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2023.02.27 - 2023.03.05

- [Headlines monday 27 february 2023](#)
- [2023.02.27 - Spotlight](#)
- [2023.02.27 - Opinion](#)
- [2023.02.27 - Around the world](#)
- [Headlines tuesday 28 february 2023](#)
- [2023.02.28 - Spotlight](#)
- [2023.02.28 - Opinion](#)
- [2023.02.28 - Around the world](#)
- [Headlines thursday 2 march 2023](#)
- [2023.03.02 - Spotlight](#)
- [2023.03.02 - Opinion](#)
- [2023.03.02 - Around the world](#)
- [Headlines friday 3 march 2023](#)
- [2023.03.03 - Spotlight](#)
- [2023.03.03 - Opinion](#)
- [2023.03.03 - Around the world](#)
- [Headlines saturday 4 march 2023](#)
- [2023.03.04 - Spotlight](#)
- [2023.03.04 - Opinion](#)
- [2023.03.04 - Around the world](#)

Headlines monday 27 february 2023

- [Live Rishi Sunak and Ursula von der Leyen expected to agree new Northern Ireland Brexit deal](#)
- [Brexit MPs must have vote on NI deal – Theresa Villiers](#)
- [Police Officers should be given power to charge suspects, say chiefs in England](#)
- [Live Ofgem cuts energy price cap to £3,280, but bills still set to rise in April](#)
- [Energy bills UK price cap falls to £3,280 from April](#)

[Politics live with Andrew Sparrow](#)Politics

Sunak sets out Northern Ireland trade deal to MPs as Labour vow to back agreement – as it happened

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/politics/live/2023/feb/27/rishi-sunak-brexit-ursula-von-der-leyen-eu-northern-ireland-brexit-deal-uk-politics-live>



Rishi Sunak (right) and Ursula von der Leyen at the Munich security conference earlier this month. Photograph: Simon Walker/Downing Street/UPI/Rex/Shutterstock

[Brexit](#)

MPs must have vote on Northern Ireland Brexit deal – Theresa Villiers

Former minister speaks out as Rishi Sunak prepares to meet Ursula von der Leyen for ‘final talks’

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

[Lisa O'Carroll](#) and [Kevin Rawlinson](#)

Mon 27 Feb 2023 05.29 ESTFirst published on Mon 27 Feb 2023 03.20 EST

The former Northern Ireland secretary, [Theresa Villiers](#), has said it is “crucial parliament has a vote” on the much-anticipated deal to end the

dispute with the EU over post-Brexit trading arrangements in Northern Ireland.

Villiers was speaking hours before the European Commission president, Ursula von der Leyen, was due to meet Rishi Sunak for what No 10 has billed [“final talks”](#) over a revised Northern Ireland protocol pact.

Villiers, who campaigned for Brexit while in her post in [Northern Ireland](#), where the majority voted to remain in the EU, said she did not know how she would vote on the new deal but wanted one that would enable the return of the Democratic Unionist party to the devolved government in Stormont.

“I want to see a deal which delivers a return to power-sharing in Northern Ireland,” she told BBC Radio 4’s Today programme.

The deal is expected to address the key issue of goods coming into Northern Ireland intended for the Republic of Ireland, and thus into the EU’s single market, by having most goods processed via a light-touch “green light” system to minimise checks. It is also expected to remove the EU’s right to automatically go to the European court of justice (ECJ) in the event of a dispute, instead establishing an arbitration panel involving Northern Irish and EU judges as the first port of call.



Theresa Villiers. Photograph: Jacob King/PA

In what could be the most perilous week of his political life, the prime minister will meet [Von der Leyen](#) at lunchtime on Monday.

The cabinet will meet shortly after, when Sunak, the foreign secretary, James Cleverly, and the Northern Ireland secretary, Chris Heaton-Harris, will give an update on the talks.

Sunak and Von der Leyen will then head to Windsor, raising speculation as to whether the European Commission chief will meet King Charles in a gesture that has already been widely criticised after [plans for such an arrangement](#) were made for Saturday and then cancelled.

Dominic Raab, the deputy prime minister and former [Brexit](#) secretary, is backing a deal. On Sunday, he said it would mark “a significant achievement” for Sunak and would be “a significant shift in the paradigm of arrangements” for Northern Ireland.

“If we can get this over the line ... it will be a really important deal. I think it would mark a paradigm shift, first and foremost for those communities,” he told the BBC’s Sunday with Laura Kuenssberg programme.

But whether Sunak will be immune to the forces that felled Theresa May is unclear. The DUP is not expected to give an instant verdict on the deal but few expect it to back it as the party has been demanding an end to the application of EU law in Northern Ireland, arguing it makes it a colony of EU law.

Pro-Brexit supporters in the Conservative party's European Research Group are also unlikely to back a deal that retains a role for EU law and the European court of justice.

As the concept of the protocol is predicated on EU law applying, it is highly unlikely it will be scrapped as this would throw out the protocol entirely.

Mark Francois, the former chair of the ERG, demanded EU law be "expunged" from Northern Ireland, warning Sunak that MPs were "not stupid".

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He told Sky that merely distancing the role of the ECJ by giving Northern Ireland courts and Stormont ministers a say in disputes and EU law was not good enough. "Just putting in a couple of intermediate phases, with a situation where you still end up with the European court of justice, is effectively sophistry," Francois said.

“We’re not stupid. What we want is a situation where EU law is expunged from Northern Ireland so it is treated on the same basis as England, Scotland and Wales,” he said.

The shadow chancellor, Rachel Reeves, said Sunak should not worry if he could not convince his own backbenchers to support the deal, because Labour would supply the votes to get it through parliament.

“We have said that the prime minister should not worry about the malcontents on his own backbenches and we will ensure that he has the votes to get this through,” she told Sky News.

“I don’t want to jump the gun. We haven’t seen this deal. We don’t know how the DUP and others in the Conservative party are going to respond. The best thing would be to have cross-party support from right across the political spectrum for this deal, and I hope that the prime minister can secure that.”

As speculation grew that the terms of the deal were close to being made public on Monday, the Tory former cabinet minister Jacob Rees-Mogg said Sunak might not have done enough to persuade the DUP to return to power sharing in Stormont.

He told ITV’s Good Morning Britain: “From what I’ve heard, he has done very well, but I’m not sure he has achieved the objective of getting the DUP back into power sharing, which is the fundamental point of it.”

Rees-Mogg stressed that the DUP’s stance on the deal would be fundamental to securing Tory backbenchers’ support “because the protocol itself sets out in its first article that it is subsidiary to the Good Friday/Belfast agreement. So if the DUP doesn’t think that it meets the test, that will be very influential among Conservative MPs.

“I’m afraid, with all the EU deals the devil is in the detail, so when people say ‘we need to see the legal text’, they are not larking about, they really want to see it to understand what the effect is.”

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



‘Officers want it, victims want it, defence lawyers want it, and we are sure the courts do too.’ Stephen Watson, chief constable of Greater Manchester police. Photograph: Christopher Thomond/The Guardian

[Police](#)

Police should be given power to charge suspects, say senior officers in England

Police chiefs say delays in charging suspects are leading to backlogs of cases and guilty walking free

- [CPS can't cope and people aren't getting justice. We, the police, want to fix that](#)

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

Mon 27 Feb 2023 02.00 EST Last modified on Mon 27 Feb 2023 03.22 EST

The police, rather than independent prosecution lawyers, should have the power to charge suspects in most cases, three senior police chiefs have said,

as they warned of a deepening crisis in the justice system.

The controversial change is being called for by the chief constables of the West Midlands, [Greater Manchester](#) and West Yorkshire forces, respectively the second, third and fourth biggest in England after the Met, the Guardian has learned.

They say the Crown Prosecution Service should be stripped of having the sole power to authorise charges in most cases, helping to drag the justice system out of a worsening crisis. This would include for crimes such as domestic abuse, harassment, burglary, robbery, theft, knife crime, and violent crime.

The chiefs say delays in charging suspects are leading to the guilty walking free and delayed justice, as victims and witnesses tire of long waits. They say the CPS – which faced government cuts under austerity – should concentrate on the most serious cases, but is “far too thinly spread” to manage its current workload and increasingly complex cases.

The police chiefs say sticking “plasters” no longer work and radical change – in effect a return to the way things were before the CPS was created in 1986 – is necessary and could be enacted quickly.

In an unprecedented intervention, the three police chiefs say: “The ability for the CPS to give timely charging advice (namely while the suspect is under arrest and in the cells) is broken; not because of anything the CPS has done, but because they do not have the resources or the people to do what they used to.

“We have tried to fix it together over the last two years, but the plasters are not sticking and things are getting worse. So for the sake of victims, witnesses and all in the criminal justice system, we need to replace it now, by restoring to the police the ability to charge most offences whilst suspects are in the cells.”

The call is made by Craig Guildford who leads the West Midlands force, Stephen Watson of Greater Manchester police and John Robins of West

[Yorkshire](#) police.

All three senior police chiefs told the Guardian: “The director of public prosecutions needs to give the right back to the police to make charging decisions there and then in far more cases: domestic abuse, harassment, burglary, robbery, theft, knife crime, violent crime.

“We used to do this, officers want it, victims want it, defence lawyers want it, and we are sure the courts do too, but the system keeps saying no. We are trying to help free up CPS and partner agency work to do what they should be doing – prosecuting, not administration.”

The causes of big backlogs in the justice system include cuts made by the government as part of austerity, with that then exacerbated by the turmoil caused by Covid and subsequent lockdowns.

Police in England and Wales report that their charging rates of suspects plummet in recent years.

The three senior chief constables say: “Where is the evidence to support our call? In March 2015, 16% of crimes were resolved with a charge and/or summons and now it is 5.6%..

“This is not because police have suddenly become less effective. It is because of so called ‘attrition’ where victim disengagement occurs and results in fewer charges due to time delays and a feeling of being unsupported by a seemingly faceless and insensitive system.”

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Watson, reputed to be one of the favourite police chiefs of the home secretary, Suella Braverman, told the Guardian that long waits led to the lifeblood of the justice system – victims and witnesses willing to testify and support prosecutions – giving up.

“We lose victims and witnesses in the process. Nothing reassures victims and witnesses like a charge – it’s validation. Delays lead to victims and witnesses losing faith in the system,” he said.

The claim by the three senior chief constables – that the crisis is worsening – is embarrassing for the Conservatives – who made the cuts in the first place, and for the government also as it claims to be fixing the problem.

The police chiefs say: “The CPS like many other public bodies, including the police and courts, had to change through austerity, we all get that and it led to a commensurate reduction in capacity. Yet we appear to be trying to do the same things, despite some elements of the system being broken through no fault of any agency.”

The call will be seen by some critics as self-serving. Policing is under fire for scandals involving its own officers’ wrongdoing and for a perceived decline in effective crime-fighting.

Jo Sidhu KC, a barrister and former chair of the criminal bar association, said the police chiefs’ plan was no substitute for proper funding and risked merely shifting the problem. He said: “Simply giving the police more responsibility for charging suspects will do little to reduce the unprecedented delays and huge backlog that have accumulated over recent years and which are now baked into the criminal justice system as a result of a deliberate government policy of neglect and disinvestment.

“If a wrong decision to charge is made by the police then it is the CPS who will have to step in to reverse it, causing unnecessary additional delays and further distress to complainants. If the police wrongly fail to charge a suspect then this can also cause real injustice.”

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2023/feb/27/police-should-be-given-power-to-charge-suspects-say-senior-officers-cps>

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

[Business live](#)**Business**

Lidl limits sales of tomatoes, cucumbers and peppers – as it happened

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The chancellor, Jeremy Hunt, is facing renewed calls to postpone the cut in support for household energy costs. Photograph: Jordan Pettitt/PA

[Energy bills](#)

Pressure on Hunt as energy bills will rise despite fall in price cap

Consumers will pay more because 1 April is also date for reduction of government support

- [Why are bills going up and what help will you get?](#)
- [Nils Pratley: a social tariff for energy is essential](#)

[Alex Lawson](#) *Energy correspondent*

Mon 27 Feb 2023 11.27 ESTFirst published on Mon 27 Feb 2023 04.06 EST

Pressure is mounting on the chancellor, [Jeremy Hunt](#), to postpone a looming cut in support for household energy costs as consumers face an

increase in their bills from April – despite a fall in the industry price cap of almost £1,000.

The energy regulator for Great Britain, [Ofgem](#), said on Monday that its cap on the amount suppliers can charge for energy for average dual fuel, direct debit customers would fall by 23% for the three months from 1 April to £3,280, from £4,279 for the January to March quarter.

Consumers will not actually pay this figure as the government's energy price guarantee and its [£400 discount scheme](#) subsidise household bills, keeping the price for a typical household at £2,100 a year. However, from April the price guarantee will become less generous and the discount will be withdrawn, meaning the typical annual bill will rise to £3,000.

Hunt faced renewed calls on Monday to postpone the cut in support.

The consumer campaigner Martin Lewis and more than 80 charities have urged the chancellor to keep support in place for a further three months until July.

Wholesale gas prices have fallen sharply in recent months but the drop is yet to feed through into household bills because suppliers buy their energy months in advance. As a result, the price cap is expected to fall to about £2,100 from July for the remainder of the year, meaning the government would not have to subsidise bills and household energy costs would come down.

Ofgem's chief executive, Jonathan Brearley, said: "Although wholesale prices have fallen, the price cap has not yet fallen below the planned level of the energy price guarantee. This means that on current policy, bills will rise again in April. I know that for many households this news will be deeply concerning."

Brearley said the regulator was studying the feasibility of a [social tariff](#) for vulnerable customers with "urgency".

The significance of Monday's announcement is that the Ofgem cap, which limits what suppliers can charge per unit of energy, is used to calculate how much the government will pay energy suppliers to limit typical bills to £3,000.

As long as the level of the price guarantee is lower than the Ofgem price cap, the government will pay suppliers the difference to cover the cost of buying wholesale energy at prices that have been inflated by the war in Ukraine.

The Liberal Democrat leader, Ed Davey, said: "The Conservatives' plan to hike energy bills in April will come as a hammer blow to families already struggling with soaring mortgages and rents, shopping bills and tax rises."

The Labour shadow climate secretary, Ed Miliband, said his party would use a "proper windfall tax [on oil and gas firms] to stop prices going up in April" if it were in power.

Holly Holder of the Centre for Ageing Better said keeping the guarantee at £2,500 would be a "vital short-term intervention" and called for a social tariff to be implemented before next winter.

Office for National Statistics figures released on Monday showed that, in the past two weeks, 5% of adults said they or their household had run out of food and could not afford to buy more.

The Treasury declined to comment on the fresh calls for the cut in support to be postponed. Hunt has previously said he does not think the government has the "headroom to make a major new initiative to help people". A government spokesperson said it is "committed to helping people with rising costs".

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Suppliers are obliged to write to customers a month before a price rise, meaning letters are expected to go out this week.

Lewis told Good Morning Britain that allowing letters to reach customers telling them their bills were going up would be “an act of national mental health harm”.

The consultancy Cornwall Insight has said that if the guarantee were to increase to £3,000 as planned, the cost to the government would be £26.8bn, while at £2,500, the cost would be £29.4bn.

Ofgem said that from 1 April, the electricity price cap per unit would fall from 67p a kilowatt hour to 51p, and a 53p-a-day standing charge. For gas, the unit cost will fall from 17p to 13p per kWh, with the standing charge up 1p to 29p a day.

About 4 million [prepayment meter customers](#) will pay an additional £45 a year, as energy companies say they cost more to serve. The disparity between prepay and direct debit customers has been questioned amid the scandal over forced installation of prepayment meters.

For customers who pay via cheque or cash, the cap has fallen by £1,051 from £4,533 to £3,482, meaning they pay about £200 more than direct debit customers.

The cost to bill payers of transferring customers over from 28 suppliers that went bust during the energy crisis, excluding Bulb, fell from £61 to £19

under the new cap calculation.

The cap is calculated on a typical household's energy use and consumers may still pay more than that if they use more energy.

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

2023.02.27 - Spotlight

- [Oscar hustings Why Everything Everywhere All at Once should win best picture](#)
- [‘Studio 54 was based on status and money’ Post-punk legend Kate Fagan on her hipster-baiting classic](#)
- [‘I’ll always be a bad feminist!’ Roxane Gay on love, success – and upsetting Piers Morgan](#)
- [Dining across the divide US special ‘We were on the brink of an uncomfortable conversation’](#)



‘It boils down to a universal story about family’ ... Stephanie Hsu, Michelle Yeoh and Ke Huy Quan in *Everything Everywhere All at Once*. Photograph: Allyson Riggs/AP

[Best picture Oscar hustings](#)[Everything Everywhere All At Once](#)

Why *Everything Everywhere All at Once* should win the best picture Oscar

This weird, hilarious multiverse fantasy has more fresh ideas than the rest of Hollywood’s output put together, plus buckets of heart and phenomenal performances from Michelle Yeoh and Ke Huy Quan



[Ann Lee](#)
[@_ann_lee](#)

Mon 27 Feb 2023 03.11 ESTLast modified on Mon 27 Feb 2023 03.16 EST

It's a testament to how far Hollywood has come in recent years that a mind-scrambling sci-fi action comedy, about a stressed Chinese American immigrant who has to save the multiverse, is leading the Oscars race with 11 nominations and is the favourite to win best picture – a standing reinforced by its sweep at the Screen Actors Guild on Sunday. The Academy likes serious prestige dramas; [Everything Everywhere All at Once](#) is anything but. It's a ridiculously silly, outrageously hilarious and profoundly weird fantasy. And that's exactly why it would be a worthy winner.

Made on a relatively modest budget of \$25m by directing duo [Daniel Kwan and Daniel Scheinert](#) (collectively known as the Daniels), the surreal martial arts adventure seemingly came out of nowhere to become one of the biggest box office triumphs of the pandemic years. It's increasingly rare these days for independent films to become commercial hits, but Everything Everywhere All at Once grossed more than \$100m worldwide thanks to good old-fashioned word of mouth, with many fans heading back to the cinema for multiple viewings.

In an industry clogged with never-ending comic book adaptations, sequels, prequels and spin-offs, it takes balls, a febrile imagination and lots of [googly eyes](#) to come up with something genuinely surprising. Where else would you see a love scene enacted with plump hotdog fingers? Or fight sequences using a giant butt plug and a fanny pack as weapons? Or a lofty philosophical idea like nihilism represented by a huge, spinning bagel?

Some critics have grumbled that it is messy and overwhelming. But there are more fresh ideas in Everything Everywhere All at Once during its two-hour 20-minute runtime than there have been for the past year in the rest of Hollywood. Hopefully, Academy voters will realise that we need to applaud this kind of innovation.

All those ideas would be dismissed as mere gimmicks if the film didn't have any heart to it, and that's something Everything Everywhere All at Once has in buckets. If you take away the eye-popping visuals, multiverse battles and spectacular martial arts choreography, it boils down to a wholesome, universal story about family and the healing power of love and kindness.

As an exploration of generational trauma, the burden of regret and the meaning of life, it is genuinely affecting

[Michelle Yeoh](#)'s Evelyn is so bogged down by her failing laundrette that she is shut off from her husband Waymond ([Ke Huy Quan](#)) and daughter Joy (Stephanie Hsu). The film follows her attempts to reconnect. As an exploration of generational trauma, the burden of regret and the meaning of life, it is genuinely affecting.

During his acceptance speech [at the Gothams](#) for best feature, Kwan revealed that fans have been sharing their own stories of trauma with the directors after screenings. Clearly, this is film-making that resonates with audiences on a deep emotional level.

Then there are the performances. Just as the story revolves around a woman who has been overlooked and ignored, you can sense that Yeoh, a bona fide

action superstar who often has to play second or third fiddle in her Hollywood outings, knows that this is finally her time to shine. As she inhabits all the different versions of Evelyn across the parallel worlds, she delivers a phenomenal, multifaceted turn that is fierce, goofy and empathic.

The 60-year-old Malaysian star became the first performer of south-east Asian descent to be nominated in the best actress category and Yeoh could be heading for a history-making win. Only Cate Blanchett, who earned a nod for her performance as a power-hungry conductor in *Tár*, stands in her way.

Quan, a former child star who previously quit acting because of the lack of decent roles for Asian actors, is just as remarkable and dynamic as Evelyn's put-upon husband Waymond. Having picked up prizes at most of the major awards this season (and given the [most touching and emotional acceptance speeches](#)), he is the favourite to win the best supporting actor Oscar, which would crown his astonishing comeback.

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His co-stars Hsu and Jamie Lee Curtis, who are competing against each other for best supporting actress, are on less secure footing. But even if they don't win, I can't wait to see Curtis in [full head cheerleader mode](#) as she

was at the Golden Globes, celebrating Yeoh's win for best actress in a musical or comedy.

There's nothing else quite like Everything Everywhere All at Once in the best picture shortlist. My only worry is that it could be considered too bizarre and over the top to lock in a win. I wouldn't be surprised if Academy voters decided to play it safe by plumping for something cosy and familiar like [The Fabelmans](#). But what a shame that would be.

If it does take home the award, it'll be a resounding victory for original thinkers and original stories. Everything Everywhere All at Once illuminates the immigrant experience with daring, creativity and passion. It deserves that Oscar and many more on the night.

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‘I got my single into the jukeboxes at all the clubs’ ... Kate Fagan.
Photograph: John van Dorn

[Music](#)

[Interview](#)

Post-punk legend Kate Fagan on her hipster-baiting classic: ‘Studio 54 was based on status and money’

[Safi Bugel](#)

As her catalogue is reissued, the Chicago club kid dishes on why Windy City’s DIY scene outshone NYC, and how she hit out against Reagan and hustled for the spotlight



Mon 27 Feb 2023 03.17 ESTLast modified on Mon 27 Feb 2023 05.43 EST

When a record label contacted her wanting to reissue her 35-year-old debut single, Kate Fagan thought it was a prank call. She had released the track, *I Don't Wanna Be Too Cool*, on her friends' DIY imprint; it had made the rounds in the underground clubs and bars of Chicago's punk scene before fading into obscurity. Now, Fagan is based in New Orleans, where she still performs and plays shows – but she says that nobody knew who she was when she got the call in 2016. “The call stunned me, it tickled me,” she laughs. “Who knew that all these years later that song would still mean something to people?”

The song was written in response to the “hipster culture” she had come of age around in New York; over a skippy drum machine and a jangly bassline, Fagan tears apart the materialism and commercialism she had seen in the late 1970s. It became an anthem for those disillusioned with the scene. “I felt Studio 54 was based on status, money, being able to get on to the list, things like that,” she says, describing the “cocaine glamour” and designer clothes that were in vogue. “I didn't wanna wear a logo on my shirt, I didn't wanna wear Calvin Klein on the back of my jeans.”

So what was she wearing? “I’d put together yellow men’s pyjama bottoms, a crazy corset from the 50s and some trashy jewellery I’d find at a secondhand store, that kind of stuff.”

Kate Fagan: I Don’t Wanna Be Too Cool – video

Fagan had grown up with a keen interest in music, playing the piano and the cornet and singing in church choirs and school musical theatre. Soon after she arrived in Chicago, she says she fell into the city’s nascent punk scene, drawn in by the collaborative spirit, the opportunity to rebel against her parents and the low-stakes approach. “I wasn’t trained to a point where I was going to have a career in being a classical type of musician,” she says. “But I realised you didn’t have to be a trained singer or musician, you could really do it yourself. It was about self-expression rather than hitting all the right notes.” She bought a cheap bass guitar and started writing songs.

The single was pressed thanks to a “stroke of luck” from one of her day jobs. The attorney she was working for had wanted to give her a bonus, perhaps an item of jewellery. “I said: what I’d actually like to do is put out a record.” On the B-side of Too Cool was Waiting for the Crisis, a jittery attack on Reagan-era politics with dub and post-punk sensibilities. “A lot of people had lost their jobs, it was a bad economic time,” she says. “I wanted to make a stand.”

Releasing music was also a way for Fagan to assert herself in a new scene. “I really wanted to get into the recording studio and put something down that proclaimed that I was now in this business, in this music scene,” she says. “When I put out the record I was like: this is me.” The first run sold out that same year. Fagan continued to make music throughout the 1980s – namely a rock opera called The Kissing Concept, inspired by the NYC nightclub scene. (Although she performed the show live in theatres and clubs at the time, the music remained unreleased until 2016.)



‘When I put out the record I was like: this is me’ ... Kate Fagan.
Photograph: John van Dorn

As well as working a string of jobs in offices, universities and clubs, Fagan organised ad hoc concerts and jam sessions with her friends and label mates. She went on to form Heavy Manners, a ska band that supported the Clash, the English Beat and Grace Jones. But she was a “real force” behind these musical endeavours, she says: “I was a hustler. I went to all the record stores, I got my single into the jukeboxes at all the clubs, and I gave copies to DJs. And then it caught on.”

It is still catching on now: this month, the extended edition of her debut record is being re-pressed once more, this time with additional unreleased material from Fagan’s rock opera. Stabbing synths wrestle against shrill guitar riffs and seductive vocals as she channels the eccentricity and sleaze of the clubs she spent time in. “The nightclubs were where a lot of change was going on,” she says, recalling the prominence of queer communities and the explosion of new sounds they were fostering. To her, they were a sanctuary. “I really liked the wild, dancing-all-night part of it and the loud, throbbing music,” she says. “I’ll always be a club kid.”

With her surprise at the continuing attention in mind, I ask Fagan what she thinks of the songs now. “They’re timeless,” she says, earnestly. “I like that on each song, I just come charging into it. I like listening back to it and thinking: you go girl, you get out there and just *tell 'em*.”

I Don’t Wanna Be Too Cool is out now on Captured Tracks

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‘I am a mess of contradictions’ ... Roxane Gay.

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[Interview](#)

‘I’ll always be a bad feminist!’: Roxane Gay on love, success – and upsetting Piers Morgan

[Chitra Ramaswamy](#)

The writer, academic and cultural critic has had a tumultuous few years, full of love, grief and phenomenal creativity. She discusses women’s rights, writer’s block and why every day with her wife remains an adventure



[@Chitgrrl](#)

Mon 27 Feb 2023 01.00 ESTLast modified on Mon 27 Feb 2023 07.38 EST

Once upon a time, almost a decade ago, a funny, fearless, and frank writer from Nebraska [described herself as a bad feminist](#). “I am failing as a woman,” she wrote. “I am failing as a feminist. I am a mess of contradictions.” The resulting book of essays, *Bad Feminist* (2014), heralded a more intersectional era in the movement, calling for less essentialism in feminism and more pluralism. It showed what it was like “to move through the world as a woman”: specifically a Haitian-American in her late 30s, who loathed *Django Unchained* and loved *Scrabble*. Perhaps, more than anything it was a manifesto of human imperfection. Thus was

Roxane Gay propelled into the literary stratosphere and – as such fairytales tend to go – destined to be forever after probed about the current state of feminism.

In many areas, like reproductive freedom, we have lost ground, which is a bitter pill to swallow

So, nine years on, does the writer, editor, professor, podcaster, cultural critic, and Gloria Steinem Endowed Chair in Media, Culture and Feminist Studies at Rutgers University, New Jersey, still consider herself a bad feminist? “I think I’m a better feminist now than I was,” says Gay when we meet on Zoom. “But I’ll always be a bad feminist. I don’t think the term has changed. When I coined it, it was partly serious and partly tongue in cheek: if good feminism is the feminism that overlooks the intersections of identity that we all inhabit, then I’d rather be a bad feminist. Most of the issues I wrote about are sadly just as relevant today. And, in many areas, such as reproductive freedom, we have lost ground, which is a bitter pill to swallow.”

It is mid-morning in New York and Gay, 48, is drinking a takeaway cup of coffee in the eaves of the brownstone house she shares with her wife Debbie Millman. “I am in a wonderful marriage,” Gay tells me. “I’m so impressed by my wife all the time.”

As an interviewee, Gay keeps her distance. She comes across as considered and a little shy, which befits a writer whose hallmark is a kind of radical authenticity. Such qualities are too often interpreted as coldness or ferocity in women, but the abiding impression Gay gives is of someone who is not going to compromise herself. It’s on the page where she gives freely, and there she gives all. Her writing is defined by contradiction, ease, emotional integrity and a generosity of perspective that has won her a huge and diverse following. “I am nowhere near as brave as people believe me to be,” she wrote in *Hunger*, her acclaimed 2017 memoir about her body. “As a writer, armed with words, I can do anything, but when I have to take my body out into the world, courage fails me.”

I know I'm on the right track if Piers Morgan starts getting red in the face and bloviating. My work here is done

Our conversation is wide-ranging, covering topics from trauma – “I want to do the least amount of harm when writing about harmful things” – to Harry and Meghan: “I’m rooting for those kids! I hope they make it!” Recently, after writing a New York Times op-ed supporting (to an extent) Harry and Meghan, she received “so much hate mail – the British didn’t take it very well at all. Piers Morgan lost his mind. I know I’m on the right track if he starts bloviating and getting red in the face.” She smiles. “My work here is done.”

Last year Gay argued that cancel culture “is the bogeyman that people have come up with to explain away bad behaviour” and she prefers to think in terms of consequence culture. “I’ve been thinking about how we can hold ourselves accountable for the choices we make,” she says. “Because as long as we continue to, for example, listen to misogynistic music it is going to continue to be made. At what point do we make different choices?”

In *Bad Feminist*, Gay admitted listening to “thuggish rap ... even though the lyrics are degrading to women and offend me to my core”. Now, she is making different choices. In 2017, she pulled a forthcoming book from Simon & Schuster [to protest over the publisher’s support of the controversial “alt-right” figurehead Milo Yiannopoulos](#). More recently she took her podcast – The Roxane Gay Agenda, in which she talks, mostly to Black women, about issues including race, feminism, pop culture and politics – off Spotify over its [“unfettered access” to the “misinformation” spread by Joe Rogan](#).

She isn’t considering leaving Twitter, noting that since Elon Musk’s takeover the platform hasn’t “gotten measurably worse for me because it’s always been terrible. You make spaces for yourself that are tolerable but I do think for the average user the experience has become incredibly degrading and it’s increasingly becoming intolerable. I don’t know that Musk cares about the town-square qualities of Twitter and what that can offer in times of crisis. And a lot of people, myself included, get news from Twitter, and to see that being compromised is really disappointing.” In

general, she has been trying to separate from social media “because at some point you have to just protect your sanity”.

We’re having better conversations about transgender issues and gender as a spectrum but there’s a lot of pushback

What progress has been made, if any, since she wrote *Bad Feminist*? “Well, I think it’s always important to acknowledge progress,” she says, “otherwise it becomes too overwhelming to want to fight for it. We are having better conversations about feminism. It has become more inclusive, though there’s still a lot of work left to do. We’re having better conversations about transgender issues and understanding gender as a spectrum, but also seeing a lot of pushback.” The week after we speak Gay is one of nearly 1,000 New York Times contributors to sign an open letter condemning the newspaper’s coverage of trans, non-binary, and gender non-conforming people. She says the environment is “quite similar” to what’s going on in the UK. “To direct that kind of ire at one of the most marginalised groups in the world is so unnecessary,” she adds. “Until enough feminists stand up and say, ‘This is wrong, we cannot do this to our trans brethren’, it’s going to continue. It continues because not enough people say: ‘You are wrong, you are toxic, you are absurdly, embarrassingly fragile.’”

Gay is juggling an overwhelming number of projects: her podcast and publishing imprint, film and TV scriptwriting (she was the first Black woman to write for Marvel, penning the *Black Panther: World of Wakanda* comic series), a book of writing advice called *How to Be Heard*, a collection of TV criticism, a compilation of opinion pieces for the New York Times and the Guardian US, and “a few novels” – including a young adult novel and – yes, the rumours are true – a romance with Channing Tatum. Oh, and she’s writing a book about Beyoncé. “I don’t know what it’s going to be yet,” she says. “I just know it’s going to be about Beyoncé.”

She has, simultaneously, been dealing with writer’s block “for a few years”. Is it caused by the demands of success, because she’s overstretched, or because she [gave so much in her 2017 memoir, *Hunger*](#) (and experienced a lot of backlash, including fatphobia and accusations of fatphobia)? “All that

might play a part, for sure,” she says. “I think it’s just burnout. I still enjoy writing even if writing doesn’t enjoy me. It’s not that I can’t write, it’s that the writing doesn’t feel the way I know it should feel.”

My parents took us seriously and included us in their conversations.
It’s why I’m comfortable with having opinions

Grief has also played a part. Her mother has stage four cancer and last year Gay’s brother, Joel, died suddenly at the age of 43. “He was very young, and he was beloved,” she says. “He left behind two children and a wife. We were all very taken aback by it. We’re still grappling with it. Life goes on, but differently. It’s not just disorienting. It completely changes the universe. You’re supposed to learn from it, but I would rather not know what I’ve learned and have my brother here than know what I know and have him gone.”

Gay and her two younger brothers grew up in a loving, religious, strict household in Omaha, Nebraska. All she ever wanted was to be a writer and, by the age of four, was drawing villages on napkins and populating them with characters. “When I wanted to tell more of a story I would add a couple more houses, a church, and there was always a cemetery,” she laughs. Her parents, who came to the US from Haiti when they were teenagers, remain huge figures in her life and when it comes to her career, “you couldn’t ask for better cheerleaders”. She thinks her capacity to express herself and see things from all sides comes from them. “My parents took such an active interest in us,” she says. “They took us seriously and included us in their conversations at the dinner table, which definitely set me on the path to being comfortable with having opinions. In the earlier years things were very good.”



‘The world feels entitled to your trauma’ ... Gay.

In *Hunger*, Gay wrote in spare and incantatory prose of what she had touched upon in *Bad Feminist*. How, at the age of 12, she was gang-raped in the woods near her home by a boy she thought was her boyfriend and his friends. That book, like her life, is divided in two. Before and after. After, Gay turned to food, and turned her body into a fortress. By the end of *Hunger*, which remains the hardest thing she’s ever done, Gay had made a tentative peace with her body. “I no longer need the body fortress I built,” she wrote. “I need to tear down some of the walls.”

In many ways she has fulfilled that promise. Millman – a New York writer, designer, and podcast host – picked up *Hunger* when it came out and fell hard first for its author’s words, then its author. Two years later, in the midst of the global pandemic, they cancelled the huge wedding they had planned – to be officiated by Gloria Steinem, naturally – and eloped.

Gay has said that writing and reading literally saved her life. It has also, in an equally literal sense, brought love into it. “It did,” she says with a smile. “I did not anticipate meeting her. I don’t think you ever do anticipate meeting the person who will be the great love of your life. But I did. And every day is an adventure. It’s great to have someone who understands the demands of my career. And of course I give that in return gladly. Nobody’s

threatened. There's no need to be jealous because we each have awesome things going on."

I don't know that I'll ever feel great in my body, but I think the surgery really helped. It's an ongoing project

In 2018, Gay underwent weight loss surgery. In a characteristically candid essay, [What Fullness Is](#), she wrote that after more than 15 years of resistance, she finally capitulated and felt "in equal parts – hope, defeat, frustration, and disgust". How is she feeling now? "Well, I don't know that I'll ever feel great in my body, but I think the surgery was the right decision for me. It's an ongoing project, but it really helped me make a dent in having a stronger relationship with my body."

"I still cringe sometimes when I think about [Hunger] being in the world, but that lets me know I was on the right track. The book has helped people. It's being taught in medical schools all over the country. So I'm just proud of what I did there." Since *Hunger* came out there has, however, been an increased demand for writing about trauma, particularly from people of colour. "That's one of the key things I talk about whenever I talk about writing trauma," Gay says. "The world expects your trauma. The world feels entitled to your trauma. The world wants you to serve it up to them. That's why it's important to recognise that you can write about trauma without cannibalising yourself. You are in control of your own story."

Roxane Gay will appear at the [Women of the World festival](#), [Royal Festival Hall](#), London, on 12 March and is on tour in the UK at the [Usher Hall](#), [Edinburgh](#) (9 March), [Royal Liverpool Philharmonic](#) (11 March), the [Forum Alumni Auditorium at the University of Exeter](#) (14 March) and [The Forum](#), [Bath](#) (15 March and will be livestreamed on [Fane Online](#)

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Jordan and Judith. All photographs: Christopher Beauchamp/The Guardian

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Dining across the divide US special:
‘We were on the brink of an

uncomfortable conversation'

They are both Democrats, but what subjects – from Ukraine to defunding the police – would leave them at odds?

[Edward Helmore](#)

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Jordan, 30, Providence, Rhode Island

Occupation Works at the progressive Jewish Liberation Fund, which aims to make Jewish philanthropy more effective. Member of Team USA at the World Athletics Cross Country Championships

Voting Record Progressive Democratic – about “as far left as you can go, but stopping short of radical or revolution”

Amuse bouche Regularly meets up with a couple of Japanese housewives to practise his Japanese



Judith, 65, Branford, Connecticut

Occupation Retired professor of contemporary literature at Yale. Poet

Voting record Democrat

Amuse bouche Designs pocket parks in her home town

For starters

Jordan I had duck confit, lobster pasta, chocolate cake, chamomile tea. We found a lot of common ground on teaching more about slavery in schools. Judith thinks we should focus on how humans have been cruel to each other over time, but for me it's more important to focus on the history in America and how that helps us understand the world we live in now. In a lot of places slavery wasn't so racially codified as it was here.

Judith I had nougat de foie gras, bass, Grand Marnier souffle for dessert. It was delicious. He was more focused on contemporary discussions of the American experience that I was. The longer, worldwide historical context was more important to me.

Jordan It's important to teach about chattel slavery. I'm not saying it was worse for us than, say, the Japanese enslaving Koreans, but the racial codification of slavery in America still affects what our world looks like and the narratives that equate people of a certain race to negative habits and stereotypes.



The big beef

Judith Jordan believes we should take money from the police and give it to other types of social workers to help deal with crime. I don't. If you want a society based in law that has arisen out of constitutional democracy, you need some way of enforcing the law. The combination of underfunding and lack of respect for the law has exacerbated tendencies we don't like in the police.

Jordan It doesn't feel like lack of resources is the issue. I'm from St Louis. Look at Ferguson. Look at Milwaukee. The police that killed [Tyre Nichols](#) in Memphis were part of one of these highly trained units. The police should be in a public safety department so they aren't self-supervised.

Judith We should increase police funding, but it should be based on more stringent training and education, to make it a profession with salaries to

match. I would have national regulation of local police. The police who killed Tyre Nichols were Black, so there's something else going on. Those officers were totally unqualified for a job that puts the power of life and death in their hands. That's not a racial issue.

Jordan We were on the brink of an uncomfortable conversation. Judith was saying we live in a violent society and there are cultural differences between groups. Judith grew up in a more working-class background; mine is more bourgeois. But I don't think she experienced a reckoning of concentrated poverty and trauma, and how that affects and drives people.

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Sharing plate

Judith My grandparents fled Ukraine during the pogroms. We need to look at Ukraine as fighting for the ideals we have now and give them support.

Jordan It's complicated. I don't think we should be diverting funds, and Russia is clearly a bad actor. But I find the lack of dissent a little surprising. The left-wing progressive space is generally anti-war, so we should be thinking about this.



For afters

Judith We got into some interesting things, like do you want a national police force so you don't have these little islands of police where the culture is leaning toward violence? That makes me uncomfortable because wherever there is a national police force, there is a potential for danger.

Jordan Whatever our public safety force looks like, it shouldn't be the free-for-all it is now. As Jewish people, we agreed a national public force could be a scary thing. It doesn't feel like police forces have a lack of resources. I don't qualify as a police abolitionist but I have serious questions about police departments and what they look like right now.



Takeaways

Jordan Judith reminded me of my grandma, which I loved. But I disagreed with this idea of cultural differences being one of the causes of crime.

Judith Jordan is a very delightful person. These questions are complex, and we need more context and nuance. We're always focused on the minute-to-minute catastrophe.

Additional reporting: Kitty Drake

Jordan and Judith ate at [Union League Cafe](#), New Haven, Connecticut.

Want to meet someone from across the divide? [Find out how to take part](#)

This article was amended on 1 March 2023. An earlier version mistakenly identified Jordan as the captain of the US cross country team.

2023.02.27 - Opinion

- Labour dreams of a slightly better Britain. But a truly great country is within reach – I've lived there
- I can't put things off until an old age I probably won't have. Accepting that has brought me joy
- The austerity-hit CPS can't cope and people aren't getting justice. We, the police, want the power to fix that
- Cold swimming pools and youth clubs closing – tale of two sporting Britains shames us all



Illustration: Eleanor Shakespeare/The Guardian

[OpinionLabour](#)

**Labour dreams of a slightly better
Britain. But a truly great country is
within reach – I've lived there**

[Nesrine Malik](#)



In its terror of jeopardising slow, marginal change, the party has sacrificed its ambition. It has stigmatised hope

Mon 27 Feb 2023 01.00 ESTLast modified on Mon 27 Feb 2023 09.30 EST

I am often asked why I hate this country. Whenever I criticise our political culture (which has been rather a lot recently, for obvious reasons), I am asked by various pleasant people on the internet why I am so ungrateful to the country that naturalised me. The simple answer, of course, is that you don't have to hate a country to point out what is wrong with it. The more complicated answer is that sometimes, you point out what is wrong with the country precisely because you believe – because you know – it can do better. Because you have hope.

My own hope was cultivated in a country that doesn't exist any more. It grew every time I found solace in times of precariousness – which I did, over and over again. I arrived in the UK in the mid-noughties, with little money and even fewer connections. I went to night school and survived by finding the cheapest canteens and supermarket deals, and taking temping jobs all over London. I stuffed envelopes and answered phones (badly – I was told I was too curt, and was not invited to return). And when cracks did

inevitably appear, in jobs or homes or immigration applications, I came to depend on a growing network of friends and partners who came through for me.

Life was not easy, but it was *viable*. What little disposable income I had stretched to cheap pubs, groceries, buses, entertainment and, eventually, the foundations of a life. Undergirding it all was the public realm. I rented rooms in council estates in east and west London where there was always a staffed office to help out. The first time I used the NHS during a serious illness and hospitalisation, I couldn't believe that there was nothing to pay. I stood in front of the hospital chemist's till clutching my prescription, waiting for and dreading the bill. After being told there wasn't one, not for the treatment or the medicine, I walked out in a daze, half expecting someone to run after me to say that there had been a mistake. To someone from a country with a threadbare public sphere, it felt like a dream.

I romanticise it all, of course, in hindsight and in comfort. There was stinging racism, mostly in workplaces, that I had neither the skills nor the luxury to challenge, and moments of profound uncertainty and alienation. But my experience in that period was brought into relief by what followed: the financial crisis, austerity and a hostile environment that almost deported me. It felt like closing time on the sort of precarious but survivable, and ultimately prosperous, existence an outsider like myself could forge.

The council estates were sold off to developers, and with them the offices that gave support and advice, and the stalls and shops that sustained those communities. Every local library that I used has been turned into flats. In their place new, expensive things were erected. Metallic new-builds, low-lit restaurants, identikit shopping outlets, cool pop-ups. And we were the lucky ones. In other parts of the country, that infrastructure was replaced by nothing at all.

You might know this as “gentrification”, but it was really a sort of class cleansing. And it was down to a post-2008 settlement that determined that the financial crisis had been the result of public sector spending, rather than of a failure of regulation. It was decided that private investment and consumerism were the keys to growth, deficits had to be eliminated, and the

welfare state simply was no longer affordable. So the country became inhospitable to those unable to spend, unable to earn high incomes, or unable to work at all.

The fallout of those slash-and-burn years is vividly clear in the shape of a cost of living crisis, a public health crisis and roiling labour discontent. I bring the promise of my history to these times with the expectation that that connection is surely clear by now: that divestment from the state has made us vulnerable to shocks; that we have been unable to effectively distribute the rewards of all that private wealth creation, which squatted on the site of the old public realm, unable to transform it into a hospital bed, a cheap home or an affordable energy bill. And I am told that, yes, a long-awaited [Labour](#) government may finally be on the cards, but there is not much now that we can change, so please be a grownup.

With the instruction to settle comes a stigmatisation of hope. It is seen as not just misplaced but suspect, disqualifying. If you have hope, then you must believe you can change things, which means you are capricious, not to be taken seriously, and certainly not to be allowed anywhere near mainstream politics.

Tories have made UK's problems 'deeper', says Starmer as he lays out Labour's 'missions' – video

It's bleak, but I get it. The iron grip of what felt like never-ending Tory rule, a huge defeat for Jeremy Corbyn's agenda in 2019, and a particularly disastrous and corrupt current government have yielded a self-inflicted lowering of expectations. Labour finally has a shot, you see, and must not squander it by offering any solutions that involve a head-on collision with the economic and political status quo.

If we can just trust in Keir Starmer's [vague but ambitious pledges](#), we have the chance to have an NHS “for the future”, be a green energy superpower, insulate homes and devolve some power from Westminster. If that doesn't excite you or seem to relate to your life in any way, then would you rather have another Tory government? Is that what you want?

The argument – the rebuke, in fact – is that you risk being able to achieve anything at all if you dare to suggest policies that might actually rebalance the economy. Why bother, if you can win without any of that headache? And so you cannot take on large corporates and redistribute their astronomical profits, or reverse a privatisation of public utilities that has done nothing but gouge customers for poor services, or deviate in any real way from the rightwing press’s poisonous line on immigration and race that obscures an expansive, diverse modern Britain.

And so low expectations become a virtue – a mark of maturity, skill and electoral viability. Not being excited becomes the pre-requisite of a Labour government. “We can’t promise all the things we want to do,” said Emily Thornberry in an [interview with this paper](#) last week. “But to get rid of this lot and have some decent people on board who know where they’re going and why they’re going there is *all right*. It’s *all right*!”

And I guess it will be all right, if your ambition for a Labour government does not involve those who are striking and struggling to eat and keep warm, those who can’t survive, let alone thrive. If you believe that the key to it all is the groundhog day of being “open to business”. But don’t tell me that I am naive, indulgent or sabotaging Labour’s chances if I believe that there could be more; for listening to myself when I think *this does not feel good*. Don’t tell me to ignore my eyes and ears when I see and hear in Starmer not a political master but a leader [reneging on his promises](#), constantly calculating which of the people desperately awaiting his government he can afford to ignore because they have no powerful advocates.

Perhaps I have let what was simply a formative personal experience inform my politics too much. Perhaps my good fortune was down to luck and privilege, rather than the bountifulness I attribute it to. But I can’t shake the feeling that if I had arrived in the UK in more recent times, I would not be here, writing these words you are reading, telling you that it is all right to have hope. That to have hope for a country, despite all instructions to submit to what we cannot change, is to love it.

- Nesrine Malik is a Guardian columnist

Nesrine Malik will be talking to former columnist Gary Younge at a Guardian Live event on [Monday 17 April](#). Readers can join the event in London or via the live stream

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‘I do things I am afraid of because I am more afraid I’ll die having not done them.’ Photograph: Supplied

[Why I quit Cancer](#)

I can’t put things off until an old age I probably won’t have. Accepting that has brought me joy

[Michelle Brasier](#)



My dad died of cancer, then my brother, and there's a high chance I'll get it too. It's taught me to stop hesitating – and live my life in full colour

Mon 27 Feb 2023 03.00 ESTLast modified on Mon 27 Feb 2023 13.44 EST

In recent years, I have realised how excellent life can be when I stop putting things off. So many perfect todays are usurped by the promise of “more time tomorrow”, “when you're old enough”, “when we have more money”. There is never a guarantee of more time, but we always have now.

Learning to use my time with purpose has been bittersweet. It wasn't exactly a choice – it comes from knowing that my old age is not guaranteed. But the perspective it has offered me has been worth the pain.

Let's go back to 2006. My dad – a jolly, bronzed Australian man who calls everyone by the name of their car – is walking into a department store. He greets the woman at the front entrance (“How you goin' there, Suzuki Swift?”) and moves towards the tech section. He's buying a laptop, because he wants to tell his story, and that of our family – about how his stepfather made him enter through the back door of his house as a child; about discovering his half sister too late, and buying a headstone for her grave.

Another thing to know about my dad is that he has always wanted a backyard spa. Now, if you think this is a typically Australian thing to want, please let me clarify: it absolutely is not. A pool, perhaps – but a family hot tub is not a common cultural occurrence. After he buys his laptop, he is going to the spa shop to once again visit the hot tub he wants but never buys.

My dad never had a chance to write his story, to fill in the gaps in those tales for his children. He never bought his hot tub. Two days after he bought the laptop he was diagnosed with pancreatic cancer. One week later, he died. Soon after, my brother Paul was diagnosed with stage four bowel cancer, and my sister with pre-cancerous polyps in her stomach, and I found myself sitting in a genetic counsellor's office talking about my 97% chance of developing cancer myself. That means I too am likely to get sick.

Before my brother was diagnosed, he had spent his entire 20s travelling the world on a dollar a day. He had seen everything. Done it all. After he and my dad died, after I started to accept that those things that happen to “other people” had happened to me, my shock and grief crystallised into certainty: I am determined now to see as much of the world as my brother did; to talk to strangers, turn the music up, be overstimulated.

