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## Headlines friday 27 january 2023

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## [Politics](#)

# **Jeremy Hunt ‘not even trying’ to settle NHS pay dispute, says Unison – as it happened**

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This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/politics/live/2023/jan/27/conservatives-jeremy-hunt-speech-economy-nadhim-zahawi-labour-uk-politics-latest-news>

**Jeremy Hunt**

## **Jeremy Hunt to promote low-tax and private sector ‘retooling’ of industry**

Chancellor also expected to tell markets that government spending will remain within strict limits



The slump in investment by domestic and foreign businesses since the Brexit vote is seen to be among hurdles facing the UK economy.  
Photograph: Henry Nicholls/Reuters

*[Phillip Inman](#)*

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Thu 26 Jan 2023 18.53 ESTFirst published on Thu 26 Jan 2023 14.32 EST

Jeremy Hunt will defend the government’s vision for Britain’s economic future in a speech to City executives in London on Friday, when he will lay out plans for investment and growth.

The chancellor will say he wants to promote policies that allow the private sector to retool the UK's industrial base and reskill the workforce to generate strong growth over the next decade.

A low-tax base will be an essential element of the UK's attraction for foreign and domestic businesses, he will say.

He is also expected to condemn British "declinism", which he will claim is being "peddled" by the Labour party, according to the Daily Mail. Hunt will insist negative forecasts from experts "do not reflect the whole picture", it reports.

The chancellor will also make "the case for optimism", blaming EU red tape for stifling British investment. The UK formally left the EU three years ago.

Making the case for bolder, long-term investments by City institutions, he will say that changes to City rules to "unlock £100bn of private investment this decade will be implemented in the coming months".

Under the scheme, life insurers will be allowed to take long-term investments without setting aside large reserves to protect them against unforeseen emergencies.

However, Hunt will warn the right wing of his party that tax cuts will need to wait while the government supports the Bank of England's efforts to bring down inflation and get the public finances under control.

It comes amid growing criticism of the government's approach from some in the business community. Last week [James Dyson said growth "had become a dirty word"](#) under the current leadership, and this week the CBI's director general, Tony Danker, said there was [a "denial of where our economy is right now compared \[with\] our international competitors"](#).

Hunt has already signalled that he is planning a "slimmed-down" spring budget in March with no immediate tax cuts as the Conservatives press ahead with attempts to win back economic credibility after the damage inflicted by the administration of Liz Truss.

Truss, the former prime minister, and her chancellor, Kwasi Kwarteng, were replaced in their roles after financial markets reacted negatively to a large increase in borrowing to fund tax cuts.

Ministers are under pressure to put forward detailed plans to boost growth and achieve net zero targets after a slump in investment by domestic and foreign businesses since the 2016 Brexit vote.

Attempts to revitalise essential elements of the UK's industrial base have foundered, with many economists blaming the government's hands-off approach and modest funding proposals.

The recent [collapse of the car battery developer Britishvolt](#), which was expected to be the cornerstone of Britain's electric car industry, with a £3bn factory in the north-east of England, has dented ministers' claims that the UK can support the transition away from high carbon-emitting industries while under increasing pressure from foreign competition.

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Hunt has commissioned Mel Stride, the work and pensions secretary, to examine the impact of raising the pension age to 68 at a faster pace – a move that will save billions of pounds in public spending over the next three decades.

Stride is also due to tell Hunt how to get many of the 9 million people of working age currently not seeking a job back into the workforce. Stride has said he would pursue “quick wins” in the battle to boost the labour force.

No 11 has become increasingly alarmed by the fall in the number of economically active people since the Covid-19 pandemic. Some workers have been forced to quit after suffering from long Covid but others have taken early retirement or returned to EU countries after spending many years in the UK.

The Bank of England is expected to raise interest rates again when policymakers meet in a week and to blame the move on the shortage of workers, which has pushed up wages over the last year.

Analysts expect that the interest rate rise on 2 February could be as much as 0.5%, taking it to 4%, as the Bank's monetary policy committee seeks to raise borrowing costs and depress consumer spending.

Hunt is expected to reassure markets that government spending will remain within strict limits, in contrast to his predecessor, Kwarteng, who was criticised for promising unaffordable tax cuts.

With government spending in check and consumer spending hit by the cost of living crisis, the UK is expected to enter a recession in the first half of this year.

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## [Access to green space](#)

# **Labour government would pass right to roam act and reverse Dartmoor ban**

Exclusive: Shadow environment secretary Jim McMahon says access to land and waterways ‘needs to change’



A right to roam protest on Dartmoor last weekend. Photograph: Jim Wileman/The Guardian

*[Helena Horton](#) Environment reporter*

Fri 27 Jan 2023 02.00 EST Last modified on Fri 27 Jan 2023 02.14 EST

The Labour party will pass a right to roam act if it comes to power, the Guardian can reveal, after widespread outcry when wild camping was [outlawed on Dartmoor](#).

In the bill, which is currently being drawn up by the party amid widespread but careful optimism that the next general election will see [Labour](#) return to office, there could be a new law that would allow national parks to adopt the

right to wild camp, as well as expanding public access to woodlands and waterways.

Jim McMahon, the shadow environment secretary, said the court decision earlier this month to overturn the long-held right in the national park – the only place in England and Wales the ability still existed – shows that there needs to be a rethink of land access.

While the right to roam has been narrowly defined as the right to walk from A to B, he said this was missing the point and not in the spirit of those who first proposed the idea.

He said: “What I am interested in is the right to experience, the right to enjoy and the right to explore,” meaning that people should be allowed to fully enjoy an area, including taking part in activities such as swimming, camping, climbing and birdwatching rather than simply walking.

Visiting Hay Tor in the national park, McMahon said: “It’s not just about the right to pass through and explore. I think we do need to go beyond that, to look at the enjoyment aspect of it as well, which really hits at the heart of the Dartmoor case. The current right to roam gives people the right to pass through, but what about actually experiencing it, and to enjoy it? Our policy needs to give people more rights to do that.”

As ponies trotted by on the moor, he said a Labour government would create more national parks and open more of the countryside for people to explore.

“There are still huge parts of England and Wales that are off limits when it comes to the right to access, whether that’s woodlands, cliffs, rivers, where the rights that we are afforded in open countryside aren’t then mirrored in those places. That needs to change.”

Only 4% of waterways give people an automatic right to canoe or swim, and McMahon plans to significantly expand this in government. He said: “This is a scandal. A Labour government would clean up the UK’s waterways for all to enjoy – if people don’t have a stake in their environment they won’t fight to protect it.”

[Alexander Darwall](#), a hedge fund manager and Dartmoor's sixth-largest landowner, took the national park to the high court last month, arguing that the right to wild camp had never existed. The judge this month ruled that the right to roam means just that – the right to walk or horse ride on the common, not to camp.

Darwall, the owner of the 1,619-hectare (4,000-acre) Blachford estate on southern Dartmoor, offers pheasant shoots, deerstalking and holiday rentals on his land.

The court case has reinvigorated the right to roam movement, with 3,000 people last weekend travelling to protest on his land.

It's a hot topic in parliament, too, with Luke Pollard, the Labour MP for Plymouth Sutton and Devonport, calling for a new law enshrining the right to wild camp on Dartmoor.

Caroline Lucas, the Green MP for Brighton Pavilion, has her right to roam bill returning to parliament this spring, and Richard Foord, the Liberal Democrat MP for Tiverton and Honiton, has tabled a bill that would protect the public's access to national parks.

Foord said: “Wealthy landowners should not seek to move in and [overturn the ways](#) in which our national parks have been used.

“If people choose to buy land in a national park, they must accept all the responsibilities that come with it. They should not be seeking to prevent respectful wild camping, or worse still, expecting taxpayer-funded organisations like the Dartmoor National Park Authority to pay the landowners for continued access.”

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The park is in talks and deciding whether to risk appealing against the decision to overturn wild camping, which could mean spending vast sums on Darwall's legal costs if they lose. It has to submit its decision by a week tomorrow.

McMahon called on the park to appeal against the ruling, and said the case showed the right to roam law needed to be clarified and strengthened.

He said: "Part of the reason we're coming here, of course, is because of wild camping, but the case also poses an existential threat to what we've taken for granted, really, which is the [access rights that we all enjoy](#), which were enshrined by the last Labour government in 2000. I think they're under a fundamental threat if this is allowed to go unchecked. So then, the law needs to be basically clarified and strengthened."

McMahon said a Labour government would enshrine the right to wild camp on Dartmoor in law if there was no successful appeal. He said: "Ultimately if an appeal isn't successful, it isn't right that this right can be taken away by one landowner. So it's parliament's job to make sure it is enshrined in law."

Campaigners have asked the park authority to appeal. Lewis Winks, from the campaign The Stars Are for Everyone, said: "Dartmoor was the only place in England where the right to wild camping existed. We don't want this to become a quirky historical anomaly, we want to see the same rights afforded to people in other national parks, so what happens today is of crucial importance to the newly reinvigorated right to roam movement. We need Dartmoor national park to step up and be courageous."

In a statement, the Right to Roam campaign said: "We welcome the Labour party's commitment to legislating for an expanded right to roam as part of their programme for government and look forward to engaging with them on the details.

“Last week’s historic protest on Dartmoor, attended by 3,500 people – following on from a year of mass trespasses organised by the Right to Roam campaign – demonstrates the huge public appetite for increasing access to nature.

“We call on MPs of all parties to publicly support a right to roam act to defend and extend the rights of all people to access nature.”

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**HS2**

## **HS2 will run to central London, Jeremy Hunt says**

Chancellor moves to quash reports that high-speed rail link might not terminate at Euston



HS2 has been dogged by criticism over its financial and environmental impact. Photograph: HS2/PA

*[Jamie Grierson](#) and [Gwyn Topham](#)*

Fri 27 Jan 2023 08.35 ESTFirst published on Fri 27 Jan 2023 03.38 EST

The chancellor, [Jeremy Hunt](#), has moved to quash speculation that HS2 trains will not run to central London, saying he did not see “any conceivable circumstances” in which the planned Euston terminus would not go ahead.

It had been reported that the high-speed rail network could instead terminate permanently in the western suburbs of the capital, stopping short of central [London](#) to save money.

However, Hunt told BBC News, when asked if ministers were committed to [HS2](#) going all the way to Euston: “Yes we are. And I don’t see any conceivable circumstances in which that would not end up at Euston.”

Hunt said he had “prioritised HS2 in the autumn statement”, adding: “We have not got a good record in this country of delivering complex, expensive infrastructure quickly but I’m incredibly proud that, for the first time in this last decade, under a Conservative government, we have shovels in the ground building HS2 and we’re going to make it happen.”

His words were later echoed by Downing Street’s official spokesperson. No 10 also played down fears of delay, saying that the planned phases of construction “remain the expected delivery dates”.

HS2 officials were reportedly considering scaling back the multibillion-pound project by delaying to 2038 – or scrapping completely – the Euston terminus, according to [the Sun](#).

HS2 had already planned to only run services from a new hub under construction at Old Oak Common, five miles away in the suburbs of west London, when the line opens in about 2030, after proposals in the 2019 Oakervee review for Boris Johnson. The Sun claimed, however, that the government was considering leaving it as the permanent terminus, with passengers having to finish journeys into central London by using the Elizabeth line instead.

Tunnelling has started west of Old Oak Common but work to cut through to Euston is not yet under way. However, large numbers of homes and premises around Euston have already been demolished, in years of works around the station for HS2.

Business groups in the north and south said that axing the line short of central London would be folly and would undermine the scheme.

The government did not earlier specifically deny the reports. A Department for [Transport](#) spokesperson said: “The government remains committed to delivering HS2 to Manchester, as confirmed in the autumn statement. As

well as supporting tens of thousands of jobs, the project will connect regions across the UK, improve capacity on our railways and provide a greener option of travel.”

The project has been [dogged by criticism over its financial and environmental impact](#). In October of last year, Michael Gove, the levelling-up secretary, suggested capital investment for HS2 would be reviewed but Hunt subsequently backed the project.

The target cost of phase one between London and Birmingham was £40.3bn at 2019 prices. A budget of £55.7bn for the whole of HS2 was set in 2015.

Penny Gaines of the campaign group [Stop HS2](#) said it was “not at all surprising” costs were spiralling out of control. “These reports just show that there are so many problems with HS2,” she said. “It’s being delayed further and further, so the cost is going up; it should be cancelled in its entirety as soon as possible.”

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Tony Berkeley, who in 2019 was deputy chairman of a government-commissioned review into HS2, argued on Friday that the entire project should be scrapped.

The Labour peer told the PA news agency: “The alternative in the news this morning is using Old Oak Common as a terminal station, which would work for half the number of trains that they want with a bit of redesign but it wouldn’t do the lot. There’s not enough space for it so they couldn’t do it except maybe a shuttle service from Birmingham.

“What’s the point of building HS2 just to get to Birmingham? I think the whole thing should be cancelled.”

He claimed investment in the project would be “much better spent on improving the railway lines in the north, east and west, than going to London a bit quicker”.

Henri Murison, the chief executive of the Northern Powerhouse Partnership, said: “As well as the obvious difficulties for travellers needing to then change train to get into central London, Old Oak Common simply does not have enough platforms to deliver a full service between London and Manchester, never mind to Leeds and beyond.

“The problem with whittling down major infrastructure projects such as HS2 and Northern Powerhouse Rail is that the new, cheaper versions do not deliver the productivity transformation we were promised and, ironically, are less good value for money.”

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**Business liveBusiness**

# **Jeremy Hunt says ministers committed to HS2 running ‘all the way to Euston’ – as it happened**

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## 2023.01.27 - Spotlight

- Eddie Redmayne ‘Until there’s a levelling, there are certain parts I wouldn’t play’
- The one change that didn’t work I dreamed of owning a pub. But it soon became a nightmare
- ‘Around here, people want top-end food’ How Lancashire’s Ribble Valley became Britain’s gastropub capital
- Czech Republic Barbs and beards from Babiš as crunch election test looms

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**Eddie Redmayne: ‘Until there’s a levelling, there are certain parts I wouldn’t play’**

[Ryan Gilbey](#)



'I believe everyone wants to be able to play everything' ... Eddie Redmayne. Photograph: Chris Pizzello/Invision/AP

The Oscar winner on learning from his mistakes, his latest role as a serial killer nurse – and why he's not wearing a wedding ring

Fri 27 Jan 2023 01.00 EST

Drinking coffee in the restaurant of a central London hotel as jazz bubbles away in the background, Eddie Redmayne is wearing faded blue jeans, a white sweatshirt and a scarf. No wedding band, though. Uh-oh. “‘Spotted without his ring!’” he says, mock-horrified. He misplaced it while shooting [The Danish Girl](#) eight years ago, which is only one of the reasons to lament that film. We'll get to the others in good time.

He bought a replacement ring then lost that, too, so he gave up. On jewellery, that is, not marriage. “I am incredibly happily married so I'm afraid there's no scoop there,” he says apologetically. The tone fits with his demeanour, which is that of a Saturday boy at John Lewis: posh, affable, sincerely regretful that he doesn't have the item in your size. He just turned 41 but could pass for mid-20s. His tousled hair is rust-coloured, his skin frantic with freckles, his lips so plump they look like crimson jellies.

A scarf stays knotted around his neck throughout our morning together; he picked up a nasty cold on his recent trip to the Golden Globes in Los Angeles, where he was in the running for best supporting actor for playing the serial killer Charles Cullen in [The Good Nurse](#). When the sneezes come today, he whips out a comically large red handkerchief peppered with white dots, like a magician preparing to make the crockery vanish.



'A character study combined with a critique of the system' ... Redmayne as Charles Cullen with Jessica Chastain as Amy Loughren in *The Good Nurse*. Photograph: JoJo Whilden/Courtesy of Netflix

In fact, his party trick is quite the opposite: he makes awards appear. He got the big three (Oscar, Bafta, Golden Globe) for playing Stephen Hawking in *The Theory of Everything*, and an Olivier last year for his lizardly, mercurial Emcee in *Cabaret*, which also starred Jessie Buckley as Sally Bowles. A soundtrack recording, taped during live performances for added wildness, has just been released. Redmayne's approach to the character, he says, "is that he would shape-shift and emerge as this Aryan conductor who could drop his baton in one of the champagne bottles at the end, and then walk off into the night. Whatever else is going on, he's fucking fine."

He took home his first Olivier (as well as a Tony) in 2010 for playing Mark Rothko's assistant in *Red*. Each night, he and his co-star Alfred Molina

splashed paint around on stage as they mocked up giant imitation Rothkos. What a job for an art history graduate, even if Redmayne's dissertation at Cambridge was on Yves Klein's blue. And don't forget the Golden Raspberry award he won for worst supporting actor in the Wachowski sisters' incomprehensible fantasy [Jupiter Ascending](#), where he was a rasping, pursed-lipped princeling in outfits worthy of a fetish night: stiff gold collars, stippled rubber vests, bare chest underneath. "I didn't know what I was doing," he says. "I still don't. I honestly haven't watched the whole movie. But I loved making choices that were ..." He wrinkles his nose. "Well, 'bold' is probably too kind a word."

Prizes are why we are here today. It's encouraging that enough of Redmayne's peers noticed his creepy but admirably level-headed work in [The Good Nurse](#) to vote for him in next month's Screen Actors Guild awards. I wish him luck. "Ah cheers. Never gonna happen but it'll be fun to go." A few days after we meet, he also gets a Bafta nomination to add to the tally.



'Lizardly and mercurial' ... Redmayne won an Olivier last year for his Emcee in Cabaret. Photograph: Marc Brenner

He plays [Charlie Cullen](#), a seemingly compassionate, diligent nurse who is now serving 18 consecutive life sentences for the murder of 29 patients in

his care at various New Jersey hospitals over the course of nearly two decades; the actual death toll could be in the hundreds. He contaminated IV bags with insulin, and injected patients with lethal doses of heart medication. His friend and colleague Amy Loughren (Jessica Chastain) was instrumental in bringing him to justice but *The Good Nurse* is less a story of heroes and villains than an indictment of the profit-centred healthcare system that enabled then concealed his actions.

“He’s basically giving his employers every opportunity to stop him,” says Redmayne. “It’s like: ‘Fucking do it. *Go on.*’ That’s what I found intriguing about the script. In some ways, yes, it’s a true crime story, but it felt more like a character study combined with a critique of the system.” With the NHS at its most imperilled, the film doubles as a warning to audiences in the UK. “Well, it’s more than a critique of US healthcare. It’s about systems in general in which the power of the individual is lost. That’s got to ring a gigantic alarm bell in relation to what we have here and what we take for granted. The NHS is going through an incredibly complex time.”



Redmayne as Julianne Moore's son in *Savage Grace* (2007). Photograph: Moviestore Collection/Rex/Shutterstock

It's admirable that the film resists trying to answer the question of why Cullen killed. But even the least prurient viewer might wonder whether he

regarded those in his care as people or merely potential kills. “In those scenes with the patients, I was playing the truth of empathy and kindness, with the sense of the killer being a different person,” he says. “I believe he was, for all intents and purposes, an excellent nurse. But there were times when he was like an empty vessel that would become filled with arrogance and truculence. I spent time with the real Amy, and she described these moments when the Charlie she knew disappeared. That dissociative idea was a revelation for me. So that’s how I played him. It was about finding this vacuum, this different person.”

He illustrates the demarcation in a pair of chilling confrontation scenes: first in a diner, where Amy wears a wire as she tries to lure Cullen into making an incriminating statement; then after his arrest, when he is harangued by the interviewing officer. In both those moments, the actor turns away from the camera then swivels back round to face us, his features fixed in an impenetrable mask. Somewhere inside him, a switch has been flicked to “off”.

I thought if anything happened for me it would be Sunday night television, something English and Etonian

No one should be surprised that Redmayne is capable of that iciness. One of his first films was *Savage Grace*, another factually based psychological drama. He played a fraught, tormented heir involved in a semi-incestuous relationship with his socialite mother, played by Julianne Moore. Redmayne had fought hard to get the part. Coming in 2007, so close to the start of his screen career, it introduced him as a risk-taker, likeability be damned. He made good on that promise in little-seen oddball endeavours such as *Hick*, where he was a limping Texas paedophile pursuing a young Chloë Grace Moretz.

His path has been unorthodox, even if his background (he was in the same year as Prince William at Eton) is privilege incarnate. “I knew nothing about film or TV but I got into acting because I loved it at school,” he says. A former drama teacher suggested him for Mark Rylance’s all-male production of *Twelfth Night* at the Globe; Redmayne, 20 at the time, won the part of Viola. “I’d played so many women at school that it wasn’t a stretch,” he

shrugs. Adela Quested from *A Passage to India* is one of his favourites. “‘I want to see the real India,’” he purrs, slipping briefly into character and gazing demurely across the restaurant.



‘I made that film with the best intentions, but I think it was a mistake’ ... Redmayne as Lili Elbe in *The Danish Girl* (2015). Photograph: Universal Pictures/Allstar

His career goals were modest. “I thought if anything happened for me it would be Sunday night television, something English and Etonian. Maybe a bit part in *Foyle’s War*.” That wasn’t how it panned out. His breakthrough stage role, in 2004, was as a fragile young American whose father is in a sexual relationship with a farmyard animal, in Edward Albee’s *The Goat*, or *Who is Sylvia?* “US casting directors came to see it. Very quickly, rather than doing English characters, I was cast as Americans.”

I’d played so many women at school that it wasn’t a stretch

As well as *Savage Grace*, there was Robert De Niro’s espionage thriller *The Good Shepherd*, where those full lips came in handy playing Angelina Jolie’s son. And that Sunday night prediction was realised in the end. “Eventually I found my way back to tweed,” he smiles. He was Angel Clare opposite Gemma Arterton as Tess of the D’Urbervilles, then the lead in

Sebastian Faulks's *Birdsong*. "Plus that whole weird period where I was in anything related even tangentially to Queen Elizabeth." He's muddling the chronology slightly – a role in the series *Elizabeth I* crops up right at the start of his CV – but it's true that if there was a doublet and hose hanging around, the young Redmayne was either wearing it or standing next to someone who was (see *The Other Boleyn Girl*; *Elizabeth: The Golden Age*). He gallops on through his IMDb page: "Then *Theory*, and *The Danish Girl*, which I suppose both is and isn't an English period drama ..."

Ah, *The Danish Girl*. Redmayne's publicists had politely asked me not to press him on an issue about which he has nothing more to add: the public statement in 2020 in which he diverged from his *Fantastic Beasts* creator JK Rowling on the matter of transgender identity. "I disagree with Jo's comments," he said at the time. "Trans women are women, trans men are men and non-binary identities are valid." But it is Redmayne who brings up *The Danish Girl*, a film he has said he would not feel comfortable making now. He believes the role of the painter Lili Elbe, one of the first known people to undergo gender-confirming surgery, should have gone to a trans performer. "I made that film with the best intentions, but I think it was a mistake," he said in 2021.



Redmayne won an Oscar, Bafta and Golden Globe for his portrayal of Stephen Hawking in *The Theory of Everything* (2014). Photograph: Liam

## Daniel/AP

I ask how that realisation has coloured his feelings toward the movie itself. Is it a failure? “Truth be told, I only see the flaws in the work I do anyway,” he says after a long pause. Then he stares into space for 10 seconds. “I worked really ... I’m, um, I ... I don’t know how to answer that question.” He turns to me, his eyes crinkled and sad. “I don’t know how to answer it. Sorry.” Can he not even say how he feels about the film? “The thing I find most complex is truth ...” There follows an explanation of the genesis of the script before he finally reaches his conclusion: “The film feels like a fictionalised version. It doesn’t feel like Lili’s story.”

He won’t take parts now that should go to trans actors: that much is clear. But what can someone with his clout do to help his trans colleagues? “A few years ago, I did a workshop with trans actors at the Central School of Speech and Drama. A lot of them were quite rightly interrogating me about my choice to do *The Danish Girl*, and pointing out that many trans actors don’t go to drama school because they don’t see it as an opportunity. Unless there are parts that you think are possible for you to play, why would you?”

A sigh. “I believe everyone wants to be able to play everything. That’s what we dream of as actors, and should do. No one wants to be limited by their gender or sexuality but, historically, these communities haven’t had a seat at the table. Until there’s a levelling, there are certain parts I wouldn’t play.” Earlier on, reflecting on his lack of formal training, he had told me: “I can only learn from my mistakes.” At least no one can say he hasn’t put his money where his mouth is.

The Good Nurse is on Netflix. Cabaret: London Cast Recording is released by Decca Records

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[The one change that didn't work](#)[Pubs](#)

## **The one change that didn't work: I dreamed of owning a pub. But it soon became a nightmare**



‘I’ve never dared work out exactly how much money we lost’ ... Peter White behind the bar of the Samuel Oldknow in Marple – not the pub he owned. Photograph: Richard Saker/The Guardian

We didn’t attract enough customers and it slowly dawned on me that the publican is not the customer – it was me who had to eject unruly patrons and make tough decisions

Peter White

Fri 27 Jan 2023 01.00 ESTLast modified on Fri 27 Jan 2023 07.26 EST

My accountant once gave me two pieces of business advice: don’t run anything with your family and don’t run a pub. So I decided to run a pub with my family. I had always loved pubs, even before I was old enough to drink. I earned my first money in them, as a very bad pianist, and found them friendly, sociable and very relaxed about my blindness. They are also, incidentally, great places to navigate if you can’t see, as you can steer yourself by sound: fruit and games machines whirring; a busy till; the frothing of pints being pulled; old Roger pontificating from his usual seat. For decades, I’d found them great places to make and meet friends, develop ideas and unwind and I began to harbour the ambition to run a pub myself one day.

So when the owners of a pub I often frequented invited me to go in with them on the lease of another, I didn’t hesitate. My children had all gravitated towards the hospitality trade and it seemed like the perfect family venture.

But the incompatibilities were clear from the start. Sure, it was a live music pub, but my new business partners preferred jazz over our rock’n’roll vision. They wanted to take the clientele upmarket; we were happy with a, shall we say, “edgier” crowd.

The upshot was that, within three months, they decided to pull out. With hindsight, that’s the moment we should have pulled out, too, and resold the lease. But my dream of being a pub landlord, plus a large portion of family stubbornness, meant we persisted.

But even when we were left to our own devices, it didn't work. The pub wasn't a good place for footfall, as it was located off the main drag and didn't have parking. The restaurant didn't attract enough customers in a city already well oversubscribed with such places, and then the government introduced the pub smoking ban (good news for some pubs, as it turned out, but not ours). Of course, as my wise accountant knew, even the closest of families can't avoid having some differences, especially when the going gets tough.

Gradually the realisation dawned that the publican is not the customer. It's now you who has to eject the unruly patrons and tell the well-behaved punters that it's time to go home when they are still having a good time. When money is tight, it's you who has to tell your staff: no drinks on the house, and no drinks for staff either, even when it has been a hard night. You realise that you – the person who used to be the life and soul of the lounge bar – would give anything for a night in.

Plenty of people gave good advice: put in TV screens for football; weed out some of your dodgier customers; put on more special events. But if they didn't conform to the image of the pub we had in our heads, such initiatives didn't last long, if they were tried at all.

