads to stubborn refusal and entrenches litterers more deeply in their position, reinforcing their negative behaviours. Rather than a blaming, moralistic attitude towards them, we might do better adopting a more thoughtful and understanding stance. “Hello, how are you?” is a much better starting point than “[Don't be a tosser](#)”. If any anger is justified, it should be directed at profiteering manufacturers and our throwaway culture. We must help people overcome the ecological alienation that ultimately leads them to mistreat their environment. Overcoming this alienation means forming attachments, which means caring.

To be caring, we need to feel cared for. Our local authorities, government and environmental groups need to be open and honest, and show that they understand and care. They should face reality, recognise the staggering scale

of issues, and apologise for past neglect. An open, honest society mourns the fact that the earth can't endlessly give – that it has limitations. It recognises that it must engage in actual, practical care of humans, wildlife and plant life through thoughtful action and collaboration. It must support volunteer groups such as ours that are doing meaningful eco-care work (like many other caring professions, our work is undervalued).

As individuals, when we reconnect with nature and enjoy whatever green and blue spaces we have locally, preferably with others, love soon blossoms. As with human relationships, you soon find yourself caring and even feeling responsible. You find yourself heartbroken when something bad happens. You fight for these places and know you just can't live without them. And if you can get some bureaucratic organisation to feel the same way, too, I'll buy you a drink.

- Leila Taheri is co-leader of Friends of the Welsh Harp and an associate creative director
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Sanna Marin suffers defeat in Finland election as SDP beaten into third place

Marin says ‘democracy is always a wonderful thing’ as her Social Democrats come third behind rightwing NCP and nationalist Finns parties

[Jon Henley](#) *Europe correspondent*

[@jonhenley](#)

Sun 2 Apr 2023 20.09 EDTFirst published on Sun 2 Apr 2023 16.27 EDT

Finland’s prime minister, [Sanna Marin](#), has lost her battle to stay in power after her centre-left Social Democratic party (SDP) was narrowly beaten into third place in a cliffhanger election by its conservative and far-right rivals.

With all of the votes counted on Sunday, the right-wing National Coalition party (NCP) won 20.8% of the vote, with the populist, nation-first Finns party scoring 20.1%. Marin’s SDP took 19.9% of the vote. Voter turnout was 71.9%.

Marin congratulated the election winners during her concession speech, but hailed an improvement in both her party’s vote share and its projected number of MPs. “It’s a really good achievement, even though I didn’t finish first today,” she told supporters in Helsinki.

Sanna Marin says 'democracy has spoken' as she concedes defeat in Finland election – video

“Democracy has spoken, the Finnish people have cast their vote, and the celebration of democracy is always a wonderful thing,” she added. “We have good reason to be happy about this result.”

The NCP's leader, Petteri Orpo, told the public broadcaster, Yle, that the result was a "big victory ... a strong mandate for our policies", adding that his party would be leading the coalition talks. Finns leader Riikka Purra called it an "an excellent result".

Orpo, a 53-year-old former finance minister, said the Nordic country's solidarity with Kyiv would remain strong during his tenure.

"First to Ukraine: we stand by you, with you," Orpo told the Associated Press at NCP's victory event. "We cannot accept this terrible war. And we will do all that is needed to help Ukraine, Ukrainian people because they fight for us. This is clear."

Finland, which shares a long border with Russia, cleared the last hurdles of becoming a Nato member earlier in the week as alliance members Turkey and Hungary signed off the country's membership bid.

Marin, 37, became the world's youngest prime minister when she assumed the leadership of the SDP – and the Finnish premiership – in 2019 and has successfully led the country through the Covid pandemic and [to the brink of Nato membership](#).

Marin's determination to enjoy a social life also made headlines, with fans hailing her as a rising star of the centre-left and model for a new generation of young female leaders. Critics say her behaviour has at times been inappropriate for her office.

She was forced to [apologise and took a drug test](#) last year, but also defended her right to party, after photos and video emerged of her drinking and dancing with friends.

Her personal popularity remained high, but with a recession forecast and inflation surging, the opposition leaders' accusations of excessive government borrowing and inflated public spending – along with their pledges to impose tough cuts, particularly on welfare budgets – hit home.