It is not that my loss has freed me from fear. It is that my fear of not having tried, tasted, seen everything is more powerful than my fear of failing. I do things I am afraid of because I am more afraid I'll die having not done them.

I am afraid of the ocean. I live in Australia, where the water is a source of danger. But I love seals – I spent my entire lockdown following the story of a seal who had left the ocean and swum up the river. So my partner, Tim, bought me a day swimming with seals for Christmas. I was scared, but I got on the boat. I packed my body into the too-tight wetsuit, donned my snorkel and jumped off a boat into the open ocean.

The first thing the instructor said was: “Now, there's a small shark underneath us so just keep swimming over the way, guys.” I wanted nothing more than to get out of that water, but I hadn't seen the seals yet, and so I stayed. I later found out the sharks were baby Port Jackson sharks, which

are best described as a cloud Pokémon without teeth. But I felt like Dwayne (The Rock) Johnson. Brave.

My comedy show, Average Bear, tells the story of my brother, my father and my health. I tell stories for a job for two reasons: because I like being on TV (fancy events, people send you free kombucha) and because stories are all we have. They are how we experience and categorise time, lessons, love, skin, chips, whisky, heartbreak, the [Fast & Furious franchise](#).

I mourn the men in my family. I mourn my imagined old age. But the thing I mourn the most is my father's stories. And so I tell mine on stage, on screen. I'm also telling the stories of the men who didn't have time to tell theirs. And people listen because they too have a dad, a brother, a ticking clock. They are all running out of time too, and they're desperate for someone to tell them how to spend it. So I tell them. Spend it laughing, drinking, telling people you love them. Quit the job. Get on the plane. Order off-menu. Buy the hot tub. Dump him, babe! Today in colour is worth a thousand blurry tomorrows.

Your future is not guaranteed. And isn't that fucking freeing? If you found out you had less time to live than the average bear, how might you spend it?

- Michelle Brasier will perform Average Bear at the Soho theatre in London from Mon 6 to Sat 11 Mar 2023



‘We need to restore to the police the ability to charge most offences while suspects are in the cells.’ Police make an arrest at an anti-lockdown protest in Richmond, March 2021. Photograph: Guy Bell/REX/Shutterstock

[OpinionPolice](#)

The austerity-hit CPS can’t cope and people aren’t getting justice. We, the police, want the power to fix that

[Craig Guildford](#), [John Robins](#) and [Stephen Watson](#)

Crimes go unpunished while officers wait for permission to lay charges. For all but the most serious cases, we should make that call ourselves

- [Police ‘should be given powers to charge suspects’](#)
- The writers are chief constables of three major UK police forces

Mon 27 Feb 2023 02.00 ESTLast modified on Mon 27 Feb 2023 02.08 EST



Craig Guildford, chief constable of West Midlands police.

If something is broken, then we should fix it. If we can't fix it, then we should replace it. The [Crown Prosecution Service](#) (CPS) is no longer able to give timely charging advice (namely while the suspect is under arrest and in the cells); not because of anything the CPS has done, but because it does not have the resources or the people to do what it used to. We have tried to fix it together over the last two years, but the plasters are not sticking – and things are getting worse. So for the sake of victims, witnesses and all in the criminal justice system, we need to replace it now, by restoring to the police the ability to charge most offences while suspects are in the cells.



John Robins, chief constable of West Yorkshire police.

As metropolitan chief constables with decades of policing experience between us, we recall having joined policing shortly after the introduction of the 1984 [Police](#) and Criminal Evidence Act (Pace), with grumbling detective colleagues still mourning the demise of “judges’ rules”, the long-standing guidelines that related to police questioning – and the acceptability of the resulting statements and confessions as evidence in court.



Stephen Watson, chief constable of Greater Manchester police.

Like Pace, the creation of the independent CPS was exactly the right thing to do. However, the current tortuous means of progressing cases to court is absolutely unprecedented.

Over the last 20 years, there has been a series of moves away from police custody sergeants making charging decisions to the current system, where only the CPS can decide, save in the most minor cases. Police officers now have to tell victims every day that they need to seek CPS “permission” to charge. Initially, this worked when CPS lawyers were in many police stations, during office hours, making decisions.

However, as resources and the CPS operating model changed through austerity, this service morphed into a telephone advice model called CPS Direct. It would be fair to say that the majority of frontline police officers, ourselves included, were unimpressed with how time-consuming and how bureaucratic that system became. Then, two years ago, ahead of the Covid restrictions, the CPS temporarily suspended the ability to get telephone advice because of its resourcing issues. That situation still remains – and there is no solution in sight. We now send them an electronic file for a charging decision which they now consider and advise us upon. This still

takes some considerable time, especially when we have someone in the cells.

The result is officers having to tell victims and witnesses that they have been caused to release the suspect “under investigation” or at best “on bail”. This does nothing to help victims and witnesses, build their confidence or feeling of safety – and does nothing to deliver the notion of “speedy justice”. The answer is simple. The CPS is unable – and is likely always to be unable – to make charging decisions while the suspect is in the cells. So the director of public prosecutions needs to give the right back to the police to make charging decisions there and then in far more cases: domestic abuse, harassment, burglary, robbery, theft, knife crime, violent crime. We used to do this; officers want it, victims want it, defence lawyers want it, and we are sure the courts do too, but the system keeps saying no.

Where is the evidence to support our call? In March 2015, 16% of crimes were resolved with a charge and/or summons and [now it is 5.6%](#). This is not because police have suddenly become less effective. It is because of so called attrition, where victim disengagement occurs and results in fewer charges due to those victims being worn down by time delays and a feeling of being unsupported by a seemingly faceless and insensitive system.

Recent coverage of how charge rates for a variety of criminal offences [have declined over time](#) against recorded crime shows there has to be a more efficient and effective method of supporting the system. It is OK to acknowledge things have changed, that the CPS does not have the resources it used to.

Parliament made a very important decision to establish the CPS as the public prosecutor in England and Wales. Successive iterations of director’s guidance from the director of public prosecutions (DPP) mandate how police forces must compile files of evidence, what offences are “chargeable” either directly, while a person is in police custody, or via a postal method for those persons dealt with voluntarily and reported for summons. That should all continue.

The CPS, like many other public bodies, including the police and courts, had to change through austerity, leading to a commensurate reduction in

capacity. Yet we appear to be trying to do the same things.

Despite recent funding increases and a shift in charging advice surrounding serious sexual offences, all too often our CPS colleagues appear to be far too thinly spread. Despite their best efforts, turning round a decision can often take much longer than they would like.

The CPS should always conduct all criminal prosecutions. It should be allowed to concentrate its skills upon the most challenging and complex of cases that need to naturally make their way to the crown court. They should continue to own and uphold the standard for the charging threshold.

The challenges are many, not least the [backlog work](#) currently being undertaken in the magistrates and crown courts, but if we allow the police to charge more offences we might also start providing swifter justice. Returning to the old ways of doing things represents a return to common-sense policing.

- Craig Guildford is chief constable of West Midlands police; John Robins is chief constable of West Yorkshire police; Stephen Watson is chief constable of Greater Manchester police
- ***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](#).***



According to UK Active, 29 leisure centres, pools or gyms have closed in the past year due to the energy crisis. Photograph: Justin Tallis/AFP/Getty Images

[SportblogSport](#)

Cold swimming pools and youth clubs closing – tale of two sporting Britains shames us all

[Sean Ingle](#)



The UK government must accept that gyms and pools are as fundamental to our health and wellbeing as a GP surgery or a pharmacy – and help them accordingly

Mon 27 Feb 2023 03.00 ESTLast modified on Mon 27 Feb 2023 05.26 EST

At the Armory gym in north London, they are still offering yoga for the visually impaired, free classes for seniors and free membership for the homeless. All the important and inclusive stuff, in short, that leisure centres should offer to their communities. But when the not-for-profit organisation that runs the gym stares at its balance sheet, and particularly the additional £350,000 on its annual energy bill, it wonders how it is going to survive.

Sadly there is nothing especially noteworthy about the Armory's story. It is one replicated up and down the land. But when I learned about its struggles, on the same day that the Premier League kicked and screamed [against a new football regulator](#), it neatly illustrated a tale of two sporting Britains. One awash with money from billionaires and dubious petro-states wanting to blunt government intervention. The other desperately pleading for help while trying not to go under.

According to UK Active, 29 leisure centres, pools or gyms have closed in the past year due to the energy crisis, while dozens more are at risk. But the scale of the problem is far greater still. This week the charity Sported will report the findings of a survey of its 3,000 grassroots clubs and youth centres – many of whom use sport to tackle issues such as homelessness, youth unemployment, knife crime and gangs. Tellingly 53% have suffered a reduction in their income in the last quarter.

The knock-on effects are devastatingly predictable. A quarter of these clubs have had to cut back on the sessions they offer, with 37% seeing a reduction in kids participating. Meanwhile 12% fear they may close down because of financial pressures. In short, a national tragedy is unfolding before our eyes. Only most of us don't yet see it.

Over the past couple of weeks I've spoken to MPs, government advisers and national and local bodies such as London Sport and Sported to try to understand what can be done. There is hope that the government will use next month's budget to extend its energy support scheme to the leisure sector. That will help. But it would only be a short-term fix.

Instead, there needs to be a fundamental change in the way we view and fund grassroots activity – and better appreciation of how it benefits society.

As one smart insider put it to me, every person that goes through a gym or pool and gets active is someone who is less likely to be a call on an NHS treatment budget. Yet the system doesn't account for that.

As things stand, leisure is treated more like a discretionary fund that local authorities can choose to provide if they want – rather than a fundamental part of our health architecture.

But what urgently needs to happen is for the government to accept that gyms and pools are as fundamental as a GP surgery or a pharmacy. That would give access to much greater pots of money – perhaps through the Department of Health and Social Care.

A few years ago Tracey Crouch MP floated another solution: having a department of wellness, to specifically focus on getting people active,

happier and healthier, which would hopefully also reduce the health department's budget.



Tracey Crouch MP suggested the creation of a department of wellness.
Photograph: Will Palmer/SWPix.com/Shutterstock

If the government needs any persuading, [a recent report by State of Life](#) found that Parkrun alone “could be up to 25 times more cost-effective in generating health and wellbeing improvements in the population than the NHS”.

Meanwhile Sport England's Active Lives survey – which polls around a quarter of a million people a year – has found that those who exercise regularly “are happier and more satisfied with their lives – and are less likely to experience anxiety”.

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A new study suggests that translates into happiness at work too. The research, which was based on detailed data from Germany between 2001 and 2019, found those who exercised at least once a week [reported higher levels of job satisfaction](#) as well.

Of course, government money is not the only solution. Sometimes unprofitable leisure centres have to do more to reform themselves. While I have also heard influential voices champion the idea of private pension funds being given better incentives to pay for new sporting facilities, in exchange for a yearly long-term profit, as another way of helping.

Yet I can't help wondering whether elite sport should be asked to do more. One of the original proposals from Crouch was for the football regulator to be able to apply a 10% levy on Premier League transfers to help the grassroots. It was, she said, an opportunity for top-flight clubs to demonstrate their "moral responsibility" to English football.

Sadly that proposal did not make the government's white paper. But just imagine the good that could have been done helping the most needy with the £280m acquired from the £2.8bn spent on transfers in the 2022-23 season. Especially if it was directed across grassroots sports and not just football.

As I write this, I can't help thinking back to what Sir Keith Mills, the founder of Sported, told me a few years ago. "There's a whole chunk of

sport which has enormous value to society but isn't talked about because it's not sexy enough," he said.

He was right, of course. Yet what does it say about our society when we struggle to keep our pools heated and our youth clubs open? And when the default position of the United Kingdom, the world's sixth richest country, seems to be one of managed decline?

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

2023.02.27 - Around the world

- [Abby Choi Ex-husband and relatives charged with murder of Hong Kong model as more body parts found](#)
- [Italy Elly Schlein voted leader of country's most important leftwing party in surprise win](#)
- [China Missing billionaire banker Bao Fan assisting authorities in investigation, company says](#)
- [France Record number of dolphins wash up on Atlantic beaches](#)
- [Asia Pacific China approves biggest expansion in new coal power plants since 2015, report finds](#)



Police believe Abby Choi was attacked inside a van. Photograph: Instagram: Abby Choi

[Hong Kong](#)

Ex-husband and relatives charged with murder of Hong Kong model as more body parts found

Remains taken for forensic testing to determine if they belong to influencer Abby Choi

[Helen Davidson](#) in Taipei

[@heldavidson](#)

Mon 27 Feb 2023 05.16 ESTFirst published on Sun 26 Feb 2023 22.50 EST

The ex-husband and two former in-laws of a woman in [Hong Kong](#) have been charged with her murder, after police revealed they had found more body parts during a weekend search.

Abby Choi's ex-husband, Alex Kwong Kong-chi, his father and his brother were formally charged with murder on Sunday. Kwong's mother was charged with perverting the course of justice.

Police also said they had arrested a fourth person and added a fifth to the list of suspects involved in the murder of 28-year-old Choi, [whose partial remains were discovered inside a fridge](#) on Friday.

The announcement came after police conducted a search at a house in a rural village near the town of Tai Po and a cemetery in Tseung Kwan O, where more body parts suspected to belong to Choi were discovered. A skull, hair and several ribs were found in a large pot inside the house. The contents were taken for forensic testing to determine if they belonged to Choi. The officer said there was a small hole at the back of the skull, which they believed was evidence of a "fatal attack" on the victim.



Police guard a home where remains suspected to belong to Hong Kong model were found.

Photograph: Jérôme Favre/EPA

Police believe she was attacked inside a van, which had been taken in as evidence, and then taken inside the house.

Kwong was arrested at a Hong Kong pier on Saturday after what police described as a failed attempt to flee by speedboat. He was allegedly carrying HK\$500,000 (£53,000) and about \$4m worth of luxury watches.

Choi, the mother of two young children, was well-known as a model and social media influencer, with more than 100,000 followers. Police have told media that Choi had financial disputes over tens of millions of Hong Kong dollars with Kwong and his family.

Supt Alan Chung said the investigation had been hampered by the uncooperativeness of the arrested suspects.

“We want to find out as much as we can, not just to convict the murderers, but to give an answer to the deceased’s family, and return justice to the deceased,” Chung said.

Choi’s torso and hands are still missing. Other limbs suspected to belong to Choi were earlier found in a refrigerator in a Lung Mei Tsuen apartment, about 10km from the Tai Po house.

“We’re still working on many clues,” Cheung said. “When we have any other clues we will do a thorough search again to find the torso and other missing parts of the body.”

The two children of Choi and Kwong were being cared for by Choi’s mother, police said.

Judge Peony Wong denied bail for the accused on Monday and adjourned the case until May, pending further investigations.



Vocal on social justice issues, Schlein has been compared in Italy to the New York congresswoman Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez. Photograph: Guglielmo Mangiapane/Reuters

[Italy](#).

Elly Schlein voted leader of Italy's most important leftwing party in surprise win

First female leader of Democratic party promises it will become 'a problem' for Giorgia Meloni's far-right government

[Angela Giuffrida](#) in Rome

Mon 27 Feb 2023 03.21 EST Last modified on Mon 27 Feb 2023 04.52 EST

Italy's most prominent leftwing party has elected its first female leader.

Elly Schlein, 37, defied poll projections and beat Stefano Bonaccini in the leadership race for the Democratic party (PD) on Sunday.

“The Democratic party is alive and ready to stand up,” said Schlein. “We did it, together we made a small big revolution, even this time they didn’t see us coming.”

Schlein said the party, which has struggled to form a strong opposition to Italy’s rightwing parties, “will be a problem” for the government led by [Giorgia Meloni](#) the leader of Brothers of Italy, a party with neofascist roots.

Schlein, a former MEP, first came to prominence in early 2020 after her small party, Coraggiosa (Courageous), played a pivotal role in stopping the far right from seizing power in the traditionally leftwing Emilia-Romagna region.

Bonaccini won the presidency of the region, with Schlein appointed vice-president, a role from which she stepped down after being elected as a parliamentarian in Italy’s general elections in September.

Vocal on social justice issues, Schlein, an Italian-American national, has been compared in Italy to the New York congresswoman Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez. She rejoined the Democratic party after leaving in 2015 out of frustration over the direction the party was taking under its then leader and former prime minister, Matteo Renzi.

In an interview with the Guardian in September, she said she “couldn’t bear” the PD any more after Renzi enforced his flagship jobs act, containing labour market measures that made it easier for employers to fire people and to hire on precarious contracts.

Among Schlein’s policy priorities in the leadership race were a minimum wage, healthcare and the environment.

She takes over from Enrico Letta, who [announced his resignation in September](#) after the election that brought Meloni to power.

Her win came as a surprise given polls had forecast a victory for Bonaccini by a wide margin.

“The first thing I ask is to applaud Elly Schlein,” Bonaccini said. “I’ve spoken to her and congratulated her. Good luck for the great responsibility she assumes at the helm of the party. Elly prevailed and I’m available to help out.”

Many on the left are pinning their hopes on Schlein to revive the PD, which polls at about 17%, and present a viable opponent to Meloni, a popular leader whose Brothers of Italy party has continued to gather strength since coming to power in coalition with Matteo Salvini’s League and Silvio Berlusconi’s Forza Italia.

“We will work together in the interest of the country,” Schlein said. “We will work for unity, my commitment is to be everyone’s leader, to win again.”

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Billionaire banker Bao Fan, the missing CEO of China Renaissance Holdings, is cooperating with Chinese authorities in an investigation, the bank says. Photograph: Mike Blake/Reuters

[China](#)

Missing Chinese billionaire banker Bao Fan assisting authorities in investigation, company says

Tech dealmaker reported to be unreachable 10 days ago in latest case of a top executive going missing during Xi Jinping's anti-corruption drive

Reuters in Beijing

Sun 26 Feb 2023 19.25 ESTLast modified on Sun 26 Feb 2023 19.48 EST

The Chinese billionaire tech banker Bao Fan, who was reported missing 10 days ago, is cooperating with Chinese authorities conducting an investigation, a China-based boutique bank has said.

It is the first time China Renaissance Holdings has given a reason for the disappearance of its founder and chairman, though no details about the investigation were shared.

“The board would like to reiterate that the business and operations of the group are continuing normally,” the bank said in the exchange filing on Sunday.

Reuters previously reported, citing sources, that authorities took Bao away earlier this month to assist in an investigation into a former colleague, Cong Lin, the company’s former president.

Shares of the company slumped last week after it said in an exchange filing the company had been unable to contact Bao.

Bao is a major figure in China’s tech industry and has played a key role in the emergence of a string of large domestic internet startups.

The star dealmaker’s disappearance is the latest in a series of cases of high-profile Chinese executives going missing with little explanation during a sweeping anti-corruption campaign spearheaded by President Xi Jinping.

In 2015 alone, at least five executives became unreachable without prior notice to their companies, including Fosun Group chairman Guo Guangchang, who Fosun later said was assisting with investigations regarding a personal matter.

Bao’s disappearance also comes against the backdrop of more than two years of sweeping regulatory crackdown on technology companies.

Bao, also China Renaissance’s controlling shareholder, started the firm in 2005 as a two-person team, seeking to match capital-hungry startups with venture capitalist and private equity investors.

The firm later expanded into services including underwriting, sales and trading.

Known to be well connected in the corporate world, Bao was involved with tech mergers including the tie-up of ride-hailing firms Didi and Kuaidi, food delivery giants Meituan and Dianping, and travel platforms Ctrip and Qunar.

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



Sea Shepherd remove the bodies of dolphins found off Les Sables-d'Olonne, during a protest to denounce non-selective fishing, in Nantes, western France. Photograph: Sebastien Salom-Gomis/AFP/Getty Images

[Animal welfare](#)

Record number of dolphins wash up on France's Atlantic beaches

Scientists say figure is 'tip of iceberg' and that dolphins becoming tangled in fishing gear is main cause of death

[Kim Willsher](#) in Paris

Mon 27 Feb 2023 01.00 EST Last modified on Mon 27 Feb 2023 04.44 EST

Animal campaigners say time is running out for the dolphin population off France's west coast and are calling on the government to ban fishing in areas where the animals are at risk.

A record number of dead dolphins have washed up on the country's Atlantic beaches in the last month, but activists believe this is only a

fraction of those being injured and killed by fishing boats.

Scientists at the [Pelagis sea mammal and bird observatory](#), attached to the University of La Rochelle, recorded 370 dead dolphins found along the Gulf of Gascony between 1 December and 25 January.

“Without any doubt, being entangled in fishing gear remains the principal cause of death observed in common dolphins found in winter strandings on beaches, and has been since the 1990s,” Pelagis reported.

“This situation is worrying and not specific to France as it affects neighbouring countries.”

The warning came as the marine conservation group Sea Shepherd France [published photos](#) showing the body of a dolphin mutilated with a homophobic message that washed up on a French beach at Sables d’Olonne.

“This is the worst face of fishing: no respect for the living, no love for the sea that sustains them. Those who atrociously mutilated this dolphin should never be allowed to fish again,” Sea Shepherd France said.

Last year 669 dolphins were found on French beaches, most from mid-December to early April, during the hake and sea bass fishing season.

Olivier van Canneyt, head of monitoring at Pelagis, said excess dolphin deaths had been “recurrent and very high” since 2016 and had started “especially early” this winter.

Lamya Essemlali, president of Sea Shepherd France, said the number of dolphins washing up on beaches was “the tip of the iceberg” and the toll could be many times higher.

“The large majority of the dolphins captured and freed then drown at sea and their bodies sink,” Essemlali added.

“It is urgent that we close certain zones to fishing boats during certain periods. We keep asking for this, but the fishing lobby is powerful in France

and the government has refused. It's extremely frustrating.

"The only thing we can do is display the dead and mutilated dolphins to local people and to the press and make people realise what is happening."

Sea Shepherd France, which estimates the true mortality rate of dolphins off the west coast could be as many as 11,000 out of a population of 180,000-200,000, recently launched [Operation Dolphin Bycatch](#) for the sixth year running to track and monitor fishing boats in the area. Its team is filming dolphins caught in nets to raise public awareness of the killings.

"Let's remind the state, which is committed to protecting marine mammals, and the fishers responsible for these massacres, that marine life does not belong to them and that the survival of all of us and that of future generations depends on our ability to preserve it," Sea Shepherd France said in a statement.

The International Council for the Exploration of the Sea, which coordinates research of the north-east Atlantic marine environment, has also urged the French government to order a suspension of certain non-selective fishing practices – a measure strongly opposed by fishers.

Essemlali added: "Our aim isn't to stop all fishing, only in certain zones and for a particular period, and for the fishers to receive financial compensation for not fishing in closed zones. That is the urgent solution.

"In the medium term, we need a complete review of fishing methods to ensure they are as selective as possible. The government has a responsibility to protect endangered species. We are not asking them to be nice to dolphins but to respect the law.

"The threat is real and now. The moment we see a significant drop in the dolphin population it will already be too late and scientists tell us they are already seeing signs of this. The situation cannot continue. It is unsustainable and we are running out of time."

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



In 2022, 50 gigawatts of coal power capacity went into construction across China – up by more than half compared with the previous year, new research shows. Photograph: Bloomberg/Getty Images

China

China approves biggest expansion in new coal power plants since 2015, report finds

Concerns about energy shortages drive increase as projects progress at ‘extraordinary’ speed

Reuters

Sun 26 Feb 2023 21.40 ESTLast modified on Sun 26 Feb 2023 22.13 EST

China approved the construction of another 106 gigawatts of coal-fired power capacity last year, four times higher than a year earlier and the highest since 2015, research shows.

Over the year, 50GW of coal power capacity went into construction across the country – up by more than half compared with the previous year – driven by energy security considerations, the Centre for Research on [Energy](#) and Clean Air (CREA) and Global Energy Monitor (GEM) said on Monday.

“The speed at which projects progressed through permitting to construction in 2022 was extraordinary, with many projects sprouting up, gaining permits, obtaining financing and breaking ground apparently in a matter of months,” said GEM analyst Flora Champenois.

The amount of new capacity connected to the grid had slowed in recent years after a decline in new approvals over the 2017-2020 period, but it is set to rebound over the next few years, driven by concerns about power shortages.

Many of the newly approved projects were identified as “supporting” baseload capacity designed to ensure the stability of the power grid and minimise blackout risks, the CREA-GEM report said.

However, many were being built in regions that already had a clear capacity surplus, and power supply problems would be better addressed by improving grid reliability and efficiency, the authors said.

China suffered a wave of blackouts in September 2021 as a result of coal supply shortages, cutting off thousands of homes and factories. A long drought last year also saw a dramatic drop in hydropower generation and the rationing of electricity.

Beijing has been trying to rejuvenate its economy after growth and employment were hit badly by stringent zero-Covid measures last year, raising concerns that its low-carbon efforts would be sidelined.

However, renewable power capacity additions have remained at record levels, with solar installations at 87GW in 2022 and expected to rise further in 2023.

The country aims to bring its climate-warming carbon dioxide emissions to a peak by 2030, but it remains unclear what level they will reach.

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

Headlines tuesday 28 february 2023

- [Live Rishi Sunak suggests UK-EU Northern Ireland deal will go ahead regardless of DUP stance](#)
- [Brexit True test of NI deal will be restoration of assembly, says Sunak](#)
- ['Brexit breakthrough' What the papers say about the deal](#)
- [Boris Johnson Ex-PM dangles threat of rebellion over NI deal](#)

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Brexit: Sunak urges Tories not to create ‘another Westminster drama’ over Northern Ireland deal – as it happened

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Rishi Sunak making a statement about the Northern Ireland protocol in the House of Commons on Monday. Photograph: Jessica Taylor/UK parliament/AFP/Getty Images

[Northern Irish politics](#)

Sunak: True test of Northern Ireland deal will be restoration of assembly

PM hints that Westminster is optimistic about return of power-sharing after unveiling Stormont brake

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

[Jessica Elgot](#) Deputy political editor

[@jessicaelgot](#)

Tue 28 Feb 2023 04.04 EST Last modified on Tue 28 Feb 2023 04.30 EST

Rishi Sunak has said the true test for his new protocol deal will be the restoration of the [Northern Ireland](#) assembly, saying citizens “need and

deserve” to return to functioning government.

In a hint the government in Westminster is optimistic about the return of power-sharing, Sunak said the new [Stormont brake](#) – which would allow the assembly a say over EU law applied in Northern Ireland – would be a key step towards restoring the “democratic deficit”.

Speaking from Belfast, the prime minister said the ultimate deficit was “the fact that people here in Northern [Ireland](#) do not have a functioning government”.

He told BBC Radio 4’s Today programme: “I’ve been very clear that people in Northern Ireland need and deserve their government to be up and running ... we’ve got to look forward.”

Sunak’s comments came after the Democratic Unionist party leader, Jeffrey Donaldson, gave a cautious welcome to the Stormont brake aspect of the protocol deal.

He told Today that “at first reading”, the Stormont brake mechanism gave the devolved government in Northern Ireland “the ability to apply the brake where the application of EU law for the purposes of facilitating cross-border trade impacts on our ability to trade with the rest of the United Kingdom”.

Donaldson said the brake would not be used for “trivial reasons” and added: “We want to do it in circumstances where a change to law would impact on our ability with trade with the rest of the United Kingdom, and that certainly is no trivial matter.”

The comments were more positive than from some others in the party, including the chief whip, Sammy Wilson, and MP Ian Paisley Jr, who said the deal “did not cut the mustard”.

The foreign secretary, James Cleverly, said earlier it would be “hugely disappointing” if the DUP did not return to Stormont.

“I think they will know that I have been very, very focused on the concerns they have expressed on behalf of their community. They will have real authority when it comes to the Stormont brake,” he said.

“If they don’t re-enter the power-sharing executive, that will be hugely disappointing. It won’t be good news for the people of Northern Ireland.”

Some DUP figures have insisted that all trace of EU law and European court of justice jurisdiction be removed from Northern Ireland – which the new Windsor framework does not achieve because of the desire to avoid a hard border with the Republic.

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Asked about the extent of EU law, Sunak said it was about striking a balance and keeping democratic accountability. He said: “At the heart of the Belfast/Good Friday agreement is the delicate balance that needs to exist in Northern Ireland, and that’s about respect for the aspirations and identities of all communities.

“In practical terms, something that is important to people in Northern Ireland is not having a border between Northern Ireland and the Republic, I think that’s important to everybody in fact, but also it’s important for businesses to have access to the EU single market.

“As long as the people of Northern Ireland consent to that arrangement, then that’s why there is a small and limited role for EU law in Northern Ireland – what we are talking about is less than 3% of EU laws that apply in Northern Ireland and they apply very specifically for the purpose that I just mentioned.”

Sunak said the changes would make a significant material difference for people and businesses in Northern Ireland. “There won’t be routine checks for goods moving from Great Britain ... There will be checks where we suspect criminality or smuggling.

“The crucial thing, though, is that there shouldn’t be physical checks of ordinary goods going between Great Britain and Northern Ireland. That wouldn’t be right. And this framework ensures that that is not the case.”

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Composite of the UK newspaper front pages after Rishi Sunak announced a Northern Ireland deal to break a Brexit impasse. Composite: The Daily Telegraph / The Guardian / The Times / Daily Express / Daily Mail / Metro

[What the papers say](#)[UK news](#)

‘Brexit breakthrough’: how the papers covered Rishi Sunak’s Northern Ireland deal

Prime minister is hailed for his achievement in facing down Tory rebels and winning over the EU to break trade deadlock

[Graham Russell](#)

[@G_J_Russell](#)

Mon 27 Feb 2023 22.24 ESTLast modified on Mon 27 Feb 2023 22.25 EST

Rishi Sunak’s [Windsor framework](#) has been welcomed, at least initially, on the front pages in the UK and Ireland, as a way to break the Brexit impasse over Northern Ireland.

Some papers look ahead to the blue skies of greater European cooperation, while others focus on the potential storm clouds ahead if Tory rebels or the Democratic Unionist party opt to reject it.

The **Times** says simply “Brexit breakthrough” and leads with Sunak’s claim that the UK had “taken back control” via a veto on new EU laws that affect Northern Ireland (now known as the “[Stormont brake](#)”). Its second story puzzles over who exactly proposed getting EU commission chief Ursula von der Leyen to meet King Charles, [given everyone seems to be denying it](#).

Tuesday’s TIMES: “Brexit breakthrough” [#TomorrowsPapersToday](#)
[pic.twitter.com/LyNwIli4Z5](#)

— Allie Hodgkins-Brown (@AllieHBNews) [February 27, 2023](#)

The **Guardian** shows a smiling Sunak and von der Leyen shaking hands under the headline: “PM hails ‘new chapter’ in relations with EU after Northern [Ireland](#) deal”. The standfirst carries a hint of the obstacles that lie ahead for Sunak in the form of hardline Brexiters in his party.

Guardian front page, Tuesday 28 February 2023: PM hails ‘new chapter’ in relations with EU after Northern Ireland deal
[pic.twitter.com/AWUERoX2CW](#)

— The Guardian (@guardian) [February 27, 2023](#)

The **Daily Mail** can’t quite believe what has happened and reflects that in its front page with the headline: “Has Rishi done the impossible?”.

Tuesday’s [@DailyMailUK](#) [#MailFrontPages](#)
[pic.twitter.com/YFkn0z8jCR](#)

— Daily Mail U.K. (@DailyMailUK) [February 27, 2023](#)

The **Daily Telegraph** carries an image of a cheerful Sunak and Von Der Leyen, and leads with the prime minister's words: "Sunak: My deal is a new way forward." It notes that an expected backlash from Tory rebels failed to materialise.

The front page of tomorrow's Daily Telegraph:

'Sunak: My deal is a new way forward' [#TomorrowsPapersToday](https://t.co/x8AV4OoUh6pic.twitter.com/gSMi26Sj8u)

Sign up for the Front Page newsletter <https://t.co/x8AV4OoUh6pic.twitter.com/gSMi26Sj8u>

— The Telegraph (@Telegraph) [February 27, 2023](#)

The **Daily Express** celebrates the Stormont brake aspect of the deal, but notes Boris Johnson has not yet given his view on the trashing of his Brexit legislative legacy. The headline is: "PM: My Brexit Deal 'Now Takes Back Control'."

Tuesday's front page: PM: My Brexit Deal 'Now Takes Back Control'
[#TomorrowsPapersToday](https://t.co/w0NZg3DERLpic.twitter.com/ummA79bn8f) <https://t.co/w0NZg3DERLpic.twitter.com/ummA79bn8f>

— Daily Express (@Daily_Express) [February 27, 2023](#)

The **Financial Times** looks ahead to the promise of an easier relationship with Europe. Its headline: "Northern Ireland trade deal eases post-Brexit tensions with Brussels."

Just published: front page of the Financial Times, UK edition, Tuesday 28 February <https://t.co/gz5vKIWHws> [pic.twitter.com/M0pEDKuNoK](https://t.co/gz5vKIWHwspic.twitter.com/M0pEDKuNoK)

— Financial Times (@FinancialTimes) [February 27, 2023](#)

The **i** paper plays it both ways, marking the deal but also the trouble that may lie ahead with the headline: "Sunak secures breakthrough on Brexit –

as tensions loom”.

Tuesday's front page: Sunak secures breakthrough on Brexit - as tensions loom [#TomorrowsPapersToday](https://twitter.com/RwEGEUdIHV)
[pic.twitter.com/RwEGEUdIHV](https://twitter.com/RwEGEUdIHV)

— i newspaper (@theipaper) [February 27, 2023](#)

Metro has some fun with Johnson’s claim to have an “oven-ready” Brexit deal back in 2019. Reporting that a Brexit deal has arrived, albeit 1,215 days late, it says “You can put the oven on.”

Tomorrow's Paper Today □

YOU CAN PUT THE OVEN ON

□ PM and EU chief shake on historic agreement
□ But still a challenge to get it past the rebels [#TomorrowsPapersToday](https://twitter.com/1xocYlc1IJ)
[pic.twitter.com/1xocYlc1IJ](https://twitter.com/1xocYlc1IJ)

— Metro (@MetroUK) [February 27, 2023](#)

The **Irish Times** covers Sunak hailing the [deal as a “new chapter”](#), and notes his adoption of the hardline Brexiter narrative of taking back control. The **Irish Independent** notes the [“extreme caution”](#) on the part of the Democratic Unionist party (DUP) as it studies the agreement but says taoiseach [Leo Varadkar has welcomed the deal](#).

The **Belfast Telegraph** says all [eyes are now on the DUP](#), whose leader, Sir Jeffrey Donaldson, said it won’t be “rushed or pushed” into a hasty decision.

The **Irish News** leads with an assessment of the [dilemma facing Donaldson](#) by columnist Alex Kane: “So, Donaldson’s choice is a simple, if brutal one. Reject a deal which a UK parliament is likely to endorse with a massive majority, leaving the party weak and friendless at the centre of power. Or

face down his internal and external opponents and try and persuade a majority of unionist voters that, while not perfect, the Windsor Framework is much better than most people imagined even as recently as the start of January.”

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2023/feb/28/uk-newspaper-front-pages-how-the-papers-covered-rishi-sunak-northern-ireland-brexit-deal>

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



Boris Johnson has urged the DUP to think carefully before passing judgment on Sunak's deal. Photograph: Daniel Leal/AFP/Getty Images

[Brexit](#)

Boris Johnson dangles threat of rebellion over Northern Ireland deal

Most Tory MPs welcome breakthrough as hardline Brexiters are mulling response

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

[Aubrey Allegretti](#) *Political correspondent*

[@breeallegretti](#)

Mon 27 Feb 2023 18.36 ESTFirst published on Mon 27 Feb 2023 12.51 EST

Boris Johnson is dangling the threat of a rebellion over Rishi Sunak after a new post-Brexit deal was announced that will rip up the former prime

minister's protocol on [Northern Ireland](#) and ditch his legislation to override it.

Although most Conservative MPs warmly welcomed the breakthrough after two years of negotiations, Johnson stayed away from the House of Commons chamber and is said not to have made up his mind about whether to endorse or oppose the “Windsor framework”.

A source close to him said he was studying and reflecting on the government's proposals.

'The protocol will never be perfect': Politicians react to the NI protocol deal – video

They did not deny that Johnson had urged the Democratic Unionist party (DUP), who hardline Tory Brexiters on the European Research Group have said they are in “lockstep” with, to think carefully before passing judgment on the deal.

The source said they would not comment on private discussions, after PoliticsHome reported that he urged the DUP to be cautious amid suggestions it was prepared to endorse the agreement.

While no Tory MPs have yet openly criticised the deal, the veteran Brexiter Bill Cash warned Sunak he would scrutinise the text closely before deciding what to do. “The devil, as ever, lies in the detail,” he said.

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Mark Francois, chair of the ERG, also said he hoped “we won’t find any nasty surprises which would materially undermine the position of Northern Ireland”.

The ERG is expected to hold a full meeting for members on Tuesday night to decide how to respond to the Windsor framework, with a “star chamber” of lawyers assembled to scrutinise the plans for a [veto for Stormont](#) on new EU laws in Northern Ireland.

Sunak vowed that MPs would get a vote on his deal “at the appropriate time”, and added the result “will be respected”.

Several members of the ERG privately said they were broadly supportive of Sunak’s deal. “Provided the details live up to the press conference, fundamentally, I think this sounds like something they should be able to live with,” said one. Another said they believed only 10 or so “headbangers” were “prepared to let the perfect be the enemy of the good”.

Some of the old Brexit “Spartans” who helped bring down Theresa May over her deal in 2019 are now part of the government, including Steve Baker. He welcomed the deal and said other pragmatists should too.

However, the former culture secretary [Nadine Dorries](#) hit out at Baker for “gushing about the deal”, claiming he was a “key agitator” who helped to remove Johnson from Downing Street last July. She said: “What shred of credibility he has left would be destroyed if he came out against Sunak. He has nowhere else to go other than to grin and support.”



The former culture secretary Nadine Dorries, who has hit out at Steve Baker for ‘gushing about the deal’. Photograph: Kirsty O’Connor/PA

Johnson has [urged Sunak not to drop his protocol bill](#), which drew a legal challenge from the EU. But the prime minister is facing pressure to do so from senior European leaders, including from the French president, Emmanuel Macron, with whom he is expected to meet to discuss measures to tackle people being smuggled across the Channel in small boats.

Any rebellion may end up being small, Tory strategists believe. Hardline Brexiters, including the UK’s former negotiator David Frost and ex-business secretary Jacob Rees-Mogg, have so far refrained from making critical interventions about the state of the deal from reports over the past week.

Rees-Mogg told ITV’s Peston on Monday evening that the prime minister had achieved “more than I thought was possible” with the deal. He insisted, however, that Johnson’s original agreement was not at fault, as he said that the protocol always contained “the means for its own amendment”.

But even a dozen Conservative MPs opposing the deal could trigger bigger problems for Sunak further down the line. Anand Menon, the director of the UK in a Changing Europe thinktank, said: “The danger for the prime

minister is that opposition might be cumulative. A few rebels on the protocol, a few more on the budget – this could all build into a real headache should the May local elections go badly.”

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2023/feb/27/tory-brexit-hardliners-erg-meet-response-northern-ireland-protocol-deal>

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

2023.02.28 - Spotlight

- [Food My body resists veganism. What's the most ethical alternative?](#)
- ['Scanners are complicated' Why Gen Z faces workplace 'tech shame'](#)
- [Dinner with Proust How Alzheimer's caregivers are pulled into their patients' worlds](#)
- [Andy Fairweather Low interview 'Jimi Hendrix sidled over and politely told me: you're in the wrong key'](#)

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If one is looking for one step away from veganism, diet options do exist.
Photograph: Clara Bastian/Getty Images/iStockphoto

[Food](#)

Veganism didn't agree with me. What's the most ethical alternative?

A vegan diet can be hard to adopt, even if you're convinced it's the right thing to do. An investigation of three options

[Peter Godfrey-Smith](#)

Tue 28 Feb 2023 01.00 EST Last modified on Thu 2 Mar 2023 13.51 EST

Suppose a person is very concerned about the ethical issues around food and farming, especially animal welfare, but for whatever reason finds that a wholly plant-based diet does not work for them. What is the most defensible step away from veganism – the best compromise to make, if it is a compromise at all?

About a year ago, this question became vivid to me soon after I set out on an experiment: a near-vegan diet for a month. For some time, I have tried to eat in a way mindful of ethical issues, avoiding, albeit imperfectly, the products of inhumane factory farming. But I have eaten animal products, including meat and fish, regularly. After I spent a lot of time in recent years working on questions about animal minds (initially trying to [understand octopuses](#) and other cephalopods, and then moving on from there), the ethical questions around food began to feel quite pressing. So I wanted to find out how I felt on a diet with almost no animal products.

My plan was *near* vegan, as I allowed myself two eggs each day, and some minor deviations (I didn't worry if I was given butter for my toast, didn't query the details of Thai sauces and stayed with my usual fish oil tablets). The eggs were included because, ever since another series of dietary experiments a few decades earlier, I have found that a high-protein and fairly high-fat diet is best for my general wellbeing. So, I thought, two eggs would help smooth the transition, along with protein supplements. Free-range eggs I see as the most ethical of all widely available animal products. Some vegans hold that eating eggs of any kind is unethical, while others at least see this choice as more defensible than other animal foods. (Peter Singer, in his [book](#) *Animal Liberation*, regards free-range egg production as acceptable.)

The aim of the experiment was to look at the possibility of heading towards veganism, and to do this primarily for animal welfare reasons. I accept

some of the arguments against meat made on environmental grounds, but the issues around [animal suffering](#) are primary for me.

To my surprise, the experiment quickly became an illuminating failure. The regimen was, after just a few days or so, much harder than I had expected. I felt unsettled, tired and much of the time quite *cold*, surprisingly (in February in Australia). Heartburn, headaches, inattention ... it did not go well. On day 10, I decided to change plans and add some dairy products to the diet for the middle third of the month. This transition was just as surprising as the previous one. Immediately I felt fine, with all those problems out of the picture. I felt better than fine, in fact – very sharp. Ten days after that, I resumed the near-vegan regime. The results were as discouraging as before, and I switched back. By the end of the month, I'd spent half of it mostly vegan and half as a vegetarian.

Perhaps I should have stuck with the first, mostly vegan diet, and waited to get used to it. (My understanding is that one's microbiome, one's gut ecology, has to make a shift.) But I was reluctant to do this, especially during the Covid-19 pandemic. With that unsettled feeling, day after day, I suspected I was more vulnerable to pathogens than usual. I expected to catch Covid-19 at some stage (as I did, a month or so later), and wanted to be physically well-equipped to fight it off.



A calf peeks out of a fence at a Florida dairy farm. Photograph: Cristóbal Herrera/EPA

I realise that this was a very short experiment. But the moments of transition between the various diets posed some choices in a clear way. Suppose one decides that a wholly plant-based or near-vegan diet is not going to work, and something must be added. If one is looking for one step away, thinking primarily about animal welfare questions, then three options appear that have completely different kinds of justification:

1. Humanely farmed meat (especially beef)
2. Wild-caught fish
3. Dairy products (conventionally farmed)

These aren't really the only three options (I will look at others below), but they are some obvious and available ones, within a developed-world urban or suburban setting. Let's say, initially, that the goal is to choose one of these as the step away. Which should it be?

I said above that they have different kinds of justifications and, when one looks closely, something like an *incommensurability* appears in the situation. This term from philosophy means that you can't measure or compare alternatives using a common standard that is fair to all of them. No suitable "common currency" or measuring stick is available. These three possible ways of going shopping bring on board quite different ways of looking at the moral issues.

Let's clarify each option before looking at the ethical side. When I talk about humanely farmed beef, in option 1, I have in mind beef produced so humanely that it makes sense to think that the cows have a good life overall, and a life that is better, most likely, than the life that nearly all nonhuman mammals might have. This is not just supermarket meat labelled "free range", but a smaller fraction of what is produced. This meat tends to come from specialist butchers who work with individual farms. In many cities, this is obtainable now. It tends to be expensive when compared with less

humanely produced meat, and that means it won't be a feasible choice for everyone. But where it is a live option, it's certainly worth considering. (What about humanely farmed chickens, pigs, and so on? Yes, they are included, but each case is a bit different and I am going to focus a bit on beef.) These animals have a good life overall. On the other hand, killing is an inevitable part of this kind of farming, and perhaps there is something intractably bad in the practice of raising sentient animals to be killed.

One might instead opt for wild-caught fish (and some other wild-caught seafood) – option 2. In that case, killing is also part of the picture, but our relationship to the animals' lives is very different from what we saw in the first option. Our role here is to cut short a life that would end anyway; we do not raise the animals to kill them. (If an animal *is* raised to be fished or hunted, I don't include it here.) I think that the deaths involved in commercial fishing are probably not especially awful, compared with the deaths that would follow in the wild. But death is death, taking place at our hands, and the numbers involved are huge.

The third option is dairy. I could become one of those epicurean vegetarians who don't eat meat but have an impressive knowledge of the endless international subtleties of cheese. Here the problems are different. I think that the lives of dairy cows within conventional farming are bad. They are probably nowhere near as bad as those of factory-farmed pigs, but worse than those of cows on humane farms who are being raised to be eaten, perhaps often worse than those of conventionally farmed beef cattle (though I am not sure, and this will depend on the details of the lives in both cases).

I would rather be reincarnated as a beef cow on a humane farm than a dairy cow in nearly any modern dairy

Why do I assume, in this option, that the dairy products are conventionally farmed? Why not assume that this choice involves special, humane farming, as seen in the beef option? When I was thinking about the choices during my experiment, dairy produced in a very humane way was not available where I live, though beef was. This is no accident. It appears to be quite difficult to bring dairy farming close to the welfare level seen in the best

humane farming of beef cattle, while remaining economically feasible. I do know of one dairy farm in Australia that is exemplary in this way – How Now Dairy. This farm keeps cows and calves together, sharing the milk; there is no early separation. Some cheese is made using that milk, though it is not easy to obtain where I live. (Disclosure: I own a small number of shares in this dairy.)

It may be that this kind of humane dairy can survive and expand, in which case a dairy option might be clearly best. But, at the moment, much of the milk, cheese and butter eaten by vegetarians is produced in a way that is quite cruel. Does it make a difference to choose “organic” dairy? The rules for “organic” status vary from place to place (as dairy farm conditions do more generally). In some settings it probably does make a significant difference, in others less so. In addition, much cheese has traditionally contained rennet, an enzyme taken from the stomach lining of calves that have been killed, and this has made cheese a more problematic choice for vegetarians. A lot of cheese can now be made with rennet substitutes, though.

Suppose, again, that the dairy products being considered are conventionally farmed, or something close to it. When one eats this food, one is not eating the body of an animal that was killed to be eaten (as in options 1 and 2). One is instead eating something made as food by an animal that remains alive. And a cow often produces 40,000 litres of milk, or more, during its life within modern farming – that is a lot of food (for example, 4,000kg, which is more than four tons, of cheddar). If we ignore waste and the like, then even if one ate half a pound of cheese every day for 50 years, one would eat the output of roughly one cow.

However, that cow’s life is usually far from a good one. Cows must be pregnant, or have recently given birth, in order to produce milk, and the result is an endless cycle of pregnancies through the cow’s rather short life, with the calves removed almost immediately. In some countries, many or most dairy cows are kept indoors for their entire lives. If reincarnated after my own death, I would rather come back as a beef cow on a humane farm than a dairy cow in nearly any modern dairy. Humane dairy with cow and

calves together might be best of all, but I am assuming, again, that this is harder to achieve economically than humane beef farming.



Milkfish at a grocery store in Mississauga, Ontario. Photograph: Creative Touch Imaging Ltd/NurPhoto/Rex/Shutterstock

As I thought about this, I had an initial sense that there *ought to be a best choice* between the three. I'd be willing to choose any of them if I thought it was clearly the best. When I say that, I don't mean that I'd never lapse from such a choice, but I don't see that as the relevant standard. It would be good to have a sense of the best goal to pursue, even if it's pursued with some flexibility or at least unreliability. But when we look more closely at the arguments, through different avenues of reasoning any of the three might be put on top.

In support of conventional dairy: killing a sentient animal might be a unique harm, and the dairy option minimises it. Far fewer animals are involved, in comparison with the other two options. In the count of lives lost, we should also include a bit over half of the calves that a cow produces. All the males and some of the females will be killed fairly quickly. Their bodies will be put to some use, but they are seen as low-value animals. The body count for dairy will still be much lower than the other options, though.