Don't get me wrong, there were some great moments – and times when I even thought the dream might be coming true. But, after almost three years (the average length of pub tenancies), we pulled out; sadder, wiser, and in my case, significantly poorer.

I've never dared work out exactly how much money we lost; a lack of business acumen on my part was certainly a big contributor to our failure. But in spite of it all, I still subscribe to the theory that it's better to know that your dream was just that, than never to have tried to live it.

*Want to share your story? Tell us a little about yourself and the change that didn't work for you by filling in the form [here](#)*

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## **‘Around here, people want top-end food’: how Lancashire’s Ribble Valley became Britain’s gastropub capital**



Stosie Madi, the chef and owner of the Parkers Arms, Newton-in-Bowland, voted the best gastropub in the UK. Photograph: Fabio De Paola/The Guardian

With villages around the town of Clitheroe now home to three of the UK's top 50 gastropubs, we celebrate this unique north-western take on excellent pub dining

*[Chris Moss](#)*

Fri 27 Jan 2023 02.00 ESTLast modified on Fri 27 Jan 2023 03.43 EST

Only a handful of UK towns can lay claim to being culinary centres. Over the years we've had hype as well as hearty reviews for Bray in Berkshire – care of the Roux brothers and Heston Blumenthal. There is also Padstow thanks to Rick Stein and posh fish and chips; Ludlow; Abergavenny with its farmers' market and [popular festival](#); and Malton, dubbed "Yorkshire's food capital" by the late Antonio Carluccio.

Now Clitheroe in Lancashire has joined the exclusive little set. Well, I say Clitheroe, but really I mean satellites of the market town, three of which now feature in the new [Top 50 Gastropubs](#) list from the team that produces the influential World's 50 Best Restaurants and other hit parades. A fourth local pub just misses the premier division, coming in at number 56.

The top-ranked venue, the [Parkers Arms](#), is in Newton-in-Bowland, a village with a population of about 300. Seven miles north of Clitheroe, along a winding country road, it's on the edge of the Forest of Bowland, a designated area of outstanding natural beauty.

The pub has been owned since 2007 by Senegal-born chef Stosie Madi and manager Kathy Smith, since when it's picked up plenty of regional prizes and been a regular fixture in the top 50 gastropubs. The food looks gorgeous and there are vegan and plant-based options, all very hip and cool for this sheep-rearing, grouse-shooting region. But it's not a pretentious fine dining or experimental experience, and the prices are similar to those in a chicken-and-chips pub.



Parkers Arms, Newton-in-Bowland Photograph: Stephen Fleming/Alamy

“We serve three courses for £45, and I’m not talking about three plates with tiny bits of food,” says Madi. “You don’t have to order side dishes or add-ons to make up your carbohydrates. We want to cook food that is delicious, modern with a light touch, but hearty and honest.

“We’re known for our signature dishes – our mutton and lamb pies. The Ribble Valley is excellent for meat. We source the lamb from [Burholme Farm](#), just three miles away. Local game is also important in the Bowland area, and it’s extremely low in fat and high in protein. The pigs at [Bowland Pork](#), our supplier, are outdoor hand-reared and free range, and the meat is superb.”

Depending on the season and availability, Madi also uses Morecambe Bay oysters, fish from Fleetwood and Formby asparagus. “We should use – and celebrate – local produce, because it’s only available for a few weeks a year. The supply chain is wonderful in Lancashire, though we do venture into Yorkshire for some items, such as rhubarb.”

The only way for a rural pub to survive is to welcome everybody. We are a food-led pub for people from all over

*Stosie Madie, Parkers Arms*

Lovers of real ale and trad pubs lovers will often muse about what constitutes an authentic local, but Stosie is a realist. “We can’t rely on local customers. The only way for a rural pub to survive, with all the energy costs and expenses, is to welcome everybody. We are a food-led pub for people from all over, including from Australia, Japan and America. We couldn’t survive if we served beers and a bowl of soup for two walkers to share between them.”

The Ribble Valley is relatively well-heeled but lots of local pubs and restaurants did go bust during the pandemic. Madi mentions the closure of two local cheese houses. “People need to put their money where their mouth is and buy good, local food.”

I’ve eaten twice in the third-placed restaurant, the [Freemasons](#). It’s in Wiswell, also a tiny village but closer to Clitheroe and the A59, the main road between Preston and York. Once I had the tasting menu; the second time I tried the roast. The former was an elaborate, multi-sensory affair that tripped through plates of fish and meat and veg, aromas and textures and elegant compositions, and it all tasted delicious. The Sunday roast was smaller than your classic pub slap-up but, as usually happens with good food, the rich flavours made up for it. I did enjoy watching a burly farmer-type trying to make his delicate-looking starter of scallops with lobster knuckle last longer than a single bite.



The Freemasons, Wiswell Photograph: Blumin

Blackburn-born chef-owner Steven Smith concurs that being a drink-led pub doesn't cut it any more. "So the natural thing to do is expand your offering, and if you have amazing food, you have a better chance of surviving. At the Freemasons we have our loyal locals but we also have some luxury rooms attached to the pub, which entices those from further afield."

Pubs is what the north-west does best. When you come here there are 20 of them

*Steven Smith, The Freemasons*

Competition, he says, is driving quality. "The wealth of residents in the area certainly helped the Ribble Valley secure three gastropubs in the top 10. But more importantly, pubs is what the north-west does best. When we were driving down to the awards [in Suffolk], we couldn't find a top-end food pub for 100 miles. When you come here there are 20 of them and we're all fighting against each other.

"Around here, the public want top-end food, and brilliant service, wine and beer, and a vast amount of people around here feel at home within a pub environment. This is why the Ribble Valley has such a high proportion of incredible gastropubs."



View towards the Trough of Bowland, north-east of Clitheroe. Photograph: David Clapp/Getty Images

The number seven pub, the [White Swan](#) is in Fence, south-east of Clitheroe. Locally born chef Tom Parker worked with Lisa Allen at Michelin-starred Northcote hotel near Blackburn, and in 2011, at 21, was awarded Young Chef of the Year. After a stint cooking in Mexico, he moved back to Burnley and took the helm at the White Swan, which now has a Michelin star. It's the only Timothy Taylors pub in Lancashire, and is still known as the Mucky Duck after the miners who once supped here.

With the [Higher Buck](#) in Waddington also featuring in the top 100 (at 56), there's plenty to entertain foodies around Clitheroe. But, for those who want to explore further, the [Angel](#) in Hetton (sixth) just north of Skipton, [Shibden Mill Inn](#) in Halifax (14th) and the [Butchers Arms](#) in Hepworth (49th) are just across the Pennines.

You have to give credit to rural chefs and their partners for keeping local businesses up and running

Sadly, the Moorcock in Norland, near Sowerby Bridge, which came 21st in the list, has just closed its doors. Being brilliant and scooping prizes is no safety net for local pubs, posh or otherwise, right now. Drive around this

region and, like barns, chapels, post offices and churches before them, you'll see lots of once-cherished pubs being turned into "character" homes. Even if you prefer pubs to be about beer and pork scratchings rather than aged beef and emulsions, you have to give credit to rural chefs and their partners for keeping local businesses up and running.

This gourmet road skims the southern tip of the Dales, gobbles its way through the Calder Valley (AKA Happy Valley) and then curves round towards Last of the Summer Wine Country and the Peak District – where the hills have always been more of a bond than a barrier. Of course, there are more award-winning, food-oriented boozers in the flat, sunny part of Yorkshire, but out there – as locals will happily boast – you may as well be in Berkshire or Wiltshire, which also have heaps of gastropubs.

*For the full list see [top50gastropubs.com](http://top50gastropubs.com)*

## Five great gastropubs to try

### **The Parkers Arms, Newton-in-Bowland, Lancashire**

Cosy, classy and great value, the Parkers Arms is a labour of love and total professionalism. Good luck getting a booking after the gong and all the media attention. This year's Valentine's Day menu (£130 for two) is typical, featuring smoked Tarleton beetroot carpaccio, charcoal-grilled 60-day-aged fillet of Bowland beef and a parfait of Yorkshire rhubarb and white chocolate. A visit can be combined with a drive/cycle/walk through the Trough of Bowland.

### **The White Swan, Fence, Lancashire**

A handsome and proper pub bar welcomes diners to this locally loved venue, where a small team turns out a seasonally changing set menu. Tom Parker's kitchen alternates between winter-friendly plates of game Wellington, Whitewell partridge and wagyu beef and Japanese-themed evenings and fish nights. Dinner is about £45 plus drinks. Fence is on the south side of Pendle Hill, just below Newchurch and Sabden Fold. This is witch territory: check out Alice Nutter's tomb at Newchurch.



Amalfi lemon meringue dessert at the Freemasons, Wiswell

### **The Freemasons, Wiswell, Lancashire**

Great front-of-house care and chef Steven Smith's attention to detail have made this one of the most successful food ventures in the Ribble Valley. The pub is tucked up a ginnel between two country roads and has a small boutique hotel attached. A typical Sunday roast menu (£45 for three courses) features a wild rabbit starter, slow-cooked pork belly and egg custard with raspberries. There's a great walk along lanes and ridges to the Nick of Pendle Hill.



A white crab starter at the Angel, Hetton.

### **The Angel, Hetton, North Yorkshire**

This Michelin-starred pub with rooms is unashamedly sophisticated and the menu matches the decor, with rarities such as hare loin, venison ragout with smoked maitake mushrooms, Anjou pigeon and the kind of pudding you might have seen at El Bulli. I imagine few other places around Skipton serve malt loaf with “styrofoam” and a tokaji and medjool parfait. The winter menu is £80. There’s a nice 7½-mile circular walk to Winterburn reservoir to burn off all that good living.

### **The Butchers Arms, Hepworth, West Yorkshire**

Stone floors, an open fire, wooden tables, dogs: this place is about as pubby as a gastropub can be. Roast pigeon, giant toad in the hole, Whitby crab and big steaks are all on the menu, and there are fine ales and well-chosen wines. Dinner is £40-£50 plus drinks. Even the sandwich menu is quite haute, with hot roast beef and skinny fries and gravy or brie and cranberry available for £8. Fries can be upgraded to either beef dripping or truffle and parmesan. There are easy country walks off the local lanes, and the Peak District is just a few miles away.

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**Czech Republic**

## **Barbs and beards from Babiš as crunch Czech election test looms**

Behind in the polls, the former PM has resorted to a no-holds-barred attack on his presidential rival, Petr Pavel



Andrej Babiš is up against Pavel in a head-to-head vote. Photograph: Martin Divíšek/EPA

*[Robert Tait](#) in Prague*

Fri 27 Jan 2023 00.00 EST Last modified on Fri 27 Jan 2023 00.02 EST

The former Czech prime minister Andrej Babiš faces a potentially career-defining reckoning this weekend when voters deliver their verdict in a presidential election that polls indicate he could lose heavily.

The combative Babiš, who together with his ally the outgoing president, Miloš Zeman, has dominated the central European country's politics over the past decade, is up against a decorated military figure, Petr Pavel – a

retired general and former Nato second-in-command – in a head-to-head runoff that many observers see as pivotal to the future of Czech democracy.

Polls open on Friday and close on Saturday.

Pavel, 61, an ex-army chief of staff, has adopted a statesman-like pose consistent with his vow to restore dignity to a political office that many Czechs feel has been sullied by Zeman's provocative antics. Zeman once joked with Vladimir Putin that he should “liquidate” journalists, and said on a state visit to China that he was there to learn “how to stabilise society”.

Pavel's supporters have drawn a contrast by invoking the spirit of the late Václav Havel, the playwright and former dissident who became the [first post-communist president of Czechoslovakia](#) after the 1989 Velvet Revolution.

Opinion surveys suggest Pavel's message is resonating. Two Czech polling agencies, Median and Stem, have shown Pavel ahead by about 58% to 42%. That is a much wider gap than in the first round two weeks ago, when Babiš finished just behind Pavel in a bigger field, though neither candidate won the necessary majority of votes cast to avoid a runoff.

Pavel has also conveyed the impression of popular support by staging mass rallies in Brno and Ostrava, the two biggest Czech cities outside the capital, Prague.

In response, Babiš has resorted to no-holds-barred attack, painting Pavel as a warmonger bent on dragging the [Czech Republic](#) into conflict on the side of Ukraine in its fight against Russia – a tactic denounced by critics as misinformation – while portraying himself as a victim of death threats and smears.

A day after his first-round defeat, Babiš – a billionaire tycoon who owns a multi-industry business empire – took aim at Pavel's military credentials by unveiling a billboard bearing the slogan: “I will not drag the Czech Republic into war: I'm a diplomat, not a soldier.”



Czech presidential candidate Petr Pavel attends the last radio debate before the presidential election in Prague, Czech Republic, 13 January 13. Photograph: David W Černý/Reuters

This was followed by an anonymous text message purportedly from Pavel's campaign thanking voters for their support in the first-round poll and instructing them to "report to the nearest branch of the armed forces, where you will receive the necessary weapons for mobilisation to Ukraine".

The texts prompted a police investigation, as Pavel alleged dirty tricks and pointed the finger at Babiš supporters. Pavel has also complained about video footage circulating on social media that appeared to have been carefully edited to falsely depict him advocating war against Russia.

There is no evidence of Babiš's direct involvement in either episode. Yet the candidate expanded on the theme in headline-grabbing fashion in a Sunday night debate on publicly funded Czech television, which he had initially pledged to boycott before a late change of heart prompted by plummeting poll numbers.

Babiš arrived appearing notably more hirsute than usual. He had allowed his previously close-cropped and barely perceptible goatee beard to sprout, in

what may have been an effort to compete with his opponent's luxuriant, Habsburg-style facial hair.

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He then triggered an outcry by appearing to undercut Nato's article 5 provision on collective security, answering "absolutely not" when asked if he would deploy Czech troops to Poland and the Baltic states in the event of a Russian invasion.

After condemnation from Poland, Babiš issued a clarifying tweet, insisting he respected Nato obligations. But the diplomatic damage was done – and Pavel followed up with his own tweet, in Polish, pledging an early visit to Poland if elected.



Andrej Babiš sitting in a restaurant after a presidential election campaign event in Brno. Photograph: Martin Divíšek/EPA

Babiš announced on Tuesday that he was abandoning public campaigning after receiving a death threat which he reported to the police, days after reporting that his wife had received a bullet in the post, and demanded an end to “hatred and aggression”.

Pavel responded witheringly, issuing an invitation to Babiš on Twitter “to calm the situation” and asserting that the charged atmosphere was “a result of your campaign”.

Jan Hartl, founder of the Stem polling group, called Babiš’s tactics “an improvisation” aimed at wooing late supporters by opening up radical divisions but said they were unlikely to work. “Czech public opinion is not very radical and isn’t showing the kind of radicalisation that Babiš is trying to bring into the race,” he said. “I doubt he can attract many new voters by doing this.”

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## 2023.01.27 - Opinion

- Salute Madonna: defying the odds at 64. But what are the work choices for other women her age?
- How should you fight inflation? (Spoiler alert: not with interest rate rises)
- Farewell, Netflix password sharing. Never again will an ex feel the sting of being locked out of your account
- Terrified of leavers and remainers, Labour offers a Brexit sticking plaster – and that won't do

[Opinion](#)[Menopause](#)

## **Madonna is the material proof: older women rock. So why do so many still have to stop work?**

[Gaby Hinsliff](#)



The government could have seriously improved women's prospects with menopause protections this week. It bottled it



‘The pressure to keep on keeping on, in the teeth of ageist assumptions, is coming for us all soon enough.’ Madonna with Nile Rodgers, New York, 2022. Photograph: James Devaney/GC

Fri 27 Jan 2023 01.00 EST Last modified on Fri 27 Jan 2023 07.26 EST

The most shocking thing Madonna has ever done, as she once said herself, is just to keep on publicly being Madonna. She won’t give up. She won’t fade away. She won’t be shamed, at the age of 64, into retirement; she is still jumping on every TikTok trend, still pumping out sexually suggestive clips to promote her [upcoming world tour](#).

And if there’s something faintly spooky now about the tautness of her face, then she is arguably doing what she has to do to remain relevant and marketable inside an industry that holds women to impossible standards. Admittedly, it all looks faintly exhausting. But the pressure to keep on keeping on at whatever we do, in the teeth of ageist assumptions, is coming for us all soon enough.

Retirement age is rising across Europe. The French [are revolting](#), once again, over plans to raise their pension age from 62 to 64. Germany is moving its own [to 67](#), with talk of ultimately raising it to 70. The chancellor Jeremy Hunt wouldn’t be out of step if, as reported, he speeds up existing

plans to raise the British state [pension age to 68](#). The pattern of working life is changing everywhere, and yet attitudes to older people at work lag oddly behind. We'll all have to wait longer to claim a pension, but what happens if we can't hang on to our jobs for that long?

The average age to which Britons can [expect to live](#) without suffering disabling illness is a shockingly young 60.9 for women and a scarcely higher 62.4 for men, with the poorest being most at risk of getting sick. But even if you stay healthy, you may still have to navigate the kind of kneejerk assumptions about being over the hill that (according to research by the former government business champion for older workers, Ros Altmann) ensure women's [careers begin to stall](#) at only 45, and men's at 55. More and more of us will shortly be fighting a workplace culture that apparently can't see 59-year-olds as vigorous or capable of learning new things, any more than some people can cope with a 64-year-old woman being sexual.

Few women would dream of going to Madonna-like lengths to hang on in there. But do we dye our greying hair, or keep a careful eye on what younger colleagues in the office are wearing and saying and thinking, so as not to stand out too much? Do we panic about what people will think if our menopausal minds go briefly blank in a meeting? Well, that's another story.

We do what we have to do, which is what makes it so disappointing that this week ministers [rejected one proposal](#) from the all-party women and equalities committee that may have helped to keep thousands of older women at the top of their professional game for longer: namely, making it illegal to discriminate against workers on the specific grounds of being menopausal.

I completely understand the fear some older women have that over-pathologising menopause may just make some employers even more reluctant to hire them. If you spent your 20s working for men who wouldn't promote women in case they (shock, horror) got pregnant, the prospect of battling assumptions about female biology all over again at 50 is enraging, especially as plenty of women do get through this time without breaking stride. But it's now very clear some are being avoidably pushed out of work by temporary menopause-related illness.

The committee, chaired by the Tory MP Caroline Nokes, noted that women who experienced at least one problematic menopausal symptom were [43% more likely](#) to have left their job by 55 than those who didn't, concluding that the current law doesn't "serve or protect" women. It recommended making menopause a protected characteristic like age or race – which could also help embolden women to ask for flexible working or other helpful adjustments – plus a pilot scheme testing the usefulness of offering "menopause leave" for related health reasons.

Over the past few months I've interviewed women for this newspaper who have suffered hormone-related symptoms from crippling anxiety, depression or brain fog to bleeding so heavy it left them scared to leave the house. Time and time again, they had either left jobs or adapted them to cope. Yet these were women who should have had a decade and more of working life ahead of them.

All the old arguments for hanging on to younger women through their childbearing years – that it's a waste of their talents and the future taxes they would pay to let them fall by the wayside – apply to older women too, especially given the government is [actively trying](#) to reverse a rise in over-50s retiring early. But ministers' response was that creating menopause rights could discriminate against older men with long-term health conditions. If so, isn't the answer to offer targeted help to these men too, so they too have a shot at working as long as the Treasury apparently now expects?

Shifting the goalposts on retirement is relatively easy for chancellors, knowing they'll probably be long gone before the impact is felt. But shifting assumptions about when and why employees are past their sell-by date is harder, and this week ministers missed a chance to do so. Tough as it is, we all need to get ready for a longer working life. But we can't unless employers, in turn, are ready for us.

- Gaby Hinsliff is a Guardian columnist

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

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## **How should you fight inflation? (Spoiler alert: not with interest rate rises)**

[Joseph Stiglitz](#)



US inflation is mainly supply-side driven so further rate hikes will have little to no effect – and cause deep problems of their own



‘The Federal Reserve’s monetary tightening has already [curtailed housing construction](#), even though more supply is precisely what is needed to bring down a big inflation driver: housing costs.’ Photograph: Saul Loeb/AFP/Getty Images

Fri 27 Jan 2023 01.00 EST Last modified on Fri 27 Jan 2023 01.02 EST

Despite favourable indices, it is too soon to tell whether inflation has been tamed. Nonetheless, two clear lessons have emerged from the recent price surge.

First, economists’ standard models – especially the dominant one that assumes the economy always to be in equilibrium – were effectively useless. And, second, those who confidently [asserted](#) it would take five years of pain to wring inflation out of the system have already been refuted. Inflation has fallen dramatically, with the December 2022 seasonally adjusted [consumer prices index](#) coming in just 1% above that for June.

There is overwhelming evidence that the main source of inflation was pandemic-related supply shocks and shifts in the pattern of demand, not excess aggregate demand, and certainly not any additional demand created by pandemic spending. Anyone with any faith in the market economy knew

that the supply issues would be resolved eventually; but no one could possibly know when.

After all, we have never endured a pandemic-driven economic shutdown followed by a rapid reopening. That is why models based on past experience proved irrelevant. Still, we could anticipate that clearing supply bottlenecks would be disinflationary, even if this would not necessarily counteract the earlier inflationary process immediately or in full, owing to markets' tendency to adjust upward more rapidly than they adjust downward.

Policymakers continue to balance the risk of doing too little against doing too much. The risks of increasing interest rates are clear: a fragile global economy could be pushed into recession, precipitating more debt crises as many heavily indebted emerging and developing economies face the triple whammy of a strong dollar, lower export revenues, and higher interest rates. This would be a travesty. After already letting people die unnecessarily by refusing to share the intellectual property for Covid-19 vaccines, the US has knowingly adopted a policy that will probably sink the world's most vulnerable economies. This is hardly a winning strategy for a country that has launched a new cold war with China.

Worse, it is not even clear that there is any upside to this approach. In fact, raising interest rates could do more harm than good, by making it more expensive for firms to invest in solutions to the current supply constraints. The US Federal Reserve's monetary-policy tightening has already [curtailed housing construction](#), even though more supply is precisely what is needed to bring down one of the biggest sources of inflation: housing costs.

Moreover, many price-setters in the housing market may now pass the higher costs of doing business on to renters. And in retail and other markets more broadly, higher interest rates can actually induce price increases as the higher interest rates induce businesses to write down the future value of lost customers relative to the benefits today of higher prices.

To be sure, a deep recession would tame inflation. But why would we invite that? Fed chair, Jerome Powell, and his colleagues seem to relish cheering against the economy. Meanwhile, their friends in commercial banking are making out like bandits now that the Fed is paying [4.4% interest](#) on more

than \$3tn of bank reserve balances – yielding a tidy return of more than \$130bn a year.

To justify all this, the Fed points to the usual bogeymen: runaway inflation, a wage-price spiral, and unanchored inflation expectations. But where are these bogeymen? Not only is inflation falling, but wages are increasing more slowly than prices (meaning no spiral), and expectations remain in check. The [five-year, five-year forward expectation rate](#) is hovering just above 2% – hardly unanchored.

Some also fear that we will not return quickly enough to the 2% target inflation rate. But remember, that number was pulled out of thin air. It has *no* economic significance, nor is there any evidence to suggest that it would be costly to the economy if inflation were to vary between, say, 2% and 4%. On the contrary, given the need for structural changes in the economy and downward rigidities in prices, a slightly higher inflation target has much to recommend it.

Some also will say that inflation has remained tame precisely because central banks have signalled such resolve in fighting it. My dog Woofie might have drawn the same conclusion whenever he barked at planes flying over our house. He might have believed that he had scared them off, and that not barking would have increased the risk of the plane falling on him.

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One would hope that modern economic analysis would dig deeper than Woofie ever did. A careful look at what is going on, and at where prices

have come down, supports the structuralist view that inflation was driven mainly by supply-side disruptions and shifts in the pattern of demand. As these issues are resolved, inflation is likely to continue to come down.

Yes, it is too soon to tell precisely when inflation will be fully tamed. And no one knows what new shocks await us. But I am still putting my money on “Team Temporary”. Those arguing that inflation will be largely cured on its own (and that the process could be hastened by policies to alleviate supply constraints) still have a much stronger case than those advocating measures with obviously high and persistent costs but only dubious benefits.

*Joseph E Stiglitz is a Nobel laureate in economics, university professor at Columbia University and a former chief economist of the World Bank.*

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## OpinionNetflix

# Farewell, Netflix password sharing. Never again will an ex feel the sting of being locked out of your account

[Ammar Kalia](#)



A small act of intimacy between people living apart is ending – but at least without access to my account my dad can watch Naked Attraction in peace



‘Sharing a TV streaming platform with my dad has been a small means of me checking in (OK, spying) on him.’ Photograph: agefotostock/Alamy

Fri 27 Jan 2023 02.00 EST Last modified on Fri 27 Jan 2023 12.04 EST

I used to watch an unhealthy amount of TV. A minimum of 24 shows per week for the best part of two years, to be precise, when I worked [on the Guardian’s TV desk](#).

As part of the job, I had access to new television series ahead of time and bought subscriptions to all the streaming services. Word soon spread through my friendship groups and family WhatsApps: “Ammar has all the new TV shows.” Passwords soon followed.

Growing up before streaming, when there was typically one telly per household, our viewing habits were common knowledge among those we lived with. My childhood was spent wrestling the remote away from my brother to switch over from Hollyoaks to The Simpsons. As a family, we watched EastEnders together. But now that we so often watch through our laptops and phones, there’s a danger that television becomes an isolated affair, curated through siloed profiles. Oddly, it’s a quirk of the streaming giant Netflix that has allowed us to buck that trend: the ability to share Netflix accounts with people beyond your household. Sharing a password –

and, by extension, our viewing habits – with a friend, or family member, or neighbour, has become an unusual form of connection.

Now it looks as though these fleeting bonds are under threat: Netflix has announced it will [end sharing passwords across multiple households](#). No more password-sharing as a small act of trust and intimacy between non-cohabiting couples. No more being able to check whether your girlfriend skipped ahead of the show you're supposed to be watching together on her night in. An end to the cold blow of changing the password on a shared account to lock your ex out of your viewing habits when things go sour.

Even in its most ephemeral guise, sharing accounts can be weirdly fun. I have lost count of the number of Airbnbs I have checked into around the world where the previous guest is still logged into their [Netflix](#) profile, allowing me a glimpse into their nightly viewing of the steamy scenes in Outlander, or their binge-watching of Cake Wars. Sometimes I might add a show of my own into the mix – communicating to them wherever they find themselves now and probably prompting them to quickly change their password.

I have long shared a Netflix account with my dad. Since [my mum passed away](#) in 2013, he has been living alone and our shared TV streaming platform has been a small means of me checking in (OK, spying) on him. I would sporadically click on his profile and see that he was watching Mad Men (fun), or The Queen's Gambit (zeitgeisty), or Naked Attraction (I didn't want to know). When I started seeing more Bollywood romances pop up, it was a sign that he had met someone.

Without password-sharing, I'll have to boot my freeloading dad off my account. Our viewing will become more boundaried and private. Without shared TV, we will lose that playful connection. Others will lose this practical shortcut for cutting down on the ballooning cost of keeping up with the latest shows, and won't get to experience those chance encounters or lingering friendships through forgotten password-lending. I'm still on an ex-boss's Disney+ account, for instance, and I shall forever be grateful to him for keeping me around.