In Finland, the largest party traditionally gets the first shot at forming a coalition to obtain a majority, meaning Marin's four-year term as prime

minister has come to a close – even if the SDP could yet form part of the new coalition.

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The NCP won 48 seats in the Nordic country's 200-seat parliament, 10 more than in the outgoing assembly, while the Finns took 46 – an increase of seven MPs – and the SDP 43, an improvement of three.

Orpo has promised to slash spending on unemployment and housing benefits, while Purra – whose Finns party was part of a coalition government from 2015 to 2017 – said its priority was to cut non-EU immigration, promising also to focus on climate, crime and energy policies if it is part of the new coalition.

“I trust the Finnish tradition of negotiating with all parties, and trying to find the best possible majority government for Finland,” Orpo told the AP.

“And you know what is important for us? It's that we are an active member of the European Union. We build up Nato-Finland, and we fix our economy. We boost our economic growth and create new jobs. These are the crucial, main, important issues we have to write into the government program.”

The NCP leader, who has said the party did not rule out working with anyone, is now expected to start sounding out other leaders to begin trying to form a new coalition government from Monday, a process likely to take several weeks.

He could try to assemble a right-leaning “blue-black” coalition with the Finns and one or more smaller parties, but may also decide to pursue a cross-spectrum “blue-red” alliance with the SDP and its allies, an outcome analysts see as perhaps most likely, despite significant policy differences.

His task is complicated by the fact that the SDP and two of its current five-party coalition, the Greens and the Left Alliance, have already ruled out any alliance with the Finns, which Marin called “openly racist” during the campaign.

Of the two others, the Swedish People’s party – a moderate party representing Swedish-speaking Finns, unrelated to the Swedish far-right party of the same name – has also said it is “very unlikely” to partner with the far-right party.

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Researchers near Japan capture footage of deepest fish ever recorded underwater - video

[Fish](#)

Scientists find deepest fish ever recorded at 8,300 metres underwater near Japan

Footage of unknown snailfish captured by researchers from Western Australia and Tokyo in Izu-Ogasawara trench

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[Donna Lu](#) *Science writer*

[@donnadlu](#)

Mon 3 Apr 2023 02.40 EDTLast modified on Mon 3 Apr 2023 10.14 EDT

Scientists have captured footage of a fish swimming more than 8km underwater, setting a new record for the deepest fish ever recorded.

The animal, an unknown snailfish species belonging to the genus *Pseudoliparis*, was filmed at a depth of 8,336 metres in the Izu-Ogasawara trench, south-east of Japan.

The footage was captured from an autonomous deep ocean vessel as part of a two-month expedition that began last year.

A few days after the snailfish was filmed, scientists caught two other snailfish, of the species *Pseudoliparis belyaevi*, in the Japan trench from a depth of 8,022 metres.

The team said these are the first fish to have ever been collected from a depth greater than 8,000 metres.

Scientists from the Munderoo-University of Western Australia Deep Sea Research Centre and the Tokyo University of Marine Science and Technology had set out to explore the Japan, Izu-Ogasawara and Ryukyu trenches – which are 8,000, 9,300 and 7,300 metres deep respectively – as part of a decade-long study into the deepest fish populations in the world.

Using unmanned submersibles known as landers, researchers deployed baited cameras in the deepest part of these trenches.

There are more than 400 known species of snailfish, which live in a wide variety of habitats ranging from shallow waters to the darkness of the deep ocean.

The expedition's chief scientist and founder of the Munderoo-UWA Deep Sea Research Centre, Prof Alan Jamieson, said specific adaptations enabled some snailfish species to live about 1,000 metres deeper than the next deep-sea fish.

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At 8,000 metres underwater, the pressure is 800 times greater than at the ocean surface.

“When you picture what the deepest fish in the world should look like, the chances are it's gnarly, black, with big teeth and small eyes,” Jamieson said. “Chances are it's got nothing to do with deep sea – that has to do with being dark.”

Deep-sea adaptations tended to be less visibly obvious, he said. “One of the reason [snailfish] are so successful is they don’t have swim bladders. Trying to maintain a gas cavity is very difficult at high pressure.”

Snailfish also do not have scales, but instead have a gelatinous layer that Jamieson describes as a “physiologically inexpensive adaptation”.

The deepest individual caught on film was a juvenile fish. Unlike other deep-sea fish species, young snailfish are generally found at greater depths than adults.