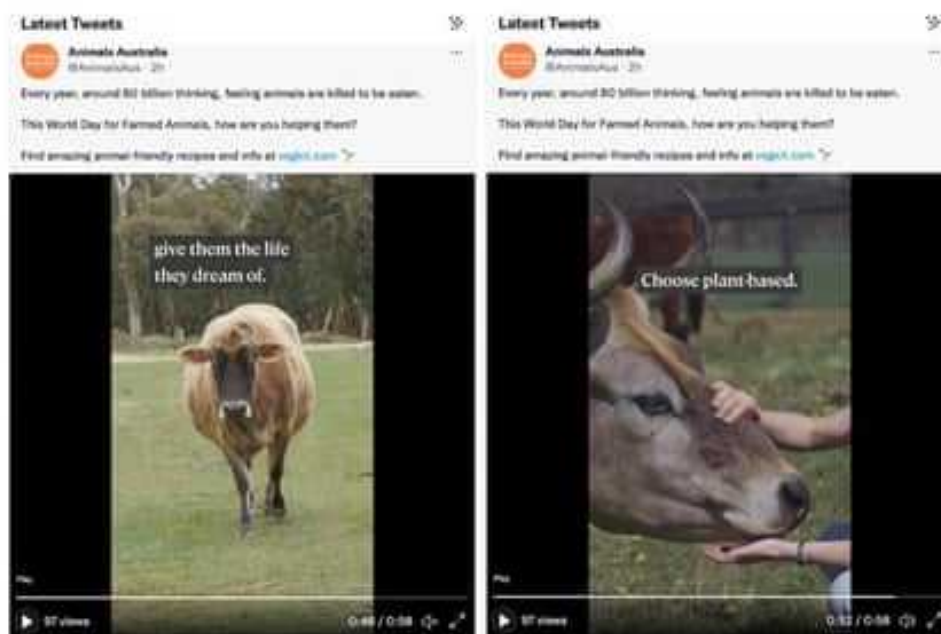
This argument in favour of the dairy option is, in a way, a pessimistic argument. The practice is agreed to be bad, but there's not too much of it. In contrast, the humane-beef option has a kind of positive defence. From several ethical viewpoints, this practice may be a positive good. It is familiar to note that a utilitarian might mount a defence like this, where a utilitarian is someone who counts up the totality of good and bad consequences from an action, and assesses the action purely in those terms. But it's not just utilitarians who might be on board with this kind of beef farming. Utilitarians, controversially, do not worry about the distribution of good and bad consequences over different individuals; one person's enjoyment, if sufficiently great, can compensate for others' pain. In the case of humane beef farming, the defence given can be one that counts the good and bad consequences of the practice for each animal individually. Animal X does well overall, over the course of its life, and the costs and benefits to animal Y, or human consumers, need not be in the picture.

In the case of sustainable fishing, I don't think an argument could be made that this is a positive good for the [fish](#) (unless a later death would be a lot more unpleasant). But this practice might be defended by arguing that humans, in this case, are just resuming their historic position in natural food webs. We are not, as with dairy and humane beef, instituting a new and different set of relationships between our lives and the animals'. All of the fish we kill will die one day anyway, and we did not organise, curate, or confine their lives.

The eating of farmed fish would not be included in a defence of seafood of this kind. The animal welfare problems associated with fish farming, at least in many forms, appear to be serious. Fish farming would not receive a defence via any of the avenues discussed in this essay. What about the farming of marine animals for which questions about suffering are either out of the picture or at least much less concerning? Cases of this do probably exist – oysters, clams, mussels – but this is a shorter list than once seemed likely. The list will probably not include shrimp, for example. On the other hand, my defence of eating wild-caught fish would also apply to wild game – (wild) venison and wild boar, for example. Some people might think those cases raise special problems, as mammals are being hunted. The numbers are also much smaller, though.

Would all wild-caught seafood have the same arguments applicable to them as apply to wild-caught fish? Not necessarily, as the handling of wild-caught marine animals can be unusually cruel in some cases, as seen in the boiling alive of lobsters and other crustaceans.

I do feel the incongruity in the claim that humane farming of any kind that includes death might be a positive good. But many views get themselves into awkward places in this area. In the picture below, I have a couple of frames from a short video that was posted on Twitter by an organisation called [Animals Australia](#). My admiration for this organisation, I want to say at the outset, is just about boundless. For many years, they have opposed the extraordinarily cruel live export of sheep and cattle from Australia to the Middle East, and have done many other impressive things, as well. My questioning of this social media message should be read with that as background.



Images from short video that was posted on Twitter by Animals Australia.
Photograph: Twitter

The suggestion in the video is that, by choosing plant-based foods, we can give cows “the life they dream of” – a happy, low-stress life. But if plant-based foods come to dominate human diets, the result will not be a “happy cow” scenario, but something closer to a “no more cows” scenario. There

will be no reason to give cows any sort of life at all, except perhaps for a few in zoos and the like (and [zoos](#), of course, raise another set of ethical questions). If we want there to be happy cows, in any numbers, that entails a continuation of farming of some kind. This makes vivid the idea that humane beef farming might be [justified](#) as a positive good, rather than something that's not as bad as what happens at present.

I've not written this essay as a dialectical exercise in which a particular conclusion is picked out in advance and I want to entice or cajole the reader into getting to the same place as me. I don't know where the discussion leaves me. Looking at it dispassionately, the arguments for humanely farmed beef seem good, but I do share some of the unease that vegetarians have about this option. Both the other options have their advantages, and I don't see any of them as inherently unreasonable.

One response to this situation might be: choose all of them! Spread the choices around. If one did this, everything one ate would be defensible on *some* line of thinking. I sympathise, though, with the rejoinder that says: make up your mind!

A recent line of thought in moral philosophy becomes relevant here. Some hold that if one is working out what to do in a situation of uncertainty about various moral arguments, one should do a kind of "expected value" calculation, choosing the action that comes out best when all the moral theories that might be right are taken into account. If one is torn 50/50 between [utilitarianism](#) and a [Kantian view](#) based on rights and duties, for example, one can try to find choices that look OK on both. If one is more of a utilitarian but has some Kantian doubts, one can weight utilitarian reasons higher, but still look for something that makes some sense if the Kantian view is right. This talk of a moral theory turning out to be right, in roughly the way that the weather tomorrow will turn out one way or another, seems philosophically off base to me, but I can also see the practical appeal of this move. What would it mean in this case? Might it mean that one can indeed mix or combine the three, or does that ignore that fact that, according to some of the moral outlooks that would figure in the accounting, killing sentient beings is an enormous harm?

Finally, I realise that at least some of the options I am considering here do not “scale up” to yield a solution to [questions](#) about diet for humanity as a whole, especially in the long term. These reflections are intended for people right now, in situations where all three of the options discussed are feasible everyday choices, given a person’s economic situation and what is available to them. The future will probably be different, including not just advances in plant-based foods but, if the technology works out, a lot of cultured or lab-grown meat. The fact that, at some time in the future, our food choices will look very [different](#) does not change the fact that we do have these choices now. And at least for people whose constitution resists veganism, the choice is vivid. I am not left, at the end of all this, with a definite conclusion.

What do you think?

Peter Godfrey-Smith is professor of history and philosophy of science at the University of Sydney. This essay was originally published in [Aeon](#).

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‘How would they know how to scan something if they’ve never been taught to do it?’ Illustration: Esme Blegvad/The Guardian

[Technology](#).

‘Scanners are complicated’: why Gen Z faces workplace ‘tech shame’

They may be digital natives, but young workers were raised on user-friendly apps – and office devices are far less intuitive

[Alaina Demopoulos](#)

Tue 28 Feb 2023 01.00 EST Last modified on Tue 28 Feb 2023 13.29 EST

Garrett Bemiller, a 25-year-old New Yorker, has spent his entire life online. He grew up in front of screens, swiping from one app to the next. But there's one skill set Bemiller admits he's less comfortable with: the humble office printer.

“Things like scanners and copy machines are complicated,” says Bemiller, who works as a publicist. The first time he had to copy something in the office didn't exactly go well. “It kept coming out as a blank page, and took me a couple times to realize that I had to place the paper upside-down in the machine for it to work.”

Bemiller usually turns to Google for answers. But he's also found an alliance with some older workers, who are veterans of the copy room and can swiftly purchase shipping labels on the office UPS account.

Bemiller knows that the expectation is that he'd be the one helping them out with tech issues. “There is a myth that kids were born into an information age, and that this all comes intuitively to them,” said Sarah Dexter, an associate professor of education at the University of Virginia. “But that is not realistic. How would they know how to scan something if they've never been taught how to do it?”

It takes five seconds to learn how to use TikTok. You don't need an instruction book like with a printer

Gen Z workers tend to be well equipped to edit photos and videos all from their phones, or use website builders like Squarespace and Wix. They grew up using apps to get work done and are used to the ease that comes with Apple operating systems. Their formative tech years were spent using software that exists to be user-friendly.

But desktop computing is decidedly less intuitive. Things like files, folders, scanning, printing, and using external hardware are hallmarks of office life. Do they know what button to press to turn on a bulky computer monitor, when many simply close their personal laptops when they're done with them? (No, says one [Reddit user](#) who works in IT and has resorted to putting a sign over the power button on work computers.)

Steve Bench runs workshops on generational differences in the corporate world. "I joke in my sessions that my Gen Z intern didn't know how to mail a letter," he said. "They asked me where the sticker went. I said, 'Do you mean the stamp?'"

The tech company HP coined the phrase "[tech shame](#)", to define how overwhelmed young people felt using basic office tools. According to the study, one in five young office workers reported "feeling judged for having tech issues", which made them less likely to ask for help. And in another survey, the employment firm LaSalle Agency [found](#) that almost half of the class of 2022 felt "underprepared" when it came to the technical skills relevant for entering the workforce.

Dell [used](#) its own survey of respondents between the ages of 18 and 26 to find that 56% of respondents said "they had very basic to no digital skills education." A third of them said their education had not provided them "with the digital skill they need to propel their career". What they know comes from the apps they use on their own time, not the tech supplies at Office Depot.

And so we come back to printers, which remain especially difficult for Gen Z to crack. "When I see a printer, I'm like, 'Oh my God,'" said Max Simon, a 29-year-old who works in content creation for a small Toronto business. "It seems like I'm uncovering an ancient artifact, in a way."

Simon, who makes humorous videos about corporate life for his audience of over 220,000 TikTok followers, falls into the category of young millennial. He considers himself something of a shepherd for Gen Z staff who feel lost navigating Google Suite and other quotidian software.



‘They may not be this godsend to the workforce who come in automatically knowing how to do Excel, but they’re fast learners.’ Photograph: SDI Productions/Getty Images/iStockphoto

“I’ll invite them to a Google Meet, and they’ll say, ‘How do we get a link to that?’ But the link is already in the calendar invite,” Simon said. “Like, it’s 2023, this is the world that we live in. Things that seem pretty straightforward often catch Gen Z off-guard.”

For Simon, it’s another problem to blame on the brain-melting power of social media. His hunch: apps like Instagram and TikTok are so easy to use that younger people expect everything else to be a breeze, too. When it’s not, they’re more likely to give up. “It takes five seconds to learn how to use TikTok,” he said. “You don’t need an instruction book, like you would with a printer. Content is so easy to access now that when you throw someone a simple curveball, they’ll swing and they miss, and that’s why Gen Z can’t schedule a meeting.”

When it comes to accomplishing simple tasks, sometimes Gen Z has to get a bit creative – or downright evasive. Elizabeth, a 23-year-old engineer who lives in Los Angeles, avoids the office printer at all costs. “I feel like I just haven’t been taught things that some people consider basic knowledge, and I’m too shy to ask,” she said.

Bemiller, the publicist, accidentally killed one work laptop because he didn't know how to ask for help. Every morning when he turned it on, he would be greeted by a pop-up from the storage service Dropbox, which he always accepted without reading. After a few months, the computer began to run painfully slowly. It often died without warning. Bemiller could not get any work done, and his manager ordered him a new laptop.

By the time the replacement came in the mail, IT had figured out the issue – and it was completely avoidable. As it turned out, every time Bemiller accepted the pop-up, it gave Dropbox permission to back up everything on to the computer's disk. At the same time, it gave the computer permission to backup to Dropbox.

“It was constantly backing up everything on to itself,” he said. “Murdering that poor laptop is still so funny to me.”

Sometimes, bosses bring in experts to help with the divide. Jason Dorsey is the co-founder of the Center for Generational Kinetics, a research firm based in Austin. Managers tap him to lead workshops that unite employees of all ages around their mutual computer struggles. In one exercise, he puts attendees in a circle, where they share the different technological advancements they remember living through.

“It's extremely humanizing,” Dorsey said. “You'll have someone who remembers the first color TV, another person who remembers the first answering machines, and a kid who can do their job on a smartphone. It helps us recognize that diversity of these experiences is a strength.”

But there's at least one thing that sets tech-hopeless Gen Z workers apart from their older coworkers. Younger people seem more willing to learn, and can quickly adapt to new skills – even if it takes a few rounds at the printer to fully master the art of scanning.

“Gen Z is very comfortable navigating software they've never used before, because they've been doing it their whole lives,” Bench said. “They are used to trial and error. They may not be this godsend to the workforce who come in automatically knowing how to do Excel, but they're fast learners.”

Dinner with Proust: how Alzheimer's caregivers are pulled into their patients' worlds

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/society/2023/feb/28/dinner-with-proust-how-alzheimers-caregivers-are-pulled-into-their-patients-worlds>

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The ultimate musicians' musician ... Andy Fairweather Low performing last year at the Cornbury festival in Oxford. Photograph: C Brandon/Redferns

[Music](#)

[Interview](#)

Andy Fairweather Low: ‘Jimi Hendrix sidled over and politely told me: you’re in the wrong key’

[Dave Simpson](#)

Kate Bush loved his voice, Clapton hired him and Paul Weller mocked his hair. Having gone from top of the charts to living with his mum, one of rock’s nice guys is back with a new album at 74

Tue 28 Feb 2023 03.38 ESTLast modified on Tue 28 Feb 2023 10.36 EST

At the age of 74, Andy Fairweather Low didn’t expect to see in 2023 as a viral sensation. He was on Jools’ Annual Hootenanny, performing his new song Got Me a Party and his old band Amen Corner’s 1969 chart-topper (If Paradise Is) Half As Nice. His appearance was so well received that he trended on Twitter. On New Year’s Day, his Wikipedia page was the second most trending in the UK.

“I was oblivious,” he chuckles, “because I don’t do Twitter and all that.” The broadcast had been filmed in mid-December. Low had appeared on Later ... With Jools Holland before, with Eric Clapton, but never on his own. “I said to Jools: ‘It’s taken me 74 years to get here.’”

It is just another chapter in a remarkable musical life. Low has topped the charts twice with Amen Corner and became a solo star in the 1970s with Wide Eyed and Legless. Since then, he has become the ultimate musicians’ musician, playing with the likes of Clapton, [George Harrison](#), Stevie Nicks, two Pink Floyd legends, various Rolling Stones and many, many more. He has played the Royal Albert Hall 116 times, played football with George Best, snooker with Alex “Hurricane” Higgins at Phil Lynott’s house and even jammed with Jimi Hendrix. “He sidled over and politely told me: ‘You’re in the wrong key.’”

The amiable Welshman carries all this very lightly. He turns up for our interview in a Cardiff City top and is fantastic company, which is why musicians like him.

“I know I’m good, but there are better players than I am,” he says. “But on a world tour whoever you’re working for doesn’t want to be looking after you and they’ve got to like your company. Most of the people I’ve played with have become my friends.”

Low’s gregarious but quietly determined good nature shines through *Flang Dang*, his first solo album in 17 years. He plays everything apart from drums and sings soulful R&B about how he is “trying to make the most of what I’ve got before I die”. He wrote the songs during lockdown and recorded in Rockfield, Monmouthshire, where he previously recorded in 1965. Countryfile came down to speak to me,” he grins. “Afterwards people kept saying, ‘I saw you on Countryfile. I thought you were dead.’”



Andy Fairweather Low performs on Jools’ Annual Hootenanny, broadcast on New Year’s Eve 2022. Photograph: Michael Leckie/BBC

Low grew up in Ystrad Mynach, Glamorgan, in a council house with no heating and an outside loo: “So when it was cold you had to really need to go.” His life changed when he saw the Rolling Stones at Cardiff’s Sophia

Gardens in 1964, aged 15. “From that moment, my education was finished. I stopped revising, everything.” A job in a music shop gave him access to guitars and he formed the Taff Beats, the Firebrands and the Sect Maniacs before becoming a teenage idol with psychedelic era popsters Amen Corner. “Our house had the curtains closed because [the fans] were all outside camping on the lawn,” he says.

Amen Corner played themselves in horror film *Scream and Scream Again* alongside Peter Cushing, Vincent Price and Christopher Lee and experienced the dark side of the music business for real. “We never saw any royalties and ended up £12,000 in debt. Our manager, Terry the Pill, was threatened with a sword stick. The only way out of it was to break up the band.”

He formed Fair Weather, clearing the debt with the 1970 smash hit *Natural Sinner* before they split in more *Spinal Tap* fashion. “There were five of us and it took four to carry the Hammond organ, so one got a free pass. Then one night in Scarborough there was this huge argument about whose turn it was to carry it. I thought: ‘I’m done with this.’”



Amen Corner, pictured in the 1960s in Australia: (from left) Alan Jones, Dennis Bryon, Clive Taylor (top), Neil Jones (below), Low, Blue Weaver and Mike Smith. Photograph: GAB Archive/Redferns

He went back to live with his mum, then reached No 6 with 1975's Wide Eyed and Legless, one of the great pop songs about drinking. "But I started living my own record," he sighs. "I became wide-eyed and legless."

The turning point was the birth of his son. "I was on the baby shift, drinking vodka, watching the tennis and went: 'Yeahhhh!' Broken glass everywhere. I thought: 'I can't keep doing this.'" He had already stopped smoking in 1971 after coughing up blood. "You need the moment to be bad enough that you remember it."

After his career was derailed by punk ("they spat at me in the street"), he glimpsed a different sort of musical career when the Who invited him to sing on the 1978 album Who Are You. "Keith Moon was fabulous," Low grins. "He came to one of my gigs with Lionel Bart. 'Dear boy!' I never got involved in the madness, but witnessing Pete Townshend in full flow was magical. I felt the same as when I saw them as a teenager in Porthcawl ... I've never lost that."



Low (left) playing with Eric Clapton at the Crossroads festival at Madison Square Garden, New York, in April 2013. Photograph: Greg Allen/Shutterstock

Stars feel kindly towards him. When Low was on his uppers, Clapton sent a telegram of encouragement before a chance meeting in a studio led to a 30-plus year working relationship. Low played with [Roger Waters](#) for 23 years. “A lot of people don’t take to Roger for many reasons, but he treated me unbelievably well,” he says.

In the 80s, Low turned up to audition at George Harrison’s mansion in a VW Polo. He puts on a dry Scouse accent. “He went: ‘Do you have to drive that?’ But we got on. After we toured Japan, George stood up and said: ‘Andy, you weren’t my first choice. You were my seventh choice.’ Then he went: ‘But you were the right choice.’” Low adored the late Beatle. “He made me feel really, really good.”

When [Kate Bush](#) rang to ask him to sing on 50 Words for Snow, he thought it was a joke. “Because one of my mates once rang up pretending to be John McEnroe, and I fell for it, but she said she liked my voice.” Paul Weller sent him the song Testify to work on for 2021’s Fat Pop and then met him with a cheeky: “Where’s your hair gone?”



In an all-star lineup at a charity concert for Action into Research for Multiple Sclerosis, at the Royal Albert Hall in 1983: (from left) Steve Winwood (keyboards), Low (standing in front of Jimmy Page), Kenney

Jones (drums), Eric Clapton, Charlie Watts (drums), Bill Wyman and Jeff Beck. Photograph: Michael Putland/Getty Images

He played in Bob Dylan's band for a charity gig at Madison Square Garden in 1999. "Bob was fabulous and talkative," he remembers. "He wanted to know about a particular chord I played on Malted Milk, on Eric Clapton's Unplugged album – a favourite song. He knew who I was." On stage for the gig, Low says that Dylan would shout, "God – go," at his band, leaving Low and the other musicians thinking: "Which one? He's got three songs with God in the title!"

Low has loved every minute, although he stopped world touring in 2006 after consecutive final outings with Waters and Clapton. "I left two of the best-paying gigs. People thought I was mad." But he had grown tired of the "boom-crunch" of arenas and wanted to perform his own material: "I wanted to get back to playing."

Having once performed The Wall in Berlin with Waters to 450,000 people, his first gig with his own band the Low Riders in 2007 was to 20 people in a 2,000-seater in Rhyl. Gradually, though, they built it up to "300 to 400 people every night, which is great at my age". Lately, he has been off the road to become primary carer to Barbara, his wife of 50 years, who has terminal motor neurone disease. It is a task he is no doubt undertaking as gracefully and diligently as all the others.

"I got to where I dreamed," he says, "but I'm not finished yet."

Flang Dang is out now via Last Music Company

This article was updated on 28 February with a correction: the Bob Dylan charity gig was in 1999, not 1989.

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2023.02.28 - Opinion

- This deal could have been done in 2021 – but the last thing Brexiteers wanted was to get Brexit done
- My husband predicts a general election this year – and he's always right
- Amazon treats me worse than the warehouse robots – that's why I'm walking out
- First Sackler, now Bet365. The art world can't keep taking money from companies that do us harm



Rishi Sunak and European Commission president Ursula von der Leyen in Windsor, 27 February 2023. Photograph: Xinhua/REX/Shutterstock

[OpinionBrexit](#)

This deal could have been struck in 2021 – but the last thing Brexiters wanted was to get Brexit done

[Fintan O'Toole](#)



The leave ultras rely on their Eurosceptic grievances – no wonder Boris Johnson created the disastrous protocol in the first place

Tue 28 Feb 2023 04.51 ESTLast modified on Tue 28 Feb 2023 15.19 EST

Is the grievance factory about to shut up shop at last? The [Northern Ireland](#) protocol is the last outpost of the once mighty manufacturing empire that produced, in industrial quantities, self-pitying narratives of Britons oppressed by Brussels. Now, perhaps, that assembly line has finally juddered to a halt.

The paradox of the Brexit project for its own advocates is that its very success has cut off the pipeline of complaint that fed their teeming springs of outrage. The protocol was the last excuse for throwing the old shapes, the one remaining arena in which the grand game of Euro-bashing could be played. It is not surprising that there are those – [Boris Johnson](#), much of the European Research Group (ERG), part of the Democratic Unionist party – who can't bear to part with it.

The most obvious thing about the [deal announced at Windsor](#) on Monday is that it shows that there was always a deal to be done. As far back as

October 2021, the EU formally accepted that the way the protocol was being implemented had to be changed. It made no sense for goods destined to stay in Northern Ireland to be subjected to the same checks as those that were going on to the Republic and hence entering the EU.

Pretty much everything that has now been agreed was there to be negotiated two years ago: the sharing of advance data on exports, red and green lanes, flexibility on VAT and state aid rules, an enhanced role for the assembly in Belfast in scrutinising new single market regulations. All that was ever required was normal diplomacy at the high level and nerds lower down to do the nuts-and-bolts stuff.

So why was this not done? Why was this row allowed to become a standoff that paralysed politics in Northern Ireland, when everyone knows from bitter experience that its political vacuums are filled by malign forces?

First, because of the inability of the [Brexit](#) ultras to wean themselves off the “Those Eurocrats don’t like it up ’em” mode of international relations. The complete failure of bluster and posturing in the negotiation of the overall withdrawal agreement taught them nothing. They remained convinced that the way to get foreigners to do what you want is to shout louder.

Hence Boris Johnson’s idiotic [Northern Ireland protocol bill](#). It said, in essence: scrap the protocol that Johnson himself begged you for or the UK will start a trade war with the EU, alienate the US, override its own most basic democratic procedures and declare its contempt for international law even while attacking Vladimir Putin for the same sin. This was never going to work, but it gave the zealots the thrill of one more excursion to the cliffs at Dover to shake their fists at the continent.

There was, though, an even more profound reason to avoid realistic negotiations on the protocol. The miasma of craziness that occludes this whole terrain emanates from the inconvenient truth that the protocol is, in horse-breeding parlance, by Johnson, out of the DUP. It was the DUP that made it inevitable by helping to bring down Theresa May, whose [“backstop” agreement](#) would have prevented the need for any controls on goods crossing the Irish Sea. And it was Johnson who, with his usual

mastery of cynical opportunism, double-crossed the DUP, created the protocol, and used it to win an election.

But all of this had to be denied. The Frankensteins had to disown their monster. And the way to do that was to indulge in the fantasy that what they had done could somehow be undone. This mirage was conjured from two impossible demands: that the protocol be scrapped and that the European court of justice should cease to be the final arbiter of EU law as it applied to Northern Ireland's operation of the single market. The beauty of these demands, for those who wished to drown the whole story in obfuscation and amnesia, was that they were so fantastical. They pushed the reality of what Johnson and the DUP had achieved – a serious weakening of the union – into a parallel universe of high dudgeon and glorious defiance.

Rishi Sunak deserves credit for rejoining the reality-based community. The relative speed with which the deal has been done shows the benefits of trying to function like a normal government and seek mutually beneficial solutions to common problems. But part of the reality he has faced is that one part of the UK – Northern Ireland – has a very different kind of Brexit to all the others. Agreeing to make the protocol work is accepting the immutable fact that a hard Brexit means that Northern Ireland will become ever more a place apart within the UK.

That's very difficult for the DUP to accept and all the more so because it is to a very large extent its own doing. It is hard to think of a worse strategic error by any political party in these islands in modern times than the defenders of the union doing so much to undermine it. It is tough to come to terms with this outcome and reasonable to give the DUP time to adjust to the fact that it has been fighting, not a losing battle, but a battle that was irretrievably lost when it put its fate in the hands of Johnson.

Yet what alternative does it have? The deal is a very good one for Northern Ireland, most of whose people will have little patience with a rearguard action against it. Sunak has called the bluff of the DUP's allies in the ERG and their hand is in fact very weak – not least because, in the end, few people in Britain care very much about the protocol. The prospect of a Labour government will further diminish the DUP's influence at Westminster.

The only place it can exercise power is in Belfast. The protocol deal, with its [“Stormont brake”](#) on new EU regulations, gives the assembly real powers to block EU regulations – but only if there is an assembly in the first place. There are a thousand other reasons why the DUP should fulfil its responsibilities and allow Northern Ireland’s political institutions to get back to work – but that has to be, from its own point of view, the most compelling.

Exporting Brexit grievances to Belfast was always much madder and more pernicious than sending coals to Newcastle. Northern Ireland has its own superabundant supply, flowing through both green and orange lanes. The heedless exploitation of that trade has been one of the ugliest aspects of the Brexit debacle. Now that the last drops of performative affront have been squeezed out of this tawdry drama, perhaps Britain and Ireland can get back to the slow and undramatic business of reconciliation.

- Fintan O’Toole is a columnist with the Irish Times

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Odds on? Most people believe the next general election will be in 2024, but it could be this year. Photograph: Claudio Divizia/Getty Images/EyeEm

[OpinionPolitics](#)

My husband predicts a general election this year – and he's always right

[Zoe Williams](#)



I've checked the odds and am planning a flutter. If Mr Z is on form, the winnings will fund a massive election night party. Or at least a night in the pub

Tue 28 Feb 2023 02.00 ESTLast modified on Tue 28 Feb 2023 15.18 EST

Mr Z has this habit of being generally right in his political predictions and it's annoying for two reasons: first, his hunches are always bad; second, we never benefit from them. How does it help that I knew [government kite-flyers would start on about the death penalty](#) 18 months before it happened? Did I find some way to hedge against high inflation in 2020, or Russia's invasion of Ukraine in 2021? I did not.

So, when he said there will be a general election this year, not 2024 as most people believe, or January 2025, which is the last possible date and what the wonkiest think most likely, I thought I would check the odds. We were on a train, on a Sunday afternoon, and everyone was drinking rosé because that's the law on trains, so the atmosphere was pretty convivial. "It's 7/1," I said. "I'm gonna put a flutter on, and then if you're right, we can have a massive election night party, with snakes or panthers or white horses, and a covers band."

“Jesus, how much are you putting on?” he said.

“Not that much. OK, if you’re right, we can go to the pub.”

“We would have gone to the pub anyway.”

“OK, sure.”

“We’re going to the pub tonight!”

“It sounds like you’re gambling over there,” a lady on the table opposite piped up, smilingly, like [the helpful Microsoft paperclip](#). Then, gesturing towards her husband, she continued: “He’s a massive gambler.” Since she said this with affection rather than resentment, Mr Stranger is obviously quite skilled at it and I decided to heed him. “If they offer you a free bet, don’t take it, because they pay out in tokens, not money, and you just get roped in,” he advised. “What is it? Horses? Football?”

“Politics.”

“Eurgh,” he said, with feeling. “What about politics?”

“There will be a general election this year,” Mr Z said, with complete authority.

“No way,” said the man. “Nobody wants a general election. It’ll be 2024.”

“Well, you and six other people think that,” Mr Z replied. “I think 2023.”

“That’s really not how odds work,” said the lady stranger.

Since Mr Z, as established, is always right, you should also consider putting a bet on. If we all clubbed together for the party, we could definitely afford snakes.

- Zoe Williams is a Guardian columnist
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| [Section menu](#) | [Main menu](#) |



Composite: Guardian Design/Reuters/Getty Images

[The day I decided to strike Amazon](#)

**Amazon treats me worse than the
warehouse robots – that's why I'm
walking out**

[Darren Westwood](#)



Jeff Bezos is making billions while we are offered an extra 50p an hour for exhausting work, doing long hours on our feet just to make ends meet

- Darren Westwood works at Amazon's Coventry warehouse and is a member of the GMB union

Tue 28 Feb 2023 02.00 ESTLast modified on Tue 28 Feb 2023 02.57 EST

Timed to [go to the toilet](#). Told off for leaning. Monitored for each package completed. As a worker at Amazon, I often feel that we aren't being treated as people.

But for me, the moment I knew we needed to go on strike was when we were told we'd be getting a pay rise of just 50p extra an hour. We came into work one day and the managers were holding briefings – telling us that this was all we were going to get, and that we shouldn't expect anything better. Just 50p extra, when we're facing rising prices in every shop and energy bills going through the roof. The company describes the offer as “competitive pay”, pointing out that we get employee benefits on top of the hourly wage. Yet the company is making millions – if not billions – for the people at the top.

Everyone who I work with at the warehouse in Coventry is frustrated. Frustrated at bad pay, at the long hours we have to work just to make ends meet, and at sky-high profits that we don't see any benefit from. The shifts are hard work, spent all on our feet, walking miles back and forth through large warehouses. All of that for just £10.50 an hour. That's why about 400 workers at our warehouse are [striking today](#).

We are treated worse than the robots doing automated tasks in the warehouses. If the robots have an issue, the company pays for them to be serviced, whereas if we drop below certain targets multiple times, we can be fired – we have to sort it out or get out. (The company says that its system “recognises great performance”, and that it offers “coaching” to employees who aren't meeting targets.)



Amazon workers on strike in Coventry on 25 January, 2023. Photograph: Henry Nicholls/Reuters

If you take too long to find a toilet in the huge warehouse, managers will ask you for account for this time – using doublespeak to describe it as being “idle”. Which other workplace would tolerate this? We are people, sometimes we need to use the toilet. How can this be a reasonable thing for a manager to ask about in a 21st-century workplace in Britain?

And it isn't as though Amazon is struggling for cash. In the UK last year, it made [£204m in profit before tax](#). Its owner, Jeff Bezos, is one of the richest men on the planet, with enough money to fly to space.

The company's profits shot up during Covid. As the high street was closed, people relied on ordering things online. We were still in the back end of the warehouses working, and Bezos was still making money – even more money than before. From 2019 to 2020, profits [nearly doubled](#) to \$21.3bn (£17.7bn) and rose again for 2021 to \$33.4bn.

At the start of 2021, Amazon could have given every one of its workers across the world a [£43,000 bonus](#) out of the increase in profits, and Bezos would still have had more money than pre-pandemic.

We were offered a 50p-an-hour increase in August. But with the cost of living soaring, inflation at 10.1% and conditions in the warehouses harder than ever, we are clear – a 4.8% pay rise isn't good enough. We deserve a £15-an-hour wage. It isn't as though [Amazon](#) can't afford it. Amazon relies on its workers. Without us the business couldn't run. But it refuses to talk to our union – it has not recognised it, and says that “a tiny proportion of our workforce is involved” in strikes. Yet at Coventry, more than a quarter of workers will be striking today.

I see colleagues falling asleep on the bus to and from the depot. They are exhausted from the long hours, the physical nature of the job and the shift patterns they have to work to make ends meet. It can't go on.

- Darren Westwood works at Amazon's Coventry warehouse and is a member of the GMB union
- ***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](#).***

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



Van Gogh Self Portraits exhibition at the Courtauld Gallery, London.
Photograph: Vickie Flores/EPA

[OpinionGambling](#)

First Sackler, now Bet365. The art world can't keep taking money from companies that do us harm

[Hannah Jane Parkinson](#)



Gambling firms rely on addiction and misery for their business model. They shouldn't be patronising the arts any more than fossil fuel companies

Tue 28 Feb 2023 01.00 ESTLast modified on Thu 2 Mar 2023 14.12 EST

In Laura Poitras's Oscar-nominated documentary, [All the Beauty and the Bloodshed](#), we watch as members of the Sackler family – then-owners of the pharmaceutical behemoth behind America's opioid crisis – are confronted with the testimony of those affected. They sit impassively as a recording is played of a desperate mother's 911 call after finding her son dead from overdose. Another piece of testimony is from [Nan Goldin](#), the photographer and former OxyContin addict whose successful campaign for the art world to renounce Sackler patronage the film follows.

Thanks to Goldin and the activist group she leads, the Sackler name has fallen away from many of the arts institutions that named spaces after the family in exchange for its largesse. First the [National Portrait Gallery](#) in the UK rejected a £1m donation. Then the [Louvre in Paris](#) removed the name. Then the [National Gallery](#), the [British Museum](#), the [Metropolitan Museum of Art](#), the [Guggenheim](#), the [Serpentine](#), [V&A](#), [the Tate](#), and [the Roundhouse](#) all followed suit.

Would they have turned away from the Sacklers without this campaign led by a leading light of the art world? Without the [\\$8bn settlement](#) that Purdue Pharma paid the Department of Justice (inclusive of a \$3.5bn criminal fine, plus a [\\$6bn civil settlement](#) two years later)? What about if the company hadn't become the subject of films with titles such as [The Crime of the Century](#)? Forgive me if I'm sceptical.

One of the cultural institutions that also took the Sackler dime is [the Courtauld](#). Consisting of galleries located in London's glorious Somerset House, as well as being part of the University of London and a research centre, the Courtauld owns some of the world's greatest artworks and most significant manuscripts. Last year, it put on a spectacular Van Gogh exhibition in a brand new space: [the Denise Coates Exhibition Galleries](#).

You'd be forgiven for not recognising the name, because this billionaire is particularly publicity-avoidant. Along with her family, Denise Coates (CBE) owns one of the most profitable gambling firms in the world, Bet365. Last year, when NHS England found that [2.2 million people](#) in the UK are either current problem gamblers or at risk of addiction, Coates took home more than £250m. And in 2021, the year a Public Health England report cited [409 gambling-related suicides](#), Coates earned [£421m](#). Fitting, I suppose, that the first major exhibition in the gallery bearing Coates's name featured Vincent van Gogh, an artist who spent time in psychiatric hospitals for chronic [addiction](#) and who took his own life.

Coates, on the opening of the gallery, [said that](#) she had "found great fulfilment from my own exposure to visual arts and I am pleased to be able to support that journey for others". I too have found great fulfilment from being exposed to the visual arts. Unfortunately, when I visit the Courtauld I will now also be exposed to the name of a woman whose company contributed to [a gambling addiction](#) which led me to mental-health crisis and the loss of tens of thousands of pounds. Unfortunately, I can no longer find as much fulfilment in the visual arts, as I have had to give up memberships to much-loved galleries as a direct result of those losses. Unfortunately, for two years, the arts didn't even cross my mind because I was entirely consumed by gambling, and lost the ability to find pleasure in anything else. I am essentially now starting from scratch.

Of course, there's a moral dilemma here; the thorny question of when quid pro quo is actually worth it. Plenty of cultural, academic and sporting institutions rely on the patronage of wealthy individuals and corporations. If I am an art lover then shouldn't I be grateful to the Coateses and the Sacklers for facilitating access to it? Does it matter that what is happening here is artwashing, sibling to the much more closely scrutinised [greenwashing](#) and sportswashing, most recently spotlighted by the [World Cup in Qatar](#) and the [snapping up of Premier League clubs](#) by [human rights abusing regimes](#)?



A public meeting to save the Oldham Coliseum in Greater Manchester, Wednesday 22 February. Photograph: Equity/PA

And where should the line be drawn? Even casual gallery-goers will recognise the signage of Credit Suisse – the Swiss bank that has clients involved in [human-trafficking, murder and political corruption](#) – in the National Gallery, of which it is [a long-term sponsor](#). Leading galleries are under pressure to divest from the energy industry. And how do we feel about the fact that oligarch [\(Sir\) Len Blavatnik](#), who is accused of links with [associates of Vladimir Putin](#) (which he strenuously denies), has donated to almost every leading cultural and academic institution you can think of?

Of course, the crux of the matter is that our cultural institutions should not have to rely upon the generosity, whether altruistic or self-serving, of the 1%. The galleries and museums and theatres and music venues which remind us of everything that life has to offer, that boost mood and educate and elevate the soul, should be deemed important enough, imperative even, to be funded properly by the state. The National Gallery is a public body under the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport, as are [14 other](#) gallery and museum groups. If funding was allocated as it should be, then the Tate, which is one of them, wouldn't also feel compelled to [accept £1m](#) from Denise Coates.

The actor [Maxine Peake has led calls](#) to save the Oldham Coliseum, a 135-year-old theatre which lost its entire Arts Council England (ACE) funding. Donmar Warehouse – one of the theatres [that has terminated its funding agreement](#) with the Sacklers – has also had its [entire ACE grant removed](#). If wealthy individuals and corporations were taxed at higher rates, there would be more money in the public purse to support the arts – instead of those wealthy individuals and corporations offering to fund them directly as a form of reputation laundering. The arts aren't just about personal and social benefits; the cultural sectors contributed [£10.8bn annually](#) to the UK economy before the pandemic hit. There is also evidence that access to culture [saves the NHS money](#) in its positive effects on physical and mental health.

It could be said (and I'd have sympathy with the view) that refusing money just because a donor's politics don't align with the liberal worldview of most cultural bodies shows a level of moral superiority that is at best self-defeating. But taking cash from those profiting via active harm to vulnerable people is, surely, very different. The Sacklers fall into this category. So, despite its charity donations and positive [support for local enterprises](#), does the Coates family. The gambling industry makes [60% of its money](#) from 5% of its customers, and those 5% are not the ones taking a flutter on the horses every now and then.

As I write, the Denise Coates Exhibition Gallery is hosting [a Peter Doig exhibition](#). I was introduced to Doig's work as a child, after an art prize in my home city of Liverpool kickstarted his career. I want to see this

exhibition. I don't want to see Denise Coates's name next to it, even if it's partly thanks to her that the show is happening. Because it's also partly down to her that millions of people, including me, are rebuilding their lives from a business model centred around our misery. It's an art-form for sure, but not the good kind.

- Hannah Jane Parkinson is a Guardian columnist and the author of [The Joy of Small Things](#)

Footnote added 2 March 2023. After publication of this article we were contacted by a representative for Sir Len Blavatnik reiterating his view that “oligarch” is an incorrect description of him. A spokesperson for Blavatnik has also stated previously that his “personal and commercial activities are not, and have never been, involved with Putin, Russian politics or the Russian government”.

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

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2023.02.28 - Around the world

- [North Korea Kim Jong-un sounds alarm on agriculture amid reports of food shortages](#)
- ['Never like this before' Settler violence in West Bank escalates](#)
- [China Confusion surrounds energy policies as GDP and climate goals clash](#)
- [Animals Last of Iran's endangered Asiatic cheetah cubs in captivity dies](#)
- [Australia Move to allow sperm donors to be identified by those conceived via donation](#)



North Korean leader Kim Jong-un attends a meeting of the Workers' party in Pyongyang on Monday. He has called for grain production to become a priority. Photograph: KCNA/Reuters

[North Korea](#)

North Korea's Kim Jong-un sounds alarm on agriculture amid reports of food shortages

Leader says agriculture needs 'fundamental transformation' and makes hitting grain targets a priority as country isolated by sanctions struggles

Reuters

Tue 28 Feb 2023 00.13 ESTLast modified on Wed 1 Mar 2023 23.50 EST

North Korean leader [Kim Jong-un](#) has urged government officials to engineer a “fundamental transformation” in agricultural production, state media reported, amid fears that the country’s food shortage is worsening.

Kim said hitting grain production targets this year was a priority and emphasised the importance of stable agriculture production during the second day of a key meeting of the Workers' party, the state news agency KCNA said on Tuesday.

The report did not elaborate on what measures [North Korea](#) would take, but Kim said the changes needed to happen in the next few years.

Kim's remark comes amid reports of growing food shortages in the country, though North Korea has denied suggestions that it cannot provide for its citizens.

Collective farms account for the vast majority of North Korea's agriculture, according to researchers. Such farms typically host multiple small farmers who produce crops with joint labour.

Earlier this month, South Korea's Unification Ministry said the food situation in the North "seemed to have deteriorated".

The ministry said at the time that it was rare for North Korea to announce a special meeting on agriculture strategy, which was slated for late February.



Kim Jong-un attends the 7th enlarged plenary meeting of the 8th Central Committee of the Workers' Party of Korea in Pyongyang on Sunday. Photograph: KCNA/Reuters

In his address at Monday's meeting, KCNA said Kim mentioned the "importance of the growth of the agricultural productive forces" in ensuring socialist construction.

North Korea is under strict international sanctions over its nuclear weapons and ballistic missile programmes, and its economy has been further strained by strict self-imposed border lockdowns aimed at stopping Covid-19 outbreaks.

The full extent of the food shortages in North Korea is unclear, but in a January report, the US-based monitoring project 38 North said that food insecurity was at its worst since famines that devastated the country in the 1990s.

"Food availability has likely fallen below the bare minimum with regard to human needs," the report said.

North Korea's pursuit of self-sufficiency means almost all its grain is produced domestically, but that has left the country vulnerable, 38 North found.

"Achieving adequate agricultural output in North Korea's unfavourable soils has, ironically, generated a heavy reliance on imported goods and left the country exposed to global shocks, diplomatic conflicts, and adverse weather," the report said.

The long-term solution to the problems lies partly in resolving the standoff over nuclear weapons and sanctions, but also requires economic reforms.

The initiation of domestic economic reforms would unshackle North Korea's productive capacity and allow it to export industrial products and tradable services, earn foreign exchange and import bulk grains on a commercially sustainable basis, 38 North said.

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



Tension rises between Jewish settlers under the protection of Israeli forces and Palestinians in the northern West Bank town of Huwara. Photograph: Anadolu Agency/Getty Images

[Palestinian territories](#)

‘Never like this before’: settler violence in West Bank escalates

Retaliatory rampage in Palestinian village likened to ‘Kristallnacht in Huwara’ with one dead and 350 injured



[*Bethan McKernan*](#) in Huwara, West Bank

Mon 27 Feb 2023 14.01 EST Last modified on Tue 28 Feb 2023 04.44 EST

There is a large rolling gate at the entrance to the small Palestinian village of Za'atara, in the north of the occupied West Bank, but it is rarely closed. On Sunday, however, wary that Israeli settlers living in the area were seeking revenge for the murder of two brothers shot dead by a Palestinian gunman in nearby Huwara, Za'atara's residents were braced for retaliatory violence.

It didn't take long for the [settlers to arrive](#). Villagers said that by dusk, about 100 armed Israelis, accompanied by a dozen Israel Defence Forces (IDF) soldiers, had massed on the road outside the entrance, and after the troops tried to intervene several of the settlers began shooting. Sameh Aqtash, a 37-year-old blacksmith who had just returned from earthquake volunteering efforts in Turkey, was shot in the stomach. Because the army would not clear the road for an ambulance to reach him, he bled to death, Aqtash's nephew Fadi said.

Aqtash was somehow the only fatality during an unprecedented [hours-long settler rampage](#) in the vicinity of Huwara overnight: more than 350 Palestinians were injured, while dozens of homes and businesses and

hundreds of cars were set alight, according to rights groups and Palestinian officials. In an article published on Monday morning, a prominent rightwing Israeli commentator, appalled by the reported inaction of the IDF, dubbed the events “[Kristallnacht in Huwara](#)”.

Sunday’s riot was triggered by the murders of Hillel Yaniv, 22, and Yagel Yaniv, 20, from the nearby settlement of Har Bracha. Route 60, the Israeli road running north to south through the middle of the territory, cuts right through the middle of Huwara, making the village a well-known flashpoint.

A gunman rammed into the brothers’ car while they were driving through, reports said, and shot them several times at point-blank range before fleeing the scene. Israeli forces are still searching for the as-yet unidentified attacker, who is believed to have been able to escape arrest owing to the chaos caused by the settler rampage.

“Of course there are lots of settlers and army around here and sometimes that is difficult but they have never come to Za’atara before like this,” Fadi Aqtash said, as he put his arm around one of Sameh’s five children outside the village mourning tent. Sporadic gunfire could be heard in the distance. “We are very worried about what will happen now,” the 29-year-old said.

Incidents of [settler violence](#) across the West Bank happen every day, and have [steadily increased over the past few years](#): many of the 700,000 or so Israelis living in the territory and East Jerusalem are motivated by what they see as a religious mission to restore the historical land of Israel to the Jewish people. Settlement communities are viewed as illegal under international law, and one of the biggest obstacles to peace.

Israeli settlers burn Palestinian homes after brothers shot dead – video

Shootings, knife attacks, burning crops, vandalism and the theft of land and livestock are supposed to make life for Palestinians so unbearable they have no choice but to leave. On many occasions, the Israeli army has been documented failing to stem the violence, or even [joining in](#).

No one the Guardian spoke to in the Huwara area on Monday, however, could recall such an intense and widespread episode, which both

Palestinians and Israelis fear could lead to more attacks on both sides and a return to full-blown conflict.

Stability in the region has arguably [already broken down](#). Last year was the bloodiest on record in Israel and the West Bank since the second intifada, or Palestinian uprising, of the 2000s. About 63 Palestinians and 13 Israelis have been killed so far in 2023, mostly in IDF raids and Palestinian terrorist attacks.

Also on Sunday, Israel and Palestinian security officials [met in Jordan for the first high-level talks in years](#) aimed at calming tensions before the imminent Muslim holy month of Ramadan, which is often a catalyst for escalation.

It does not seem likely that the situation on the ground can improve. The Palestinian Authority (PA), the West Bank's semi-autonomous governing body, is [weak and corrupt](#), viewed by many Palestinians as little more than a subcontractor for the occupation. It has all but lost control of several areas in the north of the territory to [newly formed militias](#) that do not take orders from the traditional Palestinian factions.

At the same time, Israeli security forces appeared to be unprepared or unwilling to deal with the scale of the settler violence in Huwara on Sunday, despite the fact that settler leaders made public calls for a march to “wipe out” Huwara in revenge for the deaths of the two brothers.

The Israeli military estimated that between 300 and 400 people took part in the rampage, although only 10 arrests have been made, and anonymous security officials told Israeli media that plans made by the IDF's central command were “faulty”.

A joint communique from the Jordan summit expressing “readiness and commitment to work immediately” to prevent further violence was not just undermined by the rioting in Huwara, but by members of the Israeli government.

Several elements of Israel's new far-right administration are fully fledged members of the settler movement, who have variously called for the full

annexation of the West Bank, relaxing the rules of engagement for Israel's police and soldiers, and harsher punishments for Palestinians who commit terror attacks. Their plans to neuter Israel's supreme court have also prompted the [biggest political crisis in the country's history](#), bringing hundreds of thousands of Israelis to the streets in protest against moves they say will erode democratic norms.

While the prime minister, Benjamin Netanyahu, issued a video statement on Sunday night calling on people not to "take the law into their own hands", members of his coalition fanned the flames, telling the IDF to show "no mercy" and visiting the scene to support the rioters.

By Monday, they had melted away, and the streets of Huwara were deserted except for soldiers and armoured patrol vehicles that roared up and down the main road. At Tapuach junction, a settlement known for violence to the south of the village, settlers carrying pistols and automatic rifles mingled with IDF units as they waited to march on Huwara again in the evening as part of the funeral procession for the killed brothers. Meanwhile, in the south of the West Bank, reports emerged of another shooting attack that killed a 27-year-old Israeli-American dual national.

Inspecting the damage at his workplace in the middle of Huwara, Sakir, a 22-year-old mechanic, said that he thought the Israeli settlers living in the area had grown bolder since the new Israeli government entered office in December. "They know they can do whatever they like," he said.