Private watching keeps our choices personal but TV needn't be serious. We should celebrate our guilty pleasures and we should be able to share them with each other. Just perhaps not Naked Attraction with our dads.

- Ammar Kalia is the Guardian's global music critic. He received the [Scott Trust bursary](#) in 2017
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## OpinionBrexit

# Terrified of leavers and remainers, Labour offers a Brexit sticking plaster – and that won’t do

[Neal Lawson](#)

David Lammy promises to reconnect the EU to ‘tarnished’ Britain, but when will we fix the democratic flaws that led to the vote?



‘Isn’t it time we took stock of what has become of Britain’s sorry relationship with the EU?’ Protest in Westminster this week. Photograph: Vuk Valcic/Zuma Press Wire/Rex/Shutterstock

Fri 27 Jan 2023 03.00 EST Last modified on Fri 27 Jan 2023 06.25 EST

Pity [Labour](#) right now: feeling the righteous heat of Brexit failure, needing to appease ever more vociferous remainers, but desperate not to alarm “red wall” voters.

So we are offered vague words from Labour's David Lammy, the shadow foreign secretary, of [better connections](#) between the EU and "tarnished" Britain and aspirations about joint talking shops, when the reality is that faced with a continually chaotic UK, the EU will simply protect its members and enjoy the schadenfreude.

What we are being offered now is another sticking plaster for the deepest running sore of British politics. As we mark [50 years](#) since we joined the then EEC and [three years](#) since we left, isn't it high time we took stock of what has become of Britain's sorry relationship with the EU and of us, the British citizens?

Let's start with some home truths. Europe was only ever a partially democratic project. It was deeply contradictory in nature. Ted Heath took us in without a vote; we only voted to stay in after this fait accompli. The public was offered its first slice of battenberg cakeism – everything was to be gained from this club and nothing lost. Instinctively, though, people knew that powers and decisions were being handed over. And for more than 40 years they had no say on it.

In the same year as the 1975 referendum, an influential report by the Trilateral Commission claimed the growing social and economic problems of the US, Japan and Europe stemmed from an "[excess of democracy](#)". Politicians were too amenable to the whims of voters and would spend too much, causing inflation. The people could not be trusted – but central bankers could. Thus the democratic deficit was deepened.

As a consequence, as [Helen Thompson](#) suggests in her majestic book Disorder, "Brexit was, in the long term, most likely unavoidable". There was bound to be a clash between the interests of technocrats and democrats. Being in Europe, by definition, meant the loss of some control. But that conversation was too difficult, and the people, after all, could not be trusted. The seeds of Faragism were being sown.

The deceit, once created, had to be maintained. With every new treaty that ceded more power to the EU – sometimes for good social or environmental ends, often to embedded neoliberalism – Thatcher, Major, Blair, Brown and

then Cameron all promised referendums, but would wriggle free from the commitment.

And all this time the nation polarised. Deindustrialisation, the political project of Thatcherism to hollow out the unions and any semblance of effective class solidarity, bred bitterness and resentment. New Labour, because it never sufficiently levelled up, eventually rolled the pitch for Nigel Farage.

By supporting the extension of the EU to 27 nations and not adopting the transitional immigration rules other countries took up, Labour handed the initiative to the Brexiters. In New Labour's cynicism, it saw a quick productivity fix that boosted tax revenues through easily imported eastern European labour.



'Eventually, of course, the country tired of it all and backed the strong man who could 'get Brexit done'.' Boris Johnson in 2019. Photograph: Frank Augstein/AFP/Getty Images

It never reckoned with the backwash from the already precarious people for whom all this was too much too quickly, economically, socially and culturally – especially when there was no enforcement of the minimum wage, so little social housing and so much pressure on the NHS and school

places. Labour refused to make the case for immigration and just hoped “growth” would cover the tensions. And poisonously, it based New Labour on its humiliation of old Labour, also known as the red wall.

The referendum cemented the divide. An adversarial two-party system that ignored huge chunks of voters eventually destabilised the country and both parties, just as it had in Scotland, two years before. But the party tribalists couldn’t learn. Instead of forging a deal that looked like the 51% to 49% result, they pursued their own factional interests. Eventually, of course, the country tired of it all and backed the strong man who could “get Brexit done”. We live in its hard wake. Inevitably, like everything in our post-democracy, it unravelled.

The tragedy, of course, is that we need to belong to institutions that go beyond nations as the only hope of dealing with climate chaos, globalised finance, multinational corporations, mass immigration and turbulent geopolitics. But that need must be balanced with nation and place. There is no socialism in one country, no globalised cosmopolitan nirvana and no Davos on Thames. Instead, there must be a way of managing the challenges, tensions and paradoxes we face.

It is our political system that forces bad binary choices on us. Today, Labour, the party that ignored leavers now ignores remainers. The Tories, eternally trying to spring the Faragist trap, see his Reform UK vote climb again. Devoid of [Boris Johnson](#), the only politician who can withstand Farage’s populist touch, the pressure to bend to the politics of hard Brexit remains irresistible. The polls are encouraging now, but something like the 2019 Tory upsurge could happen again, as the right consolidates around an anti-Europe, anti-immigration agenda, retaining some of the red wall. Whether it’s enough to deny Labour a majority remains to be seen. But the most dynamic force in UK politics continues to be rightwing populism.

Farage tweeted recently that “Britain is broke”. He should know. Brexit tipped us over the edge, but for Brexit to have happened, the country must have been broken. The biggest beneficiaries of such desolation could be him and his populist, scapegoating anti-politics. Only a new negotiated politics

allows a serious and deep conversation about what sort of country we want to be and how we govern ourselves.

It is more than six years since the Brexit vote, but everything and nothing has changed: we have same electoral system, the same cartel parties, the same adversarial and short-term, zero-sum politics. It's "blue walls" v red walls, as if the country, its people and its future really were that binary.

Brexit was a project instigated by people who wanted to take our country in the wrong direction, and the fact that they won still hasn't given us anywhere near enough pause for thought about why, and whether we are anywhere near a politics that could make people feel connected, and repel the populists.

Labour means well, but it's offering sticking plasters – and sticking plasters will not do.

- Neal Lawson is director of the cross-party campaign organisation Compass
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## 2023.01.27 - Around the world

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## [China](#)

# China claims Covid wave has peaked with severe cases, deaths falling fast

But reporting from inside China during the lunar new year period suggests rates of infection and fatalities exceeding official reports



Masked crowds gather around a lion dancer during lunar new year activities in Beijing. Photograph: Kevin Frayer/Getty Images

*Helen Davidson in Taipei  
@heldavidson*

Thu 26 Jan 2023 23.31 EST Last modified on Fri 27 Jan 2023 13.56 EST

China's health authorities have said the Covid wave is past its peak, with rapid decline in both severe cases and deaths in hospitals, but experts remain wary of the government's official data.

According to China's Center for Disease Control (CDC), the number of critically ill patients in hospital peaked in the first week of January, then

rapidly declined by more than 70%. The number of deaths also reached its highest level that week, the data said.

Prof Chi Chun-huei, director of the centre for global health at Oregon University, said local officials were incentivised – via punishments and rewards – to under-report infection figures during the zero-Covid policy. Now that policy was gone, they were incentivised to exaggerate infection rates and under-report deaths.

“Most international experts know this very well – China’s statistics are very unreliable,” he said.

Covid cases have swept across China in recent months, escalating rapidly after the government suddenly ended its zero-Covid policy in early December 2022. Last week a senior health official said [80% of people had been infected](#) in this wave, although it was not clear where the figures came from.

According to the data, there were 128,000 critically ill Covid patients in Chinese hospitals on 5 January, the highest number reached during this wave. It described a peak inside hospitals over the western new year, with almost 10,000 new critically ill cases a day from 27 December to 3 January.

By 23 January the total number of critically ill cases had dropped by 72% to about 36,000, it said.

The number of deaths in hospitals reached their highest point on 4 January, with 4,273 recorded, before falling 79% by 23 January to 896.

The CDC said the number of visits to fever clinics peaked at 2.867m on 23 December, before falling 96.2% to 110,000 on 23 January. A similar decline was observed in visits to rural clinics, with peaks around the same date, it said.

The data, published on Wednesday, was based primarily on hospital inpatients, giving some insight into the severity of the outbreak, but external

health experts and observers have cautioned that it only shows one part of the true toll.

China's wave of infections hit major cities first, and there has been concern that travel for lunar new year could spread infections into regional areas. Reporting from inside China has already found apparent high rates of infection and fatalities that appear to exceed official reports.

With the end of zero-Covid, travel restrictions, mass testing, mandatory quarantine and other measures were wound back or dropped entirely. Data collection systems quickly fell far behind the reality on the ground, with fewer than 60 deaths officially recorded in the first few weeks until authorities updated the way deaths are attributed.

The notice from the CDC acknowledged that PCR testing was not keeping up with infections. Daily tests had dropped to 280,000 by Monday, down from 150m on 9 December, and 7.54m on 1 January. Some provinces had enacted systems for collecting the results of residents or allowing residents to self-report, but the figures were “affected by the willingness of residents to test”.

Previously several provinces or major cities had reported infection rates of 70-90%, but some analysts speculated such figures might have been over-inflated to suggest places were on the way to recovery.

Prof Antoine Flahault, director of the institute of global health at the University of Geneva, told the Guardian the figure of 80% total infection rate was “mostly plausible” and in line with global knowledge of Omicron’s attack rate.

“Having said that, to transfer that to mortality figures is highly difficult.”

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## Tyre Nichols

# Tyre Nichols: five Memphis ex-police officers charged with murder over motorist's death

Nichols, 29, died three days after a traffic stop turned into a fatal physical attack on 7 January



From left are fired Memphis police officers Demetrius Haley, Desmond Mills Jr, Emmitt Martin III, Justin Smith and Tadarrius Bean. Photograph: MPD/Reuters

*[Victoria Bekiempis](#) and agencies*

Thu 26 Jan 2023 22.28 ESTFirst published on Thu 26 Jan 2023 13.03 EST

Five former Memphis police officers were charged on Thursday with murder and other crimes in the killing of [Tyre Nichols](#), a Black motorist in Memphis, Tennessee, who died three days after a 7 January traffic stop spiraled into a fatal physical attack, local jail records indicated.

Shelby county sheriff's office online records showed that Tadarrius Bean, Demetrius Haley, Desmond Mills Jr, Emmitt Martin III and Justin Smith were in custody. All five were charged with second-degree murder, aggravated assault, aggravated kidnapping, official misconduct and official oppression.

"While each of the five individuals played a different role in the incident in question, the actions of all of them resulted in the death of [Tyre Nichols](#) and they are all responsible," Steve Mulroy, the Shelby county district attorney, said during a press conference on Thursday.

David Rausch, director of the [Tennessee](#) bureau of investigation, said: "Let me be clear: What happened here does not, at all, reflect proper policing.

"This was wrong," Rausch said. "This was a crime."

Nichols's stepfather, Rodney Wells, told the Associated Press by phone that he and his wife, RowVaughn Wells, who is Nichols's mother, discussed the second-degree murder charges and are "fine with it". They had sought first-degree murder charges.

"There's other charges, so I'm all right with that," he said.

Nichols, 29, endured a three-minute attack, Mulroy said. An attorney representing his family reportedly [said](#) an independent autopsy indicated that he "suffered extensive bleeding caused by a severe beating".

"He was a human piñata for those police officers," the family attorney, Antonio Romanucci, told reporters. "Not only was it violent, it was savage."

Police officials initially said there was a "confrontation" when officers came toward Nichols's vehicle and then another "confrontation" after they arrested him.

The five former officers accused of involvement in the deadly encounter, who are all Black, were fired last week. Memphis police officials [said](#) the officers flouted "multiple department policies, including excessive use of force, duty to intervene, and duty to render aid".

Other officers are being investigated for possible policy violations. Two Memphis fire department members who worked on Nichols's initial care have been "relieved of duty" pending an internal investigation, [officials said](#).



A portrait of Tyre Nichols is displayed at a memorial service for him on Tuesday. Photograph: Adrian Sainz/AP

State and federal officials are investigating the fatal encounter.

Memphis authorities said they would release video of the incident. The public has not yet seen the footage, but family members and their attorneys have. During the press conference on Thursday afternoon, officials indicated that the footage would be released after 6pm local time on Friday.

The chilling recording showed that Nichols "called repeatedly for his mother", his family's legal team said, throughout the beating, which took place some 100 yards from his mother's home, family representatives [told reporters](#).

Speaking to reporters after viewing the video, Romanucci said officers pepper-sprayed Nichols, used a stun-gun and restrained him. Family representatives said Nichols said he wanted just to return home.

“Tyre was brutalized by Memphis police, much like how Rodney King was beaten more than 30 years ago – but unlike Rodney, Tyre lost his life from this violent attack,” the civil rights attorney Ben Crump, who is on the family legal team, said after seeing the video.

“How are we here again so many years later? These former officers must face the consequences of taking this young man’s life and robbing his family of their loved one – justice is the only path forward.”

A day before charges were announced, the city’s police chief, CJ Davis, denounced the fatal encounter as “heinous, reckless and inhumane”.

“Aside from being your chief of police, I am a citizen of this community we share,” Davis said in a [video published on YouTube](#). “I am a mother, I am a caring human being who wants the best for all of us.

“This is not just a professional failing. This is a failing of basic humanity toward another individual … and in the vein of transparency when the video is released in the coming days, you will see this for yourselves.”

A description of Nichols’s health provided by his family suggested a dramatic disparity between his physical strength and that of the arresting officers. Nichols had Crohn’s disease and had trouble maintaining his body weight, the Washington Post [reported](#).

Nichols’s weight was about 145lb. All the officers allegedly involved in his death exceeded 200lb. Two of the officers were on college football teams, the Post noted.

RowVaughn told the Post her son was a “gentle soul”. Nichols, who had a four-year-old son, worked for the shipping giant FedEx. Every night, during his evening meal break, he would return to his mother’s home. His hobbies included taking photos of sunsets and skateboarding, the New York Times reported. He had a tattoo of his mother’s name on his arm.

“That made me proud,” RowVaughn told the New York Times. “Most kids don’t put their mom’s name. My son was a beautiful soul.”

Rodney, Nichols's stepfather, said: "He was a great, great kid, he didn't deserve what he got, now what he deserves is justice."

Memphis remains on edge as residents await the video release. The Democratic congressman Steve Cohen, who represents the city, said the killing was "awful" while urging calm, [the Times](#) said.

While people might "want to exercise their first amendment rights to protest actions of the police department", Cohen said, "and people should, they should be peaceful and calm".

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## Myanmar

# Myanmar opium production surges since coup, UN finds

Conflict and economic hardship force farmers to rely on opium, with poppy cultivation rising by 33% in 2022



Farmers working in a poppy field in Myanmar's Shan state. The country's opium cultivation has risen by 33% in 2022. Photograph: Ye Aung Thu/AFP/Getty Images

*Associated Press*  
Thu 26 Jan 2023 21.48 EST

Production of opium has flourished in [Myanmar](#) since the military's seizure of power, with the cultivation of poppies up by a third in the past year, according to a UN report.

In 2022, in the first full growing season since the military wrested control from the democratically elected government of Aung San Suu Kyi in 2021, Myanmar saw a 33% increase in the cultivation area to 40,100 hectares, according to the report by the UN Office on [Drugs](#) and Crime released on Thursday.

“Economic, security and governance disruptions that followed the military takeover of February 2021 have converged, and farmers in remote, often conflict-prone areas in northern Shan and border states have had little option but to move back to opium,” said the UN office’s regional representative, Jeremy Douglas.

The overall value of the Myanmar opiate economy, based on UN estimates, ranges between \$660m and \$2bn, depending on how much was sold locally and how much of the raw opium was processed into heroin or other drugs.

“Virtually all the heroin reported in east and south-east Asia and Australia originates in Myanmar, and the country remains the second-largest opium and heroin producer in the world after Afghanistan,” Douglas said.

“There is no comparing the two at this point, as Afghanistan still produces far more, but the expansion under way in Myanmar should not be dismissed and needs attention as it will likely continue – it is directly tied to the security and economic situation we see unfolding today.”

Decades of political instability have made the frontier regions of Myanmar largely lawless, to be exploited by drug producers and traffickers. Most of the opium exported by Myanmar goes to China and Vietnam, while heroin goes to many countries across the region, Douglas said.

“It is really where the value is for traffickers,” he said. “Very high profits.”

The cultivation of opium had been trending downward in recent years before the military took control. Production estimates hit a bottom of 400 tonnes in 2020. After rising slightly in 2021, that spiked in 2022 to an estimated 790 tonnes, according to the report.

Myanmar has been plunged into a state of civil war since the military's takeover.

The violence has meant that the government has been unable to reach some areas to carry out drug eradication raids and has also had to divert its resources elsewhere. Consequently, eradication efforts appear to have decreased substantially, with 1,403 hectares reported eradicated in 2022 – approximately 70% fewer than in 2021.

As the conflict continues to take its toll on Myanmar's economy, an increasing number of rural households have been pushed into relying more on opium cultivation for income, the UN said.

“The expansion of opium production that is under way is fundamentally about poverty and people in rural areas reacting to the economic situation,” Douglas said. “It has always been there in tough times. At the same time, the security situation is clearly difficult with increasing frequency and intensity of conflict, and those involved in the drug economy have been left largely unchecked.”

Its synthetic drug economy has also been surging for the same reasons, with reported regional seizures of methamphetamine and other drugs reaching record levels.

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## [Tennessee](#)

# Tennessee high school students build robotic hand for classmate

Students designed, 3D printed and sized a prosthetic hand for Sergio Peralta, whose right hand is not fully formed



Tennessee high school student Sergio Peralta's classmates built him a prosthetic hand for his right hand. Photograph: CBS News

[Ramon Antonio Vargas](#)

Fri 27 Jan 2023 02.00 ESTLast modified on Fri 27 Jan 2023 13.13 EST

Students at a [Tennessee](#) high school have built a robotic hand for a classmate missing part of his, an act of friendship that he has called life-changing.

At the center of perhaps one of the most heartwarming news stories to come out of the US so far [this year](#) is Sergio Peralta, who initially arrived at Henderson high school near Nashville this past fall while trying to cover up that his right hand was not fully formed, [CBS News](#) reported on Wednesday.

“As I was growing up, like during my first years of school, I had a lot of people asked me what’s wrong with … my hand, lots of people, and I used to just say even in kindergarten, ‘I was born like that,’” the 15-year-old Sergio recalled to the local CBS affiliate [WVTF](#).

Sergio added to CBS: “In the first days of school [at Henderson], I honestly felt like hiding my hand – like nobody would ever find out.”

But an engineering teacher at Sergio’s school, Jeff Wilkins, eventually learned of the boy’s right hand and reportedly promised him that his classmates might be able to do him a favor.

Those classmates then spent four weeks designing, 3D printing and sizing a prosthetic hand for Sergio, who also helped. One of the first things for which Sergio used his new prosthetic when it was ready was to catch a ball with his right hand.

Despite growing up without a fully formed right hand, Sergio said he was able to do “almost everything”. But it wasn’t until he got his prosthetic that he could play catch with his right hand, he said.

Henderson student Leslie Jaramillo told the local CBS affiliate [WVTF](#) that the project embodied the spirit of their school’s engineering class.

“You’re supposed to be engineering, coming up with new ideas, solving issues,” Jaramillo said.

Their principal, Bob Cotter, echoed Leslie’s sentiment in an interview with [the BBC](#). He said Wilkins and his students challenge themselves to turn abstract concepts “into reality”. And, Cotter added, Sergio’s robotic hand “is a testament to the students … who care about each other and the program that Jeff Wilkins has built”.

Sergio told CBS that he never would have expected his classmates’ kindness and creativity “in a million years”.

“I didn’t know them, so I actually got introduced to them by the teacher,” Peralta said to WVTF of the peers who helped him with his prosthetic. “And then that’s what I started working on, and I got to be friends with them.

“Living without a hand for 15 years and they actually offered me two is [something] actually pretty cool. No one has ever offered me this stuff – [it] changed my life.”

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## [Haiti](#)

# Gunfire reported near Haiti PM's home after rebel police rampage through capital

Police protesting the killings of fellow officers by gangs stormed the airport and surrounded the prime minister

- [Explainer: How did the Haiti crisis get so bad?](#)



Haiti has been gripped by gang wars following the assassination of its president in 2021. Photograph: Richard Pierrin/AFP/Getty Images

*Staff and agencies in Port-au-Prince*

Thu 26 Jan 2023 16.48 ESTFirst published on Thu 26 Jan 2023 14.11 EST

Disgruntled police officers have rampaged through the streets of Haiti's capital of Port-au-Prince, blocking roads and forcing their way into the country's main airport where they briefly prevented prime minister Ariel

Henry from leaving. Later there were reports of heavy gunfire near his official residence.

Police are protesting the [killings of officers by Haitian gangs](#). At least 10 officers have been murdered in the past week; another is missing and one more has severe bullet wounds, according to the Haitian national police.

The killings are just the latest example of escalating violence in the Caribbean nation, which has been gripped by gang wars and political chaos [after the 2021 assassination of President Jovenel Moïse](#). His unelected successor has asked for an [international military intervention](#) to combat the gangs, but no country has been willing to put boots on the ground.

The deaths enraged members of Fantom 509, an armed group of current and former police officers that have violently demanded better conditions for officers.

Protesters in civilian clothes who identified themselves as police first attacked prime minister Ariel Henry's official residence, according to a Reuters witness – at one point, breaking down one of the gates outside his home. They then flooded the airport as Henry was arriving back from a trip to Argentina.

Henry was temporarily stuck in the airport, unable to leave, but returned to his residence in Port-au-Prince later on Thursday, followed by police protesters. A Reuters witness heard heavy gunfire near his home.

Earlier in the day, dozens of police wove through the city, many wearing hoods along with police uniforms, flak jackets and rifles and automatic weapons. They seized buses to blockade roads and torched tires across the city, leaving smoke billowing through the streets.

Many demanded tougher crackdowns on the gangs and called for an end to the current government of Henry, which many Haitians view as illegitimate.

“If they are killing police officers, me as a citizen, what should I do?” one protester in a mask screamed into an Associated Press camera. “The police

are second only to God and we're going to stand behind them.”

Local media reported that armed men were robbing foreign passengers in the car park of the city's airport.

One video filmed by local media showed a group of men, some of them wearing shirts with the word “Police” written on them, heatedly arguing with uniformed officers at the airport and then appearing to walk past the officers without struggle.

A video recorded by local Haitian media shows empty streets and closed businesses on a key road in Port-au-Prince where the rebel group passed through.

Police anger has been inflamed by a video circulated on social media showing the naked and bloodied bodies of six officers stretched out on the dirt, their guns lying on their chests. The gang which killed them, known as Gan Grif, still has the bodies, police said.

In addition to the bodies displayed by the gang, a number of officers were killed last week in a skirmish with gangs in a neighbourhood that was once considered relatively safe.

The Haitian national police expressed condolences to the slain officers' families and colleagues, and said it was “calling for peace and invites police officers to come together to bring forward an institutional response to the different criminal organizations that terrorize the Haitian people”.

The United Nations estimates that 60% of Port-au-Prince is controlled by the gangs. On the streets of the capital, Haitians say it is more like 100%.

This week, the UN special envoy for Haiti urged the US and Canadian governments to lead an international armed force to help Haiti combat the gangs. Haitian police, meanwhile, are pleading for more resources.

Some on the streets said they would continue to protest.

“The movement will continue, we can't let police get killed like this,” said one masked man in a police uniform carrying a pistol who did not want to be

identified. “We can do the job if they give us ammunition.”

*Associated Press and Reuters contributed to this report*

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## [Tyre Nichols](#)

# ‘I’m just trying to go home’: Tyre Nichols heard pleading in released video

The grisly footage, released in four parts, indicates an ambulance did not arrive for more than 20 minutes after the vicious beating

- This article contains video and descriptions of physical violence



A photo of Tyre Nichols is positioned before a press conference.  
Photograph: Scott Olson/Getty Images

*[Victoria Bekiempis](#)*

Sat 28 Jan 2023 12.01 ESTFirst published on Fri 27 Jan 2023 19.05 EST

A group of Tennessee police officers punched and kicked [Tyre Nichols](#) – delivering at least a half-dozen blows – as he languished on the ground, crying out for his mother, during a 7 January beating that would result in his death, surveillance footage released on Friday night revealed. The deadly

attack on Nichols reportedly [unfolded](#) about 80 yards from his mother's home.

The disturbing video, which was released in four parts by the [Memphis](#) police department, included both body-camera and street lamp-mounted camera video showing the attack on Nichols, who is Black. While Nichols's injuries were clearly severe, and his physical condition in obvious decline, the video indicates that an ambulance did not arrive for more than 20 minutes after the vicious beatdown.

Tyre Nichols: Memphis police release footage of deadly traffic stop – video

The four videos made public provide a rough chronology of the fatal encounter between Nichols and the five Black police officers. The incident started when two Memphis police officers pulled him over in a traffic stop.

“Get the fuck out of the car!” one officer shouted several times. An officer pulled him out of the car.

Nichols replied: “I didn’t do anything”. An officer said, “Get on the fucking ground” and warned that he would “Tase” Nichols.

Nichols, 29, tells them: “I’m on the ground.”

“You guys are really doing a lot now,” Nichols also said. “I’m just trying to go home.”

Nichols, who was brought to the ground, wound up running from the officers. “I hope they stomp his ass,” one of the officers could be heard saying. The fatal beating unfolded when other officers later apprehended him at an intersection.

Some of the chaotic footage shows officers punching and kicking Nichols. One officer shouted that he would “baton the fuck outta you”.

Video from the camera attached to a light pole provided the broadest – and most wrenching – view of the beating. As Nichols, who appeared cuffed,

remained on the ground, one officer kicked him in the head and then did so again.

As multiple officers restrained Nichols, who did not appear to be resisting or presenting any threat to them, another officer repeatedly struck him with a baton.

Officers then appear to bring Nichols to his feet. He was repeatedly punched and, when he fell to the ground, was kicked again. They dragged Nichols's limp body to a police car shortly thereafter and sat him against the side.

None of the officers involved appeared to stop the beating or help Nichols. This video appears to show eight officers milling about as he languished against the car.

As video of the deadly beating was released, thousands of protesters took to the streets across the US. The protests around the US were overwhelmingly peaceful.

[Protesters](#) in Memphis marched on a highway and chanted, “Say his name”. In New York City, a group of protesters [marched](#) near Times Square; the police department said there were three arrests on allegations ranging from criminal mischief to assault.

Joe Biden had urged peaceful demonstrations, while acknowledging the deep anger stoked by the attack, saying: “Tyre’s death is a painful reminder that we must do more to ensure that our criminal justice system lives up to the promise of fair and impartial justice, equal treatment and dignity for all.”



Civil and human rights activists gather to protest Tyre Nichols's death in New York. Photograph: Robin Rayne/Zuma Press Wire/Rex/Shutterstock

After the video footage was released, Biden said: "Like so many, I was outraged and deeply pained to see the horrific video of the beating that resulted in Tyre Nichols's death. It is yet another painful reminder of the profound fear and trauma, the pain, and the exhaustion that Black and brown Americans experience every single day."