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“Because there’s nothing else beyond them, the shallow end of the range overlaps with a bunch of other deep-sea fish, so putting juveniles at that end probably means they’ll get eaten,” Jamieson said. “When you get down to the mega deep depths, 8,000 plus [metres], a lot of them are very, very small.”

The depth of the Izu-Ogasawara fish beats the previous record of 8,178m, set in 2017 by a Mariana snailfish in the Mariana trench, by 158 metres.

Jamieson, who also made the [2017 discovery](#), said the Japan expedition confirmed a longstanding theory that the Mariana snailfish would not be the

deepest fish in the world.

“Temperature and pressure are both very much interlinked,” Jamieson said. “When we go to colder places, everything goes shallower, and when we go to warmer places, things go deeper.”

The water in Izu-Ogasawara, which lies further north of the Mariana trench in the Pacific Ocean, is a fraction of a degree warmer, which Jamieson said made a significant difference at depth.

[Nearly a decade ago](#), Jamieson and his colleagues had hypothesised that it may be biologically impossible for fish to survive at depths greater than 8,200 to 8,400 metres.

“Fish all have osmolyte, a fluid in their cells that they use to counteract pressure – it’s the thing that makes that fishy smell,” Jamieson said. “One of the only things, when you look at fish from a biochemical point of view, that is linear with depth is the concentration of that fluid.

“When you get to about 8,200 to 8,400 metres – the variation is probably temperature-dependent ... it reaches what’s called isosmosis, which means you can’t increase the concentration of that fluid in the cells anymore.

“After all these years of hammering away at this [theory], it seems to be pretty solid. We’ve done close to 250 deployments ... the window is narrowed to the point where on this Japanese expedition, we were seeing snailfish every single deployment down to this last one [of 8,336 metres].”

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A black bear in northern Japan. A vending machine in Akita prefecture has started selling fresh bear meat. Photograph: Yoshihiro Sato/The Guardian

[Japan](#)

Japan's bear meat vending machine proves a surprising success

The machine in the northern prefecture of Akita sells locally killed wild bear captured by hunters

[Justin McCurry](#) in Tokyo

Sun 2 Apr 2023 23.50 EDTLast modified on Mon 3 Apr 2023 23.21 EDT

[Japan](#) has added to its large and eclectic pool of vending machines with a new model that sells fresh bear meat – and which has proved an unlikely hit.

The machine, in the northern prefecture of Akita, has attracted a steady stream of customers since it was installed at the end of last year, according to media reports.

The meat, which sells for ¥2,200 (£13/\$16.50) per 250g, is proving popular with passengers alighting at a nearby railway station in the town of Semboku, but the operator has also received requests for mail order deliveries from Tokyo, about 400km away.

The machine, which touts its contents as a regional speciality, was stocked with locally killed wild bear and sold a mixture of lean and fatty meat, the Mainichi Shimbun newspaper said.

The meat came from bears captured in the mountains by members of a local hunting club who were permitted to kill a certain number during the annual hunting season, the paper added.

But animals rights campaigners condemned the vending machine enterprise and called for an end to the hunting of bears for their meat.

“This feels like another low blow for wildlife,” Nick Stewart, wildlife campaign director at [World Animal Protection](#), said in a statement to the Guardian.

“Bears are of great significance to the wider ecosystem in which they live. If we protect them, then their habitat and the animals and plants within it also benefit. This is animal exploitation gone mad. Bears are wild animals, not a convenience food. Leave them in the wild to live a wild life.”

The vending machine appeared in November after Soba Goro, a local restaurant, spied an opportunity to use ursine cuisine as a tourist attraction.

Bear meat consumption is highest in northern [Japan](#), where it is sold in cans and even as instant curry. It has a slightly gamey flavour that some have likened to venison, and is often served in stew.

“Bear meat tastes clean, and it doesn’t get tough,” a Soba Goro spokesperson told the Mainichi.

Japan’s ubiquitous vending machines sell myriad food items, from staples such as hot and cold drinks to edible insects and [hamburgers](#).

According to the Japan Vending System Manufacturers Association, the number of machines peaked at 5.6m in 2000 – or one for every 23 people. That had fallen to just over 4m by 2020, but Japan still has the largest number of vending machines per capita in the world.