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A man tends to vegetables growing in a field as emissions rise from cooling towers at a coal-fired power station in Anhui province, China. Photograph: Bloomberg/Getty Images

[China](#)

[Analysis](#)

Confusion surrounds China's energy policies as GDP and climate goals clash

[Peter Hannam](#)

Wave of permits for coal-fired power plants sparks concern as ambitions for GDP growth and lowering emissions come into conflict

Tue 28 Feb 2023 04.28 ESTLast modified on Tue 28 Feb 2023 04.37 EST

China's energy policies are fast creating a type of "emissions ambiguity", as the twin goals of boosting GDP growth and reducing carbon emissions come into conflict.

The uncertainty is whether and when the world's biggest carbon emitter will start to curb greenhouse gas pollution. The release of the country's [annual statistics communique on Tuesday](#) did not clear things up.

As Lauri Myllyvirta, an analyst at Centre for Research on Energy and Clean Air, [noted this month](#), China's carbon emissions may have risen 1% or fallen by that amount in 2022.

A crude conversion of the 3% GDP growth reported by China and its 0.8% reduction in the carbon intensity of economic activity – as stated in the communique – indicates emissions may have risen 2.2% last year.

The calculations matter as China emits more than a quarter of global emissions, roughly twice as much as the next largest, the US.

In November 2021, China told the UN it would reach [carbon neutrality “before 2060”](#), and President Xi Jinping has also promised to reduce coal consumption by the 2026-30 period, but has not said when China will stop building new power plants.

Pollution growth should also have been subdued in 2022, a year when economic activity was slowed by rolling Covid curbs. Excluding 2020, which included the worst of the pandemic disruptions, GDP growth last year [was the weakest since the 1970s](#).

Local officials often use big infrastructure projects, such as power plants, to boost economic activity in their areas. There will be even more pressure to stimulate growth after the GDP target for 2023 is announced at the National People's Congress, which starts on 5 March. The national target is expected to be about 5%.

As Myllyvirta's [centre reported on Monday](#), China was busy granting permits for an average of two power plants a week in 2022, or six times more capacity than the rest of the world combined. One executive boasted of securing approval to build a 4,000-megawatt coal-fired plant in just 63 days after taking ownership of the project.

“China has not seen such a wave of new permits for new coal-fired power plants since the permitting frenzy of 2015, when provincial governments were given the authority to approve new projects,” the report says.

Should a large proportion of the 106GW of new coal projects permitted – more than four times 2021’s 23GW tally – begin operation, global efforts to keep climate heating to the Paris accord temperature limit of 1.5C are, frankly, cooked.

“One of the clear upshots is that China is now very significantly behind its energy and carbon intensity targets for 2025”, Myllyvirta said.

But here is where the ambiguity lies. Permitting does not equate to construction, and since many of the proposed plants are in regions already oversupplied with power, it is not clear new capacity will necessarily equate to extra coal combustion.

And, as Myllyvirta highlights, numbers in the communique stating that coal consumption rose 4.3% in 2022 and total energy use rising 2.9% “appear to contradict weak or falling industrial output”.

The 3.1% drop in oil consumption and a 1.2% fall in gas use – the first fall in at least 20 years – also point to suspiciously weak demand in the economy.

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Of course, while China is pouring money into building new coal plants, it is also leading spending on renewable energy and low-carbon products such as electric vehicles – even if the US Inflation Reduction Act looks to challenge that primacy. [The IRA pledges](#), among other things, to result in 950m new solar panels and 120,000 new wind turbines in the US by 2030.

China added a record 125GW solar and wind capacity in 2022, with about two-thirds of that solar, the Centre for Research on [Energy](#) and Clean Air says.

According to the official communique, clean energy consumption – which includes nuclear and hydropower – rose 0.4 percentage points last year to 25.9%. That's still less than half coal's share at 56.2%.

China's output of solar panels totalled 340m kilowatts of capacity, up almost half on 2021's level. Production of so-called new energy vehicles, most of which were plug-in electric, soared 90.5% to just exceed 7m units, the communique says.

Why those solar panels and zero-emissions cars might come in handy was hinted at in another statistic that China's policymakers must keep in mind when considering the urgency of tackling pollution.

“Of the monitored 339 cities at prefecture level and above, 62.8% reached the air quality standard and 37.2% failed,” the communique says.

Clearing that up, too, would be a good thing.

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Pirouz, meaning ‘victorious’ in Farsi, had become a source of national pride since his birth last year at a wildlife refuge. Photograph: Iranian Department of Environmen/AFP/Getty Images

[Iran](#)

Last of Iran’s endangered Asiatic cheetah cubs in captivity dies

Authorities announce death of cub named Pirouz from kidney failure at veterinary hospital in Tehran

Agence France-Presse in Tehran

Tue 28 Feb 2023 03.31 ESTLast modified on Tue 28 Feb 2023 19.19 EST

The last survivor of three critically endangered Asiatic cheetah cubs born in captivity in [Iran](#) has died in hospital from kidney failure.

Pirouz, who was admitted to the Central veterinary hospital due to kidney failure last Thursday, died after undergoing dialysis, the official IRNA news agency said.

“The loss of Pirouz and ineffectiveness of all the efforts made by the treatment team in the past few days to save the animal saddens me and all my colleagues, and we apologise to everyone that we could not keep this animal alive,” said the hospital director, Omid Moradi.

The cub, Pirouz, meaning “victorious” in Farsi, had become a source of national pride since his birth in May last year at a wildlife refuge in north-east Iran.

Two other cubs born with him died that same month, but Pirouz survived at a time when only a dozen members of the species are left in the wild.

The Asiatic cheetah, *Acinonyx jubatus venaticus*, is categorised as at threat of “dangerous ongoing decline” and is critically endangered, according to the International Union for [Conservation](#) of Nature (IUCN).

According to a 2017 study referenced by IUCN, the subspecies is found only in Iran, where there were fewer “than 50 mature individuals”.

The world’s fastest land animal, capable of reaching speeds of 120 km/h (75 mph), cheetahs once stalked habitats from the eastern reaches of India to the Atlantic coast of Senegal. They are still found in parts of southern Africa but have practically disappeared from north Africa and Asia.

Iran began a UN-supported cheetah protection programme in 2001.

In January 2022, the deputy environment minister, Hassan Akbari, said Iran was home to only a dozen Asiatic cheetahs, down from an estimated 100 in 2010.

Iran’s environment department had hoped the birth of the cubs in captivity would help increase the cheetah population.



Queensland's attorney general says granting donor-conceived people the right to know their genetic history will enhance people's health and wellbeing. Photograph: Yuichi Yamazaki/AFP/Getty Images

[Queensland](#)

Queensland moves to allow sperm donors to be identified by those conceived via donation

Recommendations supported by state government also include the establishment of a central donor register

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Australian Associated Press

Tue 28 Feb 2023 03.40 ESTLast modified on Tue 28 Feb 2023 16.47 EST

People conceived through sperm or egg donations may have greater access to their genetic history under a suite of recommendations accepted by the [Queensland](#) government.

In response to a parliamentary inquiry on the issue, the government has given in-principle support for donor-conceived persons to be legislatively provided with the right to know the identity of their donor and siblings when they turn 18.

Donors having access to information about donor-conceived persons was also supported.

Providing accurate and timely information will require a central donor conception register to be established in Queensland, according to the government.

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“Further consideration is required regarding the implementation, funding and resourcing implications to establish and maintain a register,” the government response says. A register would likely involve developing IT systems and digitising historical records.

The state’s attorney general, Shannon Fentiman, said access to genetic origins would not only enhance peoples’s wellbeing, but could allow them to manage their health more appropriately,

“Conception using donated sperm, eggs or embryos has given countless Queensland couples and individuals the precious gift of starting or extending a family,” she said on Tuesday.

“We must not lose sight of the unique needs of those who have been conceived through this process.”

The best way to obtain contact preferences of those involved, particularly for historical donor conception procedures, needed to be considered, the

government said.

Donor Conceived Australia's national director, Aimee Shackleton, said the changes came after 30 years of advocacy.

“Queensland donor-conceived people have the same rights to their medical and family history as any other Australian, including the option for facilitated contact with donors and siblings, with the consent of both parties,” she said.

Queensland does not have legislation to regulate donor conception practices or assisted reproductive technology services generally, including access to donor conception information, the government response says.

Timing for introduction of the required legislation will depend on consultation and working through the operational and implementation issues.

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- [Matt Hancock Ex-health secretary calls Isabel Oakeshott leak 'massive betrayal'](#)
- [WhatsApp leak Hancock and Williamson clashed over Covid school closures](#)
- [Isabel Oakeshott The journalist who turned over Matt Hancock](#)

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Hancock apologised for the impact of the release of the messages on those he had worked with during pandemic. Photograph: Ken McKay/ITV/Rex/Shutterstock

[Matt Hancock](#)

Matt Hancock calls Isabel Oakeshott WhatsApp messages leak ‘massive betrayal’

Former health secretary says he is ‘hugely disappointed’ with journalist who gave messages to Telegraph

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

[Kevin Rawlinson](#) and [Jessica Elgot](#)

Thu 2 Mar 2023 05.55 EST First published on Thu 2 Mar 2023 03.36 EST

Matt Hancock has said he is “hugely disappointed” by what he described as a “massive betrayal and breach of trust by Isabel Oakeshott”, who [gave WhatsApp messages](#) from his time as health secretary to the Daily Telegraph.

[Oakeshott](#) was given the WhatsApp exchanges by Hancock while they were collaborating on a book about the pandemic.

Messages have been leaked so far from the former prime minister Boris Johnson, England’s chief medical officer, Prof Chris Whitty, the cabinet secretary, Simon Case, Johnson’s former director of communications Lee Cain and Hancock’s adviser Emma Dean.

In the latest revelations, texts from Hancock and Gavin Williamson [show the former education secretary alleging](#) that teachers complained about a lack of PPE in order “to have an excuse not to teach”, commenting later that some teaching unions “really do just hate work”.

The former health secretary apologised on Thursday for the impact of the release of the messages on those he had worked with during the pandemic.

In a statement, Hancock said: “I am hugely disappointed and sad at the massive betrayal and breach of trust by Isabel Oakeshott. I am also sorry for the impact on the very many people – political colleagues, civil servants and friends – who worked hard with me to get through the pandemic and save lives.”

He said there was “absolutely no public interest case for this huge breach” because all the material used for his [Pandemic Diaries book](#) was given to the Covid-19 public inquiry.

Isabel Oakeshott claims Matt Hancock threatened her in a messages after WhatsApp leaks – audio

Oakeshott defended her decision to release the messages on Thursday.

She claimed publishing the messages with the Telegraph this week was in the public interest because they shed light on the inner workings of government as it responded to the Covid pandemic. Addressing her decision not to reveal them until after she had finished working for Hancock, she told BBC Radio 4's Today programme: "My responsibilities, having finished that book with him, are now to the public interest."

"Not one journalist worth their salt would sit on a cache of information in such an important matter, such a historic matter, and cover that up. Do you know what would have happened if I hadn't released this stuff? The usual suspects would have had a massive go at me for sitting on these files, wouldn't they? We know that."

When it was put to her that she had in fact sat on the files for more than a year while writing Hancock's book, Oakeshott said: "There were 2.3m words. I was trying to write a book in an extraordinarily tight deadline."

She accused Hancock of sending her a threatening message in the early hours of the morning before the Daily Telegraph's first story was published on the messages, though she has declined to give details.

Isabel Oakeshott accuses Matt Hancock of sending 'menacing' message after leak – video

Speaking to Today, she said: "He can threaten me all he likes. There are plenty of things I can say about his behaviour, by the way, that I'm not going to do – at least not at this stage – because this is not about [Matt Hancock](#). It is so much bigger than that."

Pressed for more details, she would only say: "I'm saying that he sent me a message at 1.20am in the morning. It wasn't a pleasant message."

Later on Thursday, Hancock released his statement and explicitly denied this. "When I heard confused rumours of a publication late on Tuesday night, I called and messaged Isabel to ask her if she had 'any clues' about it, and got no response. When I then saw what she'd done, I messaged to say it was 'a big mistake'. Nothing more."

Responding to his statement that there was no public interest case for the leaks, Oakeshott told TalkTV: “What a ridiculous defence. For someone who’s as intelligent as Matt Hancock to issue a statement saying there is no public interest in these revelations is patently absurd. And he knows that very well.”

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



Matt Hancock and Gavin Williamson's messages to each other have been leaked to the Daily Telegraph. Photograph: Dinendra Haria/Alamy

[Coronavirus](#)

Gavin Williamson said teaching unions 'just hate work' during Covid pandemic

Former education secretary said to have made comments in leaked WhatsApp exchanges to Matt Hancock, then health secretary

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Teachers complained about a lack of PPE in order “to have an excuse not to teach”, Gavin Williamson said in a leaked WhatsApp chat, commenting later that some teaching unions “really do just hate work”.

In new leaked WhatsApp messages from the Telegraph's investigation, [Matt Hancock](#), the then health secretary, was asked by Williamson, who was the education secretary, to help unblock school requests for protective equipment if a child became ill at school as classrooms prepared to reopen after the first lockdown.

Williamson said it was “basically as a last resort so they can't use it as a reason not to open. All of them will but some will just want to say they can't so they have an excuse to avoid having to teach, what joys!!!”

Teaching unions, including the National Education Union, were deeply critical of the government's approach to schools reopening and exams, including a fiasco over [A-level results predicted by an algorithm](#).

In October 2020, Williamson said publicly the following year's exams would be postponed for a few weeks to make up teaching time. According to the leaked messages, Hancock then got in touch with his cabinet colleague to say “what a bunch of absolute arses the teaching unions are”.

Williamson replied: “I know they really really do just hate work.” Hancock then responded with a laughing emoji and a bullseye.

Dr Mary Bousted, joint general secretary of the National Education Union, said in response to the leak: “Why am I utterly unsurprised to now have it absolutely confirmed that Gavin Williamson was unfit to be secretary of state for education?”

In a statement on Wednesday, Williamson said: “Further to reports in the Telegraph and other outlets, I wish to clarify that these messages were about some unions and not teachers. As demonstrated in the exchange, I was responding regarding unions.

“I have the utmost respect for teachers who work tirelessly to support students. During the pandemic, teachers went above and beyond during very challenging times and very much continue to do so.”

The messages also reveal Hancock fought against Williamson to persuade the government to close schools in January at the height of the wave of the new Covid variant.

After initially losing the argument during a cabinet meeting, the then health secretary told an aide that “the next U-turn [was] born”, and added: “I want to find a way, Gavin having won the day, of actually preventing a policy car crash when the kids spread the disease in January. And for that we must now fight a rearguard action.”

Other disclosures on Wednesday indicated Boris Johnson bemoaning the likelihood of “another U-turn” over face masks in schools after advisers said it was “not worth an argument” over why Scottish schools would enforce them in the classroom but not schools in England.



Boris Johnson (right) and Matt Hancock visiting a hospital in November 2019. Photograph: Christopher Furlong/Getty Images

Hancock also reportedly said No 10 did not want to change the “rule of six” for meetings to include children during lockdown, even though another minister said there was “no robust rationale”.

Discussing the issue of face masks in schools in a WhatsApp group with the prime minister, England's chief medical officer, Prof Chris Whitty, appeared to say there were "no very strong reasons" either way, but Johnson received advice from senior aides that he would have difficulty communicating the difference.

The Scottish first minister, Nicola Sturgeon, had already announced children would need to wear face coverings in corridors. In a group chat, Johnson said: "Folks I am about to [be] asked about masks in schools. Before we perform another U-turn can I have a view on whether they are necessary?"

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Two senior advisers apparently warned against conflicting communications advice. His then director of communications, Lee Cain, said: "Considering [Scotland](#) has just confirmed it will I find it hard to believe we will hold the line. At a minimum I would give yourself flex and not commit to ruling it out ... Also why do we want to have the fight on not having masks in certain school settings."

Simon Case, a senior official in No 10 who would become Johnson's cabinet secretary, indicated that unless Whitty and the chief scientific

adviser, Sir Patrick Vallance, were “willing to go out and say WHO and Scots are wrong, I think some nervous parents will freak out about this happening in Scotland, but not in England”.

But Whitty admitted there were “no strong reasons against in corridors etc, and no very strong reasons for”, and then added: “So agree not worth an argument.”

A day after the conversation, the government announced that secondary schoolchildren in areas with heightened lockdown rules would need to wear face masks in corridors. It included many parts of the north-west, Yorkshire and Leicester.

In October 2020, the rule of six policy was questioned by Helen Whately, the minister for adult social care, who said she wanted to “loosen [it] on children under 12 ... it would make such a difference to families and there isn’t a robust rationale for it”.

Hancock said No 10 “don’t want to go there on this ... Also on curfew – they don’t want to shift an inch.” The rule of six – where gatherings of more than six people were against the law, except in certain circumstances – remained in place for much of the rest of the pandemic, apart from during stricter lockdowns when no social mixing was allowed.

Whately defended her former colleague in the Commons on Wednesday, saying [“selective snippets” of leaked WhatsApp messages](#) were misleading.

Hancock issued a furious response to the leaking of his WhatsApp messages, which he had previously given to the journalist [Isabel Oakeshott](#) to ghostwrite his book. Oakeshott, who is said to have signed an NDA, said she had made them available to the Telegraph in the public interest.



Isabel Oakeshott has admitted leaking the entire archive of messages to the Daily Telegraph. Photograph: Ian Forsyth/Getty Images

[Matt Hancock](#)

Isabel Oakeshott: the journalist who turned over Matt Hancock

Ex-minister's judgment questioned for trusting journalist who has long made clear her disdain for his lockdown policies

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When [Matt Hancock](#) entrusted more than 100,000 of his personal WhatsApp messages to Isabel Oakeshott, he hoped the political journalist

would help him write a book to rehabilitate his reputation as a pro-lockdown health secretary during the coronavirus pandemic.

Instead, Oakeshott has admitted leaking the entire archive of messages to the Daily Telegraph, which is planning days of critical anti-lockdown stories about [Hancock's role in the pandemic](#).

Setting aside the merits of the news stories being underpinned by the trove of messages, Conservative MPs and political journalists have expressed some astonishment that Hancock entrusted millions of words of his private correspondence to Oakeshott, of all people.

A journalist who has long made clear her disdain for his lockdown policies, she has been accused of having a poor track record when it comes to source protection, and is in a relationship with the leader of the anti-lockdown Reform party.

As Robert Colvile, the director of the rightwing Centre for Policy Studies thinktank and co-author of the 2019 Tory manifesto, said: “The main lesson I’ve learned from this is not to hire someone who absolutely hates your signature policy as your ghostwriter.”

One political journalist said: “The man needs his head testing to have gone near Oakeshott with a flaming trebuchet, let alone a bargepole.”

Extraordinarily, Oakeshott handed the entire archive of Hancock’s messages to the [Daily Telegraph](#) despite being paid a rumoured six-figure salary by Rupert Murdoch’s News UK to be a pundit on its struggling TalkTV channel.

Staff at the Sun and the Times have been left fuming that they are now trying to follow up a story given to a rival newspaper by one of their own employees – while TalkTV has missed out on a scoop that could have helped it in its ratings battle with GB News. Oakeshott said she is only employed by TalkTV on a freelance basis and is therefore able to work for other publications.



Matt Hancock during a Covid media briefing in Downing Street in 2020.
Photograph: PA Video/PA

For her part, Oakeshott wrote she was morally obliged to leak the messages because “a great deal of material that is overwhelmingly in the public interest” was left out of Hancock’s book, which was published last December.

She told the Guardian that her decision to share the material was based on the ideological belief that the UK must not repeat the lockdown “disaster”. She insisted she did not always plan to publish Hancock’s WhatsApps but decided to leak them “when it became clear the public inquiry had no deadline and will likely take a decade or more to conclude”.

The leak is the latest step in Oakeshott’s journey from political reporter to a self-described “passionate Brexiteer” commentator, which has featured some high-profile stories that have not always worked out well for her sources.

While political editor of the Sunday Times in 2011 she was in touch with Vicky Pryce, the ex-wife of the former Liberal Democrat cabinet minister Chris Huhne. Pryce mentioned that she had once taken speeding points on behalf of Huhne. In [follow-up emails](#) the pair discussed how best to deploy

the information to damage Huhne's career, with Oakeshott ultimately publishing a front page story that prompted police to re-examine the driving incident.

What happened next has dogged Oakeshott's journalism career since. The Crown Prosecution Service – led by the future Labour leader Sir Keir Starmer – requested the correspondence between Oakeshott and Pryce. A judge agreed with Starmer's request and – rather than protect their source – the Sunday Times and Oakeshott complied with the order. The material proved to be crucial evidence at trials in which both Pryce and Huhne were found guilty of perverting the course of justice and sent to prison.

Despite the convention that journalists should always do their utmost to protect their sources, Oakeshott stood by her decision to hand over the material. She [said she had warned](#) Pryce of the legal risks of running the story and insisted it was “not my job to provide expert criminal advice”.

After leaving the Sunday Times she took a different approach, writing a biography of the then prime minister, David Cameron, in conjunction with the disgruntled Tory peer Michael Ashcroft. Despite extensive research, Call Me Dave failed to get close to Cameron's inner circle and is mainly remembered for its allegation that the prime minister engaged in sexual congress with a dead pig at a decadent university party.

One problem was that this tale was not necessarily true. Oakeshott later said at a book festival that she had been told the story by a Conservative MP, saying: “It's my judgment that the MP was not making it up, although I accept there was a possibility he could have been slightly deranged.”

She said she relied on a single source, and that criticism of her claim rested on the false premise “that things that are written in books need to have the same standard as things that are written in newspapers”.



Copies of Call Me Dave on sale in 2015. Photograph: Ben Pruchnie/Getty Images

Her leak of Hancock's messages is not the first time she has shared a cache of private messages provided to her by a political figure while ghostwriting a book.

In 2016 she helped produce Arron Banks' Bad Boys of Brexit book, during which she was handed the Leave.EU founder's text messages and emails to help reconstruct a narrative of the EU referendum campaign. Two years later, having sat on the messages, she [shared previously unpublished correspondence with the Sunday Times](#) that suggested Banks had more meetings with Russian officials than he had previously disclosed.

Further front pages followed when she obtained leaked internal government correspondence in which Sir Kim Darroch, the British ambassador to Washington DC, criticised the Trump administration as "inept" and "utterly dysfunctional". Darroch was forced to resign on the basis that his position had become untenable as a result of the leaks.

Yet while the story was credited to Oakeshott, it was [later revealed](#) it had come from a teenage freelance journalist called Steven Edginton who also

did work for the Brexit party. He passed the story to Oakeshott and kept his name off it to avoid “possible controversy”.

Some Tories also expressed surprise that Hancock entrusted his records to Oakeshott, given she is in a long-term relationship with Richard Tice, the leader of the Reform party. This is a rebranded version of Nigel Farage’s Brexit party, which hopes to take votes off the Conservatives at the next election.

The duo have appeared as co-hosts of programmes on TalkTV, most recently interviewing the former chancellor Kwasi Kwarteng together, although their mixed performances have led someone at the station to describe them as “a shit Richard and Judy”.

Despite her record, Oakeshott’s decision to turn on Hancock – blindsiding the former cabinet minister – is seen as particularly brutal. Just three months ago she was proudly promoting the book, appearing at its launch and writing [in the Spectator](#) that she was “not paid a penny” for the year she spent on the project but it “was richly rewarding in other ways”.

She said she disagreed with Hancock on many points but concluded there was not any malign intent on the part of political leaders during the coronavirus pandemic. “They may have been misguided; and got some things catastrophically wrong, but mistakes were made in good faith.”

One theory as to why she leaked Hancock’s messages is that her decision to co-write his book was causing problems for her as a rightwing pundit in the so-called culture wars. One News UK source said: “This liaison with Hancock was not good for her brand. Her brand is anti-lockdown headbangers.”

As for Hancock, the politician turned reality TV star may be wondering whether it was worth writing his memoir at all. Despite Oakeshott’s assistance – and the publicity of him being on I’m a Celebrity ... Get Me Out of Here! – the book sold fewer than 4,000 copies in its first two weeks. Many more people will now read the correspondence that didn’t make the cut.

2023.03.02 - Spotlight

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‘We feel like a bit of a pack’ ... Aaron Robinson with his pace-setters, River (left) and Inca. Photograph: Jill Mead/The Guardian

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The resilience secret: 13 ways to stay strong and active – from the man who

runs a marathon a day

Every morning this year, Aaron Robinson has arisen before dawn and run 26 miles before work. He explains how to turn an intimidating exercise plan into a simple habit



[Emine Saner](#)

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Thu 2 Mar 2023 01.00 ESTLast modified on Thu 2 Mar 2023 10.39 EST

By the time you read this, Aaron Robinson will – barring disaster – have run his 75th marathon in 75 days. Aided by his two pace-setters, Inca and River (his border collies), Robinson will have got out of bed around 3am, and completed 26 miles. He'll probably do the same tomorrow, and the day after that.

People always ask how many marathons he'll do, he says. "I don't know. I'd love to say, especially for fundraising, 'I'm doing X amount.' But we're just doing it day by day. It depends on the dogs and how they feel."

But how does *he* feel? "Doing previous ultra-marathons, the second half you're often running on 'tired legs'. I feel like every run now I've done on

tired legs,” he says. Robinson, 40, who lives in east London, ran 200 miles in three days last year and he has completed many other ultra runs. The daily marathon has been tough, but, he says, it’s also “one of my happiest times of the day, really. I’m an introvert – I love running on my own. It’s my happy place.”

The 3am start is a necessity, so that he can make it to work on time. Robinson works for the charity [Hope for Justice](#), which campaigns to end modern slavery and supports victims, and for which he is [raising money](#) and awareness. “Trying to fight modern slavery can feel overwhelming,” he says, “but each of us can do something, however small.”

Starting in the cold and dark of winter was no deterrent. “I just wanted to do it,” he says. “I’m planning on doing this for a long time, so I’m going to go through all the seasons.” It probably helped to start in the harder months, he adds, so that now he is appreciating the earlier dawns. At the weekend, he had a lie-in “until 5am, and I ran most of the time in sunshine. That was the fastest run I’ve done. It just feels more natural.”

Whether the rest of us need a push to start exercising, are taking on a new challenge, or want to operate with more grit, determination and resilience, what can we learn from Robinson? He sounds alarmed at the question. “I don’t consider myself an expert,” he says cautiously – and his extreme schedule wouldn’t be recommended by experts. “I can only say what works for me.” The good news: it includes crisps.



Inca hitches a ride. Photograph: Jill Mead/The Guardian

Be inspired by others

Robinson had been following the consecutive marathon women's world record attempts. "It changed hands several times in a short space of time," he says. "Seeing them do it – it just really appealed to me." And there are more who have achieved similar feats: [Gary McKee ran a marathon every day in 2022](#), raising more than £1m for Macmillan Cancer Support. Robinson wanted to raise money for Hope for Justice, as he has with previous challenges. "A lot of charities are going through a tough time at the moment with cost of living and lack of donations." He also gets a lot of motivation from knowing he has inspired others – people have told him they're now training for a 5k. "That means a lot."

Create a habit

People tell Robinson that he must have amazing willpower to get himself up at 3am every morning and go out, whatever the weather. "Not really, actually," he says. "Maybe you use willpower at the start, but after that, you just keep doing the same thing and it becomes easier. Habit is a really powerful thing for me, probably more powerful than willpower." It would be harder to stick to, he thinks, if he set himself the challenge of running three or four marathons a week. "I never have a choice. I never think: do I do it today, or do I not? I have to get up. Once you're there, and you've run

the first mile or two, it's actually fine. The hardest part is just starting." A daily marathon, or even daily intense exercise, is not necessarily healthy, but fitting in some sort of non-negotiable movement every day – a walk, or yoga, or some strength training – is.

Be prepared

Robinson charges his phone, head torch and head camera the night before, puts out his running clothes and packs his energy gels, water, dog snacks and a packet of crisps. "I do exactly the same thing each night. It's definitely a lot easier." It's the same reason he runs a more or less identical route each time. "There's a lot of energy in working out where to go. Sometimes we go a different way but I don't really want to get lost when it's 4am."

If you're coming home from work, do not sit down. Your sofa will suck your motivation from you as soon as you sit on it

Jo Wilkinson, running coach and former elite athlete, advises creating a routine, and setting a reminder on your phone half an hour before your run. "If you're working from home, put your running kit on in the morning, even if you're going to go for a run in the evening," she says. "If you're out at work and you're coming home, do not sit down. That's the worst thing you can do, because once you sit down, it's really hard to get up again. Come in, get changed, go out again. Your sofa will suck your motivation from you as soon as you sit on it."

Prioritise sleep

Robinson says sleep is one of the most important things to him, and he tries to make sure he gets at least eight hours. This means going to bed at 7pm – "it's bad for my social life" – but he says it's worth it because sleep is "probably the No 1 factor in how well I'll perform. I've had 10 hours of sleep twice and both those times I got the fastest times afterwards."

Eat well

Robinson isn't exactly the ideal to follow here. He doesn't give much thought to his (vegetarian) diet, and doesn't count calories – he needs approximately 6,000 a day, but he says he takes that as a ballpark figure and

eats when he's hungry. "I find that generally eating healthy foods is better than junk, but I've also found that eating crisps is quite helpful because they're high in salt, and replace the sodium you lose when you sweat."

Sarah O'Neill, a personal trainer and nutritionist, says: "It's even more important to make sure you're eating healthily, and you're giving yourself the full complement of vitamins and minerals, and healthy fats. Exercise is great, but it's still a stressor on the body." Don't forget you need extra water, too. "For every hour you exercise, you're meant to have an extra litre of water."



'Rest is an important piece of the puzzle.' Photograph: Jill Mead/The Guardian

Enjoy well-earned rest

Robinson doesn't take rest days – at least during this challenge – but O'Neill cautions against following his example. "People often make the mistake of not factoring in rest, but that's when your muscles can repair and build, so it's a really important piece of the puzzle," she says. "Over-training can cause repetitive stress which can then lead to injury. Everybody's a little bit different: some people can work out every day, but they'll use something like yoga as their rest session. I would say it's good to have at least one clear rest day a week."

Set a goal, or find a purpose

All of us will have moments where we just can't be bothered to get out and exercise. A purpose or goal can help. For Robinson, it's raising money for people who are "forced to work in appalling conditions, forced into sexual slavery, and they literally can't run away". [Running](#) in the cold and rain, however unpleasant, is "nothing compared to what they're going through, so putting that in perspective changes my mindset and helps me," he says.

Your goal could be simply to engage in regular exercise, but be specific about the number of days. Motivation can be developed, says Andy Lane, professor of sport psychology at the University of Wolverhampton. Believe you can do it, try it and get confirmation that you can. That, he says, "is massive. See what positive steps you took on the way to get there."

Find a training partner

"If you arrange to meet somebody, you don't want to let them down. So find a friend to go out for a run with," says Wilkinson. It doesn't have to be extreme: arranging a regular walk with a friend is a good first step, but she also advises joining a group such as a local running club. "They cater for a range of abilities, from super-speedy people down to beginners. They absolutely are for everybody." Or you could set up a WhatsApp group or sign up to any number of training apps to keep you accountable to others.

Inca and River get him up in the morning, either with a paw or, if that fails, by sitting on him

For Robinson, his two dogs are his best motivators. "They've got so much energy. As soon as we come back from the marathon, they still want to play." He has been a bit stung by some comments online that it is cruel to run a daily marathon with dogs. "For some dogs, it probably is, but if you've got a working breed, anyone who owns a border collie knows they've got so much energy. They love running; they love doing things with you and they like you giving them tasks, so we play a few games along the way as well. If they see a squirrel, they're off chasing it."

The challenge has improved their relationship with him, he says. Inca and River get him up in the morning, either with a paw or, if that fails, by sitting

on him. “It’s a nice, bonding thing to do with your dogs. We feel like a bit of a pack.” The only thing that would stop the daily marathons, he says, is if one of them was ill or injured. “It’s the three of us doing it or none of us.”

Don’t go too hard

A daily marathon is extreme, but Robinson wasn’t starting from zero. For many of us, starting with a daily walk would be ideal. “If you tried to make every session very hard, it would be gruesome and even the fittest would find that extremely tough,” says Lane. Robinson may be running a marathon a day, but at least, says Lane, “he generally goes at the same speed”. People starting out often don’t get the levels right, “and don’t pay attention to what can be the very negative effects of pain that come with intense exercise. The idea that it has to be brutal for you to improve is simply not true. The most important thing – and Aaron’s doing this – is the consistency.”

Be realistic

Most of us are not going to get up at 3am to run for five hours, but don’t take an all-or-nothing approach. “Say: ‘Can I fit in 10 minutes of exercise most days of the week?’” suggests O’Neill. “When I’d just had my children, I realised I wasn’t exercising because I felt like it had to be a big session. Then I thought: ‘I’ll just do what I can.’ It’s finding what suits you and where you’re at, physically or in your life. If you don’t adapt your expectations, that’s when training falls off the map.”

Make it fun

Exercise can be boring. Robinson sometimes listens to podcasts but he often embraces the long runs as a form of meditation, and zones out. “You lose track of the mileage,” he says. And make the most of exercising outdoors: “What’s that phrase? You can never step in the same river twice. I feel like I never do the same run twice, because I’m different, the dogs are different, the weather’s different, the seasons are changing. It doesn’t feel boring.”

Choosing something you enjoy – dancing, roller skating, trampolining – will probably help you stick to it. “The idea that going on the treadmill for half an hour will be fun? It’s nonsense,” says Lane. “It’s enjoyable when

you're out in nature, and it's nice scenery, or when you've got nice music on, or you're walking or cycling with somebody. You can create those scenarios. You can also identify what makes it agony. Typically, for most people, it's going too hard, too early."

Take it step by step

Robinson isn't particularly interested in running fast. A marathon takes him about five hours each morning. "In that time, you're going to get moments where it feels great, and moments where it's tough," he says. "Sometimes from nowhere a second wind will come and you'll feel amazing, so it's just about hanging in there. OK, you don't feel great now, but maybe in 10 miles, it'll be fine. Sometimes it's literally just getting to the next mile, the next tree, the next bench and focusing on that rather than trying to get to the end, because that might be quite a long way away."

O'Neill agrees. She once ran 12 marathons in 12 days, and says she found it hardest when, "we looked ahead too far. You have to go one bit at a time, breaking it into small chunks and only look at the piece ahead of you."

Robinson says that when you're hitting the miles that are the hardest, "and you don't think you can get through, it makes it even more rewarding to think: if I do get to the end, what would that mean? When I stop and walk for a bit and think this might be the last [marathon], then I push through – those are the most rewarding runs. For me, suffering and pain are not necessarily bad in small, manageable quantities. It's an opportunity to prove yourself."

Focus on the mental rewards

Robinson has never got on with platitudes such as "believe in yourself". "I've always found that a bit meaningless," he says. "What if you don't believe in yourself? It's often talked about like something you just switch on, like a light switch." He says he has developed psychological resilience from his running. "I'm more confident. If I can do this, then [how hard can] a presentation I have to give at work be? I don't worry about it as much."

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The trials of an Indian witness: how a Muslim man was caught in a legal nightmare

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Spotify's AI DJ is the next move in its bid to 'personalize' our listening experiences. Photograph: Spotify

[Spotify](#)

Last night AI DJ saved my life? Testing Spotify's virtual radio host

A male voice offers 'commentary' as the service curates a stream of songs I've heard before. Do I really need this?

[Alaina Demopoulos](#)

Thu 2 Mar 2023 01.00 EST Last modified on Thu 2 Mar 2023 11.42 EST

I'm listening to Radiohead's Creep on the radio. "You may not know this," the DJ coos patronizingly, "but this song turns 30 this year." So far, so titbit of trivia on FM drivetime. The only difference is this DJ is not a real person.

AI DJ is the next move in Spotify's never-ending goal to "personalize" our listening experiences. Like its Discover Weekly new music playlist, or its

end-of-year Wrapped recap, the AI DJ curates a stream of songs it thinks I'll like based on my listening history. Along with the tunes, I get segues of "commentary" from a male AI voice, which bursts with the forced friendliness of an over-invested high school guidance counselor.

The feature is currently being rolled out, so you may have already noticed it on your Spotify app. Like just about everything this year, it's made with OpenAI, a chatbot known for its distinctively human – and sometimes [quite creepy](#) – responses. Spotify music editors also give the feature a boost, as they're the ones who write up the fun facts the voice gives you every few songs. "With this generative AI tooling, our editors are able to scale their innate knowledge in ways never before possible," said a press release.

"Let's keep this vibe going," the voice says as I skip through the next songs: Television's Marquee Moon, The Slits' Typical Girls, and Jimmy Eat World's The Middle. I learn that robots like dad rock.

While the honey-voiced guide to my listening session is not a real person, it's based on one: Xavier "X" Jernigan. He's the head of Spotify's cultural partnerships and host of The Get Up podcast, a daily morning show about pop culture that also gives listeners a "personalized playlist".

According to a Spotify press [release](#), "[Jernigan's] personality and voice resonated with our listeners" well enough for him to land the gig as the "first model for the DJ". But more options could come in the future, the brand noted.

I liked the voice, even if it came off as stalker-ish. "I know what you listen to, so I'm going to be here every day," it told me, kind of threateningly. And it *is* a little scary just how much the AI DJ knows about me.

With the tap of a button, it launches into a "look back at 2018", but not the songs that came out that year – the songs *I* listened to. It starts blasting three Celine Dion anthems I played nonstop during a particularly self-indulgent time in my life. As I get a weather alert about an incoming snowstorm, it switches to my "favorite summer jams" from past years.

Was this “personalization”? I felt like the AI DJ was less picking out songs from its digital crystal ball of predictions and mostly just playing songs I’d listened to before. It was also happy to serve up songs supposedly “picked just for me” by their editors: indie and R&B playlists that seemed to hype up new releases.

It’s tough to imagine who, exactly, this feature is for. The app’s promotional videos brand it as a kind of personalized crate-digger serving up deep cuts and commentary. But I assume that those looking for human curation will keep listening to, well, actual radio (or maybe rival Apple Music’s take on “curated” services, which taps experts like Ebro Darden, Zane Lowe, and Elton John as alternatives to algorithms.)

For the most part, the AI DJ wants to please me. When I tap a button to change the genre, I get an amiable: “Not into it? I got you.” There’s no waiting around for a song I like to enter the rotation, as I do with the FM station in my car. It’s effortless. But after some time, the AI DJ starts to speak to me less and less. Soon, it only lets me know what artist is on deck. I wonder why I need it at all.

After 30 minutes, I realize I’m just listening to my top-played songs. I’ve heard them all thousands of time. I turn off the AI DJ, and go look for a new album I haven’t heard yet.

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Gladstone's Library, in Hawarden, north Wales

[Travel](#)

From book butlers to library sleepovers: 10 great UK places to stay for book lovers

To celebrate World Book Day we've picked 10 lovely literary retreats for bookworms

[Rhiannon Batten](#)

Thu 2 Mar 2023 02.00 ESTLast modified on Thu 2 Mar 2023 12.01 EST

Library sleepover, Flintshire

Gladstone's Library in **Hawarden** is the ultimate destination for those who like to wind down with a bedtime story. Founded by William Gladstone, the former British prime minister, in 1894, the Grade I-listed library is now home to 250,000 works, some 32,000 of them shuttled there in a wheelbarrow by Gladstone himself – at the age of 85 – from Hawarden castle. Run as a charity, the property is the UK's only residential library, with 26 bedrooms and a bistro as well as those hallowed reading rooms.

Doubles from £135, B&B, with various discounts for students, clergy and members of the Society of Authors, gladstoneslibrary.org

A room of one's own, Cornwall



The flat above the Hypatia Trust's Women in Word bookshop

Penzance's historic Chapel Street has many a literary connection. From the house in which Maria Branwell, mother of the Brontë writing clan, grew up, to the Admiral Benbow pub – said to have inspired the inn of the same name in [Robert Louis Stevenson's](#) *Treasure Island* – the street promises rich pickings for visiting bookworms. Not least at Women in Word, the bookshop of the Hypatia Trust. Sitting towards the top of the street, it specialises in women's fiction and nonfiction and includes titles by local writers. Behind it is a stylish two-bedroom holiday apartment, income from which supports the Trust's work.

Three nights from £373.50 for four people, self-catering, hypatia-trust.org.uk

Book club holiday, North Yorkshire

HF Holidays' new book club holidays are for anyone who has always fancied joining a book club but can't commit to regular meetings. In addition to a Literary Oxford trip, timed to tie in with the city's [literary festival](#) this month, the company is introducing a thriller-based break in the Lake District in October. Also in October is a gothic fiction holiday at Grade II-listed Larpool Hall, just outside **Whitby**. On the last, participants will spend the weekend reading and discussing three key works as well as heading out on guided visits to relevant locations, such as Whitby Abbey.

Three nights from £449pp, full-board, hfholidays.co.uk

Book butler on call, Cambridge



The library at the University Arms Hotel, Cambridge

Cambridge isn't short on bookish pleasures. The city's University Arms hotel, however, offers several under one roof. Guests can sleep in suites named after locally affiliated writers such as Lord Byron and Christopher Marlowe, browse bookshelves curated by Heywood Hill of Mayfair, sip a Bloomsbury Boozer in the bar or enjoy afternoon tea in the hotel's 200 well-stocked library. Since December they have also been able to call on the services of a "book butler", who will discuss literary interests, preferred authors and themes over a cup of tea then have a bespoke range of titles delivered to their room.

Doubles from £188, room only, universityarms.com

Readers' retreat, Scottish Borders



Barns Library on the Neidpath Castle estate

Close to **Peebles**, on the Neidpath castle estate, Barns Library is a two-bedroom, two-bathroom apartment set in an old stables courtyard. All on one level, with a private garden and direct access to a 200-year-old arboretum, it's a romantic spot. There's a four-poster bed fringed with silk, an intricate frieze to gaze at from a clawfoot bath, textiles in warm, earthy colours and a wood-burning stove. The name hints at the biggest draw for visiting bookworms: between the dining area and the kitchen a run of bookshelves is ready stocked with holiday reading. For further inspiration, Abbotsford, [Sir Walter Scott](#)'s former home, is 40 minutes' drive away.

Three nights from £330 for four people, self-catering, neidpathcastle.com

Pick up a Penguin, Shropshire



The Penguin Bar at Whitton Hall

A Georgian manor house surrounded by graceful gardens and gentle countryside west of **Shrewsbury**, Whitton Hall has been a B&B for 30 years. Wooden panelling, antique furniture and home-cooked hospitality (dinners can also be arranged with a bit of notice) draw a roster of regulars. Book lovers tend to make straight for the Penguin Bar – so called because it houses a collection of more than 400 vintage Penguin books as well as an honesty bar stocked with bottles sourced from Tanners, the illustrious Shrewsbury wine merchant. The B&B's six bedrooms can be booked individually but it's also ideal for book club over-nighters.

Doubles from £130 a night with a two-night minimum stay, B&B, whittonhall.com

Literary lookout, Kent



The Boatman's Reading Rooms, Deal

Founded in 1873 by local philanthropist Caroline Wollaston, the Boatman's Reading Rooms in **Deal** was originally designed to offer the town's famous boatmen some scholarly escapism, recuperation or simply an alternative to the pub. Celebrated as heroes by some, opportunists by others, the small-boat sailors worked in tough conditions, doing everything from shuttling people and supplies to and from ships to helping with rescues and recoveries. (Many also did a fair amount of smuggling.) Today the Georgian building serves instead as a refuge for holidaymakers. Along with four bedrooms and front-row views of the sea, there's wallpaper emblazoned with snippets from Charles Dickens' *Nicholas Nickleby*, a small guest library and, for those seeking inspiration for their next novel, a secret tunnel.

Two nights from £854 for 10 people, self-catering, byquince.co.uk

Storybook city break, Edinburgh



A booklover's bed with a view, Edinburgh

With its ancient tenement setting and high-rise views of Princes Street Gardens and the Firth of Forth, this studio apartment in **Edinburgh** has all the ingredients for a fairytale weekend away. Owned by bookbinder Rachel Hazell, it has book-themed decor, with book art on the walls, a library of modern Scottish literature and a writing desk. It's in the old town, looking out to the new, so brilliantly located for exploring the Unesco City of Literature: the [Writers' Museum](#) is on the doorstep, the [Scottish Poetry Library](#) is just down the hill. Those short on time can sign up for a [Book Lovers' Tour](#) and take in many of Edinburgh's literary sites and citations in one 90-minute swoop.

From £405 for two people for three nights, self-catering, thetravellingbookbinder.com

Author's escape, Devon

A Scandi-style, timber-clad house near **Braunton** with two bedrooms, bright windows and a moss--green kitchen, the Author's Escape was

originally built in the 1950s by Tarka the Otter writer Henry Williamson, though it has since been through a sustainable renovation. Williamson used money he won in a competition to buy the land and build the listed writing hut that stands in the garden, complete with battered leather chair and a collection of scratched 78s. Now a peaceful country retreat for holidaying readers and writers, the house comes with a selection of books (Williamson's among them) and plenty of sun-dappled corners to enjoy them in, inside and out.

From £200 for four, self-catering, kiphideaways.com

Scholarly style, Outer Hebrides

A 19th-century school on **North Uist** magicked into a modern holiday home, Tigharry Schoolhouse has swapped rows of desks for cossetting bathrooms, tactile kilim rugs, velvety cord armchairs and an honesty bar stocked with locally distilled Downpour gin. As befits a former centre of learning, the soaring open-plan kitchen and dining room also includes one of the best holiday cottage libraries in Scotland, running to 1,000 titles. If you can drag your eyes away from the clouds skittering hypnotically past the property's large windows, you'll find everything from local and less-local fiction to works on local birds, wild flowers and cooking.

Three nights from £300 for four people, self-catering, tigharryschoolhouse.com

This article was amended on 2 March 2023. In an earlier version, the picture illustrating the Author's Escape in Devon was in fact the studio apartment in Edinburgh. The main image was also changed as a previous image showed a private area in the Gladstone family's ancestral home, which is not part of Gladstone's Library.

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/travel/2023/mar/02/book-butlers-library-sleepovers-10-great-places-to-stay-for-book-lovers-world-book-day>

2023.03.02 - Opinion

- Rishi Sunak is shaping up to be a prime minister Keir Starmer should be wary of
- Rotten, with no quick fixes: the state of our mouths reflects the plight of NHS dentistry
- Many men have a problematic relationship with food – and I'm one of them
- Football is firmly in gambling's grip as it hypocritically clamps down on Ivan Toney



‘Sorting the protocol was a sensible bit of ground-clearing and confidence-building.’ Rishi Sunak during prime minister’s questions on Wednesday. Photograph: Jessica Taylor/UK Parliament/AFP/Getty Images

[Opinion](#)[Rishi Sunak](#)

Rishi Sunak is shaping up to be a prime minister Keir Starmer should be wary of

[Martin Kettle](#)



Sunak's handling of the NI protocol suggests a leader – and a Tory party – with more left in the tank than some think

Thu 2 Mar 2023 01.00 ESTLast modified on Thu 2 Mar 2023 12.33 EST

Does Rishi Sunak deserve some kind of apology? Too soon for that. But don't underestimate this prime minister, either. His party trails Labour by [more than 20 points](#) in the polls. His job [approval rating](#) is bumping along at -26. But his handling of the Northern Ireland protocol changes this week suggests a leader with more in the tank than critics have allowed. Perhaps Sunak should not be too readily dismissed as a caretaker who is seeing out time until Keir Starmer takes over.

It is, admittedly, early days for such speculation. The protocol deal has not yet been approved. The [DUP is divided](#) about how to respond, and enjoys the feeling of having Sunak's future in its hands. A return to power-sharing at Stormont, with the DUP playing second fiddle to Sinn Féin, is a long way off. An improved UK-EU relationship that could eventually ease Britain's trading problems is more distant still. Most voters in Britain don't have Europe or Northern Ireland on their minds anyway.

But allow some credit where it is due to Sunak. He could hardly have been in a weaker position than he was when he took over as Tory leader in October. It was the year of three prime ministers and four chancellors. War in Ukraine overturned the political landscape. Inflation, higher interest rates, energy price hikes and strikes ensured a grim winter. The health service has been on its knees. Boris Johnson has been greedily eyeing a return.

Amid all that, Sunak didn't cower in the bunker. Instead, unlike Liz Truss, he prioritised the things where he could begin to shift the dial and build some political capital. Sorting the protocol was in that category, a sensible bit of ground-clearing and confidence-building. A government of which he was part had created the whole problem in the first place, of course, and one should never tire of saying so. But he [did an important job](#) this week.



‘Sunak has had luck along the way. Nicola Sturgeon’s departure has disarmed the Scottish separatist threat for a while.’ Photograph: Mike Boyd/PA

In some ways, the content of the protocol deal was the relatively straightforward bit. Most of what was unveiled – notably the green and red lanes and the dispute resolution system – has been [on the table](#) for years. The politics of selling it was always going to be a much tougher task. Sunak

had to market a compromise not just to the DUP, but also to a Tory party in which too many had become intoxicated with their own dogmas – which is exactly why Sunak lost to Truss last summer. He also had the [shameless Johnson](#) and the Faragiste Tory press bursting to make trouble.