Five former Memphis police officers involved in the fatal encounter were charged on Thursday with second-degree murder, aggravated assault, aggravated kidnapping, official misconduct and official oppression in the death of Nichols, who succumbed to his injuries on 10 January.

Protests across US after video of fatal police beating of Tyre Nichols released – video

However, the video shows that more than five officers were present at points during the incident including after the beating, when Nichols reeled from his injuries and was not have taken to hospital in an expedient manner.

"While each of the five individuals played a different role in the incident in question, the actions of all of them resulted in the death of Tyre Nichols and

they are all responsible,” Steve Mulroy, the Shelby county district attorney, told reporters on Thursday.

Police officials initially claimed that a “confrontation” unfolded when officers approached Nichols’s vehicle, followed by another “confrontation” upon his arrest.

The five officers, who are Black – Tadarrius Bean, Demetrius Haley, Desmond Mills Jr, Emmitt Martin III and Justin Smith – were fired last week. They are due in court on 17 February for their arraignment, [CNN reported](#).

Mills’ attorney, Blake Ballin, insisted that his client didn’t engage in the same misconduct as other officers who were involved. In a statement reported by CNN, Ballin said the footage “produced as many questions as they have answers”.

The Memphis police department [said](#) the men broke “multiple department policies, including excessive use of force, duty to intervene, and duty to render aid”.

The city’s police chief, CJ Davis, described the deadly incident as “heinous, reckless and inhumane”.

“Aside from being your chief of police, I am a citizen of this community we share,” Davis remarked in a [video](#) on 25 January. “I am a mother, I am a caring human being who wants the best for all of us.”

“This is not just a professional failing. This is a failing of basic humanity toward another individual … and in the vein of transparency when the video is released in the coming days, you will see this for yourselves.”



Demonstrators participate in a protest against the police killing of Tyre Nichols in Washington DC. Photograph: Tasos Katopodis/Getty Images

The Memphis Police Union issued a statement following the release of the video, saying it is “committed to the administration of justice and NEVER condones the mistreatment of ANY citizen nor ANY abuse of power. It added: “We have faith in the criminal justice system. That faith is what we will lean on in the coming days, weeks, and months to ensure the totality of circumstances is revealed.”

Shelby county, [Tennessee](#) sheriff Floyd Bonner announced on Friday night that two deputies had been relieved of duty in relation to the events.

“Having watched the video for the first time tonight, I have concerns about two deputies who appeared on the scene following the physical confrontation between police and Tyre Nichols,” Bonner said in a tweet. “I have launched an internal investigation into the conduct of these deputies to determine what occurred and if any policies were violated.

“Both of these deputies have been relieved of duty pending the outcome of this administrative investigation.”

Nichols’s family members and their attorneys viewed the video earlier this week. One attorney said that Nichols was attacked for three minutes.

The family's legal team reportedly [said](#) an independent autopsy showed that Nichols "suffered extensive bleeding caused by a severe beating".

"He was a human piñata for those police officers," one family attorney, Antonio Romanucci, said to reporters. "Not only was it violent, it was savage."

There's a lot more questions that need to be answered after this video has been made public

### *Ben Crump*

Ben Crump, a civil rights attorney on the family's legal team, said, "Tyre was brutalized by Memphis police, much like how Rodney King was beaten more than 30 years ago – but unlike Rodney, Tyre lost his life from this violent attack."

Following the release of the video, Crump said that while Nichols's mother couldn't watch the video, she wanted others to do so, believing that "people need to see how and why her son was killed".

Crump also said that he had received inquiries about why other officers, including a white officer present, hadn't been charged. "There's a lot more questions that need to be answered after this video has been made public."

Missouri Congresswoman Cori Bush said more must be done to prevent police violence—and that Congress needed to act, arguing "charging the officers who brutalized Tyre is not enough".

"Our country will continue to sanction the taking of Black lives with impunity until it embraces an affirmative vision of public safety and dismantles its racist policing system rooted in enslavement and government control," Bush said in a statement. "And let's be clear: merely diversifying police forces will never address the violent, racist architecture that underpins our entire criminal legal system. The mere presence of Black officers does not stop policing from being a tool of white supremacy."

Leaders of other police departments across the country have decried the violence shown in the video. "The NYPD and the communities we serve are

collectively outraged at the death of Tyre Nichols in the custody of the Memphis police department,” the department commissioner, Keechant L Sewell, said in a statement. “The disgraceful actions depicted in the released video are an unequivocal violation of our oath to protect those we serve, and a failure of basic human decency.”

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## Tyre Nichols

# ‘Seared in our memories’: outpouring of shock and horror over Tyre Nichols’s video

Recording of the 29-year-old’s killing has sent shockwaves across the US, with the officers’ conduct being condemned

- This article contains video and descriptions of physical violence

Protests across US after video of fatal police beating of Tyre Nichols released – video



Sam Levine

Sat 28 Jan 2023 01.00 ESTLast modified on Sat 28 Jan 2023 12.28 EST

The first thing the video captures [Tyre Nichols](#) saying to police are four simple words: “I didn’t do anything.”

It didn't matter. In minutes, police yanked him from his car, threw him to the ground, attempted to Tase him, and threatened to knock him out. They gave him nonsensical commands, the journalist Wesley Lowery [noted](#), yelling at him to lie on the ground when he was already there. "I'm just trying to get home," Nichols said.

When Nichols escaped and ran away, more officers chased him down, tackled him and then proceeded to kick him in the head, punch him in the face, and hit him with a baton. As he struggled to sit up, officers and medical personnel stood around, declining to give him any kind of medical attention.

Even after being warned for days that the video of Nichols was gruesome, the images released on Friday evening were horrifying. "It's as bad as it was described," Charles Ramsey, the former Philadelphia commissioner, said on CNN shortly after the videos aired live on the network.

Tyre Nichols: Memphis police release footage of deadly traffic stop – video

An audio-less bird's-eye view of a police camera on a lightpole provided the fullest, and most gruesome, angle of the incident. It showed how Nichols, 29, was swarmed by police and helpless as he was brutally beaten by them – images that will be forever seared into the American conscience.

The videos show "how gruesome it is, how appalling it is", Benjamin Crump, the civil rights attorney who is representing Nichols's family, said on CNN on Friday. But they also show "how unnecessary this was. That Tyre Nichols was killed in this manner."

"They did not know the character of the person who they were brutalizing. They did not know that he was such an outstanding citizen," Rodney Wells, Nichols's stepfather, [told ABC](#). "I guess they always are dealing with criminals or whatever. But they did not know that Tyre had such a beloved following, so to speak."

Joe Biden was also swift in condemning the video on Friday and called for peaceful protest. "Like so many, I was outraged and deeply pained to see the horrific video of the beating that resulted in Tyre Nichols's death," he said in

a statement. “It is yet another painful reminder of the profound fear and trauma, the pain, and the exhaustion that Black and Brown Americans experience every single day.”

“Tyre Nichols should have made it home to his family,” Vice-President Kamala Harris said in a statement. “The footage and images released tonight will forever be seared in our memories, and they open wounds that will never fully heal.” She also called on Congress to pass the George Floyd Justice in Policing Act, a police reform bill for which there was once a glimmer of bipartisan support that has now faded.

The decision to release the video on Friday was itself significant. In other police brutality cases, prosecutors and police departments will often stonewall the release of video that shows police in a bad light. Charges against officers, if they come at all, can take a long time. In Memphis, the city released the video 20 days after the incident, fired the five police officers involved, and has already charged them with murder.

“This is now the blueprint for all these other police forces around the country,” Crump said on CNN. “Now, they can’t tell us it takes this long to investigate. When those five Black officers in Memphis, Tennessee, were caught killing Tyre Nichols, they moved swiftly.”

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[Tyre Nichols](#)

## **US protests begin after police release footage of fatal beating of Tyre Nichols**

Demonstrations in Memphis and other US cities follow release of video and request from Nichols's mother to 'protest in peace'

Protests across US after video of fatal police beating of Tyre Nichols released – video

*[Victoria Bekiempis](#) and [Sam Levine](#)*

Fri 27 Jan 2023 20.37 ESTFirst published on Fri 27 Jan 2023 17.02 EST

Demonstrations quickly began on Friday evening as Memphis police released footage of the fatal beating of [Tyre Nichols](#).

The video released on Friday showed [Memphis](#) officers kicking Nichols repeatedly in the head, punching him in the face, and hitting him with a baton. It also showed officers and medical personnel failing to intervene as Nichols could not sit upright after the assault.

In Memphis, demonstrators began marching shortly after the video was released, taking over a bridge connecting [Tennessee](#) and Arkansas.

HAPPENING NOW: Protestors are finally walking off bridge and are headed directly to where police.

Protestors chanting: "WE READY, WE READY, WE READY FOR YALL" [pic.twitter.com/ypw6nkYs7B](https://pic.twitter.com/ypw6nkYs7B)

— Anthony Cabassa (@AnthonyCabassa\_) [January 28, 2023](#)

NOW: Activists are making their way to the highway. [#TryeNichols](#) [#Memphis](#) [pic.twitter.com/WzuDghJB00](https://pic.twitter.com/WzuDghJB00)

— Kirstin Garriss (@ReporterGarriss) [January 28, 2023](#)

Protesters also gathered in Atlanta and New York City, where there appeared to be some arrests.

Peaceful protests in NYC after video of #TyreNichols murder by police officers is released. pic.twitter.com/LW7YzNSnXI

— Kaivan Shroff (@KaivanShroff) [January 28, 2023](#)

Activists have planned demonstrations in Memphis and at least seven other major American cities: New York City, Washington DC, Philadelphia, Chicago, Detroit, Boston and Portland.

Arrests starting at Times Square protest for Tyre Nichols @CBSNewYork pic.twitter.com/IWzOANYNeb

— Ali Bauman (@AliBaumanTV) [January 28, 2023](#)

Nichols's family, as well as US officials, have urged protesters to remain peaceful. "When that tape comes out [Friday], it's going to be horrific," Nichols's mother, RowVaughn Wells, was quoted by the Los Angeles Times as saying. "But I want each and every one of you to protest in peace. If you guys are here for me and Tyre, then you will protest peacefully."

#HappeningNow Protesters stand off with the NYPD as police and SRG (Special Response Group) block off the road on W42nd Street and 10th Avenue in Times Square, following #TyreNicholsVideo Release

Video by Ken Lopez @FreedomNTV

FULL STORY https://t.co/QJ2nE1QYX7  
pic.twitter.com/DLoIqDHwHh

— Oliya Scootercaster ☰ (@ScooterCasterNY) [January 28, 2023](#)

In a statement released shortly after the videos were made public, Joe Biden said: “I join Mr Nichols’s family in calling for peaceful protest.” The White House also met with mayors of several of America’s largest cities on Friday to prepare for protests.

The five police officers – all of whom are Black – who beat Nichols during the traffic stop have been fired and charged with murder and other offenses.

Local officials across the US are preparing for mass demonstrations. In Memphis, where the deadly encounter between Nichols and police unfolded, schools cancelled after-school activities for Friday and events scheduled on Saturday, while some area businesses were expected to close earlier.

Brian Kemp, the Republican governor of Georgia, has declared a state of emergency on Thursday in advance of the release of this video. Kemp’s declaration comes in the wake of protests in Atlanta on 21 January over the death of activist Manuel Esteban Paez Terán, who was killed at a police training centre, NPR reported.



Demonstrators protest near the White House in Washington DC.  
Photograph: Tasos Katopodis/Getty Images

Washington DC police officials also said they are preparing for demonstrations. While the Metropolitan police department “respects the

community's first amendment right to demonstrate and peacefully protest", officials said in a statement to [WTOP](#), "we will not tolerate any unlawful behavior during first amendment demonstrations, and we will take swift law enforcement action should anyone break the law".

The expected demonstrations over Nichols's death come more than two years after the police killing of George Floyd in Minneapolis spurred worldwide [mass protests](#). Police departments across the US drew [extensive scrutiny](#) over their handling of often peaceful protesters.

Some US police punched, kicked, teargassed, pepper-sprayed and drove vehicles toward protesters. Thousands of US protest participants found themselves jailed and many were injured, with some sustaining life-threatening injuries.

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## Tyre Nichols

# **‘He had a beautiful soul’: Tyre Nichols’s parents reflect on the son who was taken from them**

A candlelight vigil was held at the skatepark where the 29-year-old would give lessons to his four-year-old son, his mother said



A portrait of Tyre Nichols is displayed at a memorial service on 17 January in Memphis, Tennessee. Photograph: Adrian Sainz/AP

*[Richard Luscombe](#)*

*[@richlusc](#)*

Fri 27 Jan 2023 14.27 EST Last modified on Fri 27 Jan 2023 18.12 EST

Tyre Nichols, the latest in a long line of young American Black men whose death is tied to the police, was a “beautiful soul” and home-loving son with his mother’s name tattooed on his arm, his family and friends have said.

Described as “a momma’s boy” by his mother, RowVaughn Wells, the 29-year-old Memphis, [Tennessee](#), resident, the youngest of four children, was also a father himself. He leaves a four-year-old boy whom he loved to teach skateboarding.

“You’ve got to put that skateboard down. You’ve got a full-time job now,” Nichols’s stepfather Rodney Wells recalled telling Nichols during a press conference this week.

“He looked at me like, ‘Yeah, right,’ because that was his passion.”

Friends at the Tobey skate park in [Memphis](#) held a candlelit vigil for Nichols on Thursday evening.

The job, Wells said, was as a shift employee at FedEx for the last nine months, but home was never far from his mind even as he was working. He would come home every evening, mid-shift, for his meal break, RowVaughn Wells said.

She believes that’s what he was doing on the night he was stopped and killed by five Memphis police officers. “He was trying to get home to safety,” she told CNN on Friday.

['My son was calling my name': Tyre Nichols's mother calls for justice – video](#)

Another of Nichols’s passions was photography, which he had enjoyed from a young age. His mother said he wanted to go to the park “almost every night” to take pictures of the sunset. Nichols called himself an “aspiring photographer” with a particular fondness for landscapes, and posted many of his images [to his website](#).

Nichols had a close circle of friends in Memphis, with whom he would meet most days at Starbucks. Politics was not up for discussion, his family said, but sport, and his beloved San Francisco 49ers, often was.

“Does that sound like somebody that the police said did all these bad things?” Wells said at the press conference. “Nobody’s perfect OK, but he was damn near.”

In the CNN interview on Friday, Wells said she would miss her son terribly.

“He just had a beautiful soul and he touched a lot of people,” she said.

“I always joked because he came in the house, he’ll come in and say, ‘Hello parents.’ I’ll never hear that again, I’ll never cook for my son again, I’ll never get a hug from my son again, I won’t get anything from my son again just because some officers decided they wanted to do harm to my son.

“No mother should have to go through this.”

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## 2023.01.28 - Spotlight

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- [Blind date We didn't talk about star signs, which is rare for London gays](#)
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**‘Girls today aren’t prey. They are  
victorious’: Michelle Williams on  
#MeToo, money and playing Spielberg’s  
mum**



Photograph: Sofia Sanchez and Mauro Mongiello / Trunk Archive

The actor is putting all her experiences into an Oscar-nominated turn as the director's formidable mother. She talks about the dramatic changes she's witnessed in Hollywood and beyond



[Catherine Shoard](#)  
[@catherineshoard](#)

Sat 28 Jan 2023 02.00 EST

Michelle Williams is apologising for the camera angle. She's cross-legged on a bed and her iPhone keeps slipping down the pillows. Sometimes all I see is the duvet, sometimes something more mysterious. "It's hard to find a place to put this," she says. "I don't want to breastfeed you."

It's 7am in Palm Springs, California. Last night, Williams was at a film gala. This morning, she's been up for two hours already. "I thought I would be super-accomplished and do this before he [the baby] woke, but he's jet-lagged and already woke at five." Williams' son was born last October; his brother, Hart, is two-and-a-half. Their father is Williams' husband, the director Thomas Kail; she also has a 17-year-old, Matilda, from her relationship with the actor Heath Ledger.

Williams wears a baggy white T-shirt and an expression of shining exhaustion. She speaks slowly: half-artist carefully considering her craft, half-drowsy from juggling red carpets and sunrise parenting. "It's a really difficult age," she says, massaging her temples. "To be able to work and meet the needs of both a toddler and an infant is pretty confounding."

Any solution? She shrugs. Only to abandon any sense of achievement. "When you add small children into the mix, all of that vanishes and you feel like you're kind of no good at anything. I don't think there's really anything to solve, other than getting comfortable with that sensation." She sits back and pours a pot of coffee down her throat.

Williams is back on the awards circuit for [The Fabelmans](#). Two years ago, Steven Spielberg called to tell her he was making an autobiographical drama about his childhood. They chatted. Williams began to twig. "For clarity's sake," she asked him, "if I'm understanding correctly, are you asking me to play your beloved mother?" He was. She still pinches herself. "It's *such* an incredible, once-in-a-lifetime role," she says. She's right. If Cate Blanchett hadn't made *Tár* last year, it'd win her an Oscar. It yet might.

Williams is a powerhouse. Now 42, she commits to the women she plays with an emotional immediacy as ferocious as it is effective. Her 11 minutes in [Manchester By the Sea](#), as a woman who has lost all three children in a house fire, will upset me for ever. She's clearly nice: sensitive, an empath. She's also tough. Ryan Gosling called her a cross between Brigitte Bardot and Clint Eastwood.



With Paul Dano in *The Fabelmans*. Photograph: Merie Weismiller Wallace/Universal Pictures and Amblin Entertainment

Mitzi Fabelman – the character based on Leah Spielberg, later Leah Adler, who died aged 97 in 2017 – is also pretty formidable: camp, theatrical, impulsive. A tornado zips past her house and she piles the kids into the car to chase it. “Of course it’s safe!” she exclaims. “I’m your mother!” Every meal is served on disposable crockery then grandly gathered into a plastic tablecloth and trashed. She suddenly buys a monkey.

“I think the way that she looked at her children was the first thing that I connected to,” Williams says. “She got down on her hands and knees with them, and she let them be the most important thing in the room. Not the dishes, not the vacuuming, not the kind of mundanity of daily life that we all so easily get absorbed in and overwhelmed by. She allowed herself to let those responsibilities fall away and become her children’s playmate.”

Leah Spielberg redefined what a mother could be. She didn't let the times tell her how to behave

Leah's dreams of being a concert pianist were shelved to care for her four children and devoted husband, Arnold, a computer scientist (renamed Burt in the film and played by Paul Dano). But she still approached life as a series of crescendos, highly conscious of the power of performance.

"She redefined what a mother could be according to who she wanted to be," Williams says. "She didn't let the times tell her how to behave. She made her own culture inside of her family, and then her children went on to make their own culture in the larger world, because it started in their home."

"That actually gives me the chills as I talk about it," she continues, proffering an arm, "because I have young children and I have an older child and so I've gone through one childhood, and now I'm back in childhood thinking about how to make this experientially rewarding and fun for all of us."

Before we talk, I've been advised not to ask about Williams' children. In fact, she is blearily frank about being a nursing mother, and theorises about parenthood with the fluency of someone who's been at it a while. Who's her best audience? "I'm sure it's my daughter," she says like a shot. "She is the person I have spent my adult life with."

What first made Spielberg think she'd be a good match for his mother, he has said, was "the secret energy that poured from her" as Gwen Verdon in a mini-series about the dancer's marriage to Bob Fosse. Well, that's nice to hear, Williams says, raising an eyebrow. She never yawns, by the way. My sense is she's so tired she's beyond yawning.

"Life requires energy to live it. And when you have children, while they take energy from you, you also have to find a way to keep the energy in the room up, to meet them where they are with understanding and joy. The only way to get through early childhood is to find a way to engage deeply with the play and wonder that children offer us."

She wedges her phone by the headboard. It keels slowly over. Such gadgets are the arch enemy of creative child-rearing, she says. What she fears is “becoming a list-making, goal-driven human robot. Because the phones and the computers are telling us that they are more important than we are, and that the world is inside of them, and they’re so alluring and they have so much power.” A still gaze down the lens. “I find myself in a struggle with it, and I want to win.”

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When she was small, Michelle Williams wanted to be a boxer. Heavyweight, not feather or welter. Mike Tyson was her idol. Home was rural Montana. “My very early memories are of riding bareback on horses and wandering the plains looking for arrowheads. What I want for myself in my work is to feel like that again. To feel open-ended. What drives me is to taste that again.”

The horizons narrowed when she was nine and the family – her mother, Carla, father, Larry, his three older children and a younger sister, Paige – moved to San Diego. Larry is a financial guru who twice stood for Republican office and co-authored a book seeking to prove the historical veracity of the Bible. He currently runs a thriving website offering market forecasts, trading tips and an online course that culminates in graduation from the [Larry Williams University](#), which has its own heraldry.

His daughter is a good advert for his skills. Aged 16, a young Michelle won the Robbins Trading Company World Cup Championship of Futures Trading by turning \$10,000 into \$100,000; the second highest profit in the tournament’s history.

Larry and Carla are now divorced and he and Michelle are no longer close. At 15, she legally emancipated from her parents with their approval, so she could work adult hours in Los Angeles, having notched up enough credits as a child actor – Lassie, Baywatch – to suggest she could make a living.

Williams moved, solo, at 15, to Burbank, California, AKA Studio City. “There are some really disgusting people in the world,” she has said of the experience, “and I met some of them.” The emancipation from parental oversight appears to have stretched a little further than formality. Supper was

always pizza – as was breakfast, and lunch. She didn't see a dentist for a decade.

At 17, she won the part of wealthy newcomer Jen on teen drama Dawson's Creek. It jump-started her career and parachuted her to the safety of small-town North Carolina, where the show shot for nine months a year. But Williams was less at ease with the glossy snogging than her co-stars. She queried the scripts and asked questions about motivation, later saying, "My taste was in contradiction to what I was doing every single day."



With Katie Holmes in Dawson's Creek, 1998. Photograph: Abaca Press/Alamy

These days, she's more reconciled to her soapy origins. "Without having first played Jen," she said last November, she never could have attempted Marilyn Monroe or Gwen Verdon. Nor would she "have known how to handle being Steven Spielberg's mother without having been Mary Beth's granddaughter".

Mary Beth is Mary Beth Peil, the Broadway stalwart who played Williams' on-screen grandmother and to whom Williams recently dedicated an award. "I was totally alone," she said in her speech. "She was gripping and bursting with energy. She showed me that creativity was more than a mere

profession. And all of this vitality was miraculously turned in my direction. Her smiling face was looking at me, and she called me ‘her girl’.” Williams blossomed in her warmth.

After the show ended in 2003, she went full throttle with the artist’s life: moved to New York, starred in *The Cherry Orchard*, made movies with Wim Wenders (*Land of Plenty*) and Tom McCarthy (*The Station Agent*). In 2004, she signed on for *Brokeback Mountain*, Ang Lee’s gay cowboy film, in which she plays the wife of Heath Ledger’s closeted Ennis.

The pair fell in love after Williams twisted her knee in a snow scene and Ledger took her to hospital. They got engaged and, at the end of 2005, Matilda was born. Two years later, they split up amicably; five months after that, [Ledger died](#) of an accidental drug overdose. He was 28, Williams 27.



With Heath Ledger in *Brokeback Mountain*, 2005. The couple fell in love while making the film. Photograph: PictureLux/The Hollywood Archive/Alamy

Everything changed. Paparazzi camped outside her Brooklyn home. A conveyor belt of houseguests didn’t staunch the scrutiny or the loneliness. “That feeling of being watched goes very, very deep,” she says today, “because it cuts you off from living your life. And for a while it felt like

such an impediment to being natural and unguarded that my daughter and I moved outside of the city.” This meant a farm in upstate New York. “We lived in the country because I felt more capable of living an unobserved life there. The particles shift under observation. I certainly felt that when we were living in Brooklyn.” Now, she has returned to the same neighbourhood she lived in with Ledger. “I feel strengthened and more capable, but I certainly have an awareness I wish I could shed, because it does change how you move through the world.”

In fact, Williams has always trusted her own compass. Just before Ledger died, she made her most grubby and naturalistic film yet: *Wendy and Lucy* (2009), about a homeless woman and her lost dog. Crew of six, no makeup or hair-washing for three weeks.

“Back then,” says its director, Kelly Reichardt, “she had heavy people on her team and they did not want her to come to Portland to make this film. I was amazed that someone at that point in her career and at her age did it, despite that. She’s always been a very independent thinker. Very no-bullshit. She’s a weird mix of very trusting and very confident.”

Very on-the-button, too. *Wendy and Lucy* was a big hit at Cannes where, last year, Williams and Reichardt’s fourth film together, *Showing Up*, also premiered. That early self-reliance was paying dividends, likewise Peil’s ad hoc conservatoire.

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In 2009, after seven years of trying, Williams, Gosling and Derek Cianfrance finally had the chance to make [Blue Valentine](#), an indie drama about a crumbling marriage. But Williams felt that she couldn't leave Matilda for the shoot and, heartbroken, pulled out. Cianfrance drew a circle on the map of everywhere an hour's drive from her home and the production relocated to accommodate her. Her performance, raw as a fistfight, led to her first best actress Oscar nomination; she earned her second a year later as Marilyn Monroe in [My Week With Marilyn](#), a film about the making of The Prince and the Showgirl.

Blue Valentine meant living with Gosling as his wife for a month (during the day, anyway). My Week With Marilyn sounds less pleasant. "I cried every single day leaving that set," she says today. "And probably a few times during the day, because I was in the midst of growing pains." Maturing as an actor felt, to Williams, akin with growing into her body as a child. "It's like how it feels to have literal growing pains where your bones are stretching and you wake up in the middle of the night crying and crawling to your parents because you are in so much pain."

It's an abruptly horrible image. And it's hard not to feel that Williams would, at various points in her life, have benefited from better protection. "I should have said no," she says of Marilyn today. "I had no training, no mode of preparation. No business in doing it." Williams did not attend drama school; she only finished high school by correspondence course. Any attempt at impersonation of the most iconic star of the past half-century was likely to be highly scrutinised. So why say yes? Her eyes flutter shut. "I want something for myself that is beyond what I know I am capable of. She opens her eyes, face fantastically wide and peaceful. "And now, 12 years after having played that part, I have my legs under me and I can come and go to my work in a state of joy."

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Speak to any of Williams' Fabelmans co-stars and, unbidden, they talk about this joyfulness. Reichardt, too. "She's definitely more happy," she says. "She always seemed very longing when I first knew her. She had a lot to prove. Now, she's able to relax into the moment."

Seth Rogen emails to say: “Michelle has a genuine love for performing that’s infectious. She’s joyful on set, focused, and exudes an energy that makes you feel lucky to be there because she genuinely seems to feel lucky to be there. Also, her ability to fully commit to a character at the drop of a hat is truly a wonder to behold.”

In The Fabelmans, Rogen is the fly-in-the-ointment: Burt’s best friend, Bennie, a de facto member of the family, and the reason it falls apart. Spielberg has said he initially blamed his father for the split; the film reassesses that through 76-year-old eyes and finds no one at fault – least of all Leah. Her decision to leave was agony, but to stay might have killed her.