Japan's biggest whaling company, Kyodo Senpaku, recently started [selling whale meat](#) from vending machines in an effort to boost consumption. The firm plans to install them in 100 locations around the country over the next five years.

[Human contact with bears](#) in Japan is not confined to the dinner table. The number of bear encounters has risen in recent years, from an estimated 4,800 in 2009 to more than 20,000 in 2020, when two people were killed and 158 injured, the environment ministry said.

Experts say a shortage of acorns in their natural habitat means the animals are more likely to come into contact with humans as they forage for food. About 40% of the encounters in 2020 occurred in residential and urban areas, or on agricultural land, the Yomiuri Shimbun said.

In Japan's deadliest bear attacks, known collectively as the Sankebetsu incident, an 8.85ft (2.7m) brown bear weighing more than 300kg killed seven villagers and injured three others on the northern main island of Hokkaido in 1915. The bear was tracked down and shot dead by a hunter.

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(L-R) actress Rachel McAdams, writer/director Kelly Fremon Craig, actor Abby Ryder Fortson and author Judy Blume at an advance screening of the film adaptation of *Are You There, God? It's Me, Margaret.* Photograph: Rob O'Neal/Florida Keys News Bureau/AFP/Getty Images

[Judy Blume](#)

Judy Blume: book banning now much worse in US than in 1980s

Children's and young adult author of 1970 book *Are You There God? It's Me, Margaret* says growing intolerance must be challenged

[Emily Dugan](#)

[@emilydugan](#)

Mon 3 Apr 2023 01.00 EDT

The author [Judy Blume](#) says a rise in intolerance in America has led to a “much worse” epidemic of book banning than she experienced in the 1980s.

The children's and young adult author, whose frank depictions of adolescence and puberty have long caused controversy, said it was time to fight back against censorship.

Her 1975 novel, *Forever*, which deals with teenage sexuality, was one of 80 books [banned in one Florida school district last month](#), for dealing with issues such as sex, race and gender.

In an interview on the BBC's Sunday with Laura Kuenssberg, Blume said of book banning: “I thought that was over, frankly ... I came through the 80s when book banning was really at its height. And it was terrible. And then libraries and schools began to get policies in place and we saw a falling-off of the desire to censor books.

“Now it is back, it is back much worse – this is in America. It is back so much worse than it was in the 80s. Because it's become political.”

Children's stories have become the latest battleground in the culture wars. When Puffin Books removed some of the more pejorative language from new editions of Roald Dahl's works, it [prompted a backlash](#).

Public outrage is not new to Blume. When her book *Are You There God? It's Me, Margaret* was released in 1970, its candid portrayal of puberty caused plenty of uproar and library bans. Even her own children's primary school refused to keep a copy.

Now a screen adaptation of the book is to be released in May, starring Abby Ryder Fortson, Rachel McAdams and Kathy Bates.

Blume said she cried when she finally got to see her work made into a film 53 years later. "I think it was my son who said to me: 'Just wait until all those people who grew up with your books are in power in Hollywood and you're going to see what happens.' And I'm so glad that I'm around to see it."

Blume's books have sold more than 90m copies and been translated into at least 32 different languages.

Asked if she was concerned about intolerance in the US, Blume said: "Absolutely. Intolerance about everything: gender, sexuality, racism. It's just reaching a point where again we have to fight back, we have to stand up and fight."

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Blume said she was also worried about censorship in teaching. [Florida introduced a bill](#) last month that may limit discussion of menstruation before the sixth grade and the state's governor, Ron DeSantis, is proposing to restrict conversation about gender identity and sexual orientation in schools.

“I mean, that’s crazy. That is so crazy,” Blume said. “And it is so frightening that I think the only answer is for us to speak out and really keep speaking out, or we are going to lose our way.

“I mean, there’s a group of mothers now going around saying that they want to protect their children. Protect them from what? You know, protect them from talking about things? Protect them from knowing about things?

“Because even if they don’t let them read books, their bodies are still going to change and their feelings about their bodies are going to change. And you can’t control that. They have to be able to read, to question.”