Sunak has had luck along the way. Nicola Sturgeon's departure has disarmed the Scottish separatist threat for a while, though the union remains fragile in the longer term. Energy prices have begun to ease. But he has made his own luck too. It was a key insight to recognise that the DUP had overreached itself at the expense of the UK's wider economic and political interests, and was therefore in a weaker position than many assumed.

The choreography of the protocol deal was also bold. Potential Tory rebels faced a pincer movement of private pressure at Westminster alongside assured ministerial actions on the national stage. Sunak was on top of the detail. Ursula von der Leyen, the European commission president, was well briefed. The king played his [symbolic role](#). The DUP was not allowed to hijack the launch and mobilise the European Research Group. Johnson was comprehensively outmanoeuvred.

None of this means Sunak is suddenly the effective and successful leader that the Tory party has lacked for so long. He is not. For one thing, the protocol deal may stumble. The battered economy, on which Starmer focused [almost all his questions](#) to Sunak in the Commons yesterday, remains far and away the central battleground of electoral politics for the foreseeable future. It is still more likely that Sunak will oversee the end of a long period of Conservative government than its renewal.

This week, though, has provided a reminder of two important things that deserve to be noted by political observers. First, it has suggested that Sunak is capable of rebuilding at least some of the reputation for Conservative competence. Second, it confirmed that he may be starting to steer the Tory party towards a more moderate and pragmatic place.

These signs of change should be watched seriously, because the Tory party has history as an election winner. It also enjoys some electoral advantages over Labour. These include the [new constituency boundaries](#) on which the

next election will be fought, the reduction in the number of seats from Wales and Scotland, and the fact that the Tories need a smaller lead than Labour in the overall national vote to be the largest party at Westminster or to have an overall majority. Sunak also gets to choose the election date.

Changes of this kind are not like electoral on-off switches. No Tory leader can simply declare the convulsions of the past seven years over, or announce that from now on, they will be competent and consensual. The damage done by the polarisation, recklessness, venality and destructiveness of the May-Johnson-Truss years casts long shadows that will shape the politics of this decade. Nevertheless, this week highlighted some early if incomplete signs that Sunak is starting to change the Tory party. It would be foolish to ignore them. Starmer certainly is not doing so.

- Martin Kettle is a Guardian columnist

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2023/mar/02/rishi-sunak-northern-ireland-protocol-tory-party>.



‘Though a few services may stagger on for a while, we are witnessing the end of NHS dentistry.’

Photograph: Peter Cade/Getty Images

[OpinionNHS](#)

Rotten, with no quick fixes: the state of our mouths reflects the plight of NHS dentistry

[George Monbiot](#)



I live in one of Britain's many 'dental deserts', where those who can't afford to go private face pain and misery

Thu 2 Mar 2023 03.00 ESTLast modified on Thu 2 Mar 2023 15.05 EST

Every child in the UK is entitled to free treatment by a nonexistent dentist. Some people on benefits, pregnant women and those who have recently given birth also have [free and full access](#) to an imaginary service. Your rights are guaranteed, up to the point at which you seek to exercise them.

For a government that wants to destroy public services, [NHS](#) dentistry provides a useful template. Rather than inciting public fury by announcing a change of policy, you stoutly proclaim your undying commitment to the service while starving it of funds until it collapses. Then people grumble and unwisely grind their teeth, but they don't rise up. The state of our mouths reflects the state of the nation.

A few months ago we moved house, after which we discovered that we are living in one of the UK's many dental deserts: regions where there are no dentists accepting children as new NHS patients. A BBC [survey](#) last year found that a tenth of local authority areas, including ours, do not contain a

single dental practice that is [prepared to do so](#). Overall, 80% of practices in the UK are no longer taking on new child NHS patients, and about 90% are refusing new adult patients.

There's no mystery about why the service is vanishing: if dentists treat patients on the NHS, they lose money

Even this does not capture the full extent of the collapse: some of the remaining practices sustain the pretence of a waiting list, but the lists are often so long that it would be more honest to admit they are no longer offering the service. By the time your child is able to register, they may be too old to qualify.

We have responded as most parents do in these circumstances: frantically seeking an alternative. As we are already struggling with the deficiencies of education and other public services that have been starved of funds, even the thought of joining another campaign is exhausting. I have sent a complaint via the [NHS page](#) but otherwise, like almost everyone else, we have tried (unsuccessfully so far) to solve our own problem. Which is just what the government wants.

There's no mystery about why the service is vanishing: if dentists treat patients on the NHS, they lose money, because the state funding package does not cover their costs. Since 2006, dentists have worked for the NHS under a contract so ridiculous that it seems designed to fail. They are paid, in classic New Labour-speak, according to "units of dental activity" (UDA), which bear no relation to the costs of treatment. For instance, until last year dentists received the [same remuneration](#) from the NHS for a patient who required 10 fillings as for a patient who required one. Treating a patient earned you three [points](#), regardless of the length and expense of the procedure. Every practice has to meet an annual UDA target. There is [no incentive](#) to practise preventive dentistry, and every incentive to exclude the patients with the greatest needs.

Nor is there any encouragement for dentists to seek further training and qualifications: they are paid at the UDA rate, regardless of skills and

experience. So, if you work for the NHS, you can [kiss goodbye to career progression](#).

These disincentives are exacerbated by vicious cuts. The NHS as a whole has [fallen behind](#) because, while modern health systems require real-terms funding improvements of about 4% a year to keep pace with an ageing population and technological change, it receives [1.2%](#) in real terms. But funding for NHS dental services has been cut in real terms by [4%](#) a year. [Dental inflation](#), driven by the rising costs of lab bills, energy, wages and materials, is about 11% a year. Dentists working for the NHS cannot stay in business unless they use income from private practice to subsidise their public practice.

As parliament's health and social committee [noted in 2008](#): "it is extraordinary that the [health] department did not pilot or test the UDA payment system before it was introduced." But since then, successive governments have only tinkered with a system that was broken before it launched. Last year, the government [introduced](#) what it called a "reformed" contract in England, to permit "better access to NHS dental services". While there was a [slight easing](#) of the UDA formula, as the British Dental Association predicted, it did nothing to stop the slide, as dentists still lose money by treating NHS patients.

In January this year, Rishi Sunak [told parliament](#) that "there are now more NHS dentists across the UK with more funding, making sure people can get the treatment they need". In reality, the number of NHS dentists is [lower](#) than it was before the pandemic, there is no new funding and millions remain without the treatment they need.

Thanks to an entirely unsurprising recruitment crisis, many dental practices have been unable to fulfil their NHS contracts. If they deliver fewer than 96% of the UDAs for which they are contracted, they are effectively fined by the government. It [looks](#) as if they will take a record hit on 1 April, when the financial year ends, being forced to pay back as much as £400m from a total English budget of £3bn. This is likely to terminate NHS dentistry in many of the remaining practices.

So, mission accomplished. To an even greater extent than in other public services, the government has created a hostile environment for practitioners. [Dentists](#) continue to offer NHS services because they feel a moral compulsion to do so, despite the money they lose and the stress and overwork inflicted by the stupid contract. But there is only so much they can take. Though a few services may stagger on for a while, we are witnessing the end of NHS dentistry.

The result, in one of the richest nations on Earth, is that people are [extracting their own teeth](#), making their own fillings, improvising dentures and sticking them to their gums with [superglue](#), and [overdosing on painkillers](#).

The policies that brought us to this point are so perverse that they can only be deliberate. Those who can afford to pay for treatment will do so; those who cannot face pain and misery. It seems extraordinary that any government would pursue this outcome, but the spirit of this government is extraordinary cruelty. What we see happening in dentistry is what it wishes on the rest of the NHS and the rest of our public services.

While ministers have their teeth fixed and whitened, the better to beguile us, across the nation they claim to govern, the rot is spreading.

- George Monbiot is a Guardian columnist



A buffet trolley can be hard to resist – as Adrian Chiles once discovered on a train from London to Manchester. Photograph: andresr/Getty Images (posed by a model)

[Opinion](#)[Eating disorders](#)

Many men have a problematic relationship with food – and I’m one of them

[Adrian Chiles](#)



People often tell me that they don't have an 'off switch' when it comes to drinking. I don't have that problem, but it's a different story when it comes to eating

Thu 2 Mar 2023 02.00 ESTLast modified on Thu 2 Mar 2023 17.04 EST

More than half of men with eating disorders have never received treatment; a third of them have never sought it. [These figures](#), from the [eating disorder charity Beat](#), don't surprise me. It's not just a women's thing. Seven in 10 men with an eating disorder had never heard of or read about other men being affected before they became unwell.

In the stuff I do about [problem drinking](#), people often tell me that they don't have an "off switch". In other words, once they start, they can't stop. This was never really my problem. Although I was drinking problematic amounts, on any given day, I wouldn't carry on for ever; I'd know when to stop, a long way short of oblivion or even what you might recognise as drunkenness.

But when it comes to food, it's a different story. Here, my "off switch" is useless. I don't know whether this counts as a disorder – I don't want

another disorder; I've been diagnosed with quite enough to be getting on with – but it sure can feel like it.

I think this is partly because – as well as “eating my feelings” and possibly just being plain greedy – when I was a kid, I was always told to finish everything, to waste not a crumb.

A few years back, when I was on a morning train from London to Manchester, having already had breakfast at home, the man came past with a platter of bacon and sausage sandwiches. I could neither resist nor decide which to go for, so he gave me both. I ate both.

Ten minutes later, he came past again, his platter still loaded. “Just about to bin these,” he said. He might as well have been holding some kittens and telling me he was about to drown them. I couldn't let it happen. He gave me another three baps. I ate all three. My day was ruined.

The only way I can deal with this inability to stop eating is not to start. I try not to eat all day, then at least the just-can't-stop issue has to be tackled only once, in the evening. Suboptimal, hardly dealing with any underlying causes, but it's the best I've got.

If you've got a bit of the same thing going on, the next time you're struggling, have a look at the Beat website. There's some useful stuff there.

Adrian Chiles is a broadcaster, writer and Guardian columnist

Contact Beat on 0808 801 0677 or at beateatingdisorders.org.uk



Ivan Toney has admitted to betting on matches. Photograph: David Klein/Reuters

[Soccer](#)

Football is firmly in gambling's grip as it hypocritically clamps down on Ivan Toney

[Rob Davies](#)

Brentford striker faces a lengthy suspension but bookmakers own some clubs and sponsor the shirts of others

Thu 2 Mar 2023 03.00 EST

Having [owned up to multiple breaches of Football Association betting rules](#), the Brentford striker Ivan Toney faces a lengthy ban. The episode heralds a sad fall from grace for the talented 26-year-old, who [might have](#)

[made England's World Cup squad](#) had the shadow of the Football Association's charges not been hanging over him.

It is right that Toney is sanctioned for breaking rules designed to protect the integrity of the game. But the powers-that-be in football can hardly clutch their pearls in horror at this turn of events having suckled hungrily at the gambling industry's teat for so long.

The Big Step, a campaign group dedicated to removing gambling adverts from football, scented the whiff of hypocrisy neatly, posting [a quartet of photos on Twitter](#). They show Toney, twice, proudly holding a SkyBet player of the month award, Toney in Brentford's strip, emblazoned with the logo of Hollywood Bets, and Toney's chest serving as a billboard for the Asian betting firm Fun88, during a stint at Newcastle.

If you force young people to endorse addictive products, don't be surprised if they use them. pic.twitter.com/U5ONQIrvP

— The Big Step (@the_bigstep) [March 1, 2023](#)

For anyone who thinks Toney is old enough to resist the gambling imagery surrounding him, consider the case of Chris Rigg, who came off the Sunderland bench in the FA Cup tie against Shrewsbury wearing a shirt advertising Spreadex. Rigg is 15. The firm specialises in spread betting, which consistently rates among the most addictive gambling products in analysis conducted by the NHS. Football's love affair with the bookmakers goes much deeper.

If Toney betting on football matches looks like a conflict of interest, what of the fact that bookmakers and gambling entrepreneurs own clubs outright? Stoke are owned by the Coates family via [their Bet365 empire](#), while the Brighton chairman, Tony Bloom, built his fortune on the back of gambling businesses, including his specialist sports betting advice firm Starlizard. Meanwhile, one of Bloom's former employees, Matthew Benham, developed statistical models to make smart sports bets and owns the gambling stats firm Smartodds and betting exchange Matchbook. As the

Brentford owner he may now have to use his gambling riches to fund a stand-in for Toney.

The gambling-football nexus doesn't end there, far from it. As the Guardian revealed last year, [football clubs have been taking a cut of their fans' losses](#) for years, thanks to secret deals with gambling companies. More visibly, nearly half of Premier League clubs have [front-of-shirt gambling sponsors](#), while rates are even higher in the Championship. Amid a [much-delayed but wide-ranging government review](#) into gambling laws, top-flight clubs are expected to agree a voluntary ban on these deals soon. Yet pitchside ads – beamed into millions of homes every game – look likely to remain untouched.

Whether one agrees that the ads should go or not, forfeiting one form of in-game advertising but not the other is nonsensical. Yet such hoop-jumping would be just another symptom of football's eagerness to bend to the will of the gambling companies, not to mention the broadcasters who profit from the industry's marketing budgets.

Quick Guide

Ivan Toney 'concerned' about FA disciplinary process after ban speculation

Show



Brentford striker Ivan Toney says speculation relating to his impending disciplinary hearing on gambling-related charges has left him concerned about the process.

Toney is reported to be facing a ban of up to six months after being charged with a total of 262 breaches of the Football Association's gambling laws that date back to 2017.

But Toney has hit out at the governing body over what he perceives to be potential lapses of confidentiality as he prepares to argue his case.

Toney wrote on his Instagram stories: "I was shocked and disappointed to see press speculation yesterday and today about the FA investigation process concerning me after I have been told by the FA that it is a confidential process until any decision has been made.

"It is especially disturbing for me to read that the FA is saying I shall be banned from football for six months before there has even been a hearing, and it does make me worried about the process.

"My lawyers will be writing to the FA to request that they conduct a leak inquiry as this is the second time stories have appeared in the newspapers –

the last time was just before the selection of the England World Cup squad.

“As I continue to be told the investigation is mean to be confidential, I am unable to provide any further comment. I shall continue to concentrate on my football.” **PA Media**

Photograph: Ian Tuttle/Rex Features

Was this helpful?

Thank you for your feedback.

Ever wondered why some games kick off at 8.15pm? Consider the [voluntary “whistle to whistle” ban](#) agreed by bookies, who promised not to advertise during matches before 9pm. The measure, brought in during 2019, meant that any matches starting at 8pm or earlier could no longer include half-time ad breaks featuring the likes of Ray Winstone demanding that punters “bet now” with Bet365. A coincidence, perhaps, that 2019 also ushered in the first 8.15pm kick-offs, allowing for the restoration of lucrative half-time advertising.

Those who listen to games on the radio don’t even have to wait for ad breaks. Commentators on TalkSport have been known to reel off odds during the match as part of commercial deals with the bookies. Little wonder, then, that some in the gambling industry see football as a cross between their personal plaything and a cash machine, at least according to a 2019 court case. In an email submitted as evidence, a broker involved in BetVictor’s deal to sponsor Liverpool’s training kit told the company: “You get to virtually own Liverpool Football Club” for an investment of £4.5m a year.

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after newsletter promotion



Stoke's Jacob Brown and Brighton's Evan Ferguson tussle for possession in the FA Cup on Tuesday. Both clubs are owned by gambling entrepreneurs. Photograph: John Mallett/ProSports/Shutterstock

All the while, gambling has continued to bring embarrassment to football's door. Recent unsavoury episodes include Everton's discomfort [over its own deal with crypto-betting firm Stake.com](#), a Paddy Power stunt that [backfired for Huddersfield Town](#), not to mention the [whole sorry "Pie-gate" affair](#) involving Sutton United's goalkeeper.

Perhaps more seriously, one of the many managers who advertises for gambling companies, such as José Mourinho or Harry Redknapp, could easily field a competitive team from the list of players whose excessive gambling, or addiction, has made headlines. They include [Wayne Rooney](#), [Paul Merson](#), [Andros Townsend](#), [Steven Caulker](#) and [Matthew Etherington](#).

The football authorities have shown little appetite to loosen gambling's grip. Yet, in the Toney affair, they presume to sit in judgment, wringing their hands over a player's betting habits. It has echoes of the moment in Casablanca when Captain Renault, the hapless policeman, declares himself "shocked, shocked to find that gambling is going on in here". A moment later, a croupier hands him a pile of money. "Your winnings, sir."

Jackpot by Rob Davies (Guardian Faber, £10.99). To support The Guardian and Observer, order your copy at guardianbookshop.com. Delivery charges may apply.

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2023.03.02 - Around the world

- 'Stunning' China leading US in technology race in all but a few fields, thinktank finds
- Chinese interference Calls grow in Canada for inquiry into alleged election influence
- Tesla Elon Musk unveils plans for low production cost while skirting affordable car option
- Australia Spears stolen by Captain Cook from Kamay/Botany Bay in 1770 to be returned to traditional owners



A production line at a smartphone factory in Ganzhou, China. Beijing is leading the global technology race in fields including communications, batteries and hypersonics. Photograph: VCG/Getty Images

[China](#)

China leading US in technology race in all but a few fields, thinktank finds

Year-long study finds China leads in 37 of 44 areas it tracked, with potential for a monopoly in areas such as nanoscale materials and synthetic biology

[Daniel Hurst](#)

[@danielhurstbne](#)

Thu 2 Mar 2023 00.00 ESTLast modified on Thu 2 Mar 2023 00.01 EST

The United States and other western countries are losing the race with [China](#) to develop advanced technologies and retain talent, with Beijing potentially establishing a monopoly in some areas, a new report has said.

China leads in 37 of 44 technologies tracked in a year-long project by thinktank the Australian Strategic Policy Institute. The fields include electric batteries, hypersonics and advanced radio-frequency communications such as 5G and 6G.

The report, published on Thursday, said the US was the leader in just the remaining seven technologies such as vaccines, quantum computing and space launch systems.

It said the findings were based on “high impact” research in critical and emerging technology fields, focusing on papers that were published in top-tier journals and were highly cited by subsequent research.

“Our research reveals that China has built the foundations to position itself as the world’s leading science and technology superpower, by establishing a sometimes stunning lead in high-impact research across the majority of critical and emerging technology domains,” the report said.

“The [critical technology tracker](#) shows that, for some technologies, all of the world’s top 10 leading research institutions are based in China and are collectively generating nine times more high-impact research papers than the second-ranked country (most often the US).”

The Chinese Academy of Sciences ranked first or second in most of the 44 technologies included in the tracker, the report added.

“We also see China’s efforts being bolstered through talent and knowledge import: one-fifth of its high-impact papers are being authored by researchers with postgraduate training in a Five-Eyes country,” it said, referring to the intelligence-sharing grouping of the US, Canada, the UK, Australia and New Zealand.

“China’s lead is the product of deliberate design and long-term policy planning, as repeatedly outlined by Xi Jinping and his predecessors.”

Joe Biden said in his State of the Union address last month that the US was “investing in American innovation, in industries that will define the future, and that China’s government is intent on dominating”.

But the institute said China was at high risk of establishing a monopoly in eight technologies, including nanoscale materials and manufacturing, hydrogen and ammonia for power, and synthetic biology.

The report said China’s [strides in nuclear-capable hypersonic missiles in 2021](#) should not have been a surprise to US intelligence agencies “because, according to our data analysis, over the past five years, China generated 48.49% of the world’s high-impact research papers into advanced aircraft engines, including hypersonics, and it hosts seven of the world’s top 10 research institutions in this topic area”.

Across the board, the institute also found that there was “a large gap between China and the US, as the leading two countries, and everyone else”.

“The data then indicates a small, second-tier group of countries led by India and the UK: other countries that regularly appear in this group—in many technological fields—include South Korea, Germany, Australia, Italy, and less often, Japan,” it said.

The research, launched at the Raisina Dialogue in New Delhi on Thursday, was conducted by a team led by Jamie Gaida, a senior analyst with the institute’s international cyber policy centre.

The institute disclosed that its research was funded by the US state department’s global engagement center and a grant from the Special Competitive Studies Project, a foundation that aims to strengthen America’s long-term competitiveness.

The institute also called for democracies to establish large sovereign wealth funds for research, development and innovation in critical technology that they add to each year. It suggests allocating 0.5% to 0.7% of gross national income, with co-investment from industry.

It said while sovereign wealth funds should support the most promising programs, governments should also allocate some funds to high-risk, high-reward “moonshot” initiatives.

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2023/mar/02/china-leading-us-in-technology-race-in-all-but-a-few-fields-thinktank-finds>

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



Recent media reports have alleged ongoing election interference in Canada's elections, claims the Chinese embassy in Ottawa has denied. Photograph: Artur Widak/NurPhoto/REX/Shutterstock

[Canada](#)

Calls grow in Canada for inquiry into alleged election interference by China

Prime minister Justin Trudeau has acknowledged attempts by China to meddle in elections but has resisted launching a public inquiry

Reuters

Wed 1 Mar 2023 20.11 ESTLast modified on Fri 3 Mar 2023 00.13 EST

Canadian opposition parties stepped up their push for a broad public inquiry into alleged foreign election interference, particularly by China, a move that Liberal prime minister [Justin Trudeau](#) has not yet endorsed.

Recent media reports have alleged ongoing Chinese interference in Canada's elections, with Trudeau this week denying one article saying his

office was told by Canada's spy agency to drop a Chinese Canadian candidate in 2019 because of his ties to Beijing.

Canada's main opposition party called for an independent and public inquiry, headed by a commissioner who is selected with unanimous agreement of all federal parties in the parliament.

"We want to know exactly what the Chinese authoritarian government did, and whether there were political parties aware of those actions or not," Conservative party leader Pierre Poilievre told reporters in Ottawa.

New Democrats put forward a motion for a "full public inquiry" during a parliamentary committee collecting testimony on Wednesday from spy agencies and other security officials about possible Chinese meddling.

The New Democrats have been supporting Trudeau's minority government.

The prime minister has [acknowledged attempts by China to interfere in elections](#), but he has resisted calls for a broad public inquiry, saying the outcome of both the 2019 and 2021 votes were not altered.

Asked whether he would support a public inquiry again on Wednesday, Trudeau did not respond.

He said the government would continue to do "what is necessary" to "safeguard our democracy and our elections."

China's foreign minister, Qin Gang, rejected the accusations as "completely false and nonsensical", on Thursday. According to state media, Qin urged Canada to "not allow rumours and speculation to disturb relations between the two countries".

The Chinese embassy in Ottawa denied any election interference. "We are not interested in meddling with Canada's internal affairs, nor have we ever tried to do so," the embassy said in an email.

Canada's national security adviser, Jody Thomas, told the parliamentary committee that China was the greatest "foreign interference threat to Canada," but she cautioned that a public inquiry would not necessarily yield more information.

"A public inquiry will have the same limitations that this committee does, in that we cannot talk about national security information in a public forum," Thomas said.

The media reports have contributed to rekindling tensions between Canada and China. They had improved somewhat after Beijing released two Canadian men in 2021 who had been detained.

Canada this week [banned the use of the Chinese-owned social media app TikTok](#) on government-issued devices, citing privacy and security risks. And a [suspected Chinese spy balloon](#) flew over the United States and Canada before being shot down last month.

A majority of Canadians want Trudeau to respond more forcefully to alleged election interference by China, according to a poll published on Wednesday. Fifty-three percent of respondents said they felt Canada's response after a string of recent events was "not strong enough," polling firm Angus Reid Institute said.

"Canadians are indicating that they expect their government to take this seriously," said Shachi Kurl, president of the institute.

Sixty-five percent of Canadians said they believe the Chinese government "definitely" or "probably" tried to interfere in the 2021 vote, according to the survey.

This article was downloaded by calibre from <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2023/mar/02/calls-grow-in-canada-for-inquiry-into-alleged-election-interference-by-china>



Elon Musk in January 2020. Photograph: Aly Song/Reuters

[Elon Musk](#)

Musk unveils plans for low production cost while skirting affordable car option

Tesla chief executive was expected to lay out plan for a smaller, more affordable electric vehicle, but it did not materialize

Reuters

Wed 1 Mar 2023 22.01 ESTFirst published on Wed 1 Mar 2023 17.10 EST

Tesla will cut assembly costs by half in future generations of cars, engineers told investors on Wednesday, but [Elon Musk](#) did not unveil a much-awaited small, affordable electric vehicle.

Shares fell more than 5% in after hours trade following presentations at the company's investor day from its Texas headquarters.

In the first nearly three hours of the webcast, [Tesla](#) executives led by Musk discussed everything from a white-paper plan for the globe to embrace sustainable energy to the company's innovation in managing its operations from manufacturing to service.

The presentation featured an array of engineers, a nod to Tesla's attempt to show the depth of its executive bench beyond Musk, the face of the company. Tom Zhu, the new global production chief, took the stage and said Tesla's global capacity was 2m vehicles a year.

Musk was expected to lay out a plan to make a smaller, more affordable electric vehicle that would broaden his brand's appeal and fend off competition, but by late in the presentation executives had not detailed new vehicle model plans or new financial targets for the year.

Tesla's chief financial officer, Zach Kirkhorn, estimated the company would need to invest six times more than it has to date to hit its long-term target of increasing output to 20m vehicles annually, a 10-fold increase from current capacity. The bill could be \$175bn, he said.

Capturing the mass market is critical to Tesla's goal of increasing deliveries 15-fold – to 20m vehicles – by 2030.

The automaker has only four models, all priced toward the higher end of the market. The Cybertruck pickup is coming this year, executives said.

Musk said Tesla could need as few as 10 models to achieve annual sales of 20m vehicles a year. That would be an average of 2m sales each year for each model line. By comparison, Japan's Toyota, the world's largest automaker by volume, sells just over 1m Corollas a year globally.

Tesla has become the world's most valuable car company by far, and the billionaire Musk has aspirations of cracking the mass market and turning the EV maker into a company that can create a more climate-friendly world.

Tesla outperformed the industry in recent years, increasing deliveries rapidly despite the pandemic and supply-chain disruptions.

But Tesla cut prices in recent months to boost sales, which were pressured by a weak economy and growing threats from rivals in the United States and China.

High-profile Tesla investor Ross Gerber tweeted that the presentation amounted to a “huge tease” on the next-generation vehicle. “It’s coming. They laid it all out. 50% less cost to build. Would get you a \$25-\$30k EV!”

On Tuesday, Mexican officials announced Tesla would build a factory in the northern state of Nuevo León. It would be the company’s first factory outside of the United States, Germany and China, and Musk is expected to provide more details on Wednesday.

The plans for a more affordable car could draw the broadest interest. In 2020, Musk unveiled a plan to develop batteries in-house, which he said would make self-driving electric cars priced at \$25,000 feasible by 2023, but Tesla has been struggling to scale up the production of the so-called 4680 batteries.

Executives on Wednesday said Tesla plans to start production of battery materials factories this year, with a lithium refinery and a cathode facility in Texas. They did not give an update to its production volume of 4,680 cells.

Some investors, including those concerned Musk is spending too much time at his latest major acquisition, Twitter, are also hoping he will address calls to buy back shares, which are at about half of their November 2021 peaks even after a rebound of more than 60% this year.

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Four Aboriginal spears taken by Lieutenant James Cook in 1770 from Kamay/Botany Bay will be returned to traditional owners after more than a decade of negotiations. Photograph: Museum of Archaeology & Anthropology, University of Cambridge

[Indigenous Australians](#)

Spears stolen by Captain Cook from Kamay/Botany Bay in 1770 to be returned to traditional owners

Held by Cambridge University for more than 250 years, the spears mark ‘first point in shared history’

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[Sarah Collard](#)

[@Sarah Collard](#)

Wed 1 Mar 2023 22.47 ESTLast modified on Wed 1 Mar 2023 22.49 EST

Four spears stolen from Kamay, now known as Botany Bay in Sydney, by Captain James Cook, a then Lieutenant, and his crew, are to be returned to their traditional owners after more than 250 years.

The Kamay spears were among 40 recorded as being taken on to the HMB Endeavour in 1770, at the time of first contact between those aboard the ship and the local Gweagal people.

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The spears have been in the hands of Cambridge University's Trinity College since shortly after arriving in the UK in 1771.

The long spears were "cut down" so they could be transported on the ship to England.

Noeleen Timbery, the chairperson of the local La Perouse Local Aboriginal Land Council, said she was eagerly awaiting their return after more than a decade of negotiations with Trinity College, the National Museum, and the Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies.

"I haven't stopped smiling since I heard the news. To hear that they're coming back and they're coming back to stay is unimaginable," she said from Bare Island, in La Perouse, not far from where the spears were originally taken.

The relationship has been the culmination of "patient" work between the local Aboriginal community and the college.

"It's something that we've worked at and it's something that we've been talking about for a really long time," Timbery said.

“We place more importance in building the relationships with overseas institutions, with Australian-based institutions. So that we knew we were going to do it right, and it was going to be meaningful for everybody involved.”

Dharawal man and chair of the Gujaga Foundation, Ray Ingrey, said the repatriation of the spears was a welcome step towards recognising the shared history that started on the shores of Kamay.

“It’s important from a cultural standpoint,” he said.

“But for all Australians it’s important, because it’s that first point in our shared history of Australia as we know, today.”

Ingrey said the story of the spears was part of the wider stories told by generations of his elders, but that their return was bittersweet as many are not alive to see them come home.

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(L-R) National Museum of Australia senior curator Dr Ian Coates, Gujaga Foundation chairperson, Ray Ingrey and La Perouse Local Aboriginal Land Council chairperson Noeleen Timbery speak about the repatriation of the spears on Bare Island, La Perouse. Photograph: Bianca de Marchi/AAP

“Our old people always spoke about it. It wasn’t set by our generation, it was set by those old Dharawal people, and in particular women. I think they’d be looking down on us proud of what we’ve achieved today.”

The return of the spears back to country still needs to be formally approved in the UK by the Charity Commission to allow Trinity College to grant legal ownership to the La Perouse Aboriginal Land Council and the Gujaga Foundation after their request for repatriation.

The National Museum of Australia’s senior curator, Dr Ian Coates, said repatriation of cultural artefacts removed from their traditional owners and communities and stored in institutions abroad was a contentious issue.

“The National Museum of Australia in Canberra is often negotiating with others, [with] our partners overseas. But really, it’s up to those institutions as to what happens with those collections.

“In terms of material in other collections or by other institutions, it’s going to be up to those institutions.”

Once formal approval is given, the spears will return to Australia within the next few months to be cared for by institutions here. After further community consultation by the La Perouse community, they are expected to have a permanent home at the planned visitor centre to be built in Kurnell.

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2023/mar/02/spears-stolen-by-captain-cook-from-kamaybotany-bay-in-1770-to-be-returned-to-traditional-owners>

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

Headlines friday 3 march 2023

- [Live Labour says it is ‘utterly ludicrous’ to claim hiring Sue Gray means Partygate report was biased](#)
- [Sue Gray Labour ready to delay appointment amid growing row](#)
- [Constance Marten and Mark Gordon Couple to appear in court after baby’s remains found](#)
- [Glastonbury festival Arctic Monkeys, Guns N’ Roses, Elton John: all-male headliners a ‘pipeline’ problem, says Emily Eavis](#)

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Boris Johnson suggests Sue Gray was wrong person to lead Partygate inquiry amid new evidence he misled MPs – as it happened

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Sue Gray was in charge of the inquiry that looked into lockdown parties in Downing Street during Covid. Photograph: PRU/AFP/Getty Images

[Labour](#)

Keir Starmer defends Sue Gray appointment as next chief of staff

Labour leader says senior civil servant who led inquiry into No 10 lockdown parties is ‘really strong professional’

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

[Kiran Stacey](#) *Political correspondent*

Fri 3 Mar 2023 12.10 ESTFirst published on Fri 3 Mar 2023 04.46 EST

Keir Starmer has defended his controversial decision to offer Sue Gray a role as his next chief of staff, calling the senior civil servant a “really strong professional”.

The [Labour](#) leader said on Friday he was delighted that Gray, who oversaw the internal inquiry into Downing Street parties during lockdown, had accepted his offer to become one of his top officials.

Conservatives have voiced outrage about the proposed appointment, saying it tainted [the inquiry she led](#) which helped [bring down Boris Johnson as prime minister](#). Meanwhile the government appointments watchdog could delay Gray's start date by up to two years to minimise concerns over potential conflicts of interest.

Starmer said on Friday however that Gray's acceptance of the job showed the party was a serious government-in-waiting. He said: "I want to ensure that we're in a position to deliver for the whole of the United Kingdom and that's why I'm so pleased that people of real quality, [who are] really respected, want to join the Labour team."

He added: "I hope we can change from this failure of the last 30 years to incoming Labour government, and in that I'm delighted that the really strong professional, respected individuals are now wanting to be part of that future."

Starmer was speaking after news of the planned appointment sparked a barrage of criticism from allies of Boris Johnson, who said it showed that the so-called Partygate inquiry was flawed from the start. They were not able to say which parts of the report, which catalogued a series of raucous parties held in Downing Street during lockdown, they disagreed with however.

The Advisory Committee on Business Appointments (Acoba) will now decide the circumstances under which Gray can take up her new job, having already quit her job in the Cabinet Office.

[The committee's rules](#) say it can approve appointments with restrictions, including a ban on former civil servants lobbying government on behalf of their new employers, and having to wait for up to two years before taking the job.

The rules do not say that Acoba can recommend blocking the appointment altogether, although they add that the final decision is for the prime minister. Rishi Sunak was reported on Friday to be concerned that Gray could use “privileged information” from her Downing Street days to help Starmer.

The Times [reported on Friday](#) that it is likely Gray will serve out a “relatively short period of gardening leave” before starting in Starmer’s office.

Lucy Powell, the shadow culture secretary, said the party would abide by the Acoba recommendations whatever they say, even though they are only advisory.

Powell told the BBC’s Today programme: “Sue Gray and Keir Starmer have made absolutely clear they will abide by those recommendations, which is not always the case in these situations.”

Labour said Starmer had offered the role to Gray after an extensive search – a decision that Labour officials said showed how serious the party’s leader is about preparing for government. Some have likened it to Tony Blair’s appointment of the senior diplomat Jonathan Powell as his chief of staff in 1995.

Meanwhile, the Cabinet Office is reviewing whether Gray accepted the offer before informing the appointments watchdog.

Many Conservatives are demanding to know when Labour first made contact with Gray, and whether they did so while her Partygate inquiry was ongoing. The Times reported that Starmer personally contacted Gray months ago after identifying her as the best person for the job.

Powell said on Friday she did not know when the party first made contact with Gray or whether Starmer would eventually publish a timeline of how the job offer was made.

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



Gordon and Marten appeared at Crawley magistrates court on Friday.
Photograph: Getty Images

[UK news](#)

Constance Marten and Mark Gordon remanded in custody over death of baby Victoria

Couple charged with manslaughter and concealing a birth will appear at Old Bailey on 31 March

[Emily Dugan](#)

[@emilydugan](#)

Fri 3 Mar 2023 12.58 ESTFirst published on Fri 3 Mar 2023 03.43 EST

Constance Marten and Mark Gordon have been remanded in custody charged with the manslaughter of a baby named Victoria.

Marten, 35, and Gordon, 48, appeared at Crawley magistrates court on Friday charged with gross negligence manslaughter, concealing the birth of a child and perverting the course of justice.

The couple were arrested in Brighton on Monday and charged on Thursday after the remains of the infant were found on Wednesday afternoon. Detectives believe the baby had been dead for several weeks and said on Wednesday it was not possible to tell if it was a girl or a boy.

The court heard on Friday that the infant's remains were found in a plastic bag under some nappies in an allotment shed. A postmortem examination was expected to take place on Friday.

Marten and Gordon spoke only to confirm their names, dates of birth and that they were of no fixed abode during a short hearing in a packed courtroom. Gordon wore a grey jumper over his head throughout the hearing.

They are scheduled to appear at the Old Bailey on 31 March.

The chair of the bench of magistrates, Carol Lintott, said: "You are both here today ... on charges of manslaughter, concealment of the birth of a child and perverting the course of justice. We are sending the case to the crown court sitting at the Old Bailey. We are remanding you in custody until that time."

The Metropolitan police have referred the case to the Independent Office for Police Conduct, which said it was "assessing the referral to determine what, if any, further action is required from us".

Marten and Gordon had been missing since 5 January, when their car was found abandoned and on fire next to a motorway in Bolton. It sparked a 53-day search for the pair, with hundreds of police officers using dogs, thermal cameras, helicopters and drones to help look for the baby.

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



‘It’s about every aspect of diversity’ ... (L-R) Arctic Monkeys’ Alex Turner, Elton John and Axl Rose of Guns N’ Roses. Composite: Getty

[Glastonbury festival](#)

Arctic Monkeys, Guns N’ Roses, Elton John: all-male Glastonbury headliners a ‘pipeline’ problem, says Emily Eavis

‘We’re trying our best,’ says organiser as she unveils first 54 names on 2023 lineup and calls on music industry to develop headline-worthy female acts

[Laura Snapes](#)

Fri 3 Mar 2023 04.00 EST Last modified on Fri 3 Mar 2023 16.34 EST

Festivals are struggling with a dearth of viable female headliners owing to an industry “pipeline” problem, Glastonbury co-organiser [Emily Eavis](#) said as the festival announced a lineup of all-male headliners for this year’s event.

Following the news that [Elton John would conclude the 2023 edition](#) on Sunday, Eavis confirmed that Arctic Monkeys would headline Friday, their third time closing the Pyramid stage, while Guns N' Roses would make their Worthy Farm debut on Saturday.

Guns N' Roses were booked when a previously confirmed female headliner pulled out because she “changed her touring plans”, said Eavis. She declined to name names but said she hoped they would headline within the next five years. Fans had anticipated Taylor Swift, who was due to headline Glastonbury 2020 prior to its cancellation as a result of Covid – but the US leg of her Eras tour this summer obviated the possibility.

Guns N' Roses – who added a female keyboard player, Melissa Reese, to their lineup in 2016 – had been discussed as prospective headliners pre-pandemic, said Eavis. “They’ll be brilliant and provide something totally different to the rest of the headliners.” [Lizzo](#) will open for the US rockers and has joint headline billing. “She could totally headline,” said Eavis, adding that the Pyramid stage often sees bigger crowds in the afternoon than at night. “Many of the artists could. But the headline slot had already been promised to someone else.”



Lizzo performing at the 2019 Glastonbury festival. Photograph: James McCauley/Rex/Shutterstock

Further down the bill, this year's lineup includes debut performances from the Eurovision winners Måneskin, the Brit-winning girl band Flo and the US country stars the Chicks. Lil Nas X will return to play before Elton John, while [Lana Del Rey](#) will graduate from her 2014 Pyramid stage afternoon slot to headline the Other stage.

52% of the 54 names on this week's partial lineup announcement – with many more acts still to come – are male. Eavis said she remained “entirely focused on balancing our bill. It's not just about gender, it's about every aspect of diversity.” 46% of those 54 names are non-white, or feature non-white members: Afrobeats star Wizkid will headline the Other stage on Friday. “We're probably one of the only big shows that's really focused on this.”

The music industry needs to invest in more female musicians to create future headliners, said Eavis. “We're trying our best so the pipeline needs to be developed. This starts way back with the record companies, radio. I can shout as loud as I like but we need to get everyone on board.”

Next year's festival should see two women headline, said Eavis – one confirmed, one close, and both of them Glastonbury first-timers. Rihanna and Madonna are among the top-billing acts who have never played the festival.

Eavis said that as a woman in the music industry she saw the matter as a personal issue, recalling the days where there was only one woman working as a live booking agent. “It's top of our agenda, and it probably makes it a bit harder because we've decided to make that important to us. To be honest, sometimes it's easier to keep your head down.”

Not, she added, that it is easy for Glastonbury to book just anyone at superstar level. To secure [Elton John](#) – for the retiring star's last ever UK date – Eavis wrote a personal letter urging him “not to miss out on a potentially incredible moment for you, for us, for the fans,” she recalled.

“He called up and confirmed right away. People assume that because we’re the ‘Christmas of music’ we can breezily book whoever – but to get Elton doesn’t happen easily, so that’s a really big moment for us.”



Melanie C DJing at Glastonbury 2022. Photograph: Anthony Harvey/Rex/Shutterstock

She denied the perpetual rumours – stoked by the group themselves – that the Spice Girls would appear. “That is not a conversation we’re having at the moment,” said Eavis, but added that Melanie C would perform solo.

In October, Glastonbury made headlines when it announced that [ticket prices would rise](#) by £55 to £340 (including booking fee). “We put it up [by] the minimum we could,” said Eavis. “In order to do the exact same show as last time, we would have had to put £100 on the ticket. That’s the amount that costs have gone up.”

Glastonbury costs £50m to run, said Eavis, adding that she remained focused on creating value for attendees. She highlighted their free tickets for children – and free rides in the kids’ area – as well as free programmes and tote bags. The festival is working with food vendors on affordable options,

as well as tackling the issue of confectionary wrappers, having previously banned single-use plastic and crisps in non-compostable packets.

After last year's festival, Mendip district council recommended that the event improve crowd control, following massive turnouts for the likes of Wet Leg and TLC. Eavis admitted that there were some surprise performers, such as Sugababes, who "were a bit too big for the stages that they were booked on. We're making sure that doesn't happen this year by not having big surprises in small places".



The vast crowd for Wet Leg at the Park stage in 2022. Photograph: Guy Bell/Rex/Shutterstock

With Wet Leg, she added, the Isle of Wight indie duo's profile blew up so much in between their booking and their performance that they probably could have headlined the Other stage. "There is a degree of flexibility this year," she said. "We might have to move a couple of things like that if they suddenly explode."

When the festival returned last year after Covid, Eavis said her team became aware of attendees behaving differently: staying out for the whole day rather than returning to their tents – making 2022 the first year they had leftover free firewood, usually snapped up by Wednesday afternoon – and

taking children to the nightclubbing zones. “They wanted to savour every moment after two years away,” she said.

This year, families will not be allowed in the notorious after-hours south-east corner after 10pm and will be encouraged to seek out child-friendly areas across the site such as the theatre and circus fields, and the campfire in the new Woodsies area. The John Peel stage would also be renamed Woodsies, said Eavis, part of a push to name stages after the fields that they stand in, such as West Holts and Silver Hayes. “We’ve had 20 years of John Peel and it’s been an honour to use his name.”

The shift was not a response to a minor 2022 petition calling for a name change owing to Peel having married a 15-year-old girl when he was 25 (then legal in Texas, where they were wed). “I haven’t got involved in that because it’s not our area,” said Eavis. “We’ve had a really good relationship with the Peel family and everyone’s on board.”

Since 2000, Eavis has steadily taken over the running of Glastonbury from her father, founder [Michael Eavis](#). Now 87, “he’s in fine form and having lots of fun,” she said. Last year, Eavis’s family took in two Ukrainian sisters, who loved the festival: “Veronika ended up doing loads of translation and Nadya was raving.” While Veronika has returned to Kyiv, “Nadya met a guy locally and has moved in with him.”

Glastonbury 2023 takes place from 21-25 June. Three months out, Eavis said her main hope was that “people will come and experience the joy that it brings to so many. The news is so depressing – I can’t bear it. We need things that bring people together to remind us of those good feelings. That is what it’s about.”

The lineup so far

Arctic Monkeys
Guns N’ Roses
Elton John
Lizzo
Aitch

Alison Goldfrapp
Alt-J
Amadou and Mariam
Becky Hill
Blondie
Candi Staton
Carly Rae Jepsen
Cat Burns
Central Cee
Christine and the Queens
Chvrches
Ezra Collective
Fatboy Slim
Fever Ray
Flo
Fred Again
Hot Chip
Joey Bada\$\$
Kelis
Lana Del Rey
Leftfield
Lewis Capaldi
Lil Nas X
Loyle Carner
Maggie Rogers
Mahalia
Måneskin
Manic Street Preachers
Nova Twins
Phoenix
Raye
Rina Sawayama
Royal Blood
Rudimental
Shygirl
Slowthai
Sparks

Stefflon Don
Sudan Archives
Texas
The Chicks
The War on Drugs
Thundercat
Tinariwen
Warpaint
Weyes Blood
Wizkid
Young Fathers
Yusuf/Cat Stevens

This article was updated on Friday 3 March to remove the description of the headliners as “all-white”, as Guns N’ Roses feature two non-white members. The number of announced artists was also reduced from 55 to 54 after an artist had been wrongly included in the initial lineup by Glastonbury organisers.

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2023.03.03 - Spotlight

- Idris Elba 'You can make sparkling wine in Portsmouth or champagne in Champagne. My ambition was to make champagne'
- You be the judge Should my husband stop cutting his nails everywhere we go?
- Oscar hustings Why Tár should win the best picture
- 'It was nuts what we got away with' Remembering the 00s UK indie explosion

Idris Elba: ‘You can make sparkling wine in Portsmouth or champagne in Champagne. My ambition was to make champagne’

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Illustration: Joren Joshua/The Guardian

[You be the judge](#)[Marriage](#)

**You be the judge: should my husband
stop cutting his nails everywhere we go?**

She says it's repulsive and unhygienic. He says he only does it to feel clean. You decide whose wings should be clipped

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



Interviews by [Georgina Lawton](#)
[@georginalawton](#)

Fri 3 Mar 2023 03.00 EST Last modified on Fri 3 Mar 2023 21.35 EST

The prosecution: Edwina

I can't stand it when he does it in public, or finding pieces of his nails all over the house

There are quite a few gross things that men do, but at my age you just learn to put up with them. My husband, Trevor, and I have been married for over 40 years, but one thing he's never stopped is his nail-cutting habit, which I still find repulsive.

Since I've known him, Trevor has always carried an all-in-one pocket knife and nail-clipper around in his trouser pocket, along with tissues or a hanky.

He will whip out the clippers at any given opportunity to snip away at his nails. He sometimes even picks the dirt out from under them and wipes it on his handkerchief. I always chastise him for it because who wants to watch a man do that? He's learned not to do it in polite company, but I still have to put up with it.

I even recall him doing it as we sat outside a cafe many years ago. Our daughter was very little and we were just married. I gave him a right telling off. His clippings were flying all over the place. But every so often Trevor will surprise me and still do it openly.

This Christmas just past, suddenly I heard 'snip...snip...snip.' And there he was, chopping away at his nails

This Christmas Day we had our daughter over with her children as usual. After dinner we were sitting down watching the telly. Our grandkids were playing with their new toys and I was dozing off. Then suddenly I hear this "snip ... snip ... snip". I know we were among family, but it was really quite repulsive. I said: "Don't do that! It's Christmas Day." Trevor said he would tidy up the clippings, except he never does.

I can't stand it when I clean the house and find all these bits of nail everywhere. Trevor worked as a gardener for years before he retired, and was always getting soil and dirt under his nails. That has fostered in him, I think, a desire to look and stay clean all the time. He still can't have a speck of dirt under his nails. And he is always clipping them, even if they are really quite short. I say, "There's nothing left to chop". He could afford to leave them alone for a bit longer. And he should make sure to clip them in the bathroom and not in front of me. I've really had enough.

The defence: Trevor

If I see a speck of dirt under my nails I just have to clean it out. That's how I've been brought up

A man needs to make sure his hands are clean and his nails are short. I think it's quite unsightly when someone has dirt underneath their nails. I always

think: well, they must have very poor personal hygiene.

I have always carried around a little pocket knife and nail clippers because that's how I've been brought up. When I was a boy, my mother taught me to keep neat and clean. She used to say: "Clean boy, clean mind. Dirty boy, dirty mind."

I worked outside as a landscaper and gardener for practically all of my career, dealing with soil, grass and fertiliser. It has made me obsessed with cleanliness, because sometimes I'd spend the whole day covered in mud. If I see a speck of dirt under my nails, I just have to clean it out.

I'm grateful to her for not getting too annoyed with my nail-clipping, but I can't say I'm sorry for doing it

Edwina and I have been married for 43 years. You learn to put up with people's habits after that long, I suppose. I'm grateful to her for not getting too annoyed with my nail-clipping and dirt-scraping, but I can't say I'm sorry for doing it. When we were courting, I probably hid it from her a little more, but then I suppose I got lazy. She's told me off so many times for doing it in public, but I only do that when I'm outside and the nails can sort of disappear. On a park bench or outside in a cafe – those sorts of places.

I have got better over the years and generally only do my nails when Edwina is not around, because she starts shrieking at the sight. In the shower is best, of course, but sometimes the moment just comes upon you. The Christmas episode was just because I had spotted some dirt under them at that very moment. Our daughter and her children have never said anything, only Edwina. If a man can't cut his nails in the privacy of his own home, where can he do them?

Edwina says I don't collect the cuttings, but I most definitely do. Sometimes it's quite hard to find them though. That's my excuse, anyway. I try to make sure I only clip and clean my nails when Edwina isn't around, but it's like a compulsion.

The jury of Guardian readers

Should Trevor stop cutting his nails in front of his wife and in public?