Photograph: Sofia Sanchez and Mauro Mongiello/Trunk Archive

“When she gave up her dream of being a concert pianist, she experienced a premonition of death,” Williams says. “She allowed part of herself to fall off. That experience, I think, made it impossible for her to live through that again. She did something that caused pain, cleaving, alienation, but she did it because she was deeply in touch with who she was. It was all truly an act of love. She loved herself enough, she loved this man enough, and she had put enough love into her children to know that they were going to survive this thing. I think that that kind of courage can be very inspiring.”

Many magazine covers have been devoted to Williams' love life. She's been linked to actor Jason Segel and film-maker Cary Fukunaga, the artist Dustin Yellin, novelist Jonathan Safran Foer and musician Conor Oberst (of Bright Eyes). In 2019, there was a short-lived marriage to the songwriter Phil Elverum. She and Kail met on the set of *Fosse/Verdon* and married in March 2020. Hart was born that summer. Reichardt reports theirs is a house of much contentment and not a lot of sleep. "But I think Tommy only needs four winks a night."



With husband Thomas Kail at the Golden Globes earlier this month.  
Photograph: Christopher Polk/NBC/Getty Images

Kail is Jewish, working on a movie of *Fiddler on the Roof*, and the couple are raising their sons with Judaism as "part of our family culture and their childhood education", Williams says. She is not Jewish. [Given recent Jewface controversies](#), such as Helen Mirren in the imminent *Golda Meir* film – plus the fact Leah was sufficiently devout to later open a kosher cafe – did Williams ever have qualms about playing Spielberg's parents?

"You know," she says, "I didn't. My feeling was: these are his parents. And if he has chosen myself and Paul, I'm going to trust him." Plus, it was a world she had experience of: growing up, the neighbours on both sides were Jewish. "The discourse, the tradition – the rituals spoke to me. It resonated

very differently from my family. I have a Nordic background,” she grins. “I come from a people who hold things in.”

I was raised in the 80s. Selfhood wasn’t put into young women. And now it is. I get to see it in my own daughter

Yet in 2017, she had evolved sufficiently to effect real-world change by speaking out. Williams had learned that while she was reportedly paid \$1,000 for her reshoot work on Ridley Scott’s All the Money in the World (they had to hastily [swap Kevin Spacey for Christopher Plummer](#)), her co-star, Mark Wahlberg, received \$1.5m. She blew the whistle on the discrepancy and said it had left her [“paralysed in feelings of futility”](#). The case kickstarted Hollywood’s pay parity revolution.

On Fosse/Verdon, Williams made the same as her co-star, Sam Rockwell. Does it feel good or bad to have money now? For the first time in our conversation, she stalls. “It’s a hard question. It’s something I’d have to reckon with before I really know how to talk about it.”

She also edges around specifics on #MeToo. But when I say I’m surprised more people weren’t brought down, she has the look of someone who knows where the skeletons are buried. “Maybe there’s still hope for that.”



With Ledger at the Vanity Fair Oscar party, 2006. Photograph: Barry King/WireImage

What she will say is that she sees the fruits of the movement all the time. “Boy, oh boy, do I ever!” she says when I ask if the young actors on *The Fabelmans* were more confident than she used to be. “I did not possess any grace or calm, nor did any of my contemporaries. I was raised in the 80s. Selfhood wasn’t put into young women. And now it is. I get to see it in my own daughter and I can’t take my eyes off her. It is a glorious miracle to behold that I never thought I would witness in my lifetime.”

When Williams talks about Matilda, rather than about being her mother, she speaks slightly differently. She speeds up. Concerns over exact expression are overtaken by enthusiasm. “I thought I would have to teach my daughter how to subvert herself and crawl underneath the system to keep herself safe. And, instead, the system has exploded and these young people act with compassion, integrity and righteousness.

“I have the chills talking about it. These girls aren’t prey. These girls are already victorious. I love to sit back and watch them in the world and know that it is safer and more inclined in their direction than it was for me.”

I wonder how different Williams would be, as both person and performer, had she been born 20 years later. After an hour talking to her, I’m still not quite sure what she’s like, beyond friendly and intense. I think that’s partly because she wants to be a work-in-progress.

“My work over the last decade is to grow my own forcefield and allow my spirit to expand,” she says. “I think energetically I’m a much smaller person than Mitzi or Gwen or Marilyn. But these women have worked on me. They have worked through me. They have made me a better person and mother and artist because I’ve been able to be under such deep influence. I find that while I am learning how to become them, they are also teaching me how to expand my definition of my own selfhood.”

She rubs her forehead and smooths her hair. It’s 8am and soon it’ll be feeding time. She starts to shuffle towards the end of the bed. Does she ever find herself feeling maternal towards Spielberg, too?

She pauses. “Yeah, you know, I do,” she says. “As recently as yesterday we were in a room and I caught a feeling from him and I wanted to be there for him in a certain way. But more as Michelle than Mitzi,” she adds. She adjusts her T-shirt and smiles. “And not *that* maternal.”

The Fabelmans is released on 27 January.

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## **Blind date: ‘We didn’t talk about star signs, which is rare for London gays’**



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Composite: Jill Mead and Linda Nylind/The Guardian

Adam, 26 (left), assistant museum curator, meets Bron, 29, news reporter

Sat 28 Jan 2023 01.00 EST



## **Adam (left) on Bron**

### **What were you hoping for?**

I try not to have any expectations, but I was excited and intrigued.

### **First impressions?**

I liked his jacket a lot, and a big messy fringe is always fun.

### **What did you talk about?**

Living in other countries while at university. The strangeness of being queer when a lot of our straight friends are starting to reach those “settled” milestones like marriage, houses and kids. We didn’t talk about star signs, which I’m tempted to say is rare for London gays.

### **Most awkward moment?**

At one point, my cocktail went down the wrong way so I was struggling to look attentive while low-key choking.

### **Good table manners?**

Impeccable, considering we were sharing Mexican – hardly the easiest food to eat gracefully.

### **Best thing about Bron?**

He was a great conversationalist. I had a great time enjoying all the tangents the evening went on.

### **Would you introduce Bron to your friends?**

Yes.

### **Describe Bron in three words.**

Energetic, attentive, warm.

### **What do you think Bron made of you?**

He was good at asking me questions, so I wonder if I talked about myself too much.

## **Q&A**

### **Want to be in Blind date?**

Show

Blind date is Saturday's dating column: every week, two strangers are paired up for dinner and drinks, and then spill the beans to us, answering a set of questions. This runs, with a photograph we take of each dater before the date, in Saturday magazine (in the UK) and online at [theguardian.com](http://theguardian.com) every Saturday. It's been running since 2009 – you can [read all about how we put it together here](#).

### **What questions will I be asked?**

We ask about age, location, occupation, hobbies, interests and the type of person you are looking to meet. If you do not think these questions cover everything you would like to know, tell us what's on your mind.

### **Can I choose who I match with?**

No, it's a blind date! But we do ask you a bit about your interests, preferences, etc – the more you tell us, the better the match is likely to be.

**Can I pick the photograph?**

No, but don't worry: we'll choose the nicest ones.

**What personal details will appear?**

Your first name, job and age.

**How should I answer?**

Honestly but respectfully. Be mindful of how it will read to your date, and that Blind date reaches a large audience, in print and online.

**Will I see the other person's answers?**

No. We may edit yours and theirs for a range of reasons, including length, and we may ask you for more details.

**Will you find me The One?**

We'll try! Marriage! Babies!

**Can I do it in my home town?**

Only if it's in the UK. Many of our applicants live in London, but we would love to hear from people living elsewhere.

**How to apply**

Email [blind.date@theguardian.com](mailto:blind.date@theguardian.com)

Was this helpful?

Thank you for your feedback.

**Did you go on somewhere?**

Sadly not, which was my fault for making early next-morning plans.

**And ... did you kiss?**

Very briefly.

**If you could change one thing about the evening what would it be?**

It would have definitely been nice to grab another drink.

**Marks out of 10?**

8.

**Would you meet again?**

Yes definitely.



Adam (left) and Bron on their date



**Bron on Adam**

**What were you hoping for?**

To meet someone cool.

**First impressions?**

Tall, cute, friendly.

**What did you talk about?**

Living in the US and Japan. Gay socialising in London. Grindr and Hinge. The White Lotus.

**Most awkward moment?**

As Adam arrived I was chatting with the restaurant host about what my preferred type of guy looked like – and I was not describing the man who walked into the conversation.

**Good table manners?**

I went home with a gnarly stain on my T-shirt, so I'm ill-placed to judge.

**Best thing about Adam?**

He's a good talker. And he has a lot to talk about. I want to hear more about his year in Japan.

**Would you introduce Adam to your friends?**

For sure. He'd be well received.

**Describe Adam in three words.**

Worldly, interested, smiley.

**What do you think Adam made of you?**

He laughed at most of my jokes, so I guess either funny or pitiable.

**Did you go on somewhere?**

Sadly not – he had a yoga class the next morning.

**And ... did you kiss?**

Yep! Just a peck.

**If you could change one thing about the evening what would it be?**

I would have cancelled his yoga class.

## Marks out of 10?

8.5.

### Would you meet again?

We exchanged numbers and we're going on a queer night out.

*Adam and Bron ate at [El Pastor](#), London W1. Fancy a blind date? Email [blind.date@theguardian.com](mailto:blind.date@theguardian.com)*

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## Housing market

### Analysis

# Why UK house prices could plunge by 20% after the latest interest rate hike

[Larry Elliott](#) Economics editor

Property market has defied gravity for years but analysts say rising mortgage rates will mirror the 1980s price crash



Dark clouds are gathering over the UK property market after years and years of prices defying gravity. Photograph: Christopher Thomond/The Guardian

Sat 28 Jan 2023 03.00 EST

Britain's estate agents normally radiate optimism but they will be watching anxiously at noon next Thursday when the [Bank of England](#) is expected to announce the latest blow to a rapidly weakening property market.

Crunch time has arrived for a sector that for years has appeared to defy gravity. Threadneedle Street's monetary policy committee (MPC) is poised to raise official borrowing costs for a 10th meeting in a row, with mortgage approvals already running 30% below their pre-pandemic levels and house prices down by 4.3% from last August's peak, according to the Halifax bank.

Further falls are inevitable as borrowers adjust to an era of persistently higher interest rates. The City is braced for a half percentage point rise, to 4%, and for the rate to remain at least as high until the Bank is sure inflation is sustainably on course to hit its 2% target.

Analysts are agreed that 2023 will see further falls in house prices, with one predicting a peak-to-trough fall of more than 25% once inflation is taken into account.

There are structural reasons why house prices tend to go up in the UK – tough planning laws, a tax system that rewards home ownership, a sharp fall in the number of new homes being built since the 1950s and 1960s – but occasionally there are breaks in the trend.

This year is on course to be one of those break periods. A long boom driven by record-low interest rates has run its course.

The party was always going to end sooner or later as, even with rock-bottom interest rates, finding a deposit for a home and meeting mortgage payments became more and more of a struggle. Figures from the Halifax this week showed a first-time buyer was paying just over £300,000 to get a foot on the property ladder and needed a deposit of £62,000. More than 60% of mortgage completions were in joint names last year.

But two other factors have contributed to the rapid cooling in demand: the steady increase in official interest rates since late 2021 and the impact of Liz Truss's brief premiership, which involved mortgage rates rising to almost 6%.

Andrew Wishart, a property economist at Capital [Economics](#), said average quoted mortgage rates had climbed from 1.4% at the end of 2021 to a peak of 5.7% in November last year. While the effects of Kwasi Kwarteng's budget had worn off slightly, mortgage rates were still likely to be just above 4.5% by the end of the year.

"While the current level of house prices was affordable when interest rates were 2%, that's not the case with mortgage rates at 5%, 4% or even 3%", Wishart said. "Higher mortgage rates mean buyers will be less able and willing to borrow, reducing their budgets and putting downward pressure on house prices. To return affordability to a sustainable level by year-end would imply a drop in the price-to-earnings ratio from almost eight times income now to below six, consistent with a drop in prices of around 20%."

George Buckley, a UK economist at Nomura, said house prices would need to fall because rising interest rates had made it more expensive to service home loans. The extent of the fall would depend on how quickly this adjustment happened. According to Nomura, to return the mortgage repayments-to-income ratio to its long-term average by the end of this year would require a drop of 20% in prices. If the adjustment took place more slowly between now and the end of 2027, the decline would be just under 10%. Nomura's central forecast is for prices to fall by 15% by mid-2024.

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Kallum Pickering, the chief UK economist at Berenberg, said the scale of the correction in house prices mattered because the wider UK economy was sensitive to large swings – either upwards or downwards. Judging by the

latest bulletin from the Royal Institution of Chartered Surveyors (RICS), he said, the imminent downturn was likely to be on a par with the early 1990s, when interest rates peaked at 15%, and the global financial crisis, when the UK banking system teetered on the brink of collapse.

“In contrast to the recent string of surprisingly positive data for the economy as a whole, the December RICS housing market survey makes for grim reading,” Pickering said.

The headline house price balance – the gap between RICS members saying prices were going up against those saying they were going down – stood at -42.0% in December, compared with -25.7% in November, the lowest monthly balance since October 2010 and the third largest annual drop going back to 1978.

“The biggest annual drop happened in the late 1980s, before the early 1990s housing market crash and recession, while the second largest fall occurred during the global financial crisis in 2008. Although a housing market downturn was widely expected by economists (including us), the monthly drop in the December survey far exceeds our and consensus’ expectation,” Pickering said.

In the early 1990s, a doubling of unemployment prolonged and deepened the house price crash, as people who lost their jobs had to sell their homes in a falling market. While the low level of unemployment currently makes a repeat of the record repossession unlikely, Wishart says there will still be a sizeable fall in prices.

“Overall, even in the absence of forced sales we think that higher mortgage rates will lead to a severe repricing in the housing market this year. The nominal peak-to-trough house price fall of 12% we expect is shy of the falls of almost 20% seen in 2007-09 and 1989-92, and only takes house prices back to their March 2021 level. But note that in real terms it amounts to a 27% drop, on a par with those episodes.”

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## The Tim Dowling columnRelationships

# Tim Dowling: the trick to fixing things that break is not to do it too soon

First the fridge door, now the bathroom plug ... No one appreciates the determination and ingenuity involved in mending such things



Composite: Getty/Linda Nylind/Guardian



[Tim Dowling](#)

[@IAmTimDowling](#)

Sat 28 Jan 2023 01.00 EST Last modified on Sat 28 Jan 2023 06.19 EST

It is the season of things coming off in your hands – knobs and latches and chair legs and cup handles and articles with no name I’m aware of. I’ve snapped the plastic sliding mechanism that allows the fridge door to open in sync with the false wooden door that conceals it. This false door – a match for the other cupboard doors – was already here when we moved in, so I installed the fridge sliders myself. It’s a system prone to annual failure.

In the meantime I take down the Christmas lights. My wife finds me pulling them from the front hedge in the dark.

“I thought you might leave them up until July, like last year,” she says.

“I would have,” I say. “But I need to trim my beard. It’s an emergency.”

“What is?” she says.

“I look like the Unabomber,” I say.

“Why are we talking about your beard?”

“Because we only have one extension lead long enough for the dog clippers I use on my beard to reach the bathroom mirror,” I say. “And it’s connected to these Christmas lights.”

“Do I need to know all this?” she says.

I can’t fit my head in to see how it fits together, so reach blindly, tightening screws when I mean to loosen them, and swearing

“You asked,” I say.

“I don’t think I did,” she says.

“I think you’ll find, if we read the record back …” I say.

“Lalalala,” she says, fingers in ears.

Fifteen minutes later I carry the extension lead up to the bathroom. Two minutes later, I go back to my wife’s office.

“Do we have one of those little plastic darts with a suction cup on the end?” I say.

“What?” she says, not looking up.

“Like from a toy gun,” I say. “I’m sure I’ve seen one somewhere in the last three years.”

“Why do you need a rubber dart?” she says.

“The bathroom sink is full of water and the plug is stuck,” I say. “When you push the knob that’s supposed to make it pop up, nothing happens.”

“I thought you were trimming your beard,” she says.

“My guess is the lever inside the waste pipe has rusted and broken off,” I say. “But if I had a suction dart I could just …”

“I haven’t seen any dart,” she says.

Over the next week small packages begin to arrive for me – sometimes two at once. My wife comes down each time she hears the doorbell.

“Just new fridge door sliders,” I say, opening the first package. “It’s that time of year.”

“What’s in the other one?” she says.

“I don’t know,” I say, pulling the cardboard tab. “But it could be ...”

“What?”

“It is!” I say. “Replacement rods for a pop-up waste assembly!”

“Oh my God,” she says.

“I mean, I wasn’t even sure what they were called,” I say, holding up little bits of hardware wrapped in plastic.

“I can’t believe I’m watching you open this stuff,” she says.

“They look right,” I say. “But I don’t know about size. Do you think they come in sizes?”

The next afternoon I go up to the bathroom with my replacement rods and a selection of tools. A cupboard with a shelf has been constructed around the sink, with little regard for the possibility of something going awry with the pop-up waste assembly, or for anyone attempting to repair it. I can’t see how it all goes together, because I can’t fit my head in there. I reach blindly round the back of the pipe, tightening screws when I mean to loosen them, and swearing.

Some hours later I am sitting in the kitchen when my wife comes in and spies something on the worktop.

“What’s this?” she says, holding it up.

“I’m glad you asked,” I say. “That is the old pop-up assembly rod.”

“Oh no,” she says.

“As you can see, it’s rusted through, exactly as I predicted.”

“I just came down for some tea,” she says.

“But don’t worry, the new rod is installed and working flawlessly.”

“I have to go,” my wife says, leaving without tea.

Instantly I realise my mistake: I barely gave my wife time to appreciate the hardship of a sink plug that does not pop up. I should have left it that way until July, along with the Christmas lights. Then, perhaps, she would have sat through my story of unlikely triumph, my tale of man versus sink.

While I’m sitting with my head in my hands in the gathering dusk, the younger one comes in.

“What’s this?” he says, holding up the rusted rod.

“I’m glad you asked that,” I say.

“Uh-oh,” he says.

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- The stench coming from this government? It's the corrupt mixture of private wealth and public squalor
- Why is British politics a raging bin-fire? Don't ask the misunderstood heroes who held the torches
- Hitler didn't build the path to the Holocaust alone – ordinary people were active participants
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## **The stench coming from this government? It's the corrupt mixture of private wealth and public squalor**

[Jonathan Freedland](#)



Johnson, Sunak, Sharp and Zahawi operate in a gilded realm, while the services that keep Britain running are hobbled and broken



'The official line on Zahawi is what we might call the Sue Gray formulation: that we need to wait for the inquiry.' A protester in Westminster, London, on Wednesday. Photograph: Vuk Valcic/Zuma Press Wire/Rex/Shutterstock

Fri 27 Jan 2023 12.29 EST Last modified on Fri 27 Jan 2023 16.02 EST

He might have gone by the time you read this. He certainly should have. But we are in the age of shamelessness now, when revelations that would once have driven public figures to hide in mortified penance now prompt not so much as an apology, let alone a resignation.

I'm speaking of the Conservative party chairman, [Nadhim Zahawi](#), but not only him. For the proliferating questions about Zahawi's finances, like those surrounding the appointment of the BBC chairman, [Richard Sharp](#), point to a phenomenon that is both wider and deeper.

The official line on Zahawi is what we might call the Sue Gray formulation: that we need to wait for the inquiry led by the independent adviser on ministerial standards, [Laurie Magnus](#), to do its work. Tory MPs parrot that in public, but in private they've made up their minds. "I don't know a single Conservative MP who believes he can survive," says one – and you can see why.

The available facts are damning enough. Zahawi paid a penalty to HM Revenue and Customs and, as the head of that body spelled out this week, that doesn't happen for "[innocent errors](#)". You have to have done something worse.

Zahawi's defenders have taken comfort in the word "[careless](#)", to suggest that the Tory chairman was guilty of a mere slip-up. But HMRC uses that word in a precise way. "'Careless' means a failure to take reasonable care in relation to your tax affairs," advises the [official HMRC guidance](#), adding: "Carelessness can be likened to the longstanding concept in general law of 'negligence'." Put like that, it hardly sounds like a credential for the person once in charge of the public finances: yet Zahawi served as chancellor of the exchequer.

Anyone who has filed a late tax return, or put a decimal point in the wrong place, might want to give Zahawi the benefit of the doubt. But it's hard to do that when you recall that Zahawi did not admit his mistake straight away but, on the contrary, [threatened to sue for libel](#) those who first asked about it. For a politician to seek to intimidate those pursuing a legitimate inquiry should, in itself, be a disqualification for high office: a democracy relies on a free press, and a free press cannot function if those who exercise state power try to use their personal financial muscle to prevent scrutiny.

When asked about his own tax history on Friday, the current chancellor breezily offered that he didn't think that "people at home are remotely interested in personal tax affairs". I suspect the opposite is true: that they are highly interested in the tax affairs of those who determine how much everyone else pays in tax – and then spend that money. At the very least, they will want to know that the people making those decisions are paying what they themselves owe. And they will not be remotely tolerant of someone who issued menaces, branding as false and defamatory what was in fact true.

Sunak can be grateful to Zahawi for one thing, though. He has diverted attention away from Sharp, appointed by Boris Johnson's government to chair the BBC a matter of weeks after he had helped secure an £800,000 loan to Johnson. If that sounds cosy, consider that Sharp, a good chum of the former PM, is now the [subject of an inquiry](#) headed by a man who, like

Johnson, is an Old Etonian, right-of-centre journalist: namely William Shawcross, who serves as the commissioner for public appointments. [Shawcross's daughter](#) happens to be head of the policy unit in Downing Street. And let's not forget that the loan Sharp helped organise came from Johnson's distant cousin. Snug, no?

This, too, is a case that can be settled before any inquiry reports. The key fact is already known: Sharp did a big favour for the PM, yet did not tell the panel that appointed him, even though he was required to declare anything that might even be perceived as a conflict of interest. Sharp says there was no such conflict, echoed by Johnson himself, who minted a Borisism specially for the occasion: "[I can tell you that for 100% ding-dang sure.](#)"

But these two cannot be the judge in their own case. Sharp simultaneously saw enough of a problem in acting as a loan-broker for the PM that he promised the cabinet secretary he would stay out of it from that point on – and yet not enough of a problem to mention it to the committee handing out a plum job. That silence is itself disqualifying.

Sunak will hope all this whistles past a public that has more immediate troubles on its mind. But that misses the point. Because what cuts through from all of this is the unbelievable sums of money involved. The minds of most Britons will boggle at a world where someone can be "careless" on a tax bill to the tune of £5m. Five million! Where someone in a handsomely paid job can still need a personal loan of £800,000 – and get it, from a cousin he hardly knows. When millions of Britons are counting the pounds just to get through the week, deciding whether to [eat or stay warm](#), the notion that their rulers are dealing in telephone-number sums of cash will confirm that, truly, they live on different planets.

Allies of the PM insist that both the Zahawi and Sharp affairs are legacy scandals, leftovers from the Johnson era. But that hardly helps Sunak. First, because it advertises his own [failure to make a break from that period](#), which would, admittedly, be difficult, given that he was there at Johnson's side throughout. And second, because if the distance between regular voters and Tory politicians who enjoy enormous personal wealth is the question, then Sunak is hardly the answer. Mr and Mrs Sunak are the richest of the lot.

Still, this goes deeper than the usual terrain of scandal and optics. The [smell of corruption](#) that has filled the nostrils this week blends with a stronger, more lingering sense of corrosion emanating from this government. An overburdened NHS barely able to cope; a rail network that is struggling to limp along, in the north of England especially; trains, schools, hospitals all hobbled by strikes – it adds up to a shared and spreading feeling that the country is broken, that the public realm in particular has been corroded, not least by more than a decade of starved budgets.

In his [Bloomberg speech](#) on Friday, Jeremy Hunt suggested it was “columnists from both left and right” who had been spreading angst with all their declinist talk. But the decline is real.

And it is made vivid by the contrast with the fabulous wealth of those at the very top. In the 1950s, the economist John Kenneth Galbraith referred to “private affluence amid public squalor”. The phrase gained new currency in the 1990s, when Britons could see public services ailing even as the super-rich soared to ever greater heights. That’s the picture now, too. The private realm of Johnson and Sunak, Sharp and Zahawi – and many others – is so abundant, those who inhabit it can be careless about sums of money everyone else would regard as life-changing. Meanwhile, the country – the services that people rely on and which, in some way, define society itself – is descending into squalor. We cannot stomach the corruption, because we see the corrosion all around us.

- Jonathan Freedland is a Guardian columnist
  - Join Jonathan Freedland for a Guardian Live online event on 2 February, when he will talk to Tania Branigan about Mao’s Cultural Revolution, and how it has shaped modern China. Book [here](#)
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**OpinionPolitics**

# **Why is British politics a raging bin-fire? Don't ask the misunderstood heroes who held the torches**

[Marina Hyde](#)



From Truss to Johnson, former chaos-mongers are sure none of it is remotely their fault. In fact, the time is ripe for a comeback



Liz Truss and Boris Johnson at the Remembrance Sunday ceremony on Whitehall in London, November 2022. Photograph: Toby Melville/AP

Fri 27 Jan 2023 10.25 EST Last modified on Fri 27 Jan 2023 14.12 EST

It's encouraging to see Liz Truss hoving back into view, after a period in the wilderness only slightly longer than that endured by the OG messiah. And, indeed, only slightly longer than her entire premiership. As one ally [told the Financial Times](#) of her abortive adventures in the public finances this week: "Liz believes that the policy was right but she didn't get the political backing she needed." Erm. Does that quite cover it? Having failed to get backing from her colleagues, the markets, business, the Bank of England, the public and experts from the Institute for Fiscal Studies and beyond, Liz was arguably a full six [infinity stones](#) short of a gauntlet.

Still, it feels inevitable that another betrayal narrative should be cranking up. You can never have too many, can you? Having accidentally divested itself of various of its other manufacturing industries, the UK is now world-beating in producing betrayal narratives, with supporters of any number of the politicians who played a part in the rolling chaos of the past seven years still claiming that their standard bearer was falsely victimised by people who simply lacked their vision. British politics throws the best pity parties. Consider us the Valhalla of misunderstood heroes.

Quite why this is the default narrative of UK public life is unclear, other than the fact the scorched-earth mess of it all has to be blamed on someone other than the people who just happened to be holding a blowtorch in the Westminster area at the time. The ranks of the betrayed grow ever larger, encompassing (but not limited to) such reverse luminaries as Truss and her chancellor Kwasi Kwarteng, [Boris Johnson](#), Jeremy Corbyn and Nigel Farage. Acolytes of all the above believe their leaders' visions have been betrayed by someone or other in one way or another, when the reality is they were undone by such trifles as "the voters", "reality" and "the consequences of their own actions".

Alas, this is not how their various tribes continue to see it, with the preferred position being to blame someone or something else for the shortcomings. British politics has been a series of bin fires over the past few years, but the various factions would have you believe that if only *their* bin fire had been allowed to burn a little longer, a phoenix would have arisen from it. Within our politics, taking responsibility is dead as a concept. The result is a public realm where it is always someone else's fault, and no mistakes, ever, can be conceded by operational figures.