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Trump's indictment is expected to include charges of falsification of business records and additional other items. Photograph: Leah Millis/Reuters

[Donald Trump](#)

Donald Trump vows to escalate attacks against Alvin Bragg – sources

The former president was stunned by the indictment at first, but after 24 hours he indicated he wanted to politically 'rough 'em up'

[Hugo Lowell](#) in Washington

[@hugolowell](#)

Sun 2 Apr 2023 17.18 EDTLast modified on Sun 2 Apr 2023 18.31 EDT

[Donald Trump](#) has told advisers and associates in recent days that he is prepared to escalate attacks against the Manhattan prosecutor who resurrected the criminal prosecution into his hush money payments to adult film star Stormy Daniels in 2016 now that a grand jury has indicted him.

The former president has vowed to people close to him that he wants to go on the offensive and – in a private moment over the weekend at his Mar-a-Lago resort in Florida that demonstrates his gathering resolve – remarked using more colorful language that it was time to politically “rough ’em up”.

Trump had already signaled that he would go after the Manhattan district attorney, Alvin Bragg, weeks before [the grand jury handed up an indictment](#) against him on Thursday, saying in pugilistic posts on Truth Social that the prosecution was purely political and accusing Bragg of being a psychopath.

But the latest charged language reflects Trump’s determination to double down on those attacks as he returns to his time-tested playbook of brawling with prosecutors, especially when faced with legal trouble that he knows he cannot avoid, people close to him said.

The episode at Mar-a-Lago came on the sidelines of [strategy meetings Trump had with advisers and associates](#) about how to respond to the indictment from a legal and political standpoint, sessions which were described by two sources close to the former president.

The case centers on \$130,000 that Trump paid to Daniels through his former lawyer Michael Cohen in the final days of the 2016 campaign. Trump later reimbursed Cohen with \$35,000 checks, which were recorded as legal expenses. Cohen pleaded guilty in 2018 to federal tax evasion and campaign-finance violation charges.

With the indictment under seal until Trump’s scheduled arraignment on Tuesday, the exact charges remained unclear on Sunday, though they are expected to include the falsification of business records and additional charges that elevate what would otherwise be a misdemeanor to a felony.

Trump was [initially caught off-guard by the indictment](#) and spent the following 24 hours absorbing the news that was relayed to him by several of his top advisers. Later, at one point, Trump repeated to himself almost incredulously that prosecutors had actually charged him.

The shock had dissipated by the weekend, when Trump's tone changed and he told his team that he wanted to attack the case and fight the prosecutors. He steadfastly contends he did nothing illegal and won't accept a plea deal that would force him to admit culpability.

The ex-president's pugnacious tone has only accelerated in recent days with a series of critical posts about New York state supreme court justice Juan Merchan, to whom the case has apparently been allotted after he presided over a separate matter involving the Trump Organization last year.

On his Truth Social platform, Trump said Merchan had "railroaded" Allen Weisselberg, the former chief executive of the Trump Organization, who on Sunday was in the middle of serving a 100-day sentence in the Rikers Island jail complex after pleading guilty to tax fraud charges in that case.

Referencing Merchan, Trump said: "The Judge 'assigned' to my Witch Hunt Case, a 'Case' that has NEVER BEEN CHARGED BEFORE, HATES ME".

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Trump has also since pivoted his focus to seeing how he can benefit politically from the indictment, the sources said, and he was encouraged that it had boosted his poll numbers over potential rivals for the Republican

nomination who found themselves forced to come to his defense against Bragg, a Democrat.

With a grim fixation on having a mug shot taken, Trump has asked whether his team could print it on T-shirts that could serve as a rallying motif for his supporters – an idea that his advisers have been particularly enthusiastic about.

Trump also spent the weekend reviewing a Yahoo news poll that showed him leading Florida governor Ron DeSantis, whom he considers his closest rival for the 2024 Republican presidential nomination, 57% to 31% in a hypothetical one-on-one contest. The poll also found Trump was attracting the majority of support, at 52%, when pitted against a wider, 10-candidate field.

The polling illustrated the perilous dance for DeSantis and Trump's other challengers, who have so far struggled to find a way to defend the ex-president strongly enough to ensure the support of his core base in the Republican party without undercutting their pitch as being worthy successors to him.

Trump's advisers observed over the weekend that DeSantis had struggled in that test when his only response to the indictment was to snap back in line behind the former president, calling the case "the weaponization of the legal system to advance a political agenda".

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