This is a simple matter of respect for one's partner. After 43 years of being told off, the fact that Trevor continues to do it regardless sounds like downright laziness, which he openly admits. I respect the effort he puts into his cleanliness, but cutting your nails outside a cafe? Yikes!

Carmen, 29

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Trevor, I think you can find a way to restrict your nail clipping to the bathroom. If it has upset your wife this much for this long, surely you can nip to the loo when you find a spot of dirt under your nails.

Jennifer, 42

Trevor is driven by his compulsive need to keep his nails clean. Edwina is right to complain at his whimsical nail-cutting antics in public and around the house. Bathrooms exist for a reason: personal hygiene.

Justin, 49

There is nothing inherently wrong with wanting to have good hygiene and clean nails, and Trevor clearly has a deep-rooted desire, bordering on a

compulsion. Perhaps he should stick to doing it indoors and in privacy, but the act itself is not something he should be ashamed of.

Damian, 42

Trevor is guilty – and I say that as a fellow nail-clipping obsessive. We need to respect the things that our partners find gross. I agree with him that it's unsightly to have dirt under your nails, but deal with it in the bathroom, like everyone else.

Maddy, 30

Now you be the judge

In our online poll below, tell us: should Trevor stop clipping his nails around Edwina?

The poll closes on Thursday 9 March at 10am GMT

Last week's result

We asked if Aleyna should stop telling her daughter Imani to [remove her body hair](#).

92% of you said yes – Aleyna is guilty

8% of you said no – Aleyna is innocent

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The walls are closing in ... Cate Blanchett in Tár. Photograph: Landmark Media/Alamy

[Best picture Oscar hustings](#)[Oscars 2023](#)

Why Tár should win the best picture Oscar

Cate Blanchett is wonderfully commanding as the sociopath musical megastar whose life is crumbling around her but it is the steely menace in Todd Field's film that is simply delicious



[Peter Bradshaw](#)

[@PeterBradshaw1](#)

Fri 3 Mar 2023 04.00 ESTLast modified on Fri 3 Mar 2023 05.25 EST

The great crack-up of Lydia Tár, the Berlin Philharmonic's entirely fictitious but docudramatically real-seeming chief conductor, has given the cinema its greatest spectacle, its greatest provocation and its greatest pleasure. If there is any justice, it will be producer-director Todd Field, with fellow producers Alexandra Milchan and Scott Lambert, who will be invited up on stage at the end of the evening to receive the climactic best picture statuette.

Cate Blanchett is wonderfully commanding as the haughty sociopath musical megastar, the monster who is disdainful of the philistinism and stupidity that surrounds her, the European-American exotic with the preposterous accent on the "A". Blanchett also gives us something faintly preposterous, but seductive and intimidating in her speaking voice: resonant, deep, faintly nasal. She wears mannish black suits and white shirts with insouciant style and shakes her hair free with explosive abandon at the

podium. At other moments, her face has a way of becoming a Tutankhamun mask of contempt.

Lydia is preparing a long-planned live recording of Mahler's Fifth Symphony, a project apparently delayed by the Covid lockdown, that is of overwhelming importance to her. But she has problems in her life. Her marriage to first violinist Sharon (Nina Hoss) is happy, but professionally fraught and when their daughter is bullied at school, Lydia shows us her sinister side by murmuring icy threats to the bully in the playground while assuring this little girl that it would be no use complaining to a grownup: "No one would believe you – I am a grownup" – thus revealing very clearly the abuser's modus operandi.

Lydia's assistant Francesca (played by Noémie Merlant) is a conducting student who has emerged through Lydia's mentoring programme which may well exist simply to provide Lydia with submissive young lovers. Francesca is self-harmingly in love with Lydia and suspects that she is about to be jilted professionally and emotionally, having witnessed the catastrophic case of another student. And most calamitously, Lydia is persuaded to host a masterclass at New York's Juilliard School at which she humiliates a student who identifies as Bipoc pangender for presuming to dismiss the supposed cis white misogyny of [JS Bach](#). Lydia's life begins to crumble and she (and we) begin to see how the walls are closing in.

Do we sympathise with Lydia or not? Does her terrible glamour reside in this conventional split between attraction and revulsion? Partly. The extended opening sequence might be seen as indulgent: the New Yorker's cultural critic Adam Gopnik, playing himself, does a deferential interview with this imaginary creative legend. The New Yorker film writer, Richard Brody vehemently took against Tár for apparently endorsing regressive and reactionary attitudes.

But this opening scene very cleverly puts us inside the head of the superstar figure who has persuaded everyone to take her at her own estimation of herself, but whose moment-by-moment existence at achievement's pinnacle means that there is no time, or space, left for enjoying anything.

And then there is the delicious, sensual chill of the film: the way its menace and anxiety has been refrigerated. From my very first viewing, I noticed its resemblance to Michael Haneke's films, with its tropes of revenge surveillance and the cruelty of classical music. Film writer Geoff Andrew has pointed something else out: that its editor, Monika Willi, has worked on many Haneke movies and may herself have made (or persuaded Field to make) decisions about what to leave out, to create that sense of injury and denial.

The magnesium flare of excitement is what Field ignites here, and he does not flinch from scorching us with it. Tár has something harder and fiercer than either of his two previous films: [In the Bedroom](#) and [Little Children](#) which were far more emollient. Did the 16-year gap after Little Children incubate a steelier artistic vision? Either way, Tár is the film of the year.

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‘We were put on a conveyor belt’ ... *(from left)* Pete Doherty, Carl Barât, John Hassall and Gary Powell of the Libertines at Barfly in Camden, north London, in 2003. Photograph: James Looker/Avalon/Getty Images

[Indie](#)

‘It was nuts what we got away with’: remembering the 00s UK indie explosion

As the film *Meet Me in the Bathroom* relives the glory days of the Strokes and Yeah Yeah Yeahs, fans and musicians recall the sweat, swagger and skinny jeans that made the British scene they inspired even wilder

[*Daniel Dylan Wray*](#)

Fri 3 Mar 2023 03.00 EST Last modified on Fri 3 Mar 2023 06.27 EST

‘Are you guys aware of the craziness you’ve created here?’ a British journalist asked a dazed-looking Julian Casablancas in 2001. The exchange is included in the documentary *Meet Me in the Bathroom*. The only words the Strokes frontman could muster were: “It’s crazy and bizarre.” When [Yeah Yeah Yeahs](#) landed on UK soil a year later, it was more of the same. “I was not prepared for it at all,” says Karen O, the lead singer, in the film. “We were drunk on the ravenous fanaticism.”

Meet Me in the Bathroom is based on Lizzy Goodman’s 2017 book of the same name, which is subtitled *Rebirth and Rock and Roll in New York City 2001-2011*, but ends up being as much about the UK. New York birthed these bands, but British media, fans and record labels lapped them up with such relish that they became stars here first. Summing up the book, [Rolling Stone US concluded](#): “The UK might have done more for New York bands than New York did.”

In the early years of this century, flying to the UK to try to break through became a common strategy. Interpol did it; LCD Soundsystem’s first show was not at a hip Brooklyn loft, but in London, at [the club night Trash](#).



‘It’s crazy and bizarre’ ... *(from left)* Julian Casablancas, Fabrizio Moretti, Albert Hammond Jr and Nikolai Fraiture of the Strokes in *Meet Me in the Bathroom*. Photograph: Piper Ferguson

The culture shock for travelling bands was no doubt amplified by the fact it was still technically illegal to dance in numerous New York venues due to the city’s prohibition-era cabaret law, [which was not repealed until 2017](#). Conversely, fans of guitar bands in the UK, malnourished by post-Britpop dirges from David Gray and Travis, were unhinged and sweat-drenched. “The Strokes were terrified of all of us,” says Mairead Hayden from the London-based DJ duo Queens of Noize. “They couldn’t handle how up for it British people were.”

The New York groups were hugely influential, too. Subsequently, a wave of guitar bands exploded in the UK, including Bloc Party, Franz Ferdinand, the Libertines and [Razorlight](#).

As *Meet Me in the Bathroom* hits cinemas, figures from the UK scene reflect on drugs, drainpipe jeans and dancefloor fillers.

The chart-topping band

Johnny Borrell, Razorlight



‘Every revolution eats itself’ ... Razorlight’s Johnny Borrell. Photograph: David Sillitoe/The Guardian

At the end of the 90s, the concept of being in a band was abhorrent because of where Britpop ended up – it was the most tedious thing you could do. I was playing with the Libertines, who were like a skiffle band at the time, and also playing acoustically. We were completely in our own world.

Then, suddenly, these American bands all came over. Peter [Doherty] saw the Strokes, fell in love and was like: I’m gonna make the English Strokes; fuck the skiffle thing. So there was this moment of: let’s get over ourselves, it’s OK to be in a band again.

I have nostalgia for the early days, but I have very mixed feelings about after we became huge. It was very organic at the start, but every revolution eats itself. All the copycat bands came. It went from being pure and genuine to suddenly becoming like the bloated carcass of Britpop all over again.

The photographer

Dean Chalkley

I started shooting for NME in 2002. It was an explosive scene. Take Junk Club in Southend-on-Sea – gritty and grimy, barely lit, with dark walls, but

what a place. The atmosphere in this subterranean collection of rooms in the bowels of the Royal hotel was breathtaking. When I first went down, I felt so moved, that this was the actual resistance right in front of my eyes. This little club and the kids who went there – [the Horrors](#), [These New Puritans](#), Neils Children, Ipso Facto – epitomised this punk attitude that was going on.

Fashion was a big part of it: tight drainpipe black jeans, fitted suit jackets with sleeves a bit too short, thin braces, hats, super-pointed winkle-picker boots, heavy eye makeup, knackered dress shoes with gaffer tape wound round. Once featured in the NME, these fashions translated to the catwalks. Then, not far behind, were the high street brands.

The boys' club infiltrator

Mairead Hayden, Queens of Noize; later managed Florence Welch

What a special time. People had no inhibitions, just loving music and wearing really bad clothes. I'm glad it wasn't well documented – it was carnage. I met Tabitha [Denholm] at a party and stayed at her house for three days until she agreed to DJ with me. Our first gig was with the Libertines at the ICA [in central London]. From then on, our feet didn't touch the ground.



‘It was carnage’ ... Tabitha Denholm (*left*) and Mairead Hayden of Queens of Noize. Photograph: PYMCA/Universal Images Group/Getty Images

We were shoddy DJs, but had a message of: you can do it; it doesn’t have to be this boys’ club. It was nuts what we got away with. We were given a TV show, a column in NME, a BBC 6 Music show. Nobody would give us those gigs these days.

Florence sang to me in the toilet of a club and I’d never heard anyone like her. I had to manage her – I’d already been to indie university doing all the other stuff. We then went on an epic journey and did three records together. Now I’m managing [HotWax](#), who are playing with the Strokes and Yeah Yeah Yeahs this summer. It’s all come full circle.

The club promoter

Matty Hall, White Heat

[White Heat](#) started in 2003 to connect all the new music we loved back to Gang of Four, the Clash, New Order. It was a place where you’d find the Horrors having a chat in the toilets, or catch an impromptu set by the Pun Lovin’ Criminals, featuring [Alex Turner](#) and [Dev Hynes](#) playing classics by the Strokes and the Walkmen. A lot of the songs we played – Yeah Yeah Yeahs, LCD, etc – are still stone-cold dancefloor killers that can hold their heads high against the Cure or Joy Division.

I can’t imagine people going out religiously every Tuesday now. Jobs were maybe a bit more easily available then – the joke was you could be sacked from one cafe in the morning and be working at a new one by lunchtime. Everything was much cheaper, too; your rent definitely wasn’t two-thirds of your income.

The fan

Laura Snapes, deputy music editor, the Guardian

I randomly bought NME in 2003 and discovered a whole world, despite living 300 miles from its epicentre in London. I papered my walls with Razorlight, Franz Ferdinand and the Libertines; I drew Pete Doherty and

Carl Barat's tattoos on my arms and got one of their red military jackets at my first Reading festival. This got me my first boyfriend – the only other kid who walked around Truro in one.

I hoarded gig tat – setlists, drumsticks, half-drunk water bottles – and longed to visit Camden and see a guerrilla gig by the Others on the tube. I knew so little of London that I thought the Razorlight lyric “don't go up the Junction” was a euphemism for avoiding unwanted pregnancy, rather than a reference to the geography of east London. At 16, I almost got to interview Johnny Borrell, but he wasn't keen (I got the drummer instead). I went home and poured his snaffled water bottle down the toilet in a fury.

When I finally made it to Camden, at 18, I found no indie thrills, just the smell of wee and incense. Ever get the feeling you've been cheated?

The hyped band

Dominic Masters, the Others



‘There was a lot of jealousy from bands’ ... Dominic Masters performing at Virgin Megastore on Oxford Street in London, 2005. Photograph: Jo Hale/Getty Images

We were business-savvy and organised. I had a lawyer before I had a manager and knew my ambition was to get the band signed to a major label. It was a very prolific time: two albums in two years, three Top 40 hits, being given the John Peel award for innovation at the NME awards in 2005. Vice gave us 10/10 and NME said we were “Britain’s most worshipped new band”. Q magazine weren’t so favourable – but subsequently the magazine died along with their hatred.

There was a lot of jealousy from bands – genuine shock and disapproval that I had got us signed to a major – but a lot of their anger helped to sell our records and got the band’s name out there. After our first album, Vertigo Records let go 26 of the 28 new bands on the label and we moved to an indie, Lime, which kept us going until 2007. When we couldn’t secure an advance for the third album, I went back to work in 2008. I’ve no regrets. We’ve had extended breaks, but never really gone away – we’ve just finished our fourth album, Look at You All Now.

The steady hand

Gary Powell, the Libertines

We were front cover of NME before we had a release out – that makes no sense. I tried to keep level headed, but I was an idiot as well. Peter [Doherty]’s ascension became stratospheric and it became less about the musical attributes and more to do with being tabloid fodder – that did Peter and Carl a disservice.

We should have stopped and taken a breath, but we didn’t. We were put on a conveyor belt. That’s got more to do with how we ended up taking a 10-year hiatus – we never fell out. Things were bad with drugs in the band before, but it’s nice to say no to the afterparty. Fifteen years ago, we would have been at that party and likely thrown out of it. Now, I just want a few drinks and to take my ass to bed.

The one who didn’t quite fit in

Eddie Argos, Art Brut

We had great new bands in the UK – Mclusky, the Parkinsons, Ikara Colt.

Things were about to get interesting and then, oh, the Strokes are here – handsome boys with guitars again. They had no effect on me – but I was obsessed with the Moldy Peaches.

Art Brut formed in 2003, but never slotted into any NME scenes. I was quite mean about other bands and got a reputation, but it was funny. I'd sing outside Razorlight's dressing room: "Oh oh oh, oh ... no one likes you in America," or deliberately mistake the Bravery for the Killers at festivals and then sing: "It was an honest mistake ..."

I look for positives now, but then I was always looking for a fight – I got into actual fights with Bloc Party and the Magic Numbers. But it was principled, too. The line: "Stay off the crack!" in our song My Little Brother is about the fact loads of kids were doing crack. That wasn't good.

The view from afar

Victoria Hesketh, Little Boots; formerly of Dead Disco

It was mind-blowing seeing the Kaiser Chiefs serving pints in Leeds one week and being signed the next. We thought: if they can do it, so can we. There was a real scene. The label [Dance to the Radio](#) put out a sampler album of Leeds bands, but you could only get a copy if you went to the showcase gig. All the A&R men from London had to come up to Leeds – it was empowering to make the London big cats come to us.



‘You had to earn your stripes’ ... Victoria Hesketh with Dead Disco at Leeds festival in 2006. Photograph: Gary Wolstenholme/Redferns

It was a good place to start. There was no bullshit and you had to get your hands dirty; you had to drive to play Club NME in Stoke on a Tuesday and get drunk dudes shouting at you. You had to earn your stripes, especially for girls, because they had to give as good as the boys. Whether or not that’s a good thing, it’s how I came up. It definitely made me resilient.

The elder statesman

Edwyn Collins, with his wife and manager Grace Maxwell

Maxwell: The idea Edwyn was this massive influence when he was younger isn’t true. It was such a struggle. You couldn’t get Orange Juice records, they were deleted.

Collins: I’d go to Camden market and they would be selling bootlegs.

Maxwell: Nobody is bootlegging you if they aren’t interested, so we licensed it all to Domino. This is when people started to really discover Orange Juice and Edwyn was being asked to produce bands like the Cribbs. But as much as you had people like Alex Kapranos namechecking Edwyn, the internet was the great revolution in people hearing the music. He’s now

got this elder statesman reputation, but there used to be a lot of roasting. NME once said something like: Edwyn Collins – promised much, delivered little.

Collins: Nowadays, the groups worship me. Genius, they say!

Maxwell: Honestly, he can't put a foot wrong. The only person left slagging off Edwyn these days is me.

Collins: Cheers for that, Grace.

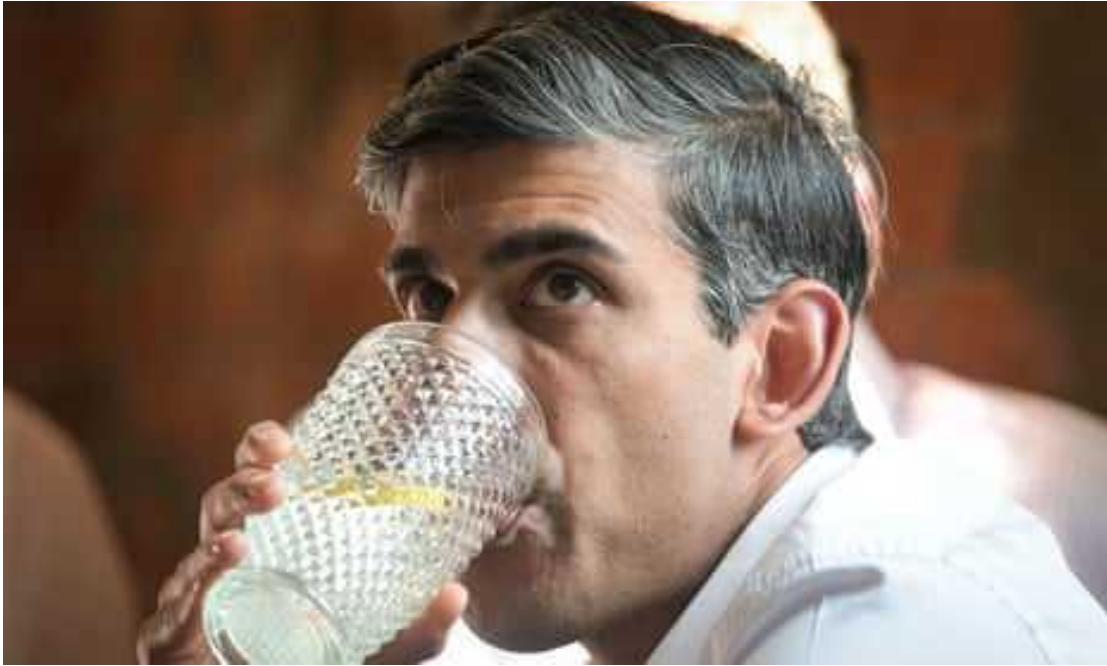
Meet Me in the Bathroom is in UK cinemas from 10 March

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2023.03.03 - Opinion

- [On Rishi Sunak's awayday from hell, team-building exercises are the least of the Tories' problems](#)
- [Netanyahu has brought Israel to a dangerous moment. We, the Jewish diaspora, cannot just stand by](#)
- [Letting thousands of poorer families into London Zoo for £3 has changed us for ever](#)
- [Cartoon Ben Jennings on the rift between Matt Hancock and Isabel Oakeshott](#)



Rishi Sunak's Windsor awayday with his MPs includes a pub quiz in the evening. Photograph: Finnbarr Webster/PA

[OpinionConservatives](#)

On Rishi Sunak's awayday from hell, team-building exercises are the least of the Tories' problems

[Polly Toynbee](#)



The prime minister is boosting MPs' morale with a pub quiz. Bonus question: name three things the government has improved since 2010

Fri 3 Mar 2023 01.00 ESTLast modified on Fri 3 Mar 2023 08.48 EST

Awaydays are a special kind of employee hell, but imagine the awfulness of Conservative MPs [compelled to be together in Windsor](#) for two whole days to contemplate one another and their future.

Team-building would test the skills of any awayday service offering trust-creating rope climbs or collaborative raft-making: try pulling together this rabble of sworn enemies and cabals with myriad acronyms, while anxious northern red wallers engage in a tug of war with the southern discomfited. Paintballing might suit them and break-out sessions will come naturally.

MPs wisely fleeing before the looming general election may feel free to speak their minds, while those clinging on with no job offers elsewhere will be enlightened by the plans of party chairman Greg Hands and political strategist Isaac Levido for an unlikely victory next year. The lowering clouds of local elections are only two months away. Before then comes a budget that few may like.

They begin with good news: [their leader's personal ratings have risen](#) since his (so far) successful cauterising of the Northern Ireland protocol (barring Boris Johnson raising a rebellion). Sunak is up five points to a net favourability of -21, far outscoring his deeply unpopular party as Labour stays some 20 points ahead, but he still trails Keir Starmer's score of -11. Northern Ireland, as its sad history shows, never much concerned the rest of the UK: YouGov finds [72% had no or limited awareness](#) of the whole shebang, despite intensive news coverage. Yet in mysterious ways a general sense of the success or failure of parties and leaders percolates through even to those with little everyday interest in politics. Sunak appears to be in some control of his impossible party, to have made some peace with the EU and Got Brexit Done. The Brexit fever that ripped the country and the Tories apart is past its crisis.

But that one day's good news is blown away by the Telegraph's revelations about how decisions were made during the early days of the pandemic. Those who suffered family deaths, small business collapses, children damaged – some irreparably, with thousands never returning to school – none of those families have forgotten. But now the leak of [Matt Hancock's WhatsApp messages](#) has reminded everyone that the UK had [the highest number of Covid deaths](#) in western Europe and [55% tell YouGov the government handled Covid badly](#), while only 40% say it did well. Hancock, expelled, is no doubt relieved not to be in Windsor.

There is, we are told, a jolly pub quiz in the evening to cheer everyone up. But questions may be tricky, with no good answers. Start with this poser: which is hardest to get, a cucumber, an ambulance, a tomato, a dentist, a place in your chosen secondary school or a GP appointment? Here is a random selection of others.

Jot down how many households are in fuel poverty, before April's extra £500 rise. ([7.4 million](#).) The Royal College of Emergency Medicine says A&E waits are causing how many extra deaths a week? ([446](#).) Which unlikely former education secretary says teachers look for “an excuse not to teach” and “really do just hate work”? [Gavin Williamson](#). The CBI reports manufacturing falling by its fastest rate since 2020: by how much? ([16%](#).) Which is “the world's most exciting economic zone” and why? ([Northern](#)

[Ireland](#), because it alone has what the UK had until three years ago, full access to the UK and EU single market.) Here's their big question: "Write down three things – or anything – the government is responsible for that works better now than when we took over in 2010."

The entertainment doesn't end there. The chancellor has [£31bn more](#) than he expected to spend in this month's budget. MPs can divide into groups and fight it out over how this should be spent. Some want to cut taxes now, Truss-style. Some want to save it all up for a war chest to splurge just ahead of the election. Some would borrow and spend more and, as Jeremy Hunt has already done, kick repayments into a mountain of cuts planned for 2025, making a "there's no money" bombshell for Labour: Hunt plainly doesn't expect to win.

Some (in actual fact, rather few) decent types point forlornly at the state of the nation and call for the tidal wave of strikes by public sector workers – whose real pay has fallen most years, but this year by a startling amount – to be addressed. [That could cost a mere £13bn](#), says the Institute for Fiscal Studies. Look at the state of the NHS, say others: Labour promises salvation for the future by training thousands more doctors, nurses and midwives. Wouldn't it be wise to at least match that? Others mutter about how hard it will be to stand convincingly as the law and order party when victims wait three years for cases to come to trial. Or what of potholes? The police? Social care? Defence? Easing the cost of living looks beyond their reach or reckoning as the austerity they voted for with such gusto now wreaks revenge on them.

Michael Gove, often one step ahead, is starting to lay out a strategy to get the Tories back on to safer ground. They can't win on the economy. They can't win on public services. He is urging them back on to the familiar home turf of [morals and culture war](#). In a speech to the Onward thinktank he said the party should stop being neutral on the need for "stronger" families, "the most important institution of all" that creates "better mental health, better educational outcomes for children, happier lives and more secure communities".

This smacks of good old back to basics, which didn't rescue John Major in 1997. As levelling up secretary, he should know that the poorer the family,

the more likely it is to collapse, less for lack of morals than lack of income, housing, childcare and decent jobs. But that kind of “radical social activist movement” must be resisted, he says. What does he mean? Here’s his appetiser for these politics: child benefit should be taken from parents if children regularly miss school. (No word of common underlying reasons for absence, from parental addictions and mental ill health to no uniform or lunch.) [Benefits are already far below 2010 levels](#), but could squeezing the last pips win votes? Though [a snap poll](#) found 44% in support of his plan, 40% against, nastiness is not a winning ticket. There is overwhelming support for food banks and for strikers from a population that knows what the cost of living and the failure of public services are doing to everyone. Bring on the team builders, but no amount of awaydays will devise any escape from these fundamentals of their own failure.

- Polly Toynbee is a Guardian columnist

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Marchers demonstrate against evictions from homes in the Israeli-annexed east Jerusalem neighbourhood of Sheikh Jarrah, January 2023. Photograph: Saeed Qaq/Sopa Images/Rex/Shutterstock

[OpinionIsrael](#)

Netanyahu has brought Israel to a dangerous moment. We, the Jewish diaspora, cannot just stand by

[Margaret Hodge](#)



There must be outside intervention to facilitate new negotiations with the Palestinians – and international pressure to halt his excesses

Fri 3 Mar 2023 03.00 EST

We are seeing the worst violence for many years erupting in [Gaza and the West Bank](#). I have just returned from a week in Israel, my first visit since 1994. I spent half the trip with Labour Friends of Israel, a grouping of like-minded Labour MPs, and half with the New Israel Fund, an NGO that funds organisations that promote democracy and equality for all Israelis, based on the vision of Israel's founders. A packed itinerary enabled me to see what had changed.

I have always supported the untrammelled right of Israel to exist and, like many others, have advocated for a [two-state solution](#), ensuring a stable and secure home for Palestinians and Israelis alike.

But the two-state solution seems a fantasy at this moment, with little prospect of it developing into a political reality. The tensions are febrile and yet the international community, preoccupied with other crises, is doing

little more than expressing concern at the heightened violence. In my humble view, it is simply not pro-Israel, nor pro-Palestinian, to do nothing.

There are so many wonderful things about Israel but the deeply anti-democratic proposals being considered by Benjamin Netanyahu's new [extreme rightwing government](#), alongside a renewed assault on the homes and most basic rights of Palestinians living in the occupied territories, will only deepen division and heighten tensions. They will end the dreams of the postwar idealistic Zionists who sought to build a new Jerusalem in the Middle East.

Netanyahu's government plans to undermine judicial independence by instituting the political appointment of judges and introducing a new "overriding" clause, allowing any decision by the supreme court of Israel to be overridden by a simple majority vote in the Knesset. This would destroy the independence of the judiciary. This is especially damaging because Israel does not have a written constitution and depends on its basic laws, upheld by an independent judiciary, to protect fundamental rights. Israel prides itself on being the only genuine democracy in the region – yet no credible democracy would undermine judicial independence in this way.

Netanyahu secured office after the last election by forming a coalition with the extreme right, and rewarding two of its most extremist leaders, Itamar Ben-Gvir and Bezalel Smotrich, with jobs – responsible for national security, defence and finance – and a series of damaging proposals are now being developed. There are [threats to LGBTQ+ rights](#); debate about [segregating men and women](#) at public events funded by the government; and there are colossal taxes imposed on funds awarded to civil society organisations [by a foreign source](#). This last proposal represents a deliberate attack on those NGOs who work to protect the rights of the most marginalised in Israel.

Netanyahu secured his mandate in democratic elections, so many might question the right of others to comment, let alone intervene. But this is a very dangerous moment for Israel that could easily tip into a third intifada. Can we really stand aside?

The Jewish Israeli community is completely divided. Massive demonstrations against Netanyahu and his backers are now the order of the day. The parties on the left are in disarray and unable to provide an effective opposition. Negotiations between two dysfunctional forces, the Palestinian Authority and the Netanyahu executive, are impossible. Threats from Iran continue to dominate, and many believe an attack on the [Iranian nuclear capability](#) is inevitable. Right now, Israel is in no fit state to navigate a peaceful way forward.

Everybody is rightly concerned with security. When visiting an Israeli kibbutz, founded in 1951 by Egyptian Jewish refugees, we were shown around by a third-generation kibbutznik woman. The kibbutz lies so close to the Gaza border that we could hear the call to prayer for Muslims. The kibbutz inhabitants live under constant threat of rocket attacks and we saw the damage done to our guide's modest home by a nailbomb that struck her reinforced external wall.

I also visited [Sheikh Jarrah](#), a deprived neighbourhood in east Jerusalem. I sat in the garden of a 20-strong family of Palestinians, who had also lived in their modest home for three generations and who were now threatened with eviction by Jewish Israelis. The security minister, Ben-Gvir, had erected a small gazebo on a patch of grass in front of this family's home, [claiming it as his office](#). In fact, it was a provocative assertion of his authority over the area and its inhabitants.

Here I also witnessed a weekly demonstration by Jewish Israelis in support of those Palestinians threatened with eviction. The demonstration was disrupted by a group of rightwing Israelis, led by a local councillor with a loudhailer who screamed abuse at the Palestinians and the protesters inches from their faces, with the police just watching on.

And yet, amid all this chaos I met wonderful people trying their best to bring the two communities together. A group of doctors who visited different Arab villages every Saturday to provide healthcare; an Arab Israeli professor who ran further education courses both for Arab and Jewish Israelis.

But with a broken political landscape and a government focused on measures that can only entrench division and hatred, what can be done?

Funding grassroots organisations that work to build confidence between Arabs and Jews from the bottom up is hugely important. However, international pressure, especially from the diaspora Jewish community, to curtail the excesses of the present government, is also needed. And it needs a country outside Israel to actively work to facilitate negotiations between the two warring communities.

A two-state solution seems politically impossible for now, but I believe it is historically inevitable. We must play our part in getting there without more unnecessary hatred and bloodshed.

- Margaret Hodge is MP for Barking and the parliamentary chair of the Jewish Labour Movement
- ***Do you have an opinion on the issues raised in this article? If you would like to submit a response of up to 300 words by email to be considered for publication in our [letters](#) section, please [click here](#).***

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‘I saw toddlers grinning with delight when a penguin swam over to investigate the bright colours of their winter coats.’ Humboldt penguins at London Zoo, January 2023. Photograph: Kirsty O’Connor/PA

[OpinionZoos](#)

Letting thousands of poorer families into London Zoo for £3 has changed us for ever

[Matthew Gould](#)



Bringing children closer to nature is the first step to building the next generation of conservationists. Everyone should have that chance

- Matthew Gould is director general of the Zoological Society of London

Fri 3 Mar 2023 02.00 ESTLast modified on Fri 3 Mar 2023 14.26 EST

It started with the monkeys. The Zoological Society of London, [which I head](#), received a grant from the National Lottery Heritage Fund to repurpose our Snowdon Aviary in London Zoo into an [enclosure for colobus monkeys](#). This grant also enabled us to offer 100,000 heavily discounted tickets to community groups. We extended this so that anyone on benefits could buy a [ticket for £3](#), which is a tenth of the cost of peak-season entry for an adult.

News of the £3 offer spread fast, and on the first day of February half-term it became clear that something extraordinary was happening. Literally thousands of families were descending on our zoos. Both London and Whipsnade had twice as many visitors as we had been expecting.

As I surveyed the queue, stretching around the edge of Regent's Park as far as I could see, I had mixed feelings. One part of me was horrified that our visitors were having to wait so long to get in. But another saw a physical expression of something powerful and good that has changed our zoos overnight. The queues marked the moment when our conservation zoos opened to all, including those who could not have previously afforded to visit.

We worked quickly to bring the situation under more control. We moved to online booking only. We set up separate queues for our members. We brought in more staff, and put a cap on the numbers in both zoos, so we could ensure all our visitors had a positive experience.

And the experience has been an overwhelmingly positive one. In half-term week alone, we had 133,000 visitors to our zoos, more than 50,000 of them on £3 tickets. Dozens of those families told us how much it meant to them to be there. Our staff are visibly energised by what's happened, if exhausted by the unexpected numbers.

I saw toddlers grinning with delight when a penguin swam over to investigate the bright colours of their winter coats. I heard gasps from whole families when our tiger cubs rolled over to show their soft bellies. I watched grownups jump in shock when [Bhanu, our male Asiatic lion](#), thundered his roar (which can be heard up to three miles away). Speaking to these families, I discovered they were all new visitors to our conservation zoos. It was the first time that their children had been up close with wildlife.

Three weeks in, it would be hubristic to be drawing grand conclusions. But I do think our £3 tickets will change us, for the better. The scheme has made us more accessible, our zoos busier and our staff happier.

As a conservation charity, we are reliant on visitors and supporters to fund our scientific research and fieldwork. We have teams working to [restore mangroves](#) in the Philippines; protect pangolins in central Africa; [reintroduce hazel dormice](#) to the English countryside; and map the seabed off Greenland. Engaging people is also core to our charity. This scheme has increased visitor numbers, engagement and our income, allowing us to do even more conservation work in the field.

There are risks and downsides to all this. We have had complaints from visitors who aren't on benefits, and it is true that such a blunt test can feel unfair to those just on the wrong side of the line. We will need to make sure that the £3 tickets aren't cannibalising demand for our full-price ones – we cannot afford to reduce our income, as that would mean doing less conservation work. We will continue the £3 ticket scheme for now, and look for funding to help us to do so.

But for all the queues and challenges, this has been a brilliant development. This view was sealed for me by the headteacher of a primary school in Somers Town, one of the most deprived parts of the capital. She said that many of her school's families had been able to go to the zoo because of it. The school was so keen that it had used its own money, raised from donations, to help parents buy the £3 tickets. I can't think of a more powerful endorsement of the scheme than that.

As a conservation charity, inspiring change is a key part of our mission. Bringing children closer to nature is the first step to building the next generation of conservationists. We have already given tens of thousands more the chance to see our amazing animals up close. We are now determined to reach millions more.

- Matthew Gould is director general of the Zoological Society of London

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[Guardian Opinion cartoon](#)
[Matt Hancock](#)

Ben Jennings on the rift between Matt Hancock and Isabel Oakeshott – cartoon

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2023.03.03 - Around the world

- [China Xi Jinping to tighten Communist party's grip on government](#)
- [Ohio train derailment US rail workers told to skip inspections as questions mount over crash](#)
- [Wildlife Florence and her cubs give hope that west African lion can come roaring back](#)
- [California Yosemite national park shut indefinitely after breaking 54-year daily snow record](#)
- [Cambodia US condemns 'fabricated' case as opposition leader is jailed for 27 years](#)



The national flag on show at the Museum of the Communist Party of China in Beijing. The capital will see a crucial Congress meeting this weekend that will see the party gain closer control of government. Photograph: Noel Celis/AFP/Getty Images

[China](#)

Xi Jinping to tighten Communist party's grip with overhaul of China's government at key meeting

The NPC, China's rubber-stamp parliament, will gather this weekend to approve far-reaching changes, and Xi's unprecedented third term as president

[Amy Hawkins](#) *Senior China correspondent*

[@amyhawk](#)

Thu 2 Mar 2023 20.53 ESTLast modified on Fri 3 Mar 2023 17.02 EST

Xi Jinping is preparing a profound overhaul of China's government and party institutions at this year's [National People's Congress](#) (NPC), China's rubber-stamp parliament, which begins its annual session on Sunday.

On Tuesday, the Chinese Communist party (CCP) trailed changes of “far-reaching significance” that are expected to include a reorganisation of the bodies tasked with managing the financial and technology sectors, as well as state security. The changes will all have one goal in mind: to strengthen the party's control.

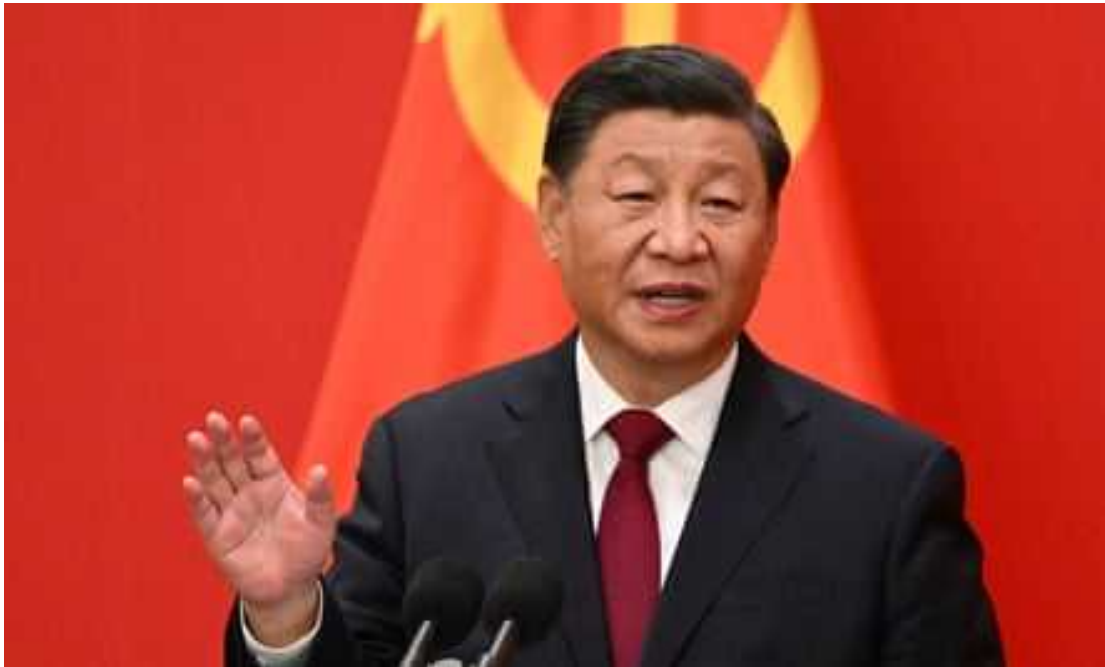
Xi is China's [most powerful leader since Mao Zedong](#). At the CCP congress in October, he was anointed as party secretary and head of the military commission for a third term, after abolishing the two-term limit in 2018, paving the way for him to rule for life. That will be reaffirmed at this year's NPC when Xi is granted his third term as president.

For posts not held by Xi, the two-term limit still applies. Li Keqiang, the premier, is expected to be replaced by [Li Qiang](#), who was elevated to the number two position of the Standing Committee of the CCP in October. Li Qiang, a close ally of Xi and his former chief of staff, was the party secretary for Shanghai during the gruelling lockdown that was imposed on the city for two months in 2022.

The sudden promotion of a cadre who did not previously hold a senior government position is indicative of the extent to which Xi values loyalty above convention and experience.

He Lifeng, another Xi ally, is expected to be appointed as vice-premier responsible for economic policy, as well as being considered for the role of party chief of the People's Bank of [China](#). One of the rumoured changes is the establishment of a new party committee that would oversee the central bank and other financial institutions. Such a change, with He at the helm of the government and the central bank, would centralise decision-making under Xi.

“Under Xi the party and government have been pushed together. The government has become less distinct and less effective,” said Richard McGregor, a senior fellow at the Lowy Institute thinktank, and author of a book about the CCP.



China’s President Xi Jinping is free to rule for life. Photograph: Noel Celis/AFP/Getty Images

Another rumoured change is that the Ministry of Public Security and the Ministry of State Security could be removed from the State Council’s portfolio, and placed under the oversight of a newly created, party-controlled, internal affairs committee. “By moving so many of these core functions away from the oversight of the state, it would arguably weaken the state while greatly strengthening the power of the party’s Central Committee and, of course, [Xi Jinping](#) himself,” said Patricia Thornton, a professor of Chinese politics at Oxford University.

Last week the CCP and the State Council published a joint opinion on legal education. The document calls on state institutions to “persist in following [Xi Jinping Thought](#)” on the rule of law and that schools should “oppose and resist western erroneous views” such as “constitutional government” and “independence of the judiciary”.

Some analysts expect the opinion to be formalised in some way at the NPC. The language in the opinion echoes that of the “Two Establishes” and the “Two Safeguards”, CCP slogans that establish Xi and his ideology as the “core” of the party. The “Two Safeguards” were added to the party charter in 2022.

The NPC is also due to consider amendments to the legislative process. One of the proposals is to allow laws to be passed on an “emergency” basis. Changhao Wei, a research fellow at the Paul Tsai China Center, said the provision “should be a cause for concern to those who value legislative openness and predictability, for the draft doesn’t define ‘emergency’ or tie it to existing emergency response mechanisms, so the legislature has complete discretion to decide whether an emergency exists.”

Aside from the political changes, the NPC will also announce the government’s GDP growth target for the year ahead. Analysts expect it to be between 5% and 6%, which would be a significant improvement on the 3% achieved last year.

Other proposals submitted to the NPC by delegates – which have little hope of progressing without support from the top leadership – cover a range of issues, from regional tensions to animal welfare, cyberbullying and boosting the birth rate.

NPC deputy Li Yihu is proposing efforts to promote “civil exchanges” between China and Taiwan to further Beijing’s push for what it terms “reunification”. Screenwriter and NPC delegate Zhao Dongling wants all children born after 2024 to enjoy free education through to their last year at university, while other delegates want more equal rights between married and unmarried women.

NPC delegate and agricultural scientist Zhao Wanping has also suggested authorities should return a little more freedom to people when it comes to fireworks. Hugely popular in Chinese celebrations, many cities have since banned fireworks and firecrackers for noise and safety reasons, but Zhao suggested designated venues for setting them off could be a good compromise.

Agence France-Presse contributed to this report

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



A view of the site of the derailment of a train carrying hazardous waste in East Palestine, Ohio. Photograph: Alan Freed/Reuters

[Ohio train derailment](#)

Leaked audio reveals US rail workers were told to skip inspections as Ohio crash prompts scrutiny to industry

Exclusive: employee says manager told her to stop marking cars for repair, as Ohio derailment brings hard look at industry's record of blocking safety rules

[Michael Sainato](#)

[@msainat1](#)

Fri 3 Mar 2023 04.00 EST Last modified on Fri 3 Mar 2023 09.51 EST

In leaked audio heard by the Guardian, a manager for one of the US's largest rail companies can be heard explaining to a former carman that they

should stop tagging railcars for broken bearings. The manager says doing so delays other cargo.

The disclosure comes as federal agencies investigate the derailment in East Palestine, Ohio. A wheel-bearing failure was cited as the cause of the crash in a [preliminary report](#) released by the National Transportation Safety Board.

In late 2016, Stephanie Griffin, a former Union Pacific carman, went to her manager with concerns that she was getting pushback for tagging – or reporting for repair – railcars. Her manager told her it was OK to skip inspections.

Griffin asked if the manager could put that in writing. “That’s weird,” said the manager. “We have 56 other people who are not bad-ordering stuff out there. You’re definitely not going to get in trouble for it.”

Griffin said: “He refused to bad-order [mark for repair] cars for bad wheel bearings. My boss took issue with it because it increased our dwell time. When that happened, corporate offices would start berating management to release the cars.”

Dwell time refers to the time a train spends at a scheduled stop without moving. “It’s very obvious that management is not concerned with public safety, and only concerned with making their numbers look good,” Griffin said.

Griffin also claimed she and other workers did not receive any formal training to inspect and repair railcars, and were left to learn from an older worker and figure the rest out from American Association of Railroads and Federal Railroad Administration handbooks. Griffin suggested all major railroad carriers operate similarly.

As part of her job at the railyard, Griffin was to inspect all railcars on inbound journeys for defects and put a tag on them to send the cars to the railroad yard repair shop. On outbound journeys, workers were supposed to check the cars’ air brakes and make a final inspection. But, she said,

management, at the behest of corporate, undermined workers' effectiveness on the job.

She said: "The regulation at the time stated that a wheel bearing was bad when it had 'visible seepage'. But that was very vague, and the bosses used that vagueness to their advantage. For me, it was whenever oil was visible on the bearing. For my bosses, they wanted actual droplets and proof it would leak on the ground.

"Most railroad workers are fighting against an entire system that only exists as a money-making apparatus to the wealthy. Those trains run through our towns, but they do not run next to rich folks' homes, nor next to our politicians' homes. This is a top-down problem."

A spokesperson for Union Pacific said in an email: "Nothing is more important than the safety of Union Pacific employees and the communities we serve. Union Pacific does not have the alleged recording and cannot comment on its authenticity."

It added: "Employees are expected and encouraged to report concerns, and have a number of avenues to do so, including a 24/7 anonymous hotline and they are firmly protected from retaliation."

The East Palestine derailment has prompted a wave of scrutiny into the railroad industry's record of deregulation and blocking safety rules.

[Train-brake](#) rules were rolled back under the Trump administration and have not been restored; hazardous material regulations were [watered down](#) at the behest of the railroad industry; and railroad workers have been decrying the safety impacts incited by years of staffing cuts, poor working conditions and neglect by railroad corporations in [favor of Wall Street investors](#).

The rate of train derailments has [increased](#) over the past decade, with two derailments per every 1m miles traveled on the railroads, compared to 1.71 derailments in 2013. There were 818 derailments reported in 2022, with 447 train cars carrying hazardous materials either damaged or derailed.



Pete Buttigieg, the US transport secretary, in East Palestine last week.
Photograph: Alan Freed/Reuters

“The railroads have opposed any government regulation on train length; they have sought waivers to eliminate having trained inspectors monitor railcars; and they have pushed back on the [train crew staffing rule](#),” said Brotherhood of Locomotive Engineers and Trainmen (BLET) national president Eddie Hall in a statement after the NTSB preliminary report on the East Palestine derailment.

“The railroads and their trade association the Association of American Railroads (AAR) employ armies of lobbyists on Capitol Hill who are there not to promote safety regulations but to slow the implementation of federal safety regulations – or attempt to eliminate them altogether.”

Edward Wytkind, who [served](#) as president of the Transportation Trades Department (TTD) at the AFL-CIO, which [represents](#) the unions in the railroad industry, said that throughout his 25 years at the TTD, the railroad industry blocked all attempts to pass legislation or advance regulation on safety.

“From attempts to address worker fatigue, lack of coherent mandatory safety plans, increasing transparency to the public and first responders

about what trains are carrying, the dangers of such long trains, or establishing floors for minimum train crew, the railroads blocked everything,” said Wytkind.

“It took a horrific derailment in Ohio that is now raising major public health alarms to get the public to understand this is a very important industry. Obviously our economy depends on it, but it’s also a dangerous industry that needs to be regulated.”

A signal maintainer on the railroads who requested to remain anonymous for fear of retaliation said that in recent years staff has been cut and the region signal maintainers are forced to cover has been extended as a result of “precision scheduled railroading”, a cost-cutting system that has resulted in class 1 railroads cutting their workforce by [30%](#) since 2016.

“We’ve lost a signal maintainer, relief maintainer, and they’ve extended from 80 miles to over 100 miles of tracks,” they said. “We’re overworked. They keep adding more tasks for us to do and cover and it’s getting to where all we’re doing is just testing and not doing much maintenance any more.”

They said they have worked hundreds of hours of overtime so far this year because of short staffing and the high workloads, and this has created safety concerns, because there is no time to keep up with the workloads or properly train newer employees.

“There’s a big opportunity to miss and overlook things. There is a big opportunity for something to fail. Missed switches, something with crossings being overlooked ... could cause train derailments. Or people could get hit at railroad crossings,” the employee added.

“There could be many opportunities for catastrophic failure between train departments that are shorthanded, maintenance workers that are shorthanded and overworked, the signal department that’s overworked and understaffed.

“It’s just an opportunity for a big failure to happen. We don’t have as many eyes or as many hands on like we used to.”

Jeff Kurtz, a retired locomotive engineer of 40 years in Iowa, said the railroad industry talking points on safety in response to the East Palestine derailment have been misleading, as the industry has [trended](#) toward adding several more railcars to trains, making them much longer, which can make derailments more damaging when they do occur. This trend has been [pursued](#) to further cut costs and increase efficiency, despite safety concerns.

“What most people aren’t talking about that would have either mitigated a lot of the damage, and it may have prevented the derailment, is reducing the size of these trains,” said Kurtz. “Because the in-train forces are increased exponentially when a train’s length and weight is increased, the chance of derailments and the increase in damage is exponentially increased.”

The size of the train that derailed in East Palestine, Ohio was 150 cars, [more than twice](#) the average length of trains operated by major railroads from 2008 to 2017. There is [currently no limit imposed](#) by the Federal Railroad Administration on train length. The industry has dismissed safety concerns on the issue.