Only in this atmosphere could [102 Conservative MPs](#) have believed last October that it was *finally* time for a return for Boris Johnson, who had vacated Downing Street in disgrace a full six weeks previously, after a series of self-generated scandals that had led to apoplectic public outcry and a downfall which had required [57 ministerial resignations](#) over not much more than 48 hours to finally shift the blockage. When he chose not to formally run in the second leadership contest last year, Johnson's supporters let it be known his betrayers were simply not yet sorry enough for what they had done. "Now is not the time for Boris," one sniffed. "They will be desperate by June next year." Certainly wouldn't rule it out. Westminster outriders feeling wounded over what happened to Johnson are all over the place these days. On Brexit, they even seem to imagine he was betrayed by his own deal.

Then again, Brexit is perhaps the richest source for betrayal narratives, with the ground being laid almost immediately after the vote. In 2017, [Nigel Farage explained](#) that if he didn't get his perfect, shiftingly defined version of Brexit, he would "don khaki, pick up a rifle and head for the frontlines".

In fact, he's farting out gin adverts and appearing on GB News and Cameo (where the platform [describes him](#) as "highly responsive" to requests to say any old shit for 73 quid). But he's still finding time to assert betrayal, and perpetually hints he may even feel betrayed enough to return to the frontlines – of politics – someday in the not too distant future. Which will at least allow me to attend his 37th resignation speech in due course.

Less politically successful but feeling no less betrayed are supporters of [Jeremy Corbyn](#), who still blame the media for the former Labour leader's failure to win two elections, the first against the worst candidate and campaign in recent memory, and the second (by a landslide) against Boris Johnson. Perhaps betrayal is easier to swallow than the idea that the last thing on earth anyone in the red wall was doing on the doorstep was regurgitating anything some twat like me had written in the Guardian. (Let's face it, if newspaper commentary of any type were remotely market-moving, the columns warning people off Johnson – from left and right – might have effected something other than a massive majority in his favour in 2019.)

So now the Trussites take their place among the furiously betrayed, despite the fact their leader left office having broken virtually every egg at her disposal, landing the UK with a vast bill and absolutely no prospect of an omelette. In fact, with nothing resembling an omelette having been served up for years now, it's possible – just possible – that the real victims of betrayal are not all these politicians, but the public.

- Marina Hyde is a Guardian columnist
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[Opinion](#)[Holocaust](#)

## **Hitler didn't build the path to the Holocaust alone – ordinary people were active participants**

[James Bulgin](#)



Having visited the crucible of these atrocities, I now believe it is dangerous to blame a handful of ideologues



James Bulgin at the Majdanek death camp in Poland, while filming for the BBC documentary How the Holocaust Began. Photograph: Benjamin Holgate/BBC/Caravan Media

Fri 27 Jan 2023 10.05 EST Last modified on Fri 27 Jan 2023 12.43 EST

I have been working around the subject of the Holocaust for more than a decade [at the Imperial War Museum](#). But generally this has been at a distance, researching in archives and institutions. Working on the BBC documentary [How the Holocaust Began](#), released this week ahead of Holocaust Memorial Day, changed that. It took me to forgotten places, sites where historical details are still unknown and mysteries remain.

There are still mass killings and mass graves about which we know little. Discovering this, and integrating it with the broader history I know, was a profound experience.

There can be a tendency sometimes to think of the [Holocaust](#) in very singular ways. It seems to be assumed that Hitler's warped and abhorrent intentions were seamlessly translated into practical action by a cabal of loyal followers and enforced in purpose-built "camps". There is also a sense that it was systemisation and bureaucratisation more than individual agency that

propelled this process forward once it had begun. This idea is not only inaccurate; I think it's dangerous.

The Holocaust did not happen simply because Hitler willed it into being, but because there were enough people prepared to act on his intentions and align themselves with his ideology. It was not implemented as part of a preconceived masterplan that had always anticipated death camps as the ultimate destination; it evolved.

The process by which this happened demanded effort, thought and consideration. Moreover, it required huge numbers of people – not just thousands, or tens of thousands even, but hundreds of thousands. These people gave Hitler the practical means to achieve his ideological vision. Hundreds of thousands of men and women who cooperated, in various ways, with the mass murder of 6 million men, women and children.

For years it has been suggested that the people responsible for this were either acting on orders that they had no choice but to follow, or were so brainwashed they had no meaningful understanding of what they were doing. I have found very little evidence to suggest that this is the case. Indeed, what shocked me most about some of the accounts I heard while filming was not just how much collaboration and compliance there was, but how readily this was offered. The path to genocide did not seamlessly unfold in front of those who walked along it: they had to build it for themselves.

From the very first shootings at the beginning of the German invasion of the Soviet Union on 22 June 1941, those on the ground did not wait for orders from Berlin to determine action – they used their own initiative.



Survivors of Nazi concentration camps lay flowers in the grounds of Auschwitz-Birkenau on the 78th anniversary of its liberation, Poland, 27 January 2023. Photograph: Zbigniew Meissner/EPA

Hitler's Wehrmacht forces were followed into the Soviet Union by four specially assembled SS units called [Einsatzgruppen](#). These units were given instructions to identify and eliminate Hitler's political enemies. Initially, their primary focus was Bolsheviks, but under the tenets of Hitler's belief that Bolshevism was a Jewish conspiracy, this swiftly evolved to encompass all Jews.

Visiting the site of one of these first acts of mass murder at the Lithuanian town of Gargždai was a sobering experience. In the years since the war, housing has built around the place where Lieutenant Hans-Joachim Böhme ordered [200 Jews to be shot](#) on the afternoon of 24 June 1941. Today there is a memorial, but it is hard to find. All remnants of the Jewish community who lived on the site are gone.

Gargždai speaks to the foundational moments where the Nazis' violent persecution of Jewish people became explicitly murderous. Those killed were not the first Jewish people to die at the hands of the Nazis, but they were some of the first to be murdered in the pursuit of a policy that would become unequivocally annihilatory.

In the weeks that followed, the scale of this mass murder grew substantially, and in less than a month the targets of the Einsatzgruppen had moved on from military aged men to include women and children. By the end of the year more than a million men, women and children had been killed.

While we have some degree of knowledge – albeit incomplete – about the deportations to death camps that ultimately followed, the history of those who were walked to their places of murder is far less clear. There is still no certainty about the total numbers involved. This lack of clarity isn't helped by present-day populations who are often extremely reticent about dealing with – or even acknowledging – the historic crimes. I had heard about this before, but being confronted with it first-hand was chilling.

In recent years, pioneering geophysicists and archaeologists have started to address this gap. By using their expertise to identify where some of the lost bodies might be, they are able to reveal something about what happened in these places, as well as to provide some degree of closure.

Until recently I had been unaware of the number of these remaining mass graves. Knowing that from 1942 the Nazis embarked on a programme to disinter and destroy the remains within them, as part of a desperate attempt to conceal their crimes, I had naively assumed little was left. I was wrong.

I was confronted with this in a direct way in a small wood on the edge of the Lithuanian town of Alytus. A few hundred yards from the carpark, Harry Jol and Phil Reeder – two of the geophysicists working with us on the programme – identified an unmarked grave. A small number of historic accounts indicated that shootings had been conducted at the site, but details were sketchy. The research conducted by Jol and Reeder's team revealed that not only was there a pit where these accounts suggested one could be found, but it was far larger than anticipated. In fact, their scans suggested that beneath the damp and sun-dappled earth were tens of thousands of bodies.

It is a terrible reality, but just feet beneath forests, fields and beaches across eastern Europe are human bones. These acts of mass murder have little, if nothing, to do with the perception of the Holocaust as a product of

systemised process. If anything, they are a more accurate reflection of its true, barbaric character.

This is the ground the camps were figuratively built on. The fact that such a place – a mass grave of potentially tens of thousands – could exist, unmarked and unexplored in a modern European nation, is a profoundly disturbing thing. I believe, however, that it is something we need face up to.

- James Bulgin is head of public history at Imperial War Museum, London, and previously head of content for the Holocaust galleries at the museum
  - [How the Holocaust Began is available to watch on BBC iPlayer](#)
  - *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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**Edith Pritchett on millennial lifeLife and style**

## **The gross meals we cook when we're alone – Edith Pritchett cartoon**

**Edith Pritchett**

Sat 28 Jan 2023 01.00 ESTLast modified on Sat 28 Jan 2023 01.01 EST

Cooking for One: My flatmate and I usually cook together and we like to try new recipes. But if I'm alone I make my SPECIAL STEW, a recipe I've honed over many years that would inedible to anyone but me. It should really really be eaten in secret ... 'on you're home early!' But then again I've spotted her furtively making her own gross little meals. And now I wonder what all my friends would be eating if they were alone? (Friends: 'Gravy eggs', 'Crumpets with mayo', 'Tuna mash', 'Just a whole stick of the Body Shop's raspberry lip balm')

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## 2023.01.28 - Around the world

- [New Zealand flooding Two dead and two missing as Auckland hit by record rainfall](#)
- [Arizona Crowdfunded DNA effort helps identify woman murdered 50 years ago](#)
- [US Biden and Pence documents reveal US crisis of 'overclassification', expert says](#)
- [Marjorie Taylor Greene Extremist keeps rising in Republican ranks despite 'loony lies'](#)
- [US Georgia is seeking to define 'Cop City' protests as terrorism, experts say](#)

## New Zealand

# New Zealand flooding: three dead and one missing as Auckland hit by record rainfall

Emergency services facing huge number of callouts as wild weather sparks landslides and forces closure of country's largest airport

Auckland flood victims wade through streets to safety – video

*Staff and agencies*

Fri 27 Jan 2023 23.25 ESTFirst published on Fri 27 Jan 2023 19.11 EST

Torrential rain in Auckland left three people dead and another missing, police said on Saturday, after widespread flooding hit New Zealand's largest city.

Two were found dead in Wairau Valley on Auckland's North Shore – one in a culvert and a second in a flooded car park – and a third body was found later after a landslide hit a house in the city centre.

Another man is missing after being swept in a community south of Auckland.

The new prime minister, [Chris Hipkins](#), visited the devastated area on Saturday with his emergency management minister, Kieran McAnulty. Hipkins promised that government support would arrive in the coming days, and warned of further bad weather.

He urged Aucklanders to avoid unnecessary travel, to stay out of the water and check in on loved ones. “For now the focus is supporting Aucklanders through this,” he said.

The city has broken all its rainfall records – 249mm compared with a previous record of 161mm in 24 hours – making this its wettest day and month on record. The nation's weather forecaster said while heavy rain had eased, another period of downpours was possible on Sunday.

It's a little hard to make out due to the colours (rain doesn't often reach that end of the scale). This is 24 hour radar observations for Auckland.

Red = 200mm+

Purple = 300mm+

Unprecedented numbers.[@Kieran\\_McAnulty](#) [@AklCouncil](#)  
[@AucklandCDEM](#) [@WakaKotahiAkNth](#) pic.twitter.com/CYEdEFIPz3

— MetService (@MetService) [January 28, 2023](#)

McAnulty said water tankers are being sent to the area, he said, and residents were urged to cut their water use in order to reduce wastewater levels. Residents in affected areas were also urged to buy only the food they need while damage to supermarkets and food supply services were assessed.

A state of emergency remains in place in the city of around 1.6 million people on New Zealand's North Island as the rains eased after causing flooding in the north, north-west and west. Asked to respond to claims the declaration was announced too late on Friday night, Hipkins said we would not get into “second-guessing” decisions on the issue.



Flash flooding in Auckland on Friday turned roads into rivers. Photograph: Twitter @MonteChristoNZ/Reuters

Auckland Emergency Management – part of the city’s council, said daylight had revealed the first “true understanding” of the impact of the storm, caused by warm air descending from the tropics which sparked heavy rain and thunderstorms.

“Auckland was clobbered on Friday – Auckland’s wettest day on record – and today we start the clean-up,” the agency’s duty controller, Andrew Clark, said in a statement, urging caution for residents returning home to survey flood damage.

“We won’t start to get a good idea of numbers affected until later today and, even then, this will take time, with information still coming in and many assessments to complete,” he said.

Simon Bridges, chief executive of Auckland’s Chamber of Commerce has said he expects the clean-up bill to run into the tens of millions, according to domestic media, and has called a meeting for Sunday to discuss how to help support businesses.

Auckland’s mayor, Wayne Brown, warned late on Friday that the clean-up operation would be a “major, major job”.

The flash flooding [turned many of Auckland's roads into rivers](#) on Friday, and the wild weather closed the city's airport, the country's largest, with ankle-deep water in some terminals.

Air New Zealand said its domestic flights in and out of Auckland resumed from noon on Saturday, and advised it was assessing whether international flights would also restart when the international terminal opens at 5pm local time..

The airline had 12 international flights due into Auckland diverted overnight, it said earlier on Saturday.

Hipkins, who was sworn in on Wednesday after Jacinda Ardern's resignation, wrote on Twitter that government agencies were "working flat out" to help.

Hipkins said the national crisis management centre, housed under the parliament building in the capital, Wellington, was helping to coordinate the emergency response.

The persistent downpour saw the cancellation of Elton John's concert on Friday at Auckland's Mount Smart stadium amid concerns for crowd safety.

Emergency services have been swamped by calls for help as civil defence officials warned residents to stay home.

Auckland residents have been urged to contact emergency services only if facing "life-threatening" danger.

*With Agence France-Presse and Reuters*

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## [Arizona](#)

# Crowdfunded DNA effort helps identify woman found murdered 50 years ago

Authorities named the victim found in Arizona desert in 1971 as Colleen Audrey Rice after money raised within five days of appeal



Colleen Audrey Rice Photograph: Mohave County Sheriff's Office

[Richard Luscombe](#)

[@richlusc](#)

Sat 28 Jan 2023 01.00 EST Last modified on Sat 28 Jan 2023 01.01 EST

A community-funded DNA project has helped detectives identify a murdered woman whose remains were stuffed in a canvas sack and dumped in the [Arizona](#) desert more than half a century ago.

Authorities named the victim as Colleen Audrey Rice, who was born in 1931 in Ohio, and would have been about 39 years old at the time of her death, before her body's discovery in November 1971.

The identification was made in partnership with a forensic genealogy company, Othram Inc, after a public appeal for \$6,500 to fund the project. The Mohave county sheriff's office put up an initial \$1,000 and posted the case to the [dnasolves.com](https://dnasolves.com) website last year, which helped raise the money in only five days.

A sheriff's office [Facebook post](#) dated 24 January said its cold case investigators worked with Othram "to determine if advanced DNA testing and forensic-grade genome sequencing could help give insight into the identity of this woman and the circumstances surrounding her untimely death".

The appeal for funding came after the detectives enlisted an artist from the Museum of Northern Arizona to age a high school photograph of Rice, who was later determined to have been married and estranged from her family.

"On January 23, 2023, the victim found her voice," the sheriff's office said in the post announcing the identification.

"Through the use of forensic genetic genealogy, the victim has been identified as Colleen Audrey Rice. DNA testing of a relative confirmed this after countless hours of investigation into her family tree and contact with distant family relatives."

Advances in DNA technology enabled the identification after five decades of frustration, the dnasolves website said.

"Early in the investigation, her fingerprints were sent to the FBI in Washington and a report of her expensive dental work was distributed in prominent dental magazines. Those records were checked against thousands of patient files," the site said, but none of the inquiries led to anything.

According to the sheriff's office: "Little is known of her life or how she came to be in Arizona. It is unknown if she had children as no records could be found."

The investigation is ongoing into who was responsible for her death, the agency added.

Law enforcement has become increasingly reliant on genetics to help identify victims and suspects in recent years. Earlier this month, [police in Idaho used DNA on public genealogy databases](#) to identify a man suspected in the murders of four university students.

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## US national security

### Analysis

# Biden and Pence documents reveal US crisis of ‘overclassification’, expert says

[David Smith](#) in Washington

System whereby government classifies 50m documents a year threatens national security and democracy, says Jameel Jaffer



Mike Pence and Joe Biden willingly turned classified material found at their homes over to the authorities. Photograph: Jim Lo Scalzo/EPA

Sat 28 Jan 2023 04.00 EST Last modified on Sat 28 Jan 2023 04.02 EST

Donald Trump was caught with classified documents and Democrats were outraged. Joe Biden was caught with classified documents and [Republicans were outraged](#). Mike Pence was caught with classified documents and it became clear that there might be a bigger problem here.

America has a crisis of “[overclassification](#)”, critics say. Since the 11 September 2001 terrorist attacks, Washington has been overzealous in defining government secrets. Politicians and officials can too easily fall foul of this secrecy-industrial complex but the biggest losers are the American people denied democratic accountability.

Among the prominent voices calling for reform is [Jameel Jaffer](#), executive director of the Knight First Amendment Institute at Columbia University in New York. Previously at the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU), he fought court battles over landmark post-9/11 cases relating to national security and individual rights.

Jaffer makes no excuses for former president Trump, who hoarded about 300 documents with classified markings at his Mar-a-Lago estate in Florida and [resisted justice department efforts](#) to retrieve them. He regards the Biden and Pence cases as different because, as far as is known, they inadvertently left classified material at their respective homes in Delaware and Indiana and willingly turned it over to authorities.

Jaffer would have expected the former vice-presidents to be more careful but argues that there is a more fundamental point: the failure of a process in which the government classifies about [50m documents every year](#) – at a cost to taxpayers of approximately \$18bn – while not declassifying them at anything like the same rate.

There's too much information that's classified. Too many people have access to the classified secrets

*Jameel Jaffer*

“The bigger scandal here is not any particular episode involving the mishandling of classified information but rather the classification system itself, which is totally broken in ways that are bad not just for national security but for democracy,” Jaffer, 51, said this week by phone from Brooklyn, New York.

“There’s too much information that’s classified. Too many people have access to the classified secrets. A lot of the information is classified for the wrong reasons because its disclosure would embarrass somebody or it would be inconvenient or would subject government officials to scrutiny that they would rather not have.”

Special counsel investigations into Trump and Biden are just the tip of the iceberg.

This week the National Archives wrote to representatives of living former presidents and vice-presidents requesting that they check their personal papers in case classified documents are still among them. Former officials from all levels of government discover they are in possession of classified material and turn them over to the authorities at least several times a year, [the Associated Press reported](#).

Why all the secrecy? One explanation is incentives. Classification can be useful for a government official seeking to conceal incompetence, preserve a bureaucratic monopoly on a particular set of facts or keep a rival government agency in the dark. Conversely there is no penalty for keeping information – [however trivial or unnecessary](#) – secret and no mechanism for declassifying in the public interest.

One consequence of this runaway effect is that the national security bureaucracy suffers classification overload: [when everything is secret, nothing is secret](#). Jaffer commented: “That has national security implications because it means that it’s harder to keep track of and protect the secrets that really do need to be secret.

“It also breeds a kind of cynicism because people see, on the one hand, senior government officials going on about how sensitive these secrets are and, on the other hand, treating the documents in this kind of careless way.”

There is a double standard, he added, between the way senior officials and junior employees are treated when they mishandle classified material. “That, too, is bad for national security because it demoralises intelligence community employees.”

Rapacious classification also takes a toll on democracy. “A lot of the information that the public needs is unjustifiably kept out of the public domain and, as a result, public debate about important issues like foreign policy and war and counter-terrorism policy is impoverished or, even worse, distorted by needless secrecy.”

Jaffer discovered this firsthand at the ACLU, which he had [joined as a volunteer](#) to advocate for people detained in raids in immigrant communities around New York in the weeks after September 11. Over the next 14 years he worked on cases relating to CIA black sites, the interrogation and torture of prisoners, indefinite detention, the drone campaign and warrantless wiretapping.

He added: “The government made bad decisions in secret and, by the time the public learned of those decisions, it was too late to avoid some of the costs.”

September 11 was a turning point after decades in which classification principally related to discreet wars overseas or the development of weapons, including nuclear weapons. The reaction to the attacks on New York and Washington changed the character of government secrets and brought them much closer to home.

Jaffer commented: “After 9/11, a lot of this had much more direct implications for individual rights including the constitutional rights of Americans. There’s a difference between what is the government doing in south-east Asia and what is it doing here in New York City.

“There’s a difference between keeping secret the specifications for a particular weapon and keeping secret the fact that you’re torturing prisoners in overseas black sites or engaged in dragnet surveillance of Americans’ phone calls and emails. Those are different kinds of secrets: they go to government policy, the scope of government power, the meaning of individual rights. The public has a much stronger interest in an informed public debate about those kinds of questions.”

If the system is broken, what can be done to fix it? Presidents Bill Clinton and Barack Obama sought to [encourage declassification](#) with limited

success. Jaffer would like to see an institution outside the executive branch – perhaps the judiciary – given the authority to make national security information public where the public interest outweighs the need for secrecy.

If you sue for national security information and the government says the information is classified, that's the end of it

*Jameel Jaffer*

“One foundational flaw in our national security system is that public interest balancing never happens. There is nobody who is tasked with considering the possibility that the government might have some interest in keeping something secret but the public interest in disclosure is greater.

“There’s no public interest balancing in the context of the [Freedom of Information Act](#). If you sue for national security information and the government says the information is classified, that’s the end of it. The judges don’t then say, well does it really need to be classified? But they should be empowered to do that. That would be an important reform.”

The Espionage Act of 1917 is also long overdue a rewrite, according to Jaffer.

In the 20th century only one person, Samuel Loring Morison, was convicted under the act for sharing information with the press (he was pardoned by Clinton in 2001). But after September 11, both Democratic and Republican administrations have used it aggressively to target journalists’ sources including Reality Winner, Terry Albury and [Chelsea Manning](#).

More recently the government has invoked the Espionage Act to go after a publisher: [Julian Assange](#), the founder of WikiLeaks, whose methods Jaffer likens to those of journalists reporting on national issues. “They communicate confidentially with their sources, protect their sources’ identities, solicit classified information, publish government secrets.

“Those are the things that Assange is being prosecuted for and that national security journalists engage in all the time – and have to engage in order to do

the work we want them to do. That's why I see the Assange case as such a threat to press freedom."

Jaffer is not an absolutist who wants to put all information in the public domain. But nor does he accept that the leaking of government secrets is an existential threat.

"The much bigger problem is not that sensitive things are being disclosed dangerously but rather that important information crucial to the public's ability to understand government policy, and crucial to the democratic legitimacy of the government's policies, is being withheld unjustifiably," he said.

"What we need is a bottom-up reform of the entire classification system including the Espionage Act. I don't think this is a system that is serving us well. The fact that the system is so broken has very significant costs for our society, and it's bad not just for public debate and for democracy but even for national security too."

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## Marjorie Taylor Greene keeps rising in Republican ranks despite ‘loony lies’



Marjorie Taylor Greene at a Trump rally in Youngstown, Ohio, in September 2022. Photograph: Gaelen Morse/Reuters

The extremist who has supported QAnon is firmly on her way to becoming a senior figure in the party as a key ally of the House speaker, Kevin McCarthy



[Adam Gabbatt](#)

[@adamgabbatt](#)

Sat 28 Jan 2023 02.00 ESTLast modified on Sat 28 Jan 2023 02.01 EST

When Marjorie Taylor Greene was elected to America's [House of Representatives](#) in 2020, she became one of the most visible of a wave of extremists to enter the Republican party whose often bizarre utterings stretched the bounds of what had previously been the norm of US politics.

The Georgian congresswoman, who has suggested Jewish space lasers are responsible for wildfires, speculated whether 9/11 was a hoax and supported the QAnon conspiracy theory, was part of a new wave of Trumpian Republicans and was mocked, ridiculed and reviled in equal measure – including by some in her own party.

But in 2023, Greene is now firmly on her way to becoming one of the senior figures in the Republican party. She has become a favorite, and key ally, of

[Kevin McCarthy](#), the new House speaker, and preparing to take up assignments on some of Congress's most prominent committees.

It's been a remarkable rise that few could have seen coming during a checkered first half of 2021, when Greene was making her name known through her penchant for unhinged conspiracy theories and strange remarks, but her ascension to the upper echelons of the GOP was confirmed this week by McCarthy, in [an interview](#) with the New York Times.

"If you're going to be in a fight, you want Marjorie in your foxhole," McCarthy said.

"When she picks a fight, she's going to fight until the fight's over. She reminds me of my friends from high school, that we're going to stick together all the way through."



Greene takes a selfie with Kevin McCarthy in the House chamber on 7 January. Photograph: Anna Moneymaker/Getty Images

This apparent fondness for a tussle has seen Greene [rewarded](#) with positions on the homeland security committee, despite her [previously musing](#) that no plane crashed into the Pentagon on 9/11, and on the oversight committee, where she is [expected](#) to be part of a subcommittee investigating the government's response to the Covid-19 pandemic.

If the latter seems problematic, given Greene's loudly stated suspicions and conspiracy theories about the pandemic – in January she was [permanently banned](#) from Twitter for repeatedly violating rules about Covid-19 misinformation – then that's only because lots of things Greene has said and done are problematic.

In 2021 Mitch McConnell, the Senate Republican leader, [condemned](#) Greene's "loony lies and conspiracy theories" in relation to Greene having [claimed support](#) for executing Democratic politicians and [harassing](#) the survivor of a mass school shooting.

Later that year McCarthy himself, who had earlier attempted to avoid conflict, [felt compelled to step in](#) after Greene compared Covid masking rules to the treatment of Jewish people in Nazi Germany.

"Marjorie is wrong, and her intentional decision to compare the horrors of the Holocaust with wearing masks is appalling," McCarthy said.

"The Holocaust is the greatest atrocity committed in history. The fact that this needs to be stated today is deeply troubling," he said.

The multiple rebukes, and the egregiousness of Greene's beliefs – whether disavowed or not – make her rise to prominence, as she takes up her seat on some of Congress's most powerful committees, all the more remarkable.

Greene's rapid recent rise began when she [backed McCarthy](#) for the House leadership, two months ahead of the ultimately [farcical vote](#) that saw him elected after 15 ballots. Greene had got in early, declaring her support [in November](#) on Steve Bannon's podcast.

For McCarthy, who has been an unpopular figure among far-right voters and politicians – it was a selection of the latter that meant the manner of his ascension to speaker was embarrassing at best, it was a boost he needed.

McCarthy and Greene had spent months forging a working relationship they believed could be beneficial for both, with Greene placating the zaniest wing of both [Republicans](#) in the House and voters at home, and McCarthy providing relevance to someone who had been stripped of her committee

assignments in 2021, leaving her, essentially, having nothing to do in Washington.

The New York Times reported that McCarthy, as he prepared to take up the speakership, had been mindful of the problems his centrist predecessors, John Boehner and Paul Ryan, faced in dealing with their furthest-right colleagues.

Both [Ryan](#) and Boehner – who would later describe some of his rightwing colleagues as “[assholes](#)” – endured battles with the Freedom Caucus, a conservative and often obstructionist group of GOP congressmen, when trying to pass legislation.

Greene remains one of the most popular figures among Trump supporters and believers, evidenced by her 758,000 followers on Trump’s Truth Social website – McCarthy has 113,000, Steve Scalise, the House majority leader, has 109,000 – and enjoys a close relationship with the former president, even [calling](#) Trump from the House floor during the debacle of January’s leadership vote.