“A derailment with a 5,000-ton train with [a small amount of] hazardous material is a whole different animal than a derailment of an 18,000-ton train loaded with hazardous material. Plus, a long, heavy train is easier to derail,” Kurtz added.

“Secretary [Pete] Buttigieg said that there are about 1,000 derailments a year. If we let the carriers run these monster trains loaded with hazardous material, cut the number of derailments to 300 a year, but blow up a town or city every other year: is that acceptable?”

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Florence plays with her cubs at the Niokolo-Koba national park in Senegal – video

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

Florence and her cubs give hope that west African lion can come roaring back

National park in Senegal shows off three surprise new recruits in fight to save critically endangered species from extinction

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Fri 3 Mar 2023 02.00 ESTLast modified on Fri 3 Mar 2023 14.07 EST

A lioness in one of the [world's rarest lion populations](#) has given birth to three cubs, new video footage shows, raising hopes that the critically

endangered big cat can be saved from extinction.

In contrast to their southern cousins, west African lions have almost completely disappeared. Scientists believe between [120 and 374 remain in the wild](#), their historic range reduced to four populations clinging on in Nigeria, Benin, Niger and Burkina Faso.

In Niokolo-Koba national park in [Senegal](#), just 29 remain in the forests that surround the tributary to the Gambia River, where they are threatened by poaching and habitat loss caused by farming. Now, new footage of the lioness and her three cubs has given conservationists hope for their survival.

Critically endangered west African lion cubs in Senegal's Niokolo-Koba reserve – video

The images show Florence, the matriarch, caring for the cubs – two males and one female – in February this year. Scientists believe the park could support a population of about 200 of the critically endangered lions, which are more closely related to Asiatic relatives found in India.

The cubs are part of a growing population in Niokolo-Koba, up from 10-15 individuals in 2011 before conservation efforts from Senegalese authorities and the global wild cat conservation organisation [Panthera](#) began in 2016.

Scientists had feared that Florence might have been poached after her GPS collar stopped functioning, and placed camera traps where she was last seen. They discovered she had been caring for the cubs in a densely forested part of the national park. They believe this is her third litter.

Having once ranged from the High Atlas mountains across the Middle East and India, global lion populations now number less than 25,000, falling by half in [Africa](#) in just 20 years. Along with habitat loss, the trade in lion bones – used for traditional medicine in Asia – is a growing threat to the species.

In Senegal, conservationists have set a target of 50 lions at Niokolo-Koba by 2025, and 100 by 2030. They say the footage of the cubs shows that their efforts, which include anti-poaching and monitoring operations, are working in the park, which is also home to African wild dogs, spotted hyena, western giant eland and the western hartebeest.

Alongside the new cubs, scientists spotted another lioness that had been injured by porcupine quills and faced death. The quills were removed, and the footage shows she is now healthy, giving hope of a further expansion of the population.

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

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Park crews are working to restore critical services so visitors can safely return. Photograph: Yosemite national park

[California](#)

Yosemite national park shut indefinitely after breaking 54-year daily snow record

Nearly unprecedented levels of snow have buried the park, with the powder piling up to 15ft deep in some areas

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[*@dani_anguiano*](#)

Thu 2 Mar 2023 18.16 ESTLast modified on Thu 2 Mar 2023 18.38 EST

Yosemite national park has closed indefinitely, according to officials, as the park grapples with extensive snowfall that broke a 54-year-old daily record.

Nearly unprecedented snowfall across the US west has buried the park in snow up to 15ft deep in some areas. Parts of the west coast have seen record-breaking snow in recent days in what officials are calling a “once in a generation” event.

The mountains of [California](#) have received so much snowfall – more than 40ft since the start of the season – that entire towns have shut down. The California governor has declared a state of emergency in 13 counties due to the unusual precipitation.



Curry Village tent cabins enshrined in snow at Yosemite national park. Photograph: Yosemite Hospitality

Yosemite has been closed for the last five days due to the extreme weather and was previously scheduled to reopen on Thursday. Officials do not yet have an estimated date of reopening.

There was “significant snowfall in all areas of the park”, the park [said on Twitter](#). Photos show snow blanketing Half Dome, completely blocking doorways of buildings and nearly burying tents.



Yosemite has experienced significant snowfall in all areas of the park, with snow up to 15ft deep in some areas. Photograph: Yosemite Hospitality

On Tuesday, Yosemite broke daily snowfall record with 40in of snow, officials told the [San Francisco Chronicle](#), exceeding a record set in 1969. Park crews are working to clear roads and restore “critical services” before visitors can return.

“We’re committed to opening the park as soon as we can do it in a safe manner,” Scott Gediman, a park spokesperson, told the newspaper. “While we certainly welcome the snow, it’s created a lot of challenges.”



Snow buildup outside the door of a restroom in Yosemite national park.
Photograph: Yosemite national park

The Sierra Nevada has seen significant snowfall – as well as avalanches – that has made travel through the mountains almost impossible. With another storm on the way, the National Weather Service (NWS) warned of “extensive travel impacts”.

“Once again, expect the travel delays and road closures not only across the Sierra, but also into western Nevada through Sunday morning,” the [NWS Reno](#) office said.

Meanwhile, Joshua Tree national park reopened on Thursday after closing due to a winter storm the day before.

Due to inclement weather, the park is closed. Rangers are working on reopening as soon as possible! [#ParkClosure](#)
pic.twitter.com/5DqywpeLdK

— Joshua Tree NPS (@JoshuaTreeNPS) [March 1, 2023](#)

Dirt roads in the park remain closed and officials advised visitors to be cautious, warning that water and ice may be present on the roads.

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2023/mar/02/yosemite-national-park-shut-snowfall-california>

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



Kem Sokha being taken to court for the verdict in his treason case in Phnom Penh, Cambodia. Photograph: Cindy Liu/Reuters

[Cambodia](#)

US condemns ‘fabricated’ case as Cambodian opposition leader is jailed for 27 years

Kem Sokha, an opponent of Cambodian dictator Hun Sen, sentenced after treason trial widely seen as politically driven

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

Fri 3 Mar 2023 01.49 EST First published on Thu 2 Mar 2023 23.13 EST

Prominent Cambodian opposition politician Kem Sokha has been sentenced to 27 years in prison after being found guilty of treason, in a case widely condemned as politically motivated.

The former leader of the dissolved opposition party the Cambodia National Rescue Party (CNRP) was [arrested in 2017](#) and accused of conspiring with the US to oust Cambodia's authoritarian leader, Hun Sen, who has ruled for almost four decades.

US ambassador W Patrick Murphy said the allegations, which Kem Sokha denied, were “fabricated conspiracy theories”.

Judge Koy Sao told the court in Phnom Penh on Friday: “Kem Sokha ... is sentenced to 27 years in prison on the charge of collusion with foreigners committed in Cambodia and other places.” Kem Sokha, who has now been placed under house arrest, was also banned from running for office and from voting in elections.

Rights groups have strongly condemned the verdict, which they say is a warning intended to silence opposition figures months before national elections, which are due in July.

Amnesty International described the charges as “fabricated”, adding that the Cambodian justice system had “once again shown its jaw-dropping lack of independence”, while Human Rights Watch said Kem Sokha should be “immediately and unconditionally” released.

Kem Sokha was arrested in 2017, when hundreds of police raided his home in the middle of the night amid a crackdown on the media and critical voices. He has since spent years in detention and with restrictions on his movement, and has been banned from taking part in politics.

His party, CNRP, was dissolved shortly after his arrest, a move that eliminated the main opposition ahead of elections the following year. In 2018, the ruling party won all 125 seats in the National Assembly.

Phil Robertson, deputy Asia director at Human Rights Watch, said the case against Kem Sokha had been a ploy by Hun Sen “to sideline Cambodia's major opposition leader and eliminate the country's democratic system”.

“Sending Kem Sokha to prison isn’t just about destroying his political party, but about squashing any hope that there can be a genuine general election in July,” Robertson said.

Under Hun Sen’s rule, civil society activists and opposition figures have been convicted in mass trials, newspapers and radio stations have been closed and legislation that restricts civil freedom has been adopted.

Earlier this month, Hun Sen ordered the [closure of one of the country’s few independent media organisations](#), Voice of Democracy (VOD), accusing the outlet of attacking him and his son, and hurting the “dignity and reputation” of the Cambodian government.

At least 39 political opposition members are being held in Cambodian prisons on bogus charges, according to Amnesty International.

With Reuters and Agence France-Presse in Phnom Penh

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2023/mar/03/us-condemns-fabricated-case-as-cambodian-opposition-leader-is-jailed-for-27-years-treason-kem-sokha>

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- ['How bad are the pics?' New messages show Hancock's reaction to footage of him kissing aide](#)
- [Eat out to help out Hancock 'ridiculed Sunak's scheme'](#)
- [UK food shortages Food tsar blames problems on 'weird supermarket culture'](#)
- [Live Russia-Ukraine war: Ukrainian defence of Bakhmut 'under severe pressure' as Russian forces close in](#)



Copies of the Sun newspaper on a newsstand on 25 June 2021. Photograph: Dan Kitwood/Getty Images

[Matt Hancock](#)

New leaked messages show Matt Hancock's reaction to footage of him kissing aide

WhatsApp correspondence centres on then health secretary's fight to save career after Sun published picture of clinch

[Hayden Vernon](#) and agency

Sat 4 Mar 2023 05.19 EST First published on Fri 3 Mar 2023 18.14 EST

New leaked messages between [Matt Hancock](#) and officials show the then health secretary scrambling to save his career after footage emerged of his embrace with aide Gina Coladangelo.

They are among the latest set of WhatsApp correspondence to emerge from the leak of more than 100,000 messages by the journalist Isabel Oakeshott to the Daily Telegraph.

The latest tranche to be published centres on the hours after Hancock discovered that leaked footage, showing him breaching social distancing rules, would appear on the front page of the Sun in June 2021.

He [resigned as health secretary](#) shortly afterwards.

The messages, [published by the Telegraph](#), show Hancock discussing the guidance in place at the time and deciding what his initial response to media questions should be.

As he awaited publication, Hancock asked his special adviser, Damon Poole: “How bad are the pics?” Told it was a “snog and heavy petting”, he replied: “How the fuck did anyone photograph that?”

The messages also show the reaction of Hancock and Coladangelo to a video obtained by the Sun.

“OMFG,” Coladangelo said.

Hancock said: “Crikey. Not sure there’s much news value in that and I can’t say it’s very enjoyable viewing.”



The former health secretary Matt Hancock with then aide Gina Coladangelo outside the BBC's offices. Photograph: Tom Nicholson/Reuters

In his diaries, worked on with Oakeshott and published last year, Hancock said he resigned as health secretary after colleagues failed to defend him publicly.

By his own account, he said Boris Johnson had assured him he could carry on, even though he and Coladangelo had been pictured kissing in his office in breach of his own social distancing guidelines.

But after the story broke, Hancock said he found himself “increasingly isolated” politically and was left with no choice but to quit.

The messages show Hancock and his advisers discussing among themselves and liaising with No 10 about how to respond to the story, amid an unfolding political storm.

Hancock set up a WhatsApp group called “Crisis Management” with Poole and Coladangelo. They talked about the transport secretary, Grant Shapps, going out to support Hancock in broadcast interviews, saying he was “probably the best person you could hope would be out this morning” other than the prime minister.

Poole asked Hancock and Coladangelo to think “really hard” about whether they could have broken any Covid rules.

Referring to the social distancing rule to keep 1 metre apart from others when 2 metres was not possible, Hancock said: “Other than obviously the 1m+ I honestly can’t think of any.” He then said that the worst thing he and Coladangelo could be accused of was that they had “kissed before they legalised hugs”.

At the time, the UK was in step 2 of the coronavirus regulations, which criminalised indoor gatherings “of two or more people”.

Separate government guidance in place at the time stated that people should maintain social distancing of 1 metre-plus.

The messages also show that Hancock asked Poole to “keep the focus” on whether Coladangelo’s appointment as a paid adviser had broken any rules, rather than whether their embrace had broken social distancing restrictions.

Coladangelo worked as a paid adviser for the government, acting as a non-executive director at the Department of Health and Social Care.

The messages also reveal that Hancock asked his former mentor and ex-chancellor George Osborne for advice about a video statement, as he prepared to resign.

Osborne advised him against revealing he had fallen in love with Coladangelo and to include an apology to his family.

A spokesperson for Hancock said: “There’s nothing new in these messages, and absolutely no public interest in publishing them given the independent inquiry has them all. It’s highly intrusive, completely inappropriate and has all been discussed endlessly before.”



Rishi Sunak and Matt Hancock pictured leaving Downing Street in 2019.
Photograph: Hannah McKay/Reuters

[Matt Hancock](#)

Matt Hancock ridiculed Sunak's 'eat out to help out' scheme, messages show

Then health secretary tried to get support of then cabinet secretary, according to leaked WhatsApp texts

[Nadeem Badshah](#)

Fri 3 Mar 2023 15.10 EST Last modified on Fri 3 Mar 2023 18.12 EST

Matt Hancock expressed disdain for Rishi Sunak's flagship Treasury initiative, "eat out to help out", during the Covid pandemic, according to the latest cache of leaked WhatsApp messages.

The messages show the then health secretary also attempting to get the support of the then cabinet secretary, Simon Case, in challenging the stance

of Sunak, who was the chancellor, and others over some pandemic-era rules.

Case – who is required to be politically neutral – complained about “pure Conservative ideology” on the part of one senior minister.

The messages, [published by the Daily Telegraph](#), suggest Hancock had concerns about the Treasury scheme designed to support restaurants, dubbing it the “eat out to help the virus get about”.

The “eat out to help out” initiative, implemented in August 2020, offered customers a 50% discount, up to £10, on meals and soft drinks on Mondays, Tuesdays and Wednesdays as businesses sought to recover from the pandemic.

Hancock wrote in a message to Case: “Just want to let you know directly that we have had lots of feedback that Eat Out to Help Out is causing problems in our jntervention [sic] areas. I’ve kept it out of the news but it’s serious.

“So please please lets not allow the economic success of the scheme to lead to its extension.”

An earlier exchange of messages, from June 2020, came as the government considered how to relax restrictions. The messages show that Hancock wanted cafes and restaurants to keep a register of customers’ details for NHS Test and trace, urging that guidance would read “should” as opposed to “can”.

The latter phrasing, according to the messages, was preferred by then business secretary, Sir [Alok Sharma](#).

“The language on customer logs has just gone from ‘should’ to ‘can’. Grateful if you can fix – we can’t reverse this at the last minute!” Hancock said.

Case replied: “Alok blocking ‘should’. Will need to fix after this meeting.”

Hancock said the “question I can’t understand is why Alok is against controlling the virus. Strange approach”.

“Pure Conservative ideology,” Case replied.

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Sunak is also mentioned in the conversation, with Case describing him as “going bonkers about ‘should’ right now too”.

The exchanges were among more than 100,000 messages passed to the Telegraph by the journalist [Isabel Oakeshott](#), who was originally given the material by Hancock while they were collaborating on his memoir.

Hancock has described the leak as a [“massive betrayal”](#) designed to support an “anti-lockdown agenda”.

Oakeshott has insisted the revelations are in the [public interest](#).

The MP resigned as health secretary in June 2021 after photographs emerged of him kissing his aide Gina Coladangelo in his ministerial office in breach of coronavirus rules at the time.

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2023/mar/03/matt-hancock-rishi-sunak-eat-out-to-help-out-whatsapp-messages>

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



Unlike in Europe, UK supermarkets pay a fixed price for some produce, whether there is a glut or shortage. Photograph: Hesther Ng/Sopa Images/Rex/Shutterstock

Farming

Food tsar blames shortages on UK's 'weird supermarket culture'

Henry Dimbleby says suppliers struggling with rising costs while locked into fixed-price contracts

[Helena Horton](#) and [Joanna Partridge](#)

Sat 4 Mar 2023 02.00 EST

The government's food tsar has blamed Britain's "weird supermarket culture" for recent food shortages, calling it a "market failure".

Experts have criticised ministers for "leaving food policy to Tesco", and meeting large food chains rather than suppliers, who have been struggling

with rising costs while locked into contracts with supermarkets.

Henry Dimbleby, the co-founder of the restaurant chain Leon, who advises ministers on a food strategy for England, said Europe was not facing such issues because they did not have the same cultural problems.

He said: “There’s just this weird supermarket culture. A weird competitive dynamic that’s emerged in the UK, and nowhere else in the world has it, and I don’t know why that is.”

Dimbleby earlier criticised the [government’s response](#) to his recommendations, saying it was [“not a strategy”](#).

He said he found the current situation “frustrating” as people were focusing on [remarks about turnips](#), rather than structural issues with the food system. “I find it quite frustrating that everyone is suddenly worried about a gap of vegetables in February, when there are much bigger structural issues that need to resolve, and definitely the government on health has very explicitly gone backwards,” he said.

Dimbleby disagreed with the environment secretary, Thérèse Coffey, who denied that the recent shortages of eggs and vegetables was a “market failure”. He said: “This is a problem of market failure in the specifically British food system. It’s going to get worse. The UK food system is, I think, unique – I don’t know another system where the supermarkets have these fixed-price contracts with suppliers. So, basically, you have no effective market. It’s a very difficult one for the government to solve, but it does need to be resolved.”

Dimbleby said that in the UK lettuce prices in supermarkets were kept stable, whether there was a shortage or a glut, meaning farmers could not sell all their crop when they had too much, or get incentives to produce more during a shortage. He added: “If there’s bad weather across Europe, because there’s a scarcity supermarkets put their prices up – but not in the UK. And therefore at the margin, the suppliers will supply to France, Germany, Ukraine.”

This week, the farming minister, Mark Spencer, held a summit with large food chains but did not invite farming groups.

Timothy Lang, an emeritus professor of food policy at the University of London, said he was “absolutely not in the least” surprised by the recent food shortages. “It’s utterly regrettable,” he said. “This government did nothing because it was ideologically not prepared to consider nuances and difficulties. They’re locked into a minimalist, don’t intervene, leave-it-to-Tesco approach to food policy.”

He accused the government of ignoring Dimbleby’s food strategy, saying: “His final report of our plan dealt very well with household food insecurity and other things like the junk food cycle, advertising marketing, because he thought those were winnable things from this government. And he was ignored.”

Dimbleby believes the problem will get worse, and said he had foreseen this for some time, urging the government to “sort it out”.

He said: “In 2004 there was a particularly bad frost and we had the same issue then. And it will continue to get worse due to climate change. These periods of freak events that used to be not very often, because of climate change are going to happen more and more often. These problems won’t be resolved until we look at what I outlined in my food strategy – we need to fix the problems of climate change, and health, and the way the food markets in the UK are structured leave us vulnerable to this, so we’d better sort it out.”

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The National Farmers' Union (NFU) is asking the government to support its call for more workers to pick crops, more affordable and sustainable energy, and fairness in food supply chains. UK growers have been saying since well before the [recent shortages in fresh produce](#) became visible that they were facing a string of challenges, some intensified by the pandemic and Brexit.

The NFU estimated fresh produce worth £60m was left to rot in fields last year, as growers could not get enough workers to pick their fruit and vegetables at the right time.

The NFU president, Minette Batters, said: "The consequences of undervaluing growers can be seen on supermarket shelves right now. Shelves are empty. This is a reality we've been warning government about for many months. Without urgent action there are real risks that empty shelves may become more commonplace." She was also critical of the government meeting supermarkets rather than producers.

The Department for Environment, [Food](#) and Rural Affairs said: "We agree that the domestic horticulture sector is crucial to the resilience of our food system as well as an important part of our wider economy. We know that farmers and growers are facing global pressures, including from the invasion of Ukraine.

"Our new farming schemes will support farmers to produce food profitably and sustainably, including £600m in grants for equipment to help farmers become more productive. This is part of the significant action we have taken to support the sector so far, alongside allocating 45,000 seasonal workers and wider government support on energy bills through the energy bills relief scheme.

“Although there are currently some issues with the supply of fresh vegetables, caused by the poor weather in Spain and north Africa, the UK has a highly resilient food chain and is well equipped to deal with disruption.”

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2023/mar/04/food-tsar-blames-shortages-on-uks-weird-supermarket-culture>

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

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As it happened: street fighting in Bakhmut as battle rages for control of the city

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2023.03.04 - Spotlight

- [Belinda Carlisle 'I wouldn't take back the drugs, but there are a few boyfriends I would edit out of my life'](#)
- [Blind date 'I showed him a scar from my woodworking class'](#)
- ['He was gaslighting everybody' Reporter Mandy Matney on exposing Alex Murdaugh](#)
- [John Lewis and Waitrose Five reasons why they are having a tough year](#)

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Belinda Carlisle: 'I'm a whistler. I whistle all the time.' Photograph: Getty Images

[The Q&A](#)[Life and style](#)

Belinda Carlisle: 'I wouldn't take back the drugs, but there are a few

boyfriends I would edit out of my life'

The Go-Go's singer on admiring Pamela Anderson, being told she sings like a goat and choosing sex over fame

[Rosanna Greenstreet](#)

Sat 4 Mar 2023 04.30 EST

Born in California, Belinda Carlisle, 64, played drums in the punk band Germs. In 1978 she co-formed the Go-Go's, which became the first all-female band who wrote their own songs and played their instruments to have a US No 1 album with their 1981 debut, *Beauty and the Beat*. In the mid-80s, Carlisle went solo, releasing successful albums such as *Heaven on Earth* and *Runaway Horses*. Her hits include *I Get Weak* and the Grammy-nominated *Heaven is a Place on Earth*. Her new single, *Big Big Love*, is out on 10 March. She is married to film producer Morgan Mason, has a son and lives in Mexico.

Which living person do you most admire, and why?

Pamela Anderson, because I love her strength and honesty and vulnerability at the same time.

What was your most embarrassing moment?

On stage in Tasmania, I tripped over a floor monitor and landed on my back like a turtle, kicking my legs in the air trying to get back on my feet in front of about 5,000 people. But when I got on my feet, the whole crowd roared in triumph.

Aside from a property, what's the most expensive thing you've bought?

I've been doing pilates for 25 years and I swear by it. I decided to kit out a room with pilates equipment – and I think it's the most expensive thing I've invested in.

Describe yourself in three words

Work in progress.

What makes you unhappy?

Watching the news. I have to put myself on 40-day news fasts because I get so worked up. My motto is: ignorance is bliss.

What do you most dislike about your appearance?

I've accepted myself. I am very comfortable in my own skin.

What is your most unappealing habit?

I'm a whistler. I whistle all the time.

Which book are you ashamed not to have read?

I am a big reader, but I've never read anything by [Dickens](#).

What did you want to be when you were growing up?

A travel agent, so I could see the world.

What is the worst thing anyone's said to you?

"You sing like a goat." When I did my French album [Voila], this French woman – a supposed friend – said to my face: "It's fantastic but, how come you sound like a *chèvre*?" It was like someone had hit me in the stomach.

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What is your guiltiest pleasure?

A super trashy reality show called 90 Day Fiance. It got me and my husband through the pandemic.

Have you ever said “I love you” without meaning it?

Totally.

If you could edit your past, what would you change?

I wouldn't take back the drugs, but there are a few boyfriends that I'd edit out of my life.

What do you consider your greatest achievement?

Having a career that's lasted 47 years, especially when I felt like an impostor for so many of them.

Would you rather have more sex, money or fame?

Sex.

How would you like to be remembered?

As a singer who did everything her way, no compromise.

What is the most important lesson life has taught you?

To stay in the moment and live each day to the maximum. You never know when it's going to be taken away.

What happens when we die?

I believe that we go back to divine consciousness. I don't really think there is any such thing as death.

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Composite: David Levene/The Guardian

[Blind date](#)[Life and style](#)

Blind date: ‘I showed him a scar from my woodworking class’

Sam, 29, a therapist, meets Yolanta, 31, advertising creative

Sat 4 Mar 2023 01.00 EST

Sam on Yolanta



What were you hoping for?

A fun evening and good conversation.

First impressions?

Stunning, great smile and worth the wait! She was a little late ...

What did you talk about?

Lots, we were there for four hours. Yolanta's ever growing list of talents: Danish stool making, scriptwriting, painting, magazine and film editing. And the time she met the Queen.

Most awkward moment?

I was quite early, and she was a little late, so I spent a fair while sat at the table alone wondering if I was about to be stood up for a Blind Date.

Good table manners?

Impeccable.

Best thing about Yolanta?

She seems to be someone who isn't afraid to try new things, and when she does she really goes for them.

Would you introduce Yolanta to your friends?

Yes.

Describe Yolanta in three words.

Intelligent, engaging, beautiful.

What do you think Yolanta made of you?

Strong eyebrows apparently ... I think that's a good thing?

Did you go on somewhere?

No, she had a 5am wake up for a shoot. I walked her to the station.

And ... did you kiss?

No.

If you could change one thing about the evening what would it be?

I would have dressed up a little more. (I live on a boat and can't power an iron so felt a little scruffy.)

Marks out of 10?

9. Loses a point for the late arrival, but otherwise a great evening.

Would you meet again?

Yes, we exchanged numbers.

Q&A

Fancy a blind date?

Show

Blind date is Saturday's dating column: every week, two strangers are paired up for dinner and drinks, and then spill the beans to us, answering a set of questions. This runs, with a photograph we take of each dater before the date, in Saturday magazine (in the UK) and online at theguardian.com every Saturday. It's been running since 2009 – you can [read all about how we put it together here](#).

What questions will I be asked?

We ask about age, location, occupation, hobbies, interests and the type of person you are looking to meet. If you do not think these questions cover everything you would like to know, tell us what's on your mind.

Can I choose who I match with?

No, it's a blind date! But we do ask you a bit about your interests, preferences, etc – the more you tell us, the better the match is likely to be.

Can I pick the photograph?

No, but don't worry: we'll choose the nicest ones.

What personal details will appear?

Your first name, job and age.

How should I answer?

Honestly but respectfully. Be mindful of how it will read to your date, and that Blind date reaches a large audience, in print and online.

Will I see the other person's answers?

No. We may edit yours and theirs for a range of reasons, including length, and we may ask you for more details.

Will you find me The One?

We'll try! Marriage! Babies!

Can I do it in my home town?

Only if it's in the UK. Many of our applicants live in London, but we would love to hear from people living elsewhere.

How to apply

Email blind.date@theguardian.com

Was this helpful?

Thank you for your feedback.

Yolanta on Sam**What were you hoping for?**

Someone creative with a similar love for film, art and making things. And putting myself out there to meet someone new.

First impressions?

I was 10 minutes late and he was very early, but he was so nice and didn't make me feel bad about it. He had a calming energy and was easy to talk to.

What did you talk about?

He's travelled to some really awesome places and so have I. Fixing up his houseboat, which looks epic. My love for courses – I showed him my scar from a recent woodworking class.

Most awkward moment?

Maybe the odd silence between conversations but it felt comfortable.

Good table manners?

We were as bad as each other: we didn't take ourselves too seriously.

Best thing about Sam?

He came across as a lovely person.

Would you introduce Sam to your friends?

My friends are inquisitive and emotionally intelligent, so they'd get on like a house on fire.

Describe Sam in three words.

Adventurous. Kind. Empathic.

What do you think Sam made of you?

I hope he also had a good time.

Did you go on somewhere?

No, but he walked me to the station in the freezing cold, which was sweet.

And ... did you kiss?

I don't kiss on the first date and he didn't try to, which I appreciated. I like to take things slow to be sure about the connection before anything physical.

If you could change one thing about the evening what would it be?

Honestly, it's hard to think of anything.

Marks out of 10?

8.

Would you meet again?

Yes, we exchanged numbers.

Yolanta and Sam ate at [Macellaio RC Soho](#), London, W1. Fancy a blind date? Email blind.date@theguardian.com

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Mandy Matney, host of the Murdaugh Murders podcast. Photograph: Sorinex

[Alex Murdaugh](#)

[Interview](#)

‘He was gaslighting everybody’: Mandy Matney on exposing Alex Murdaugh

[Andrew Lawrence](#)

The podcast co-host calls the verdict ‘a huge wake-up call to people who have been abusing the system’

[@by_drew](#)

Sat 4 Mar 2023 01.00 ESTLast modified on Sat 4 Mar 2023 12.31 EST

Mandy Matney was at her home in Hilton Head, South Carolina, video-chatting with true-crime fans when a Colleton county jury found [Alex Murdaugh](#) guilty of killing his wife and son on Thursday.

“I wasn’t mentally prepared for this to happen today!” exclaimed the podcast co-host of the Murdaugh dynasty’s collapse.

Not only has she been reporting on the family since Alex’s son Paul emerged as a central figure in a 2019 boat crash that left a 19-year-old woman dead, Mandy kept a harsh light on the family despite their sweeping power in the state’s Lowcountry and the threats to her career and mental health.

It was only after her podcast about the family’s unsolved mysteries, Murdaugh Murders, became a runaway sensation that her courage and persistence were validated, and the walls finally closed in on Alex – who, on Friday, was sentenced to consecutive life terms in prison.

As her phone buzzed with notifications from family, friends and fans expressing their shock, we discussed what the verdict means for Alex’s other crimes, how the prosecution won without actual smoking guns, and whether good ol’ boys everywhere should be running scared.



Alex Murdaugh is sentenced on Thursday. Photograph: Reuters

The last time [we spoke](#), the national media was slowly tuning into what had been the biggest story in our community for years. Now OJ Simpson [is weighing in](#).

I'm so glad that the world caught on to this. People were so disgusted by the idea that a privileged white man who spent his life stealing from the less fortunate was treated with kid gloves when a Black or brown person in his predicament certainly wouldn't have gotten a six-week trial.

There was a minute there when the cable news pundits had me believing there could be a hung jury.

Every day I'd get texts from friends and family who were like, 'Are you sure he did it?' Just the fact that Alex could get the benefit of the doubt is infuriating. Race is definitely involved here, and every time I mention that people freak out. They just can't wrap their heads around the idea of a prominent white man killing his family. But they believe it so easily when it's somebody of color or with a lot less power or super poor or someone who looks like Cousin Eddie [aka Curtis Smith, a longtime associate Alex is alleged to have hired to kill him in a suicide plot]. I get it. You don't want

someone who looks like he could be your dad to be a murderer. That's scary.

Who wants to believe their dad is capable of this level of domestic violence and emotional abuse?

Those are two huge themes that have gotten so overlooked throughout this case. I never believed Alex and [his wife] Maggie had a healthy relationship. The defense wanted us to believe that it was perfect on the outside, even as Alex was apparently exerting so much control on the inside. I'm not a psychologist, but he just strikes me as such a narcissist.

One thing I found especially self-indulgent was the folksy act he put on in the dock, in a clear effort to win over rural jurors.

Alex behaves like he believes his best skill is talking his way out of anything

I keep using this phrase, but he was gaslighting everybody. I think it's so powerful that these common people of Colleton county were like, 'This is complete bullshit.' His lawyers, Dick Harpootlian and Jim Griffin, underestimated their common sense. Six weeks of testimony, and they came back in less than three hours. Also, Alex was a very difficult client.

I found it telling that Dick didn't call Alex to the stand. He said Alex "wants to take the stand", sounding deflated and looking resigned.

Alex behaves like he believes his best skill is talking his way out of anything. He's done it his entire career. So of course he was going to stand because he believes he can still fool everybody.

But the lines about Maggie! "Such a feminine person" ... "a girl" who "became a boy's mom". He went on and on about what a pain in the ass she was while pregnant.

One of my girlfriends who just had a baby was like, "I hope that's not how my husband remembers me 20 years later." He just could not fake being a

normal person. He really tried.

I thought the prosecution did a masterly job of marrying Alex's pathological lying to his abuse of power: the police blue lights in his private car, the assistant solicitor badge he kept out at all times, etc.

I applaud the strategy very much, but at the same time I want the attorney general's office to fucking go after that. There needs to be an investigation into the office of SC solicitor Duffie Stone, who empowered Alex all this time.

Even after seeing video of Alex at the hospital after the boat crash, I totally missed the badge hanging out of his pocket, as if he left his fly purposefully undone.

But it's also hard for prosecutor Creighton Waters, who's a part of the same system, to call that out. Because then it gets into a territory of, "Do I look bad because I'm part of the same system?" But I'm really glad he showed the jury this was a guy who had every advantage, including a badge and blue lights.

On the bright side, this is over for Alex's defense team. And yet I can't help but feel a bit for Jim Griffin, who seemed like he gave it his best.

Yeah, Dick Harpootlian has made his name and his millions and can go to Slovenia and be with his wife, US Ambassador Jamie Lindler Harpootlian. But I always got the sense from Jim that he wanted to believe Alex was his friend. And I think that he was fooled.

Well, he's in good company. Alex charmed so many for so long.

The case is a huge wake-up call to people who have been abusing the system and relied on old traditions and horrible ways of thinking. Pretty much all of Alex's victims are Black people, children and the infirm. They're getting justice, too.



Alex Murdaugh listens as attorneys speak during a bond hearing in 2021.
Photograph: Lewis M Levine/AP

What do you make of him 'fessing up to what seemed like *every* fraud, like there aren't still cases out there against him?

Liz [Farrell, Matney's writing partner] and I always talk about his habit of admitting to the "lesser" crime. We're still wondering if he faked his \$60,000 a week pill story, because he's still hiding money from fraud victims.

For as pricey as Murdaugh's defense team was on paper, seems like they really cheaped out on experts. Ripped from the yellow pages.

I think the defense spent more money and time on the court of public opinion – and I don't have any proof of that beyond the bots I saw on Twitter. One day, they'd be anti-Judge Newman; the next, it was Creighton who was awful. I'd look at these accounts and see most of them were started in the past six months. You can't underestimate the power of Jim Griffin and Dick Harpootlian. Dick could totally call Joe Biden for a favor. Amanda Loveday, who ran PR for Alex, was at a White House Christmas party. These people are very, very connected.

[Alex's elder son] Buster, though, would appear to be left even more adrift. Not only is his Dad now behind bars on consecutive life sentences, but the verdict likely further complicates his ability to inherit family assets.

I still don't know what I think about Buster. Learning so much about how his father and family operate – the passing of the John Grisham novel, which got Alex another contraband charge – it shows they think they're above the law and can do whatever. At the end of the day I don't think Buster ever had any normalcy. It's amazing that he's still with us.

Even though this closes a chapter, there's still so much we don't know – like what really happened to Buster's former peer [Stephen Smith](#), and who killed the family housekeeper [Gloria Satterfield](#), and how the legal fraud really adds up.

That's something I was thinking about this morning as I was getting ready for the day, not expecting that it would end with a guilty verdict. I really didn't. I was preparing to be a nervous wreck all weekend while waiting for a jury verdict.

What do you make of them coming back so quickly?

It's the biggest middle finger to a system that has oppressed so many people, dating back to slavery. I said from day one, the best story usually wins – which was the lesson I took away from the OJ trial. In this case, you had to do so many mental backflips to embrace a scenario where someone other than Alex murdered Maggie and Paul. And the defense never presented another story that made sense.

This interview has been edited and condensed for brevity and clarity

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The partnership is expected to report an annual pre-tax loss before one-offs of about £50m. Photograph: Paul Grover/PA

[John Lewis](#)

[Analysis](#)

Five reasons why John Lewis and Waitrose are having a tough year

[Sarah Butler](#)

Financial woes, cost of living crisis and tougher competition are among problems that have led to expected second ever full-year loss

Sat 4 Mar 2023 03.00 EST

It is tough times at the checkout of [John Lewis](#) and its sister chain, Waitrose, as the staff-owned retail group is expected to report its second ever full-year loss later this month.

The retailer is parting ways with the head of its department store chain and the celebrity chef Heston Blumenthal, who cooked up orange-filled Christmas puddings and other eccentric treats for Waitrose. Things have got so sticky even the staff golf course is [for the chop](#).

So what has gone wrong for middle England's favourite retail group? Have its fans switched to [Aldi](#) or been tempted away by a resurgent Marks & Spencer?

1 Financial woes

John Lewis Partnership is expected to report an annual pre-tax loss before one-offs of about £50m, compared with a profit of £181m last year, largely owing to the difficulties at its supermarkets.

One-offs such as write-downs on the value of some of its supermarkets and head office restructuring, are expected to add £100m to losses, according to the independent retail analyst Nick Bubb.

He predicts sales for the group will fall slightly to £10.6bn from £10.8bn a year ago, hit by a slide at [Waitrose](#), which has been losing market share since September 2021.

The partnership has talked about efforts to keep costs down, laying off thousands of staff at head office in recent years, even turning down lights and heating to save money. It is understood that investments in stores has been put on hold in recent months.

However, the group still carries heavier costs than rivals, not least from its array of staff benefits such as hotels, sailing club [yachts](#), and the soon to be sold golf course in Maidenhead, Berkshire.

The partnership had £1.4bn of debt at its last financial year end, including leases and pension obligations, against turnover of almost £11bn but £200m of that was due to be repaid late last year and £300m must be refinanced or paid down by 2025.

The group is a partnership, which means it is owned by its employees. So it cannot issue new shares to the public to raise money. With debt markets tight, the partnership is heavily reliant on its cash resources to invest during tricky times.

2 Cost of living crunch

With John Lewis and Waitrose at the more expensive end of the high street, the stores have had a tough year as inflation means spare cash for shopping is in short supply.

Waitrose's sales have been falling as its customers try out discount stores such as Aldi and [Lidl](#).



John Lewis's golf club in Cookham, Berkshire, is up for sale to save costs. Photograph: Maureen McLean/REX/Shutterstock

During past economic crises, Waitrose customers switched away from dining out to buying its ready-meals. This time, those with the spare cash have been keen to spend it on nights out after the long period of social exclusion.

Waitrose's Essentials budget range, introduced during the credit crunch in 2009, is designed to help the chain hold on to more price-conscious shoppers. The retailer only recently upped advertising of Essentials alongside £100m of price cuts. Some analysts say Waitrose has moved too slowly to adapt and could have lost shoppers to rivals.

James Bailey, the boss of Waitrose, says: "Of all the things customers want us to spend money on, price is not in the top three or four. However, all customers are feeling the pinch." He suggests that price cuts last year may not have made much difference to shoppers but "now is a great time".

In an attempt to cut costs, the supermarket also trimmed back the benefits of its loyalty card, ditching free coffee in 2020 and newspapers last year, but was recently forced to bring back the hot drinks to help keep shoppers on side.

The department stores were ready for the cost of living crisis, having introduced the Anyday budget range in 2021. Sales have gone well – particularly on fashion – and the range has attracted younger shoppers. However, overall sales growth at the department store is expected to be low: pricey items such as technology, beds and sofas have been affected by weak consumer confidence.

3 Online step back

John Lewis has proved a huge success online, with digital sales accounting for 60% of the department store's sales at the half year. However, click-based trade is slowing after the pandemic boom. Half-year sales at the department stores rose just 3% despite underlying price inflation flattering the numbers. The rising costs of deliveries and processing returns is likely to be biting into profits.

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At Waitrose all of the sales decline over the past year is understood to have come online, which now accounts for just over 12% of sales, down from a peak of 15%, as shoppers have changed their habits now that fears of Covid-19 infection have subsided.

4 Tougher competition

John Lewis's rivals have stepped up a gear.

On food, Marks & Spencer has cut prices on essentials and broadened its ranges to appeal to a more family audience. Its tie-up with Ocado may have struggled, but M&S replacing Waitrose as the online specialist's partner generated lots of publicity and meant new competition online.

On clothing too, M&S seems to have regained its mojo, benefiting from a general switch to longer lasting and more formal clothing, and tie-ups with other brands.

That's meant more competition for middle-aged, middle-class shoppers for John Lewis.

On homewares, Dunelm and Ikea have been gunning for the John Lewis market. Ikea's move on to London's Oxford Street later this year will only up the ante after it invested heavily in online.

Dunelm, meanwhile, has been opening stores and is keen on price, at a time when that matters more to shoppers.

5 Stalled strategy

With department stores challenged by the rise of online shopping and cheaper rivals to Waitrose rapidly opening stores where will the group find growth?

Small stores – for both Waitrose and John Lewis – have been talked about as the potential future.

Bailey says “the biggest growth opportunity is convenience stores” but openings have been held up by a lull in investment in recent months.

With the [sudden exit of the department store boss](#) Pippa Wicks this week, the architect of smaller John Lewis outlets, it’s not clear if this plan is still on the cards. More concessions in Waitrose are a possible way forward.

Sharon White, the group’s chair, has flagged up build-to-let flats above Waitrose stores and other property as a potential future revenue stream. The group [struck a £500m deal with the investment firm Abrdn to build 1,000 residential rental homes](#), on three sites. However, some of these sites, such as Ealing, are already being challenged by local people and even the council, suggesting this may not be an easy route to success.

Waitrose is looking for new routes to growth via partnerships that open up access to new customers, and has already joined forces with the [food courier Deliveroo](#) and Dobbies garden centres, but this seems small beer.

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2023.03.04 - Opinion

- Victim or villain: how guilty are the female accomplices of predatory men?
- Sunak is the Michael Corleone of the Tory party – try as he might to break free, he's up to his neck in it
- The joy of mediocrity: we need hobbies, even if we're bad at them, to free us from perfection
- Trouble in paradise: corruption in the Caribbean has become normalised



‘Could these women be understood as brainwashed victims who were acting on the orders of more powerful and threatening men?’ Illustration: Rita Liu/The Guardian

[Women](#)

Victim or villain: how guilty are the female accomplices of predatory men?

Lucinda Rosenfeld

The sentencing of Isabella Pollok, ex-ally of a cult leader, resurfaces thorny questions about the likes of Bonnie Parker and Patty Hearst

Sat 4 Mar 2023 03.00 ESTLast modified on Sat 4 Mar 2023 17.47 EST

It was in her second year of college that a not-quite-20-year-old Sarah Lawrence student, Isabella Pollok, fell under the influence of [Lawrence Ray](#), a cult leader who, for a decade, turned her into his trusted lieutenant in his campaign of terror.

Pollok was [sentenced](#) to 54 months in prison last week for her role in helping Ray abuse a group of vulnerable classmates. While in Ray's thrall, Pollok, who was also his lover, even played prop master at his late-night torture sessions, allegedly fetching the plastic bag that Ray placed over one coercively prostituted cult member's head.

In a shocking new documentary on Hulu, *Stolen Youth*, the film-makers discover a now 30-ish Pollok still defending Ray, who is twice her age, alongside her de facto sister-wife, even after Ray has been arrested and carted off to jail. "When I think about Lawrence, it's like my heart's breaking because he's in prison – innocently," she says as she sits atop a floral bedspread in the New Jersey ranch house where the three set up a home, complete with padlocked refrigerator to prevent being poisoned by imagined adversaries. « It feels like a twilight zone. » (Indeed.)



Bonnie Parker holds a shotgun to Clyde Barrow in this early 1930s photograph. Photograph: PN2

Bonnie Parker was also 19 when, in 1930, she first met seasoned criminal Clyde Barrow in West Dallas. Following Barrow's release from prison in 1932, legend has it that the photogenic duo spent the next and final two years of their lives co-conspiring in a fugitive crime spree that left 13 dead.

Parker, however, never fired a shot. When the couple was finally ambushed by law enforcement in Louisiana, the poetry-writing Parker had already resigned herself to an early death. She expired in a fusillade of bullets in the front seat of her and Barrow's get-away car; the coroner later counted a gruesome 26 holes on her corpse.

To what extent were all these women, really just girls at the time they fell under the influence of homicidal figures, independent actors who should have known better? Could they also be understood as brainwashed victims who were acting on the orders of more powerful and threatening men?

Just as Bonnie Parker became tabloid-famous in her time on account of a series of clowning photos (in one, she [aims a](#) shotgun at her outlaw lover; in another, she packs a revolver [while chomping on a cigar](#)), the young newspaper heiress and Berkeley sophomore Patty Hearst is remembered for the indelible 1974 image of her coolly [wielding a semi-automatic weapon](#) in front of the ragtag Symbionese Liberation Army's cobra flag, a beret angled over her shoulder-length hair.

Yet as the adage goes, appearances can be deceiving. Hearst, who was initially given 35 years for bank robbery (the sentence was later commuted by Jimmy Carter), testified to having been threatened with death, kept locked in a closet for 57 days by the SLA leader, Donald DeFreeze, and repeatedly raped both by him and an SLA member, William "Cujo" Wolfe. But the jury didn't buy the coercion argument, the harshness of their verdict essentially forcing Hearst into the role of co-conspirator.



Patty Hearst in 1974. Photograph: Bettmann/Bettmann Archive

The Stolen Youth documentary makes it clear by its title alone that Pollok was a victim, too. While the prosecution accused Pollok of “collecting money from her abused and trafficked college friends [while] spending luxurious nights at the Pierre Hotel on the Upper East Side ... buying expensive clothing, beauty products and high-end lingerie”, unlike some of her classmates who found the wherewithal to flee while still in their early 20s, Pollok was the very last one to escape Ray’s clutches – if she ever escaped at all.

Recent research on the brain suggests that the prefrontal cortex – which controls everything from making predictions to delaying gratification, organizing one’s thoughts to foreseeing the possible consequences of one’s actions – does not fully mature until the mid 20s. When problem-solving or decision-making, young adults instead rely on the amygdala, which is associated with impulses and emotions.

As such, and while I admit it taxes my powers of empathy to do so, one could even argue that Eve Braun, just 17 when she first crossed paths with the worst man of the 20th century, the 23-years-old Adolf Hitler, was among his many million victims. At the very least, Braun – who spent most

of the war hiding in the Alps reading magazines – sacrificed her life on his behalf; hours after marrying, the two died by suicide together in Hitler’s Berlin bunker as the Red army approached and the Third Reich collapsed.

But if it is easier to forgive the antisocial behavior of barely adult female accomplices, it becomes more difficult to conjure sympathy for mature women like Alison Mack, who [recruited women](#) into the NXIVM cult, or Ghislaine Maxwell, who spent two decades [grooming underaged girls](#) under Jeffrey Epstein’s watch.



Allison Mack was sentenced to three years in prison for her role in manipulating women into sexual relationships with Keith Raniere, the leader of the cult-like group NXIVM. Photograph: Drew Angerer/Getty Images

Both did the bidding of capital-B bad men. The scandals that erupted around their respective participations in a sexual slavery cult-slash-pyramid scheme (Mack) and international sex trafficking ring (Maxwell) more or less bookended the #MeToo movement.

At first, the take-away seemed to be that, given a little power, women could be just as monstrous and entitled as men. (The controversial Oscar contender *Tár* appears to make the same argument.) Yet it bears noting that

both Mack and Maxwell were recruiting and delivering girls not primarily for their own sexual or sadistic pleasure, but on behalf of men they idolized, rendering their own actions not simply evil but, from a certain angle, pathetic as well.

The 2022 documentary [Ghislaine Maxwell: Filthy Rich](#) argues that her involvement with Epstein may have been an unconscious re-enactment of her desperate-to-please early relationship with her father, the tyrannical media baron Robert Maxwell. Court papers filed by the defense in advance of Ghislaine's sentencing further this narrative, recounting how Pere Maxwell once battered his daughter's hand with a hammer for the "crime" of trying to hang a poster in her bedroom. Yet her appalling lack of remorse in the courtroom during her trial suggest a personality ever bit as machiavellian as Epstein himself.

Complicating the question of whether women such as Maxwell deserve any of our pity or only our wrath is the age-old philosophical debate about whether there is such a thing as free will. Or are we all, at our core, the product of our genetic inheritance (not our fault), our early childhood experiences and upbringing (also not our fault), and our brain chemistry (biologically determined and therefore beyond our control)?

As far back as 1886, Frederick Nietzsche spoke of "the crass stupidity of the celebrated conception of free will" in his book *Beyond Good and Evil*. Precisely a century later, British philosopher Galen Strawson wrote in his influential book *Freedom and Belief*: "Surely we cannot be free agents, in the ordinary, strong, true-responsibility-entailing sense, if ... our actions are ultimately wholly determined by 'causes anterior to [our] personal existence'. And surely we can no more be free if ... it is, ultimately, either wholly or partly a matter of chance or random outcome that we and our actions are as they are?"

But if Strawson is correct, the very concept of criminal justice becomes suspect. If none of us bear moral responsibility for our actions, how can society justify punishing those who harm others?

Which brings us back to the question of Pollok's sentencing. Since the documentary was shot, the one-time scholarship student has finally

assumed at least nominal responsibility for her wrongdoing. “I am truly ashamed of my conduct and the pain I caused others,” she wrote the presiding judge. But whether you regard Pollok as victim or villain, you don’t have to be an anti-incarceration activist to wonder if society might be better served by her spending the next half-decade not in the slammer but in some way “giving back”.

Besides, at least for those in possession of a conscience, lingering guilt has a way of being its own lifetime sentence.