Greene is also a successful fundraiser, bringing in \$12.5m in the 2021-22 election cycle, the fifth most of any Republican representative, her popularity among the base and alignment with Trump making her the model of the new Republican politician.



Greene with Tucker Carlson and Donald Trump at the ex-president's golf club in Bedminster, New Jersey, in July 2022. Photograph: Seth Wenig/AP

On Greene's part, she has sought to sanitize, somewhat, the ill-informed, conspiracy-minded viewpoints that have characterized her political career. In early 2022 Greene began a deliberate, "methodical" reinvention, a confidante [told](#) the Washington Post.

From her position on the sidelines, with a congressional office but no meaningful role in the House, she began to think of the future. Greene, like most observers, believed McCarthy would be the next House speaker, and saw a role for herself as a bridge between the far right and the less kooky Republicans, the Post reported.

As she tried to make herself palatable to a wider audience, Greene set about trying not to speak at [any more white nationalist rallies](#), or discuss the "gazpacho police" who are apparently patrolling the US Capitol. (Her remark was widely understood to mean Gestapo.) She is also yet to repeat her [2018 claim](#) that the Clinton family orchestrated the plane crash that killed John F Kennedy Jr more than two decades ago.

In addition to this new reserve, Greene hired a new aide with a track record in conventional conservative politics, and eventually began meeting with

McCarthy once a week, as the pair forged a close bond, each aware of the potential benefits.

McCarthy would go on to win the speakership. But his concessions to the right, personified by his promotion of Greene, have come at a cost. Already McCarthy has pursued Greene-backed, far-right strategies on vaccines and treatment of January 6 perpetrators, something that has left Greene delighted.

“People need to understand that it isn’t just me that deserves credit,” Greene told the New York Times.

“It is the will and the voice of our base that was heard, and Kevin listened to them. I was just a vehicle much of the time.”

If Greene was displaying an amount of faux humility, her conviction that she is channeling the will of the people and willingness to make it heard are a warning as to the level of influence she now wields.

In her new roles Greene [said](#) she will be investigating: “How many of our enemies got pallets of cash!?” from Covid-19 unemployment benefits, a question she posed without any context or explanation, and has [pledged](#) to impeach the homeland security secretary, Alejandro Mayorkas, for his perceived failures in handling immigration.

From Greene’s political position in February 2021, when she was [removed](#) from her committee assignments by Democrats – and some Republicans – in a rebuke over incendiary and racist statements, which included her [posting a mocked-up image](#) of her holding a gun next to three Democratic lawmakers, all women of color, on Facebook, it has been a remarkable turnaround.

Less than two years on, Greene has taken up positions on two of the most prominent committees in the House. She has a metaphorical seat at the House speaker’s right hand, and will enjoy the visibility that all this brings.

It’s a testament to how quickly things can change in politics, but also a very visible reminder of what the Republican party increasingly stands for.

Greene may have sought to sanitize her image, but it is clear that her brand of populism, outrage and misinformation is not the embarrassment it once was to the party leadership: this is the modern version of the Republican party.

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## [Atlanta](#)

# **Georgia is seeking to define ‘Cop City’ protests as terrorism, experts say**

Actions by police match rhetoric from state politicians seeking to define a largely peaceful protest movement as terrorism



Protesters march against ‘Cop City’ in Atlanta, Georgia, on 21 January.  
Photograph: Cheney Orr/Reuters

*[Timothy Pratt](#) in Atlanta*

Sat 28 Jan 2023 03.00 EST Last modified on Sat 28 Jan 2023 11.01 EST

When author and environmental movement expert [Will Potter](#) saw the Atlanta police chief, Darin Schierbaum, tell a recent press conference “it doesn’t take a rocket scientist or an attorney to tell you that breaking windows and setting fires is not protest – it’s terrorism”, he could not believe his ears.

The problem, Potter told the Guardian, is that while you may not have to be a rocket scientist, “the reality is, it’s been difficult to come to an understanding of what terrorism is and what political violence is for decades”.

Schierbaum was speaking about a march through midtown Atlanta, Georgia, last Saturday night that began peacefully, only to see several protesters separate and begin breaking windows of businesses and lighting fire to a police car. The marchers were protesting “[Cop City](#)”, an 85-acre, \$90m training facility planned for South River forest, a wooded area south-east of the city.

They were also protesting the fatal police shooting of Tortuguita, a fellow activist, less than a week earlier, on a raid in the [Atlanta](#) forest where dozens have been tree-sitting and camping for more than a year.

The march, arrests of 18 activists charged under a state domestic terrorism law, a series of raids on the forest in recent weeks and Tortuguita’s killing have escalated tensions over Cop City. They culminated Thursday afternoon in the Georgia governor, Brian Kemp, declaring a [state of emergency](#). Under the order, up to 1,000 national guard troops will be available until 9 February or upon further order.

These actions have also been matched by a strident rhetoric from police and politicians in [Georgia](#), seeking to define a largely peaceful protest movement – often focused on environmental and racial justice issues – as terrorism and those who participate in it as terrorists. It has shocked many observers including Potter, who see a crude attempt to use as powerful tools as possible to crush opposition.

“I can’t help but think it’s to shut the protest down and remove them from the public spotlight,” Potter said of Kemp’s order Thursday.

Potter has looked at changing federal government approaches to pursuing terrorism charges against environmental activists in his book, [Green Is the New Red: An Insider’s Account of a Social Movement Under Siege](#). These efforts culminated in attempts to charge activists with domestic terrorism

during the 2000s on at least 70 occasions – succeeding in only 18, according to a 2018 report by [the Intercept](#).

On Saturday night, six activists in Atlanta were arrested and charged with domestic terrorism, bringing the total since December to 18. All have been charged under a Georgia statute, marking the first time state law has been used this way in the history of environmental movements in the US.



Activists hold a vigil for Tortuguita. Photograph: Jake Lee Green/ZUMA Press Wire/REX/Shutterstock

On 18 January, Tortuguita also became the first environmental activist killed by police in US history, experts said. The Georgia bureau of investigation said Tortuguita, or Manuel Esteban Paez Terán, had shot an officer first, and in recent days has produced photos of a gun and a [Firearms Transaction Record](#) that appears to be in Terán's name. The agency charged with investigating Georgia police shootings also said ballistics evidence from the wounded officer matches the gun – and that there is no body-cam or other footage of the shooting.

The arrests come on the heels of at least a year's worth of rising public chorus from Kemp, law enforcement officials and others using the term

“terrorist” to describe the protesters, even as opposition to the Cop City project has grown since Atlanta city council approved it in late 2021.

Eli Bennett and Joshua Schiffer, two Atlanta attorneys representing some of the activists, both told the Guardian the state statute is “overly vague”. Four of the 18 cases brought under federal domestic terrorism charges during the 2000s were dismissed due to allegations being too vague, according to the Intercept. “It’s too easy to abuse, and I strongly have issues with how domestic terrorism is thrown around” in the state law, Schiffer said.

Arrest affidavits obtained by the Guardian for seven activists arrested 18 January during the same police raid on South River forest in which Tortuguita was killed begin by alleging that the defendants were “participating in actions as part of Defend the Atlanta Forest (DTAF), a group classified by the United States Department of Homeland Security as domestic violent extremists”.

But a homeland security (DHS) spokesperson responded to a query by the Guardian: “The Department of Homeland Security does not classify or designate any groups as domestic violent extremists” – adding that the agency also “regularly shares information” regarding perceived threats to the “safety and security of all communities”.

Meanwhile, a White House [bulletin](#) issued early in the Biden administration underlined: “The two most lethal elements of today’s domestic terrorism threat are (1) racially or ethnically motivated violent extremists who advocate for the superiority of the white race and (2) anti-government or anti-authority violent extremists, such as militia violent extremists.”

Potter’s work looks at several decades of efforts by corporate leaders to create a legal and policy framework for prosecuting groups such as the Animal Liberation Front and the Earth Liberation Front, which in the 1990s used tactics such as vandalism and even arson to defend animals and the environment – but never harmed a person. In the mid-2000s, corporations such as Pfizer, Wyeth and GlaxoSmithKline joined the United Egg Producers, National Cattlemen’s Beef Association and others in pushing Congress to consider these acts “terrorism”, he writes.

Broadening definitions and sentencing guidelines arising from these efforts resulted in a situation where “even writing pro-animal slogans on the sidewalk in chalk” could get you charged with terrorism, said Ryan Shapiro, co-founder of [Property of the People](#), a national security-oriented nonprofit organization focused on transparency that has released thousands of FBI and CIA documents exposing government overreach.

Similarly, [Bill McKibben](#), author of 20 books on climate change and other subjects, [wrote](#) this week that, according to Georgia’s domestic terrorism law, “lie down in front of a police car and you’re a terrorist who could spend many many years behind bars”.

Shapiro shared documents with the Guardian obtained through FOIA showing that lack of agreement on legal frameworks around terrorism inhibit DHS’s work.

In one email chain between a DHS agent and a regional director from 2021, the former says: “The lack of a consistent, applicable definition of DVE [domestic violent extremism] that has been coordinated and agreed upon” is the “greatest challenge in preventing … the DVE threat”. The agent goes on to write:, “Anyone can fall into any category based on an independent interpretation of what DVE term is being implied.”

The case in Georgia arises from another thread in the recent history of approaches to domestic terrorism, Shapiro noted. “The post-9/11 downward creep of national security justifications has provided local police with counterterrorism powers previously limited to the FBI and other federal agencies,” he said.

An additional aspect of the ongoing conflict in Atlanta worth noting is that activists opposing both the training center and separate plans to expand a film studio on the South River Forest land approach the issue from “two of the most targeted groups” by the FBI for decades, Shapiro said. Those are the racial justice and environmental movements.

The arrest affidavits appear predicated on the notion of arrestees allegedly belonging to a group that the state has linked to acts such as burning

construction vehicles needed for the training facility or film studio, as well as vandalizing other property.

“Language matters,” said Potter. “Terrorism and violence have meanings. It’s misleading to characterize broken windows, even arson, in the same breath as murdering people in a nightclub.” Potter pointed to other political movements throughout US and global history that have used similar tactics – including women suffragettes and gay rights activists, he said. “How we evaluate these things really depends on how we see the movements,” he said. “We’re going to look at the tactics of prior movements differently now, because they’re more mainstream.”

Moving forward, another aspect of this movement may prove challenging to pursuing domestic terrorism charges due to supposed affiliation in a group, Potter noted.

Opposition to development in South River forest has included neighborhood associations, established environmental groups, local schools, Atlanta-area citizens, and many others, he said. As for those who have chosen to stay in the forest, attracting the most attention of law enforcement (and media): “They don’t have an official leader. They don’t have a spokesperson. We don’t know who’s classified as a member … or not,” Potter noted.

“It’s like trying to turn a political movement into a criminal organization,” Bennett said.

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## Headlines monday 23 january 2023

- [Live Nadhim Zahawi's job as Tory chair 'hanging by a thread', says former No 10 communications chief](#)
- [Nadhim Zahawi Former chancellor resisting calls to resign as PM called 'weak'](#)
- ['Careless not deliberate' What's going on with Nadhim's Zahawi's taxes?](#)
- [Labour Nadhim Zahawi's future threatened as opposition steps up pressure over tax affairs](#)

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# **Minister unable to say whether Zahawi was telling truth when he first said taxes were fully paid – as it happened**

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**Nadhim Zahawi**

## **Nadhim Zahawi resisting calls to resign as PM called ‘weak’**

Ally signals Tory chair is digging in and ‘absolutely not resigning’ over tax row despite cross-party calls

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



Nadhim Zahawi arriving at the Conservative party’s head office in Westminster on Monday. Photograph: James Manning/PA

*[Aubrey Allegretti](#) Political correspondent  
@breeallegretti*

Mon 23 Jan 2023 04.44 EST Last modified on Mon 23 Jan 2023 04.45 EST

Nadhim Zahawi is resisting calls to quit as chair of the Conservative party amid a [row over previously unpaid taxes](#), as Rishi Sunak was accused of being weak by refusing to sack him.

Despite Labour and some Tory MPs suggesting the cabinet minister should stand down, an ally of Zahawi's signalled he was digging in and “absolutely not resigning”.

The prime minister will be confronted later over his decision to appoint Zahawi in October and suggestions that the Stratford-upon-Avon MP settled a seven-figure tax bill with HMRC when he was chancellor last summer – including a significant penalty.

During a visit on Monday morning, the prime minister will face questions from broadcasters over the row, as he grapples with upholding the pledge made at the start of his premiership of restoring “integrity” to the government.

However, Labour’s deputy leader, Angela Rayner, called Zahawi’s position “untenable”. She said: “Every hour that [Rishi Sunak](#) refuses to sack him shows just how weak the prime minister is.”

Other senior opposition frontbenchers urged him to act quickly. Jonathan Reynolds, the shadow business secretary, said on Monday: “The danger is that the public sees a case like this and they just think all politics and public life revolves in this way – and it doesn’t. It undermines the probity of the country and it undermines the confidence people have in the political system.”

Having spent months refusing to answer questions about unpaid taxes, Zahawi admitted over the weekend he paid HMRC what “was due” after it “disagreed about the exact allocation” of shares in the YouGov polling company he co-founded. He said the team that looked at his case found it was [a careless – not deliberate](#) – error.

Some Tories have also piled on the pressure. The backbencher Peter Aldous said on Sunday: “Really you shouldn’t have a situation where the chancellor, his private advisers, have or are negotiating a settlement with HMRC; that’s not acceptable.”

The former Tory leader Iain Duncan Smith also urged Zahawi to “just clear it up” given the remaining questions the minister has refused to answer about whether he incurred a penalty, when the payment to HMRC was made and the size of it, which is estimated to be about £4.8m.

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The ex-minister Tim Loughton said Sunak would “take the appropriate action” if more damaging details emerged about Zahawi’s tax affairs, and said it would have been “more helpful” if the Tory chair had explained himself “more fully rather earlier on”.

A source familiar with the payment Zahawi made to HMRC [told the Guardian](#) last week that a penalty was triggered as a result of a non-payment of capital gains tax due after the sale of shares in YouGov.

Fresh allegations about Zahawi continued to emerge after the weekend, with [the Times reporting](#) that when he was a business minister he wrongly told officials during the Greensill lobbying scandal that he had not exchanged WhatsApp messages with the former prime minister David Cameron that later turned out to have been deleted from his phone. Zahawi has declined to comment on the claim.

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**Nadhim Zahawi**

**Explainer**

## **‘Careless not deliberate’: what’s going on with Nadhim Zahawi’s taxes?**

Rishi Sunak is facing calls to explain what he knew about the former UK chancellor’s tax affairs. We explain what the story is about

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Labour has said Nadhim Zahawi’s position as Conservative party chair is untenable and that Rishi Sunak should sack him. Photograph: Victoria Jones/PA

**Archie Bland**

Mon 23 Jan 2023 03.31 EST Last modified on Mon 23 Jan 2023 14.35 EST

The story of Nadhim Zahawi's taxes has been rumbling on for months; now it may have finally come to a head.

After the Guardian [revealed on Friday](#) that Zahawi's settlement of an HMRC tax bill worth millions included a seven-figure penalty, the Conservative party chairman and former chancellor [gave his version of events](#) – and said that his error was “careless and not deliberate”.

But after the foreign secretary, James Cleverly, [endured a torrid interview round](#) defending Zahawi on Sunday (and said he was not fully informed about the story in part because he had been “having a bit of a rest and doing some shopping on Saturday”), pressure on the government continues to build. Now Rishi Sunak is [facing calls for him to explain](#) what he knew about Zahawi's affairs when he appointed him to his current role.

## What is the story about?

Before he was a politician, Nadhim Zahawi rose to prominence as one of the co-founders of YouGov, a polling company.

When YouGov got started in May 2000, a Gibraltar-based company, Balshore Investments Limited, was allocated shares equal in value to those given to Zahawi's co-founder Stephan Shakespeare – 42.5%.

Zahawi took no shares himself. Balshore was held by a trust controlled by Zahawi's parents; he has said that the shares went to Balshore in recognition of his father's role in setting up YouGov through the provision of start-up capital and advice.

The [first YouGov share issuance from 2000](#) says that another founder, Neil Copp, provided £287,500 of capital and received 15% of the shares. YouGov's records suggest that Zahawi's father provided £7,000 to the company two years after it was founded. When the [Times spoke to people involved in YouGov at the start \(£\)](#), none could recall Zahawi's father being involved.

YouGov was highly successful, and as well as attracting dividends, the stake in the company owned by Balshore was eventually sold by 2018 for about £27m. If Zahawi was the beneficiary of that transaction, he would owe tax on it. A 2005 document suggested that he benefited from the trust on at least one previous occasion, when Balshore at least partially covered a £99,000 loan he had received from YouGov.

The central questions are these:

- Did the work done by Zahawi's father at YouGov's founding truly merit such a large proportion of the initial shares?
- Was the trust really controlled by Zahawi's parents, or was the true beneficiary of the sale of Balshore's shares in YouGov Zahawi himself?
- Did Zahawi thus avoid paying capital gains tax on the sale of Balshore's stake?
- Did Zahawi give HM Revenue and Customs (HMRC) a straightforward account of his affairs when it came to investigate?

[Here are some more unanswered questions](#) about Zahawi's taxes and the Balshore shares.

## Why has the story become a big deal now?

Questions about Zahawi's tax affairs date back to 2017, when [the Guardian reported](#) his links to Balshore.

In July last year, when Zahawi was [appointed Chancellor](#) by Boris Johnson, [the Independent reported](#) that his finances were under investigation by the National Crime Agency. At the time Zahawi said he was unaware of it, and the investigation was reported to have not led to any action.

Then, a few days later, the [Observer reported](#) that an HMRC "flag" was raised over Zahawi's finances before his promotion. A source close to

Zahawi said that he “does not have, and never has had, an interest in Balshore Investments and he is not a beneficiary”.

Prompted by these stories, Dan Neidle, an independent tax expert, started to go through the publicly available documents on Zahawi’s business activities. He reached the conclusion that Zahawi arranged for the shares that would otherwise have been his at YouGov’s founding to go to Balshore, and alleged that “the obvious rationale for this is tax avoidance”, a claim denied by Zahawi. Neidle noted that while Zahawi says he “is not a beneficiary” of Balshore, this is not the same as saying he never has been.

After that, as Zahawi continued to deny through his lawyers that he “set up an offshore tax structure for a tax benefit” and was moved by Rishi Sunak from the treasury to Conservative party chairman, the story went relatively quiet. But last week, the Sun on Sunday reported that Zahawi had agreed to pay several millions of pounds in tax to settle a dispute with HMRC.

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Then, on Friday, the Guardian’s Anna Isaac reported that a source said the settlement with HMRC included a 30% penalty on top of an estimated tax bill of £3.7m. The total sum including the penalty and interest charges, apparently on the sale of multiple tranches of YouGov shares worth more than £20m, was reported to be more than £5m.

That report led to Labour saying on Saturday that Zahawi’s position as Conservative party chair was “untenable” and that Rishi Sunak should sack him. Over the weekend, the Sun on Sunday reported that Zahawi was denied

[a knighthood](#) after officials contacted HMRC “as part of the normal due diligence”.

## What has Zahawi said?

When stories about his tax affairs surfaced last summer, Zahawi [described them](#) as “smears”. His lawyers [wrote to Neidle](#) [pdf] via email last July demanding he withdraw his allegations and saying that he is “not entitled to publish [the email] or refer to it”, a condition Neidle had already said he would not accept. Last week, the [Independent published](#) exchanges with Zahawi from the same period in which he threatened legal action three times.

On Saturday, he took a different approach, [with a carefully worded statement](#) that he said he was making to “address some of the confusion about my finances”. He reiterated that his father “took founder shares in the business in exchange for some capital and his invaluable guidance” and said that HMRC had accepted he was entitled to do so – but that “they disagreed about the exact allocation”. Because of this “careless and not deliberate” error, he said he paid what was due “so that I could focus on my life as a public servant”. He did not confirm a figure.

He also said that he resolved the matter between being appointed as Chancellor and moving to be party chair. That implies that he reached a settlement with HMRC while chancellor – and overnight on Monday, [Sky News reported](#) that he had indeed done so, a situation which critics suggest created a conflict of interest.

## What does ‘careless’ mean?

One important point arising from Zahawi’s statement that unpaid tax on a benefit apparently worth more than £20m was viewed by HMRC as “careless and not deliberate” is what exactly that phrase means.

While a plain English reading might suggest that it means he simply made an error, Dan Neidle [told the BBC](#) that the meaning in tax law is more

complicated, and may be a designation settled on by HMRC if it concludes it cannot prove deliberate tax evasion.

“‘Careless’ has a very specific meaning,” he said. “‘Careless’ means that you weren’t just wrong, you’re allowed to get your tax wrong ... it works like this: You or I, as long as we instruct a proper adviser, we give that adviser the right information, we follow that adviser’s advice, and we check that final tax return to the best that we’re able to, so long as we do that, even if it was completely wrong ... we won’t pay penalties. To pay a 30% penalty, you didn’t do one or more of those things.”

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**Nadhim Zahawi**

## **Nadhim Zahawi's future threatened as Labour steps up pressure over tax affairs**

Angela Rayner says Rishi Sunak should come clean about any concerns raised with No 10 about ex-chancellor and HMRC penalty



Nadhim Zahawi is believed to have paid a penalty to HMRC as part of a seven-figure settlement. Photograph: Tayfun Salci/Zuma Press Wire/Rex/Shutterstock

*Peter Walker Political correspondent  
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Sun 22 Jan 2023 13.26 EST Last modified on Sun 22 Jan 2023 17.41 EST

Nadhim Zahawi's political future appeared under increasing threat on Sunday night, after Labour pushed hard for answers about his tax issues and government colleagues offered little support for his plight.

After a weekend dominated by questions over the Conservative party chair's tax position, Labour signalled its intention to pin the controversy on to [Rishi Sunak](#), demanding the prime minister explain if he knew about the issue when he appointed Zahawi to his cabinet.

However, it is understood No 10 will argue Sunak only knew Zahawi is believed to have paid a penalty to HMRC as part of a seven-figure settlement when the [Guardian reported this on Friday](#).

James Cleverly, the foreign secretary, spent the Sunday morning broadcast round [trying to deflect questions about Zahawi](#), at one point saying he had been unable to find out more details as he was busy over the weekend "having a bit of a rest and doing some shopping".

Even his supporter, former Tory leader [Iain Duncan Smith](#), urged Zahawi on Sunday to provide more detail about the tax settlement.

Zahawi, who in his role as party chair attends cabinet, [accepted on Saturday](#) that he had reached a settlement with HMRC over his shareholding in the polling company he co-founded, YouGov.

He seemingly confirmed that the tax authority had carried out an investigation into his affairs while he was Boris Johnson's chancellor, and thus in overall control of tax policy. HMRC concluded [he had made a "careless but not deliberate" error](#), Zahawi said, but gave minimal details.

[Angela Rayner](#), Labour's deputy leader, said Sunak must "now come clean on what he knew and when about Nadhim Zahawi's tax affairs and the concerns raised with No 10".

She said: "This whole episode is corrosive to public trust, with a chancellor in charge of the nation's finances asking the public to pay their taxes while apparently having failed to do so himself."

Sunak, who entered No 10 with a pledge to restore integrity and professionalism after the scandals under Boris Johnson and the economic

chaos of Liz Truss, will be particularly keen to avoid spending weeks having to answer questions on Zahawi.

While the official position remains that Zahawi should and will remain in his post – Cleverly called him “a very, very effective minister” who was not about to quit – there is a growing sense of colleagues seeking to distance themselves from the controversy.

It is understood that because the settlement was made before Sunak took over as prime minister, when Zahawi was vetted by the Cabinet Office’s propriety and ethics team before the new cabinet was announced, No 10 was only told that there were no outstanding issues preventing his appointment.

But Duncan Smith said he did not believe Zahawi had been deceitful, telling [BBC One’s Sunday with Laura Kuenssberg](#): “I’m always of the view with these things that the sooner you can get the actual facts out the better, rather than have them coming out in phases. I would say to him if he was here, get it all out now, whatever you have to do, and clear it up.”

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While Sunak knew about previous media reports on Zahawi’s tax affairs, he is understood not to know any other details in advance of Friday’s Guardian report and Zahawi’s statement the next day.

In media interviews on Sunday morning, Cleverly said he too knew nothing beyond Zahawi’s account.

“The only information I know is this information that he’s put out in his statement,” Cleverly told Sky’s Sophy Ridge on Sunday show. “Now, you know, Nadhim was a very, very successful entrepreneur. As he said in his statement he had an outstanding settlement with the [HMRC](#), which is now settled. I don’t have any more details.”

Quizzed about whether Zahawi was investigated when he was chancellor, from July to September last year, Cleverly said: “I don’t know any more detail about the timing, about the granularity, of what’s in his statement.”

According to a report in the Sun on Sunday, Zahawi had been due to receive a knighthood in the most recent new year honours list but this was blocked due to concerns over his tax situation.

The former executive chair of HMRC, Sir Edward Troup, later told BBC Radio 4 that while the organisation does not block honours, it gives a red, amber or green rating of an individual’s tax affairs.

“They don’t decide whether the honour or the peerage is given but they give the information to those who do make the decision, who form their own judgment,” he said.

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## 2023.01.23 - Spotlight

- ['My education was in a bar' Shania Twain on childhood, stardom, divorce and survival](#)
- ['Symbol of our pride' Newcastle city council vows to restore Tyne Bridge](#)
- ['Brexit has lost us 25% of sales' British bike storage firm buckles under red tape](#)
- ['It's the opposite of art' Why illustrators are furious about AI](#)

# ‘My education was in a bar’: Shania Twain on childhood, stardom, divorce and survival

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## **‘Symbol of our pride’: Newcastle city council vows to restore Tyne Bridge**



The Tyne Bridge linking Newcastle upon Tyne with Gateshead has been showing serious signs of deterioration since its last major maintenance

works in 2001. Photograph: Richard Saker/The Guardian

Leaders hope work will be completed in time for bridge's centenary in 2028 despite rising costs and new complications

*Mark Brown* North of England correspondent  
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Mon 23 Jan 2023 02.00 EST

To say one of Britain's best-loved bridges is in a sorry state might be an understatement.

The Tyne Bridge is badly rusting, its paint is peeling and the steelworks are visibly corroding, but its custodians have vowed that it will be restored to its former glory in time for its centenary in 2028.

The promise has been made despite a long list of headaches facing a huge engineering project to restore a structure that is as much a symbol of geordie pride as being a vital transport link between [Newcastle](#) and Gateshead.

For one thing, maintenance is at least four years overdue. There are also rising and higher-than-budgeted costs because of inflation. Then there is [the annual arrival of kittiwakes](#).

Despite all the problems, there is a determination to get the job done. "We will complete the Tyne Bridge project," said [Newcastle councillor Jane Byrne](#). "The Tyne Bridge is an iconic part of the north-east landscape, so what it looks like to people and it being a symbol of our pride is incredibly important."

Alastair Swan, principal engineer at Newcastle city council, agrees that the bridge is in a sorry state. "The bridge clearly looks tired, it looks depressed, it doesn't look pleasant," he said. "But it will be something we can be proud of again."

Swan was speaking as he gave the Guardian a rare behind-the-scenes tour of the bridge to show its many problems, and how restoration is far more than

giving it “a lick of paint”.