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‘Sunak’s task is made harder by daily reminders that the Tories have been in for 13 years, and have spent much of that time veering between chaos, scandal and calamity.’ Photograph: Anadolu Agency/Getty Images

[Opinion](#)**Rishi Sunak**

**Sunak is the Michael Corleone of the
Tory party – try as he might to break
free, he’s up to his neck in it**

[Jonathan Freedland](#)



The return of Boris Johnson, Matt Hancock and Partygate shows that, as the Godfather found, it's almost impossible to escape past sins

Fri 3 Mar 2023 10.49 ESTLast modified on Fri 3 Mar 2023 15.27 EST

When it comes to on-screen charisma, [Rishi Sunak](#) is no Al Pacino, but after the week he's had, he can authentically channel one of the Hollywood legend's most treasured lines. With conviction, he can make like Michael Corleone in The Godfather Part III and hiss: "Just when I thought I was out, they pull me back in."

For Sunak is desperate to break free of the disastrous recent Tory past, but again and again it grabs him by the ankles and yanks him back. A week that began with hopeful talk of a breakthrough with the European Union has ended back on the booze, cake and serial rule-breaking of [Partygate](#).

That's thanks in part to a Friday update from the Commons privileges committee, as it released [new evidence](#) showing that Boris Johnson's own officials were struggling to argue that Downing Street lockdown gatherings were within the rules. One aide talked of a "great gaping hole in the PM's account".

Cue a great Westminster back and forth. Johnson called the report “surreal” because it had cited the work of Sue Gray, the Whitehall veteran who is [set to join](#) Keir Starmer as chief of staff. The committee replied that it had not relied on Gray and had run its own investigation. But that will not quiet the Johnson faction, now in full cry: Jacob Rees-Mogg calls the Gray report a “[leftwing stitch-up](#).” The Daily Mail asks on [its front page](#), “Is this proof the Partygate probe was a Labour plot?”

To answer yes, here’s what you’d have to believe. That Gray ensured the task of investigation fell to her by secretly engineering the recusal of the cabinet secretary Simon Case, the man originally tasked with the Partygate inquiry, presumably by going back in time and installing Case at the Downing Street Christmas get-together that would later require him to [step aside](#).

Indeed, for the Partygate findings to be a cunning Gray-Starmer plot, the mandarin would have had to have wheeled in the suitcase packed with drink, uncorked the bottles and laid out the nibbles – enticing an innocent Johnson and his staff to break lockdown rules they would otherwise have obeyed, all with a view to serving her future Labour boss. It is, shall we say, a bit of a reach.

So we can dismiss the confected outrage of those Tories who might, in truth, be more concerned about the secrets Gray knows thanks to her six years as head of Whitehall’s “department of cover-ups”, the Cabinet Office’s propriety and ethics team. Because it’s not really Labour that is damaged by this appointment, even before you get to the benefit for Starmer of advice from an insider who knows the business of government intimately. It is Sunak who will suffer.



‘Having Hancock’s face splashed everywhere was bad enough, but Sunak has had to endure the return of Boris Johnson himself.’ Photograph: Anadolu Agency/Getty Images

Think of the week the prime minister has had. Monday brought that EU breakthrough over Northern Ireland, the perfect demonstration, Sunak hoped, of the clean break from the Johnson-Truss era he wants to represent, proof that technocratic competence, not flag-waving bluster, gets results. By Thursday, it was back to Partygate. What view voters take of the rights and wrongs of the Gray appointment matters less than that simple fact: we’re talking about, and remembering, the recent Tory past that Sunak yearns to shake off.

And it keeps happening. The middle of the week was consumed with the [100,000 WhatsApp messages](#) of Matt Hancock, the emergence of which provided yet more proof that when it comes to the poorest political judgment in Britain, the former health secretary is the [king of the jungle](#): plenty in Westminster could only marvel at the notion that Hancock thought it wise to trust his deepest secrets to ... [Isabel Oakeshott](#).

The Telegraph has used its scoop to advance the lockdown sceptics’ case, but the clearest takeaway is a reminder of the government’s serial failures on Covid, starting with the seeding of the virus among elderly and

vulnerable people: now we know that Hancock rejected the advice of the chief medical officer to test all residents going into England's care homes.

Having Hancock's face splashed everywhere was bad enough, but Sunak has had to endure the return of Johnson himself. In a [speech on Thursday](#), the former PM pretended to eschew any thoughts of a comeback, demurely insisting it was unlikely he would "need to do anything big in politics again" (and we might linger on that word "need"). But don't be fooled. When [Nadine Dorries suggests](#) that the Gray report is no longer worth the paper it's written on, and seeks to wave aside the privileges committee's new evidence, she is doing it to rehabilitate her old patron.

Even if that were not the goal, the mere presence of the former PM undermines the Sunak project to start afresh. Johnson's words didn't help either, saying he would struggle to vote for Sunak's "Windsor framework", thereby ruining what was meant to be his successor's first major achievement, offering himself as a focus for Tory and DUP discontent and increasing the chances of the very "[Westminster drama](#)" the PM had urged his MPs to avoid.

Sunak wants to do what John Major did in 1990: make voters feel they've got a brand new government, so there's no need to replace it with Labour. But his task is made harder by these daily reminders that the Tories have been in power for 13 years, and have spent much of that time veering between chaos, scandal and calamity.

But there's one specific reason why Sunak cannot escape that legacy. Because, like Michael Corleone, he is up to his neck in it. He was number two in the government during Covid, adding to the disaster with his ludicrous "eat out to help out" scheme, whose chief [achievement was adding](#) to the rate of infection. He stood at Johnson's side during Partygate, even receiving a fixed-penalty notice of his own. He claims a great victory on Northern Ireland trade, but that is merely solving a problem created by the very government in which he served at the highest level.

This week he was telling the people of Northern Ireland that they were in an "[unbelievably special position](#)" of having access to both the UK home

market and the EU single market. “Nobody else has that,” he said. And you know why no one else in the UK has that, Prime Minister? Because you took it away from us, with the catastrophic Brexit you voted for and supported.

Sunak laments his inability to escape the Tory past, but it’s too late. Like the scion of the mythic mafia family, he chose his fate long ago – and now it haunts him.

- Jonathan Freedland is a Guardian columnist

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‘Supportive friends and well-wishers have suggested I take lessons or insisted I could improve if I trained harder ... but I’m happy being a below-average surfer.’ Photograph: Jason O’Brien/AAP

[OpinionHobbies](#)

The joy of mediocrity: we need hobbies, even if we’re bad at them, to free us from perfection

Kerri Duncan

When I focus on getting better at something, it creates room for failure. I want only carefree pleasure from my down time

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Fri 3 Mar 2023 09.00 ESTLast modified on Fri 3 Mar 2023 19.14 EST

I've been surfing for almost 20 years now, but you wouldn't guess it if you watched me. I'm the 30-something-year-old woman frolicking in the whitewash with the little tackers, whooping when I manage to stand up on a wave like a kid cycling for the first time without training wheels. After mornings full of spectacular stacks, I've spent many an afternoon slowly draining saltwater from my brain. And I wouldn't want it any other way.

Supportive friends and well-wishers have suggested I take lessons, offered to be my mentor, or insisted I could improve if I trained harder. The implication is if I'm passionate about something, I should also be proficient. I say thanks, but I'm happy being a below-average surfer.

My career has mainly been in laboratory and medical sciences, which allows little to no room for error. Perfectionism and productivity have been drilled into me from a young age, both directly and diffusely. There has been a consistent cultural undertone of "anything worth doing is worth doing well", and this, combined with a "hustle culture" that equates busyness with success, leads to the expectation that our precious spare time should be spent honing our skills or increasing our output. Anything less than that would be lazy.

Approaching an activity without the dangling pressure of needing to be good at it motivates me to try new things with an open mind

The gig economy and a rise in the uptake of side hustles sparks further encouragement to "monetise our hobbies". While that can certainly be satisfying, and a great way to make some extra cash, it can also be considered an oxymoronic concept. Merriam-Webster's definition of a hobby is "a pursuit outside one's regular occupation engaged in especially for relaxation". Introducing the pressures of selling your services can effectively dull – or completely kill – that all-important "relaxation" factor of a hobby. If we turn everything into a productivity race, our downtime can inadvertently devolve into extra work time.

While I get a sense of fulfilment from developing certain skills, I want to reserve some activities purely for imperfect pleasure. I would go so far as to

say I *need* to reserve some activities purely for imperfect pleasure, for the sake of my mental health. Psychologists have been spruiking the positive effects of hobbies on psychological wellbeing for years; we get those essential happy hormones from losing ourselves in a chosen activity, giving us a sense of meaning and purpose, while being blissfully distracted from everyday stressors.

When I focus too much on getting better at something, it creates room for failure. I don't want to fail in my relaxation time – I just want to go with the flow and soak in the fun. No pressure, only carefree, uncomplicated enjoyment. I simply want to enjoy the ride.

I make clay earrings that often turn out mismatched or lumpy. Yet I still enjoy the production process; the feeling of the clay between my fingertips, the pleasure of creating something uniquely mine. The wholesomeness of taking amorphous lumps of clay and letting my creativity take the reins, organically constructing something beautiful (beauty is in the eye of the beholder, after all).

I'm lucky if my vegetable garden yields enough produce to make one full salad every six months. But I still harvest portions of delight every time a new leaf unfurls or a flower blooms. Watching new life sprout forth from seeds gives me a sense of wonder and pride. And I'm happy – although somewhat begrudgingly – when my dog derives such innocent enrichment from “helping” me dig up the soil.

Approaching an activity without the dangling pressure of needing to be good at it motivates me to try new things with an open mind. A good friend and I recently agreed to try a new activity every month, regardless of how well we thought we'd do at it. This has led to some amusing adventures trialling sword-fighting and tai chi, with our next one booked in as dodgeball. Jiu-jitsu struck a particular chord with her, and she's decided to continue with it. Who cares if we're the worst ones there? The joy is in giving it a go and relishing a fresh experience.

I'm not saying I don't want to put any effort into my recreational pursuits; learning and improving at something provides a fantastic feeling of

accomplishment. It just doesn't have to apply to everything; I don't *need* to improve at something in order to enjoy it. If I find an activity that brings me simple happiness, I can permit myself to treasure it as it is – whether I objectively suck at it or not.

Kerri Duncan is an Adelaide-based [freelance writer](#), scientist and below-average surfer

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



Many Caribbean countries, including the Bahamas, pictured, are found in the lower reaches of the corruption perception index (CPI). Photograph: Ramunas Bruzas/Alamy

[Global development](#)

Trouble in paradise: corruption in the Caribbean has become normalised

[Kenneth Mohammed](#)

The focus is often on rich countries when it comes to corruption initiatives but the situation is so embedded in these islands that it demands greater attention

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Sat 4 Mar 2023 02.00 EST Last modified on Sat 4 Mar 2023 04.30 EST

When Transparency International published its 2022 [corruption perception index](#) (CPI) at the end of January [much was written about some of the rich countries](#) that saw significant falls in their scores. Austria, Canada and Luxembourg were among those who fell, while the UK slipped to its worst-ever position on the index, dropping from a high score of 82 in 2017 to 73 in 2022.

Corruption initiatives worldwide seem to have run aground as the countries perceived as the least corrupt have shown little or no improvement, as seen with Germany, France and Switzerland.

Meanwhile, in the [Caribbean](#) nothing has been said or done about the situation of these countries languishing in the lower echelons of the CPI.

The Caribbean region stretches from the Bahamas to [Trinidad and Tobago](#) and can be said to include non-island countries from Belize to Guyana, Suriname and French Guiana. It is home to some of the wealthiest politicians in the world – yet, the ever-popular posts on social media about

the richest or best paid in the region tend to ignore most of the millionaire and billionaire politicians of Trinidad and Tobago and other islands.

It is interesting to see the net worth of these politicians, and shocking that some were of average wealth, only becoming millionaires or billionaires since taking office. Meanwhile, the citizens who voted them into power have become poorer, more disempowered and more disfranchised.

How did these politicians get so wealthy?

I believe some have done it legitimately, as professionals in other fields. Others have profited as politicians, using insider information and receiving contracts through proxies, such as wives, friends and colleagues, and some through kickbacks and bribes.

One ongoing [corruption case in the region](#) involves Michael Misick, premier of Turks and Caicos, a British overseas territory. Misick [resigned in 2009](#) when a UK commission found a high probability of systemic corruption amounting to £75m in the sale of crown lands.

Misick later fled to Brazil but was extradited in 2014. There have been many similar allegations of corruption in the region over the last five decades, for example in Haiti. And let us not forget the [allegations against Jack Warner](#), former Fifa vice-president and national security minister in a previous Trinidad and Tobago government. He is still [fighting extradition](#) to the US on bribery and corruption charges.

Corruption in the Caribbean has shown no improvement over the last decade as we seem to be content to have set up shop at the bottom of the CPI. In terms of points, with 100 as a perfect score, Barbados dropped from 76 in 2012 to 65 in 2022, the Bahamas from 71 to 64 and St Lucia from 71 to an astonishing 55.

What of the watchdogs charged with leading the anti-corruption fight in this region? The results show they lack meaningful influence in creating change

Some islands have been consistent in achieving low scores on the CPI as democracy continues to be eroded, moving steadfastly to autocracy, where the political and business elite has captured the legislature and law enforcement.

Take the islands ranked poorly in the Caribbean: Cuba, Jamaica, Trinidad and Tobago, Guyana, Suriname, the Dominican Republic and Haiti. There has been no significant improvement over the last decade in any of these countries except for Guyana, which moved up from a score of 28 in 2012 to 40 in 2022. No doubt, its recent [discovery of large oil deposits](#) may send it back down if that wealth is allowed to be exploited by its politicians and by “business experts” from its salivating neighbours.

What of the watchdogs, the social activists, the financial intelligence units, the integrity commissions, the other agencies and organisations charged with leading the anti-corruption fight in this region? The results show they lack meaningful influence in creating change.

Transparency International has, over the last two decades, done an amazing job in bringing awareness to global corruption issues. However, TI itself is not without criticism in the Caribbean region.

One chapter in Trinidad and Tobago came under scrutiny from social and political activists – but with total silence from its head office in Berlin. This was an interesting case. A past chair of the Trinidad chapter, after retiring from the post, went on to accept a position as high commissioner to Jamaica in September 2019. Of course, there was a period in between positions, so not much was read into it, but was the former, and much-loved, West Indies cricketer Deryck Murray oblivious to the optics and the possible perception in accepting what can be perceived as a political appointment?

A [controversial past situation](#) was the appointment of Fern Narcis-Scope as a director of Transparency International Trinidad and Tobago. Scope was a legal officer in the Elections and Boundary Commission (EBC) when the People’s National Movement (PNM) took power in 2015. She was propelled to chief elections officer in September 2017, amid much uproar, especially from the deputy chief elections officer Lena Sahadeo, who filed a freedom of information request to understand why she was overlooked as a

natural successor to the position. This originated with an allegation made in the Senate by opposition member [Wade Mark accusing Narcis-Scope](#) of being related to a PNM minister. This was denied by the EBC.

The EBC under Narcis-Scope was later accused of gerrymandering to create undue advantage for the PNM in 2021. Lawyers for June McKenzie, a resident of Tobago, [accused it of attempting](#) to move boundary lines to sway an election in Tobago.

Narcis-Scope denied any wrongdoing in relation to the commission's report and said it was consistent with the statutorily prescribed procedure.

Transparency International has responded that Narcis-Scope has served her time and is no longer a director (although she remains on its website listed as a director).

The question remains, is the organisation's head office in Berlin oblivious to what transpires in its chapters? It said it has robust procedures for reviewing its chapters, which are independent entities, and also added that Trinidad and Tobago was last reviewed and reaccredited in 2021.

A director of an agency such as Transparency International should at least be beyond reproach of any conflict of interest and not hold political positions. Any chair of Transparency International Trinidad and Tobago should ensure that these situations never occur again. Alas, the modus operandi of most institutions in this country is to simply keep quiet until the well-known [nine-day memory](#) of its citizens soon kicks in; Transparency International seems to be no exception.

Repeatedly, we have seen nepotism, fraud, bribery, kickbacks, conflicts of interest, revolving-door syndrome – all these forms of corruption being normalised in the Caribbean, with absolutely no outrage or protests by the citizens and taxpayers of these islands. Not to mention the utter mismanagement of public funds on vanity projects, awarding unqualified contractors resulting in poor infrastructure, the corrupting influence of political financiers, and the gifting of public contracts to wives, girlfriends, friends, and family.

Sad indeed, as the region has lost that “paradise” title and the once-held ambition to becoming classified as “developed” countries. Sad as well that the complacent citizens are complicit without fully appreciating that fact.

A spokesperson for Transparency International said: “Our national chapters are independent entities, and adhere to Transparency International’s policies, values and principles.

“Serious concerns regarding a chapter’s misconduct or allegations of unethical practices can be raised through two channels available to the public. Concerns may be communicated directly to the chapter itself, or can also be raised to the board ethics committee of Transparency International, with contacts and guidance available on our website [here](#). In the event that concerns are raised about a Board Ethics Committee member, that person would recuse themselves from the case and the Board Ethics Committee will proceed as a panel.

“In addition to this, the Transparency International secretariat has a robust internal system in which we regularly check the health of our national chapters as well as the situation in terms of integrity complaints. The Trinidad and Tobago chapter underwent its last review in 2021 and was reaccredited having thoroughly undergone the reaccreditation process.”

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2023.03.04 - Around the world

- [Ohio train derailment Plan to incinerate soil from crash is 'horrific', says expert](#)
- [Exclusive British health worker shot multiple times in Iran protests, injuries show](#)
- ['The tip of the iceberg' Author Kimberlé Crenshaw warns against rightwing battle over critical race theory](#)
- [Space End 'colonial' approach to exploration, scientists urge](#)
- [Covid lab theory WHO calls on US to share information on virus origins after China claims](#)



A view of the site of the derailment site in East Palestine, Ohio.
Photograph: Alan Freed/Reuters

[Ohio train derailment](#)

Plan to incinerate soil from Ohio train derailment is ‘horrifying’, says expert

Soil is being sent to a nearby incinerator with a history of clean air violations, raising fears the chemicals will be redistributed

[Tom Perkins](#)

Sat 4 Mar 2023 02.00 ESTLast modified on Sat 4 Mar 2023 02.02 EST

Contaminated soil from the site around the East Palestine train wreck in [Ohio](#) is being sent to a nearby incinerator with a history of clean air violations, raising fears that the chemicals being removed from the ground will be redistributed across the region.

The new plan is “horrifying”, said Kyla Bennett, a former Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) official now with the Public Employees for

Environmental Responsibility non-profit. She is one among a number of public health advocates and local residents who have slammed Norfolk Southern and state and federal officials over the decision.

“Why on earth would you take this already dramatically overburdened community and ship this stuff a few miles away only to have it deposited right back where it came from?” Bennett asked.

Incinerating the soil is especially risky because some of the contaminants that residents and independent chemical experts fear is in the waste, like dioxins and [PFAS](#), haven’t been tested for by the EPA, and they do not incinerate easily, or cannot be incinerated.

A Norfolk Southern train carrying vinyl chloride used to produce PVC plastic derailed on 3 February in the small industrial town of 4,700 people, located at the edge of the Appalachian hills in Ohio.

As the fire threatened to ignite tankers full of the chemical days later, emergency responders, fearing a major explosion, conducted a controlled burn of the substance.

Environmental researchers say the combustion of vinyl chloride almost certainly created dioxins, a highly toxic chemical that can remain in the environment for years. However, the EPA has resisted calls to test for it, and the agency removed from its website the results of its in-depth soil analyses, so it’s unclear which chemicals are in the soil.

Chemicals like dioxins must be incinerated at extremely high temperatures, and the combustion of some substances can be difficult or unpredictable during incineration, said Carsten Prasse, an environmental health professor at Johns Hopkins University who focuses on risk science. Those issues are generating uncertainty about the plan’s safety.

“My concern is basically do we just translate the issue that’s right now in the soil into another medium by blowing it into the air?” he asked. “That is not necessarily the case, but I’m not sure that we can exclude this at this point, so it is an issue.”

The ground also likely contains PFAS, informally called “forever chemicals” because they do not naturally break down, and no human-made method to destroy the compounds has been fully developed.

“The effectiveness of incineration to destroy PFAS compounds and the tendency for formation of fluorinated or mixed halogenated organic byproducts is not well understood,” the EPA [has written](#).

Still, it is putting residents’ health at risk by sending potentially PFAS-contaminated soil to the incinerator, Bennett said.

“The most important thing in my mind is the human health and health of the environment, so right now that should be priority number one, and things like this fly in the face of basic human decency and science,” she added.

The incinerator, owned by Heritage Thermal Services, is already burning PFAS waste from the Department of Defense, which prompted a federal lawsuit from a coalition of local environmental groups. Heritage also faced an [investigation](#) and [enforcement action](#) from the EPA in 2015 after officials determined the facility had violated the Clean Air Act nearly 200 times between 2010 and 2014.

Among the chemicals that had been released at dangerous levels was dioxin, and among the issues cited by the EPA were a failure by Heritage to maintain a required minimum temperature, raising questions about whether the facility can handle more dioxin and PFAS waste.

The facility has also recorded air quality violations in eight of the last 12 quarters, EPA [records show](#).

Local environmental groups have been fighting with Heritage over its emissions since the incinerator was built in the 1990s, said Amanda Kiger, director of River Valley Organizing. She has been assisting residents in East Palestine about 15 miles north, but lives near the incinerator in East Liverpool, both of which are in Columbiana county.

“[Environmental officials] are just dumping more shit on Columbiana county,” Kiger said. “They say, ‘We already poisoned them so it doesn’t

matter if we poison them more.’”

In a statement to news outlets, Heritage said it is “providing support at the site in accordance with the cleanup plan approved by government agencies with jurisdiction over the response to the event”.

East Palestine’s waste disposal has raised fresh questions about the disposal of toxic substances. Some of the waste is being sent to incinerators around Ohio, while about 1.5m gallons of wastewater is being injected into wells deep into the Earth’s crust near Houston. Deep wells can leak waste into groundwater, and are thought to cause earthquakes.

Meanwhile, some contaminated soil was shipped to a Michigan landfill with a history of discharging PFAS into a public sewer system. A state-of-the-art incinerator in Arkansas is likely equipped to more safely handle the East Palestine waste, Kiger said.

“But how do you say, ‘Not in my backyard – give it to someone else’?” she asked. “They got us fighting each other.”

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



Some pellets were removed in Iran and two more were removed in the UK, but five remain in his body.

[Iran](#)

British health worker shot multiple times in Iran protests, injuries show

Exclusive: British-Iranian man says he was attacked after protesting against an assault on a teenage girl by security services

This story contains graphic images

[Patrick Wintour](#)

Sat 4 Mar 2023 02.00 EST

A British-Iranian health worker who joined anti-regime street protests in Tehran still has five shotgun pellets lodged in his body after being fired at repeatedly by Iranian security forces at point-blank range.

It is thought the security officers were using shotguns to fire buckshot cartridges containing multiple pellets that then spread through the victim's body.

The brutality of the assault on the man raises further disturbing questions about the way in which the protests were policed, including the willingness of the security forces to use such buckshot ammunition at close quarters with the intention to kill.

The individual cannot be named for his own safety, but has been interviewed by the Guardian. Two senior British doctors who saw him in hospital confirmed his injuries were consistent with his account.

The man went to Iran last October to visit his family and became involved in the demonstrations. He was attacked at the end of the month after he protested at the way in which the security services were assaulting a teenage girl in Shariati Street, one of the main streets in Tehran.



The man said he became involved in a protest in Tehran when he visited family there last October. Photograph: AP

He says: “I nearly died in the process of treatment and had multiple complications such as [with my] ileum, blood clots or low [blood oxygen] saturation as well as fractures to my ribs. I only survived because fearless people helped me on the scene and brave doctors in Iran who took extreme risks for my survival.”

Multiple pellets were removed in Iran, and a further two removed during painful operations in the UK, but five remain in his body, some so deeply lodged that their removal may endanger vital nerves. According to X-rays undertaken in the UK, these consist of one in his leg, one in his arm and three around his knee. An MRI scan on his knee three months after the assault showed extensive bony contusions. He is still off work and unable to drive.

According to the man, the shooting happened after he started to walk away, unable to help the protesting teenager. He says he was hit by a plainclothes officer wielding a police baton. As he lay on the floor unarmed, and slipping out of consciousness, he says he recalls at least two officers were shooting him with semi-automatic shotguns.

They fired seven rounds of ammunition containing buckshot pellets into different parts of his body including his chest under his left arm, his right leg and back. He claims the police had intended to shoot him in the face but he protected himself by raising his arm, leading to the bullet going into the upper back of his arm. Photos taken hours after the attack show some of the gaping bullet wounds in his body were 2in to 3in wide due to the proximity with which he had been shot. At no point before firing did they issue a warning or ask questions, he says.



Some of the man's wounds after police allegedly fired seven rounds of ammunition into different parts of his body. Photograph: Supplied

Bleeding profusely, one of his main wounds was dressed using a scarf provided by a girl on the demonstration and another one closed by a car-cleaning cloth that he administered himself. He then took a taxi to a family home. The remainder of his wounds were treated for five-and-a-half hours at the home by a team of doctors that he knew from his professional background.

He had decided not to go to the hospital to have the wounds treated, fearing that once his name was on record he would be arrested by the police. Authorities have recently ruled that any patient needs to be registered with a national identity number before treatment. His dual nationality would have exacerbated his predicament and could have led to accusations that he was a British spy, he feared.

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In total he was treated for 17.5 hours, and according to one of the doctors that attended him, he came close to death.

He said he left Iran on his passport still not at that point knowing the number of bullets inside his body, and that he had been unable to return to work.

Richard Kuper, an orthopaedic consultant who viewed the injuries in the UK, said in a letter seen by the Guardian: “It does appear that he was assaulted in a way that [shows] the Iranian security services clearly were trying to end his life. It seems they nearly succeeded and if it had not been for the management received by a friend he may well not be here today.”

A second consultant who saw him wrote that the X-rays show he had multiple bullets embedded subcutaneously. “Luckily all the bullets have been around the knee but not on the knee joint itself,” the consultant added.

Now back in the UK, the victim added: “I would regard this treatment of an unarmed and non-violent protester such as myself as equivalent to a war crime. My treatment was really extreme and my best guess is that I am not the only person who has been hit like that, but maybe not every one was lucky enough to survive to report how they have been treated.”



Kimberlé Crenshaw at her home in New York. She's a trailblazer of the critical race theory. Photograph: Jasmine Clarke/The Guardian

[US politics](#)

‘Just the tip of the iceberg’: Kimberlé Crenshaw warns against rightwing battle over critical race theory

Exclusive: Author and academic cautions pushback against racial justice education feeds revival of segregationist policies

[Gloria Oladipo](#) in New York

[@gaoladipo](#)

Sat 4 Mar 2023 02.00 EST Last modified on Sat 4 Mar 2023 02.02 EST

The professor who is [a leading voice](#) on critical race theory has warned that the rightwing battle against racial justice education not only threatens US democracy, but encourages a revival of segregationist values and policies.

Kimberlé Crenshaw is among top American academics and authors recently [stripped from](#) the latest draft of the advanced placement (AP) African American studies course being piloted in US high schools, after Florida's rightwing governor, [Ron DeSantis](#), [led](#) an aggressive backlash [against it](#).

The Columbia University and UCLA law professor and co-founder of the African American Policy Forum thinktank, believes that the escalations [against racial history](#) teaching, in Florida [and elsewhere](#) represent “the tip of the iceberg” of rightwing efforts to retract the progress since the civil rights era and push America towards authoritarianism.

“Are [schools] on the side of the neo-segregationist faction? Or are [they] going to stick with the commitments that we've all celebrated for the last 50, 60 years?” Crenshaw asked, referring to headway made on equal opportunities since the 1960s.

“The College Board fiasco, I think, is just the tip of the iceberg. There are a lot of interests that have to make this decision,” she said.

The College Board, the organization that administers college readiness exams and AP courses for high schoolers to earn college credits, [denied bending](#) to political pressure [amid accusations](#) that the curriculum has been watered down.

But in [what many viewed](#) as a response to DeSantis's ban, the work of Crenshaw and other high-profile progressive Black figures, such as [Ta-Nehisi Coates](#), were relegated from required reading to “optional” within the course.



People hold signs during a gathering outside a bookstore where the Florida governor was expected to be signing copies of his book. Photograph: Marco Bello/Reuters

Several topics, including intersectionality, queer studies and the Black Lives Matters movement, were downgraded. The new version of the course now suggests Black conservatism as a [research project idea](#).

DeSantis, who will probably run for president in 2024, [claimed the course](#) violated state law and “lacks educational value”.

Even apart from outrage at states moving to ban the course outright, if the edited version ends up being the course’s final form when it is [set to launch fully in 2024](#), Crenshaw cautions that states teaching the significantly pared-down version will see its students earning the same credits as those studying the fuller version that includes the kind of contemporary and intersectional material she views as vital.

Making such core topics optional “is exactly the same structure of segregation”, she said. “It’s like ‘we’re going to create this so that the anti-woke [camp] will permit states to decide whether they want the segregated version, or whether they want a more fully representative and inclusive version,’” said Crenshaw.

Crenshaw is [widely known](#) for her activism and scholarship on two essential schools of thought on anti-Black racism. She is a trailblazer in [critical race theory](#), which explores the persistence of systemic racism in US legal institutions, pioneered by law professor [Derrick Bell](#). And she coined the term [intersectionality](#), [in 1989](#), describing how different identities such as race, gender and sexuality cut across each other and overlap.

And from the previous draft last fall to the current version of the AP course, the key word “systemic” disappeared entirely and the word “intersectionality” went from several to a lone mention.



Thousands of protesters walk in a peaceful manner across the Brooklyn Bridge holding signs in June 2020. Photograph: Ira L Black/Corbis/Getty Images

Crenshaw said that the “frightening” choice in the new AP course to make contemporary lessons optional follows a similar logic to how corporations navigated Jim Crow segregation.

Crenshaw noted that Donald Trump and the right’s Make America Great Again ([Maga](#)) [extremism](#) is directly linked to the College Board’s decision

– and further back to strategies used during decades of [racial segregation laws](#) that prevailed from [post-Reconstruction](#) to the 1960s.

“One of the truly, bone-chillingly frightening things about the aspiration to ‘make America great again’ that’s amplified by what’s happening with the College Board is that one of the most sustained features of segregation in the past was the fact that businesses were not only enablers, they facilitated segregation,” she said, driven by the profit motive and the white supremacy movement.

“So when businesses and segregation were aligned, it was a chokehold on Black freedom aspirations,” she said.

Crenshaw spoke to the Guardian from the sunlit living room of her New York home. A nearby desk that Crenshaw calls the “graveyard” is stacked with commonly banned books – books that [Crenshaw herself hands out](#) as part of her Books Unbanned tour, such as [Toni Morrison’s The Bluest Eye](#).

It’s called ‘make America great again’. So what is it about this America now that this faction finds wanting?

She urges a stronger, concerted pushback to this latest manifestation of racist history. “What was brilliant about the civil rights movement is that they really pressured national interests, corporate interests, to break with their policies of simply facilitating segregation in the south,” she said.

Crenshaw believes that the College Board development reflects just one part of a continuous strategy from the right to target and disenfranchise minority groups.

“It’s called ‘make America great again’. So what is it about this America now that this faction finds wanting?” she asked.

“The energy and power structure of the Maga [movement] is really this desire for a time where there isn’t a sense of ‘I have to share this country with people who don’t look like me, [and] what we are born into was never an even playing field,’” she said.

So when the “idea of greatness” harks back to the time of racial tyranny, she noted, far-right forces attempt to forgo the teaching of said history, so that “future generations have no tools, no exposure, no ability to critique the present as a reflection of the past”.

Today’s most influential Republicans have made inclusive education a target and taken the supreme court further [to the right](#), undermining [other democratic institutions](#), as well as playing down the [6 January 2021 insurrection](#) where extremist Trump supporters tried to stop the certification of Joe Biden’s victory over Trump and some carried [Confederate flags inside](#) the US Capitol after breaking in.

In Crenshaw’s view, this is all with the goal of transforming the “decades-long journey towards greater social justice” into what the right admonishes as “wokeness” – which is in fact the encouraging of racial justice and equity.

If parents can be convinced that there is a wrong happening in public schools, they might be convinced to agree to the dismantling of public education across the board

“Wokeness has become the oppression, not the centuries of enslavement and genocide, and imperialism that has shaped the lives of people of color, in ways that continue into the present,” said Crenshaw.

Crenshaw traces the aggressive disinformation campaigns about critical race theory to a [September 2020 executive order](#) passed by then president Donald Trump that restricted federal agencies and contractors from providing diversity and equity training.

“When that happened it was a five star alarm for me. Because if this can happen with the stroke of a pen, it means that our entire infrastructure that we’ve built since Brown [v Board] is weakened,” said Crenshaw, noting the landmark supreme court case that prohibited segregation in US public schools, adding that [several elite universities](#) rushed to comply with Trump’s mandate.

Soon after, she became acutely aware that Trump and activist Republicans were twisting the term critical race theory and critiquing Black history taught in schools, or [slamming research](#) such as the New York Times' [1619 project](#) in order to [spread moral panic](#).

“The ban on anti-racism is so profound, that even the story of a kindergarten or first grade integrating an all-white school runs counter to [the new laws],” said Crenshaw, referring to the memoir of activist Ruby Bridges, the [first Black child to integrate](#) an elementary school in the American south in 1960.



‘This court stands poised to really gut the entire civil rights infrastructure that was built by blood, sweat and tears,’ says Crenshaw. Photograph: Jasmine Clarke/The Guardian

“So, white kids’ feelings are more important than black kids’ reality.”

She continued: “They got their marching orders and into the school boards they went, and into the legislatures they went.”

She warned: “If parents can be convinced that there is a wrong happening in public schools, they might be convinced to agree to the dismantling of public education across the board.”

Colleges and universities have faced similar assault, Crenshaw noted, as [professors are targeted](#) under state laws.

Crenshaw further laments the risks of conservatives' steady takeover of the supreme court and the dismantling of federal [voting rights protection](#) and [threat to affirmative action](#) in higher education.

“This court stands poised to really gut the entire civil rights infrastructure that was built by blood, sweat and tears,” said Crenshaw.

Overall, Crenshaw exhorts Democrats and the media to employ much more vigor and urgency in addressing escalating attacks on US institutions, noting that many news outlets frame “the push towards authoritarianism as a [mere] rebrand”.

“It was wishful thinking to believe that once the campaign was over, this was going to go away,” said Crenshaw, referring to the [Biden-Harris victory](#) in [the 2020 election](#).

But Crenshaw remains buoyed by hope that the next generation can overcome attempts at retrenchment from the far right: “This is the next generation’s lap to run. And we’ve got to hand them a baton that they can carry.”

In the meantime, Crenshaw says there must be more acknowledgment of what’s at stake.

“At some point, there has to be a recognition that we’re fighting for the soul of the country,” she said.



Humans should endeavour to be ‘gentle explorers’ of space. Pictured: the Milky Way. Photograph: Thilina Kaluthotage/NurPhoto/REX/Shutterstock

[Space](#)

End ‘colonial’ approach to space exploration, scientists urge

Focus should shift away from seeking to exploit discoveries on other planets, researchers say

[Nicola Davis](#) *Science correspondent*

[@NicolaKSDavis](#)

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Humans boldly going into space should echo the guiding principle of Captain Kirk’s Star Trek crew by resisting the urge to interfere, researchers have said, stressing a need to end a colonial approach to exploration.

Nasa has made no secret of its desire to mine the moon for metals, with China also keen to extract lunar resources – a situation that has been called a new space race.

But Dr Pamela Conrad of the Carnegie Institution of Science said the focus should shift away from seeking to exploit discoveries.

Speaking ahead of a panel event on Saturday on the ethics of space exploration at the American Association for the Advancement of Science (AAAS) meeting in Washington DC, she said: “If we were willing to seize that as not just a possibility, but an imperative then oddly enough, the Star Trek series and culture becomes a prime directive for how we could explore space: seeking not to interfere.”

In the Star Trek series, the Prime Directive, or General Order 1, of Starfleet Command sets out that the Starfleet should not interfere with the social, cultural or technological development of any other planet.

Conrad said that rather than setting out to own or take resources from space, humans should endeavour to be “gentle explorers”.

“Regardless of who or what is out there, that attitude of exploration being almost synonymous with exploitation gives one a different perspective as you approach to the task,” she said.

“Because if something that’s not here [on Earth] is seen as a resource, just ripe to be exploited, then that [perpetuates] colonialism.”

Conrad said such attitudes matter because a colonial approach can impinge on the rights of others to explore – whether in space itself or by looking at it from Earth.

Researchers have previously argued that light pollution creates just such a problem, with low-orbit satellites threatening to [hinder the ability for astronomers to make new discoveries](#), and lighting associated with urban expansion and the use of LEDs making it increasingly difficult to pick [out the constellations when stargazing](#).

The latter, some have argued, [amounts to cultural genocide](#) as the stars, and the ability to observe them, play a key role in many indigenous traditions and knowledge systems.

Dr Hilding Neilson, a Mi'kmaq person and a scientist at the Memorial University of Newfoundland and Labrador, who will also take part in the AAAS panel, said that in Canada Indigenous peoples had rights and responsibilities to unceded and treaty land, with the absence of a height limit, meaning those concerns extend to the skies above.

What's more, he said Indigenous people had deep connections with bodies such as the moon.

“Part of that connection is inherent to the culture and the way of living and way of knowing,” he said, adding any damage to such bodies was therefore a concern.

As a result, Neilson said those working on space missions, such as the Nasa Artemis programme – which seeks to establish a long-term presence on the moon and eventually send humans to Mars – should engage with Indigenous people in advance.

“Right now when we look at the moon in terms of the space missions and colonisation it is very much as a dead object to be conquered. And that's not how many Indigenous peoples see it,” he said.

“So when we go [and] do things like mining on the moon, are we creating harm and are we essentially cheering on the history of colonialism in ways that are harmful to some peoples?”

He also stressed the need for a move away from rhetoric around “building colonies” on the moon or on other planets.

“I've actually sat and listened to a CEO of a very large company talking about how going to space is the same [as] when people settled what is now Quebec,” he said, adding that stance not only glorified colonisation and its history but ignored the negative impacts of space colonisation.

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



Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus of the World Health Organization has called on countries to share any information they have on the origins of Covid-19. Photograph: Cyril Zingaro/EPA

[Coronavirus](#)

WHO calls on US to share information on Covid-19 origins after China lab claims

World Health Organization's director general says the politicisation of research into Covid's origins was making the scientific work harder

Agence France-Presse

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The [World Health Organization](#) has urged all countries to reveal what they know about the origins of Covid-19, after claims from several US government agencies that a Chinese lab leak was behind the disease were furiously denied by Beijing.

“If any country has information about the origins of the pandemic, it’s essential for that information to be shared with WHO and the international scientific community,” the WHO director general, Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, said on Friday.

The FBI director, Christopher Wray, [told Fox News on Tuesday](#) that his agency had now assessed the source of the Covid-19 pandemic was “most likely a potential lab incident in Wuhan”.

The first infections from coronavirus were recorded in late 2019 in the Chinese city, which hosts a virus research laboratory. Chinese officials have denied the [FBI](#) claim, calling it a smear campaign against Beijing.

Tedros stressed that the WHO did not wish to apportion blame, but wanted to “advance our understanding of how this pandemic started so we can prevent, prepare for and respond to future epidemics and pandemics”.

He said the politicisation of the origins research was making the scientific work harder and the world less safe as a result.

In 2021, the UN’s health agency set up the Scientific Advisory Group for the Origins of Novel Pathogens (Sago) to look into the origins of the pandemic.

“WHO continues to call for China to be transparent in sharing data and to conduct the necessary investigations and share the results,” said Tedros, adding that he had written and spoken to top Chinese leaders on multiple occasions.

“Until then, all hypotheses on the origins of the virus remain on the table.”

The comments from Wray came after [a report earlier this week said the US Department of Energy](#) had determined that a Chinese lab leak was the most likely cause of the Covid-19 outbreak. However, this assessment was made with “low confidence”.

Other agencies within the US intelligence community believe the virus emerged naturally.

Maria Van Kerkhove, the WHO's Covid-19 technical lead, said the organisation had reached out to the US mission in Geneva for more information.

So far, however, they did not have access to the data on which the US reports were based, said Van Kerkhove.

“It remains vital that that information is shared”, to help move the scientific studies forward, she added.

Tedros said there was a moral imperative to find out how the pandemic started, for the sake of the millions who lost their lives to Covid-19 and those living with long Covid.

More than 6.8m Covid-19 deaths and more than 758m confirmed cases have been recorded by the WHO. The organisation acknowledges that the true toll is far higher.

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2023/mar/04/who-calls-on-us-to-share-information-on-covid-19-origins-after-china-lab-claims>

Table of Contents

[The Guardian.2023.03.05 \[Sun, 05 Mar 2023\]](#)

[Headlines monday 27 february 2023](#)

[Live Rishi Sunak and Ursula von der Leyen expected to agree new Northern Ireland Brexit deal](#)

[Brexit MPs must have vote on NI deal – Theresa Villiers](#)

[Police Officers should be given power to charge suspects, say chiefs in England](#)

[Live Ofgem cuts energy price cap to £3,280, but bills still set to rise in April](#)

[Energy bills UK price cap falls to £3,280 from April](#)

[2023.02.27 - Spotlight](#)

[Oscar hustings Why Everything Everywhere All at Once should win best picture](#)

[‘Studio 54 was based on status and money’ Post-punk legend](#)

[Kate Fagan on her hipster-baiting classic](#)

[‘I’ll always be a bad feminist!’ Roxane Gay on love, success – and upsetting Piers Morgan](#)

[Dining across the divide US special ‘We were on the brink of an uncomfortable conversation’](#)

[2023.02.27 - Opinion](#)

[Labour dreams of a slightly better Britain. But a truly great country is within reach – I’ve lived there](#)

[I can’t put things off until an old age I probably won’t have.](#)

[Accepting that has brought me joy.](#)

[The austerity-hit CPS can’t cope and people aren’t getting justice. We, the police, want the power to fix that](#)

[Cold swimming pools and youth clubs closing – tale of two sporting Britains shames us all](#)

[2023.02.27 - Around the world](#)

[Abby Choi Ex-husband and relatives charged with murder of Hong Kong model as more body parts found](#)

[Italy Elly Schlein voted leader of country's most important leftwing party in surprise win](#)

[China Missing billionaire banker Bao Fan assisting authorities in investigation, company says](#)

[France Record number of dolphins wash up on Atlantic beaches](#)

[Asia Pacific China approves biggest expansion in new coal power plants since 2015, report finds](#)

[Headlines tuesday 28 february 2023](#)

[Live Rishi Sunak suggests UK-EU Northern Ireland deal will go ahead regardless of DUP stance](#)

[Brexit True test of NI deal will be restoration of assembly, says Sunak](#)

['Brexit breakthrough' What the papers say about the deal](#)

[Boris Johnson Ex-PM dangles threat of rebellion over NI deal](#)

[2023.02.28 - Spotlight](#)

[Food My body resists veganism. What's the most ethical alternative?](#)

['Scanners are complicated' Why Gen Z faces workplace 'tech shame'](#)

[Dinner with Proust How Alzheimer's caregivers are pulled into their patients' worlds](#)

[Andy Fairweather Low interview 'Jimi Hendrix sidled over and politely told me: you're in the wrong key'](#)

[2023.02.28 - Opinion](#)

[This deal could have been done in 2021 – but the last thing Brexiteers wanted was to get Brexit done](#)

[My husband predicts a general election this year – and he's always right](#)

[Amazon treats me worse than the warehouse robots – that's why I'm walking out](#)

[First Sackler, now Bet365. The art world can't keep taking money from companies that do us harm](#)

[2023.02.28 - Around the world](#)

[North Korea Kim Jong-un sounds alarm on agriculture amid reports of food shortages](#)

['Never like this before' Settler violence in West Bank escalates](#)

[China Confusion surrounds energy policies as GDP and climate goals clash](#)

[Animals Last of Iran's endangered Asiatic cheetah cubs in captivity dies](#)

[Australia Move to allow sperm donors to be identified by those conceived via donation](#)

[Headlines thursday 2 march 2023](#)

[Live Matt Hancock says leaking of WhatsApp messages a 'massive betrayal' as he apologises to colleagues](#)

[Matt Hancock Ex-health secretary calls Isabel Oakeshott leak 'massive betrayal'](#)

[WhatsApp leak Hancock and Williamson clashed over Covid school closures](#)

[Isabel Oakeshott The journalist who turned over Matt Hancock](#)

[2023.03.02 - Spotlight](#)

[The resilience secret 13 ways to stay strong and active – from the man who runs a marathon a day](#)

[The trials of an Indian witness How a Muslim man was caught in a legal nightmare](#)

[Last night AI DJ saved my life? Testing Spotify's virtual radio host](#)

[From book butlers to library sleepovers 10 great UK places to stay for book lovers](#)

[2023.03.02 - Opinion](#)

[Rishi Sunak is shaping up to be a prime minister Keir Starmer should be wary of](#)

[Rotten, with no quick fixes: the state of our mouths reflects the plight of NHS dentistry](#)

[Many men have a problematic relationship with food – and I'm one of them](#)

[Football is firmly in gambling's grip as it hypocritically clamps down on Ivan Toney](#)

[2023.03.02 - Around the world](#)

['Stunning' China leading US in technology race in all but a few fields, thinktank finds](#)

[Chinese interference Calls grow in Canada for inquiry into alleged election influence](#)

[Tesla Elon Musk unveils plans for low production cost while skirting affordable car option](#)

[Australia Spears stolen by Captain Cook from Kamay/Botany Bay in 1770 to be returned to traditional owners](#)

[Headlines friday 3 march 2023](#)

[Live Labour says it is 'utterly ludicrous' to claim hiring Sue Gray means Partygate report was biased](#)

[Sue Gray Labour ready to delay appointment amid growing row](#)

[Constance Marten and Mark Gordon Couple to appear in court after baby's remains found](#)

[Glastonbury festival Arctic Monkeys, Guns N' Roses, Elton John: all-male headliners a 'pipeline' problem, says Emily Eavis](#)

[2023.03.03 - Spotlight](#)

[Idris Elba 'You can make sparkling wine in Portsmouth or champagne in Champagne. My ambition was to make champagne'](#)

[You be the judge Should my husband stop cutting his nails everywhere we go?](#)

[Oscar hustings Why Tár should win the best picture](#)

['It was nuts what we got away with' Remembering the 00s UK indie explosion](#)

[2023.03.03 - Opinion](#)

[On Rishi Sunak's awayday from hell, team-building exercises are the least of the Tories' problems](#)

[Netanyahu has brought Israel to a dangerous moment. We, the Jewish diaspora, cannot just stand by.](#)

[Letting thousands of poorer families into London Zoo for £3 has changed us for ever](#)

[Cartoon Ben Jennings on the rift between Matt Hancock and Isabel Oakeshott](#)

[2023.03.03 - Around the world](#)

[China Xi Jinping to tighten Communist party's grip on government](#)

[Ohio train derailment US rail workers told to skip inspections as questions mount over crash](#)

[Wildlife Florence and her cubs give hope that west African lion can come roaring back](#)

[California Yosemite national park shut indefinitely after breaking 54-year daily snow record](#)

[Cambodia US condemns 'fabricated' case as opposition leader is jailed for 27 years](#)

[Headlines saturday 4 march 2023](#)

['How bad are the pics?' New messages show Hancock's reaction to footage of him kissing aide](#)

[Eat out to help out Hancock 'ridiculed Sunak's scheme'](#)

[UK food shortages Food tsar blames problems on 'weird supermarket culture'](#)

[Live Russia-Ukraine war: Ukrainian defence of Bakhmut 'under severe pressure' as Russian forces close in](#)

[2023.03.04 - Spotlight](#)

[Belinda Carlisle 'I wouldn't take back the drugs, but there are a few boyfriends I would edit out of my life'](#)

[Blind date 'I showed him a scar from my woodworking class'](#)

['He was gaslighting everybody' Reporter Mandy Matney on exposing Alex Murdaugh](#)

[John Lewis and Waitrose Five reasons why they are having a tough year](#)

[2023.03.04 - Opinion](#)

[Victim or villain: how guilty are the female accomplices of predatory men?](#)

[Sunak is the Michael Corleone of the Tory party – try as he might to break free, he's up to his neck in it](#)

[The joy of mediocrity: we need hobbies, even if we're bad at them, to free us from perfection](#)

[Trouble in paradise: corruption in the Caribbean has become normalised](#)

[2023.03.04 - Around the world](#)

[Ohio train derailment Plan to incinerate soil from crash is 'horrifying', says expert](#)

[Exclusive British health worker shot multiple times in Iran protests, injuries show](#)

['The tip of the iceberg' Author Kimberlé Crenshaw warns against rightwing battle over critical race theory](#)

[Space End 'colonial' approach to exploration, scientists urge Covid lab theory WHO calls on US to share information on virus origins after China claims](#)