The tour included the imposing granite towers intended as warehouses but which have remained mostly, aside from the odd event or illegal rave, unused for nearly a century.

The bridge remains, Swan said, a “phenomenal” engineering achievement. In just three years between 1925 and 1928, engineers used pioneering techniques to construct what was at [the time the largest single-span steel bridge in Britain](#).

The bridge has always been green, apart from in the 1960s, when it was painted blue and grey to reflect the livery of councils.

“Cold, grey Tyne gets a warm new colour scheme” ran the headline in the Journal on a story that said the colour scheme was due to be chosen by an expert from the Royal College of Art, until councillors discovered that it would cost £420. Council officials made the choice.

It last had proper maintenance and painting in 2001, a paint job expected to last 18 years. For various reasons, the paint lost its colour much sooner. More than 22 years on, no one disagrees that restoring the bridge is urgent, especially with its centenary in 2028.

A £41.4m bid for central government funding was made in 2019 and [finally agreed in June last year when the Department for Transport agreed to give £35.3m](#), with the remainder to come from councils.



The bridge is used by 70,000 vehicles a day and needs more than a ‘lick of paint’. Photograph: Richard Saker/The Guardian

[A report to councillors](#) last month detailed significant increases in the prices of materials, pushing up planned costs. That will mean using money earmarked for spending on the central motorway.

Swan estimates that the Tyne Bridge work will take three years. It would be quicker if it was possible to stop the traffic that thunders over the bridge night and day, but no one is proposing that. “You’re looking at 70,000 vehicles a day. Where do you put them?”

Swan was also in charge of the 2001 restoration, and his memory is of it being much easier, with less traffic and fewer health and safety requirements.

There were also no kittiwakes. The birds once enjoyed nesting at the abandoned Baltic flour mills, but moved on when it became a building site to become the [Baltic centre for contemporary art](#).

They moved to the bridge and loved it. Numbers have increased every year, and next month more than 1,200 breeding pairs are expected to arrive and stay until September. As they are a protected species, all bridge work will have to be done in a way that does not disturb them.

Swan is phlegmatic. “They’re part of the Quayside. In engineering, there’s loads of things you have to work around, whether it be wildlife, noise or traffic. It is just one of those things.”

Once the government gives the green light, authorities hope to begin the work in the autumn. It will mean traffic being reduced from four lanes to two.

But it will be done, said Byrne. It has to be. “People care about it. That’s what is important about the north-east: people are very proud of the region, and for north-easterners who live outside, it’s the same thing.

“When you’re on the train, you look for that first glimpse of the Tyne Bridge and you feel like you’re home.

“People do get upset that they think it’s not being looked after as good as it might be. People do want to make sure it is maintained for future generations.”

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## Manufacturing sector

# ‘Brexit has lost us 25% of sales’: British bike storage firm buckles under red tape

Cycloc says ‘Kafkaesque’ rules have cost it £100,000 in latest tale of how EU exit is harming small firms



Andrew Lang founded Cycloc in 2006. Photographed in east London, 19 January 2023 Photograph: Alicia Canter/The Guardian

*[Lisa O'Carroll](#) Brexit correspondent  
[@lisaocarroll](#)*

Mon 23 Jan 2023 01.00 EST Last modified on Mon 23 Jan 2023 04.34 EST

A British bicycle entrepreneur says [Brexit](#) has buckled his business and left him with a £100,000 hole in revenues, accusing the government of failing to do enough to mitigate its impact on British small exporters.

Cycloc, which has made a name for its distinctive indoor bicycle storage and accessories and includes Stella McCartney, Jonathan Ross and cycling star Mark Cavendish among its customers, says the EU represented 50% of its business before Brexit left it nursing a 25% decline in overall sales.

“It is very disappointing. I am a naturally optimistic person, but in a sense it is very difficult to be positive,” said the company’s founder and designer, Andrew Lang, in his studio in east London.

“One of the things that is quite disappointing about this whole process is that from the outset, we made an active decision to manufacture in the UK. We’ve remained faithful to that and it feels as though the UK government hasn’t necessarily helped us.”

Cycloc’s products have been a British small business success story with its striking wall hangers popular with owners of expensive wheels who want to store them safely inside. They are used by some of the world’s leading cycle brands including Pinarello, whose bikes can sell for as much as £15,000.

A product designer by profession, Lang launched the injection-moulded products in 2006. They quickly found favour among cycling enthusiasts, professionals and distributors, winning a prestigious Eurobike award in 2009, the Oscars of the cycle sector.

Distributors across the EU lapped up the wall-mounted blocks, which cost from £43 and hang bikes in “any orientation or space”, stopping them cluttering up hallways across the continent.

By the time Brexit came along, business was flying with 10,000 units sold in the EU each year and annual turnover hitting £450,000.

But once new rules came into force in January 2021 after the end of the transition period, business started to slow, especially after Amazon stopped fulfilling orders for individual EU customers buying from Britain.

There was also a drop in confidence in British products, says Cycloc’s head of operations, Clare Lowe, with some “EU distributors stopping placing

orders, citing cost of shipping and customs clearance as prohibitive”.



Patron McCleary, Andrew Lang and Clare Lowe. Cycloc was founded in 2006. Photograph: Alicia Canter/The Guardian

The company made every effort to beat what Lang calls “Kafkaesque” Brexit red tape by opening up a warehouse in the Netherlands at the end of 2021 to ensure costly paperwork would only have to be done per truckload crossing from Dover rather than per individual unit.

The aim was to fulfil direct-to-EU consumer business from its website and Amazon and smaller business sales to bike shops but it still cost £10,000 extra in overheads.

As 2022 progressed, it became apparent that EU consumer sales were “not going to recover to their pre-Brexit levels” and the warehouse would be operating at a loss.

“To say the Brexit process was gritty is an understatement,” said Lowe. “Within 12 months of having got it up and running, we just had to take this decision to close it because it wasn’t covering its costs.”

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Cycloc's products are still being sold direct to customers in the EU via an “import one-stop shop” in Ireland, an automated service to cover complex VAT compliance procedures.

Its experience is not unique and highlights the continuing damage Brexit is causing small exporters who cannot easily absorb the new administrative burden as easily as big businesses.

Cycloc's experience mirrors that of the Cheshire Cheese Company, which made headlines all over the world in 2021, when it [declared Brexit had cost it £250,000 in lost revenue](#) leading a government minister to suggest it look to the global market to plug the Brexit hole. Last November, its owner Simon Spurrell, said those losses had ballooned to £600,000 and he [had sold the firm to a larger rival](#) to improve his access to the single market.

Lang also tells of the wider impact Brexit has had, diverting the company's energies from growing its product range. “We have about half a dozen products in the pipeline that are in a very advanced stage but we've not been able to commit the capital to bring those to the market yet because of the other Brexit costs and problems we've been confronted with,” he said.

Reflecting on the difficult decision to close the warehouse operation, Lang said he could not understand why the government did not support small-scale British manufacturers like him more.

The business is now trying to “pivot pretty quickly” to new markets in the US, Asia, Australia and South Africa, said Patron McCleary, head of

marketing, but the “learning” to get into those markets is also a drain on resources.

“In places like China or Hong Kong I’m having to learn a lot about the culture, about buying habits, and how British products are viewed. It would have been easier in Europe, but because of how bad the Brexit actually was, we’ve actually had to be quite reactive rather than being proactive,” he said.

The government did not comment on Cycloc’s experience. A spokesperson said the Trade and Cooperation Agreement (TCA) it signed in December 2020 was “the world’s largest zero-tariff and zero-quota deal” and it had established the Export Support Services “so businesses can make the most of the TCA”.

They added that the UK was further investing to make exports easier and recent data showed trade to the EU was up 0.5% on the third quarter of 2019.

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## [Art](#)

# ‘It’s the opposite of art’: why illustrators are furious about AI

AI art generators may provide five minutes of fun for most users, but the blurring of creative and ethical boundaries is leaving many artists raging against the machine



How many books is she reading? ... our writer's AI image. Photograph: Sarah Shaffi

[Sarah Shaffi](#)

Mon 23 Jan 2023 01.00 EST Last modified on Mon 23 Jan 2023 08.22 EST

‘Woman reading book, under a night sky, dreamy atmosphere,’ I type into Deep Dream Generator’s Text 2 Dream feature. In less than a minute, an image is returned to me showing what I’ve described. Welcome to the world of AI image generation, where you can create what on the surface looks like top-notch artwork using just a few text prompts, even if in reality your skills don’t go beyond drawing stick figures.

AI image generation seems to be everywhere: on TikTok, the popular AI Manga filter shows you what you look like in the Japanese comic style, while people in their droves are using it to create images for everything from company logos to picture books. It's already been used by one major publisher: sci-fi imprint Tor discovered that a cover it had created had used a licensed image created by AI, but decided to go ahead anyway "due to production constraints".

The biggest players in AI include companies such as MidJourney, Stable Diffusion and Deep Dream Generator (DDG). They're free to use, up to a point, making them attractive to those just wanting to try them out. There's no denying that they're fun, but closer examination of the images they produce shows oddities. The face of the woman in my image has very odd features, and appears to be holding multiple books. The images also have a similarly polished, somewhat kitsch aesthetic. And, while there's an initial thrill at seeing an image appear, there's no creative satisfaction.



'It's nonsense' ... Rob Biddulph in his studio

The implications of AI image generation are far-reaching and could impact everything from film to graphic novels and more. Children's illustrators were quick to raise concerns about the technology on social media. Among

them is author and illustrator Rob Biddulph, who says that AI-generated art “is the exact opposite of what I believe art to be. Fundamentally, I have always felt that art is all about translating something that you feel internally into something that exists externally. Whatever form it takes, be it a sculpture, a piece of music, a piece of writing, a performance, or an image, true art is about the creative process much more than it’s about the final piece. And simply pressing a button to generate an image is not a creative process.”

Beyond creativity, there are deeper issues. An online campaign – #NotoAIArt – has seen artists sharing concerns about the legality of AI image generators, and about how they have the potential to devalue the skill of illustration. To create images from prompts, AI generators rely on databases of already existing art and text. These comprise billions of images that have been scraped from the internet. Among the biggest is the open-source LAION-5B dataset, used by DDG’s Text 2 Dream. Kaloyan Chernev, founder of DDG, says that the dataset comprises “largely public domain images sourced from the internet”, but many artists and illustrators say that databases will often also include a lot of copyrighted images.

Harry Woodgate, author and illustrator of Grandad’s Camper, which won the Waterstones 2022 picturebook prize, says: “These programs rely entirely on the pirated intellectual property of countless working artists, photographers, illustrators and other rights holders.” It’s a point echoed by illustrator Anoosha Syed: “AI doesn’t look at art and create its own. It samples everyone’s then mashes it into something else.”



The real thing ... Dapo Adeola's debut Hey you!

While prompts to image generators can be very general, they can also ask for an image to be based on the work of another artist, further blurring ethical boundaries. Syed says that this could lead to the creation of images “that are intentionally meant to mimic my style” or that of other artists, without their consent. There is an argument that AI generators work no differently to humans when it comes to being influenced by others’ work, but Biddulph says: “A human artist is also adding emotion and nuance into the mix, and memory – specifically, its failings.”

He adds: “If I’m making a painting and decide it should be Hockney-esque, I’m not going to trawl the internet for millions of Hockney-esque images, work out exactly what traits makes these images Hockney-esque, then apply them to my picture, systematically and with forensic accuracy. I’m going to think, ‘I like the way Hockney juxtaposed blocks of purple, green and ochre in that painting of a field I saw at the National Gallery.’ And then I’ll attempt to add that into my picture. Inevitably, I’ll misremember it, and will probably end up creating something that bears a faint resemblance to something Hockney once painted, but in my own style.”

AI doesn’t look at art and create its own. It samples everyone’s – then mashes it into something else

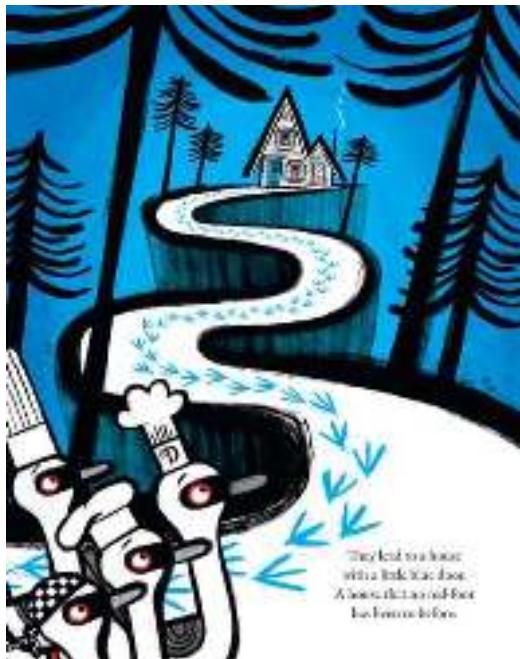
Syed agrees, saying “another human will never look at an image the exact same way the original artist did. They will never move their hands the way the original artist did. AI doesn’t do the same – it can only copy.” When a human artist does “mimic a style, or pass off a piece of artwork as their own, it is incredibly frowned upon – and in some cases could be seen as copyright infringement. This is essentially what AI art is doing.”

Chernev says he recognises the “complex ethical considerations surrounding the use of non-public domain images and the potential impact on artists whose work is used in the training of AI tools like ours”. But there’s a more insidious danger: the ability to create images that are potentially illegal. Chernev admits that during the initial launch of Text 2 Dream, people tried to “generate images of nude children, despite the fact that no such images were present in the training dataset”.

He adds: “As AI continues to advance, there is a risk that it may be able to synthesise images of inappropriate or illegal subjects based on existing content. In response to this, we have swiftly adapted our tools to prohibit the generation of any inappropriate or illegal content, including nude images of children and NSFW material. We are committed to ensuring the responsible and ethical use of our image-generating service.”

Although Chernev says DDG reported the incidents to authorities, as a whole AI image generation is unregulated, something artists are quick to point out. Both Woodgate and Dapo Adeola, who won Illustrator of the Year at the 2022 British book awards, would like to see more regulation. “A welcome first step,” says Woodgate, “would be to scrap the UK government’s proposed copyright exception, allowing text and data mining for any commercial purpose, and instead advocate for opt-in licence-based models.” That way, Woodgate adds, any future databases would be created using voluntary contributions that are properly paid for.

Adeola agrees, saying the “simplest thing is getting permissions from the artists to use their work” along with a fee. Chernev says DDG does take on board requests from artists who want to be excluded from their system, but the “asking forgiveness, not permission” model is not one that sits well with Adeola, who says seeking permission “should have been the first stage”.



In his own style ... an illustration by Rob Biddulph

Although children's book illustration will, say artists, remain largely unaffected, AI image generation has the potential to do away with smaller jobs that up-and-coming artists often rely on to build up portfolios. Syed says that for things such as fan-art, self-published books, logos and family portraits, people may turn to AI. "These clients will usually care more about saving money than the quality of the finished product," she says. "They will prefer to use AI if it means keeping costs low. So a lot of these small jobs will vanish."

The increasing use of AI, says Adeola, will also lead to a devaluing of the work of artists. "For me," he says, "there's already a negative bias towards the creative industry. Something like this reinforces an argument that what we do is easy and we shouldn't be able to earn the money we command." Biddulph goes further. "There's no question that AI-generated art devalues illustration," he says. "People will, of course, begin to think that their 'work' is as valid as that created by someone who has spent a career making art. It's nonsense, of course. I can use my iPhone to take a nice picture of my daughters, but I'm not [Irving Penn](#)."

For the moment, AI image generation is largely being used for fun, but Chernev says it's "rapidly approaching a level of sophistication and

complexity that will allow it to generate highly realistic and nuanced images. I am convinced AI-generated content has the potential to not only enhance the work of artists and designers, but also to enable the creation of entirely new forms of art and expression.”

Artists and illustrators aren’t so sure. “AI-generated art has a specific ‘look’ to it,” says Syed. “As time goes on, users will become more attuned to it and start to turn away from it because of its inauthenticity and ‘cheapness’. I also think that, in response to AI, we might even see a reemergence and appreciation of traditional media.”

What’s more, illustrators firmly believe their most honest critics and biggest fans – children and young people – won’t be convinced by AI art. “Children’s books are highly complex, multimodal forms of communication,” says Woodgate. “The kids who read them expect a great deal, not only from the stories and illustrations, but from the people who make them.”

- This piece was corrected on 23 January: Harry Woodgate’s pronouns are they/them.
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## 2023.01.23 - Opinion

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## [OpinionNHS](#)

# **Mark my words: this will be the end of the NHS if the Tories have their way**

[Gordon Brown](#)



They are now openly contemplating a more privately funded healthcare system. It wouldn't just be unfair, it makes no economic sense

Report: [Gordon Brown warns of Tories 'testing the water' for two-tier healthcare](#)



‘Sajid Javid is calling for a national debate on the contribution private financing can make to healthcare.’ Javid at Great Ormond Street hospital, London, June 2022. Photograph: Yui Mok/PA

Mon 23 Jan 2023 01.00 EST Last modified on Mon 23 Jan 2023 14.11 EST

Sajid Javid, a former chancellor and health secretary, [has written approvingly](#) of the £20 fee that some European countries charge for visits to the GP. He labels Ireland’s €75 (£66) bill for attending an A&E without a GP’s referral as merely “nominal”, as if it’s so modest that a higher charge would be more appropriate. And he [calls for a national debate](#) on the contribution private financing can make to healthcare.

But the direction in which the Conservatives are travelling is already clear. The sick would pay for being sick and charging would force, as has happened with GP and [hospital fees in France](#), the better-off sections of the population to take out private insurance – inevitably creating, in its wake, a two-tier healthcare system.

Javid’s intervention in favour of what he calls “nothing short of a 1948-style moment” is no accident. The prime minister, Rishi Sunak, who has used private healthcare, once came up with a [proposal for new charges](#): £10 for patients who miss GP and hospital appointments. And so once again, as they

did in opposition at the turn of this century, with [Alternative Prescriptions](#), Conservatives are testing the water for a different kind of NHS.

Today's Conservatives may have clapped NHS nurses and health workers at the height of the pandemic; yet they are not only opposing decent remuneration for them, but also contemplating a more privately financed healthcare system. It reminds us that exactly 75 years ago they [opposed the introduction of the NHS](#), having attempted in 1944 to impose charges and private insurance.

So comprehensively have senior Conservatives lost sight of the uniqueness of the NHS that their model for future healthcare is not Britain, but Ireland, continental Europe and the United States of America. All this points to them abandoning the special characteristics of a great institution that expresses a very British set of values – that healthcare is not a privilege to be bought, but a right for all who are in need of it.



'Today's Conservatives may have clapped NHS nurses and health workers during the pandemic; yet they oppose decent remuneration for them.' Rishi Sunak outside No 11 Downing St, May 2020. Photograph: Neil Hall/EPA

Their desire to break with the British model is not only morally concerning: it would also be very costly and economically wasteful. Never do NHS doctors or nurses have to ask sick patients, “Who is paying for this?” When we leave the hospital or GP surgery we are not pursued by bills or subject to complex negotiations with insurance companies or legal threats. But as the overseas experience of billing and means-testing shows, charges not only mean [higher administration and collection costs](#) – and thus raise far less than is predicted – they also discourage the sick from seeking treatment until too late, when more severe problems require not only more intensive, but more expensive interventions.

Conservatives argue that charging is one way – and perhaps the only way – to secure the long-term funding that the NHS needs. I understand well the cost pressures that come with a projected [82% increase](#) in the number of over-85s in 25 years, and from not just continuously high waiting lists but also – and more worryingly – the health needs of an estimated 15 million, [in England alone](#), who suffer from chronic or long-term diseases, and who are likely to be the biggest users of NHS resources.

I am also fully aware of the huge medical advances taking place, from genetics and stem cell therapy to transplantation, and in the treatment of cancer and heart disease. These will be essential but expensive additions to all modern healthcare systems.

As a former chancellor, I have said for some time that the NHS refinancing that Labour achieved in 2002 – a 6.3% [real terms annual rise](#) between 2000 and 2010 – had to be revisited every decade. This hasn’t happened under the Conservatives, and the consequences are visible to all of us. But the pressures the NHS faces make the case for comprehensive funding through national insurance even stronger; and show why this is to be preferred to either European-style social insurance, or private insurance.

The reasons are clear. None of us know in advance which of us or our family members will need medical interventions or hospital stays, the costs of which could run into hundreds of thousands of pounds. A system that guarantees comprehensive cover paid for by general taxation and that shares the costs across the whole population is the best insurance policy we could

dream up – and indeed, if properly funded, is bound to be the best in the world.

And such a national insurance system is best equipped to meet even greater pressures ahead arising from further advances in medical knowledge. For as DNA gives private insurers more information about each person's susceptibility to ill health and offers the possibility of anticipating future risks, companies will be reluctant to cover large sections of the most at-risk population, except at an exorbitant cost. It is this new reality, arising from welcome scientific breakthroughs, that makes the pooling of risks and resources and the sharing of costs across the whole of the UK even more important.

Even in these circumstances, Conservatives may prefer, as a matter of ideology, a private sector performing inefficiently to a public service delivering well. Indeed, neoliberals seem to find more joy in one person joining Bupa than 60 million people using the NHS. But what we know of the rising pressures from health inequalities, from the path-breaking work of [Michael Marmot](#), should turn the focus of our attention from this ideological sideshow of charging and private insurance to tackling entrenched poverty and the other social determinants of ill health. It is by attacking and eradicating the causes of ill health that we will do most to reduce waiting lists and pressures on the hospital sector.

Our full attention should also be, as [Keir Starmer has advocated](#), on the efficiencies to be achieved by reform and modernisation within the health and social care system. This will achieve far more than spending our time debating private financing coming in from the outside. The focus should be on a reformed social care system, which starts not from the hospital or the nursing home, but from where most elderly people want to be – in their own home, supported by home help, health visitors and domiciliary care. This can prevent them, in turn, from having to enter care homes – or being labelled “bed blockers” in our hospitals.

As we celebrate 75 years of the NHS on 1 July, we should recall the Labour health minister [Aneurin Bevan's words](#), proposing Britain's revolution in healthcare. He said that our NHS would “lift the shadow from millions of homes”, by providing what he called “serenity”. And it would do so

because, as a result of its free universal coverage, “rich and poor are treated alike, poverty is not a disability and wealth is not an advantage”.

- Gordon Brown was UK prime minister between 2007 and 2010
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# African leaders who dilute workers' rights for Uber's digital empire harm Africa

Kelle Howson

During a decade on the continent, Uber has often cut drivers' pay and added little value to local economies. Governments should admit it is not economic progress but imperial exploitation



A Uber billboard in Nairobi. In Kenya, the company slashed drivers' earnings in a 35% fare cut in 2016. Photograph: Dai Kurokawa/EPA

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## About this content

Mon 23 Jan 2023 01.30 EST Last modified on Mon 23 Jan 2023 05.06 EST

This year will mark a decade of Uber's operations in [Africa](#). The ride-hailing service entered Johannesburg in August 2013 – one of its earliest forays outside the US – and now operates in dozens of cities across eight African countries.

But if Uber plans to celebrate this milestone, it will do so under a cloud of controversy. Many of the ruthless practices highlighted in last year's explosive leak, dubbed the [Uber files](#), were honed in African markets in particular. The documents revealed how Uber forced its way into economies while sometimes [ignoring](#) local laws. [Uber spokespeople have since claimed](#) that the company culture has changed under new leadership.

But the [Uber](#) files highlighted how successful labour platforms have been at interweaving themselves from afar into vital public services and infrastructure in the global south, selling a vision of tech-driven development while paying scant attention to local needs, conditions and regulations.

The expansion of digital labour platforms in Africa has been largely welcomed by governments desperate to tackle crises of unemployment and

low growth. The hope is that low- and middle-income countries can unlock development by specialising in digital commodities and services. The African Union, and African governments, have placed heavy emphasis on the potential of the fourth industrial revolution to create opportunities for young unemployed people across the region.

For the most part, digital strategies have toed the neoliberal line, positioning African governments' role as being the creation of an enabling regulatory environment: getting out of the way of private tech investment and innovation, in other words.

The Uber files and other [recent exposés](#) have shone a light on how global platform power has operated largely unchecked in many African countries. In particular, the centralised control of labour, alongside the [general absence](#) of the platform companies from policy and labour relations dialogue, has been discussed. In the decade since Uber's launch on the continent, the vision of the inclusion and empowerment of African workers in a new, flexible, egalitarian world of work has not materialised. Instead, African labour has been commodified within new – digital – [value chains](#), which funnelled much of the value to northern corporations.

This is illustrated by what one former executive has described as Uber's strategy of leveraging extremely high levels of unemployment in African countries to rapidly sign up workers, capture transport markets, and then cut drivers' pay. In [South Africa, for instance](#), where the unemployment rate is currently more than 30%, Uber lured thousands of drivers with attractive subsidies and secured market dominance while labour supply vastly outstripped demand. It then undermined drivers by upping its commission and eroding pay, to the extent that South African cities became the company's most quickly profitable markets outside the US.

In Kenya, Uber slashed drivers' earnings in a 35% fare cut in 2016, and subsequently launched a cut-price service, UberChapChap, which paid even less. A similar cut-price service, UberGo, was introduced in [South Africa](#). Drivers, locked into car financing or rental agreements, often facilitated through Uber's partnerships with local banks, and with limited alternative employment prospects, had little choice but to accept the new rates.

In countries where much work takes place in the informal economy without labour protections such as a minimum wage, platform contractual arrangements have been justified as a step-up from the status quo. However, they have forcibly closed off avenues for improvement in labour standards and collective bargaining, and aimed to normalise and legitimise precarious labour as standard. Research by the University of Oxford's Fairwork project has repeatedly failed to verify that workers on major platforms in Egypt, Ghana, [Kenya](#), Nigeria and South Africa earn at or above local minimum wages.

The Uber files showed that when the company did become subject to regulatory pressure, it unleashed massive [lobbying efforts](#), and in some cases attempted to rewrite laws in its favour. For instance, when Nigerian authorities tried to address Uber's corporate tax avoidance, the company [deflected criticism](#) by offering to help the government collect tax from its drivers.

Uber has demonstrated that it will not hesitate to leave African transport systems in the lurch, should regulators move to protect workers' pay

Uber admits to past mistakes and says that it has “fundamentally changed” over the past five years. However, in a recent case, in Tanzania, the government tried to determine a per-kilometre ride-hailing rate and force companies to lower their commissions to 15% amid soaring fuel prices in March 2022. In response, Uber suspended its operations in the country, giving one day’s notice of this action in a statement. Its main competitor, Bolt, also significantly scaled back [its](#) operations. Uber resumed its service in Tanzania in September, apparently having reached an agreement to work with the regulator. Three months later, new regulations were brought in, allowing ride-hailing companies to charge 25% commission, as well as a 3% booking fee.

Uber has again demonstrated that it will not hesitate to leave urban African transport systems in the lurch should regulators move to protect workers' pay. The company says that it “rigorously engages” with drivers and takes their feedback on board but, as costs and platform fees increase, most drivers

are forced to work longer and longer hours, competing with a growing pool of other drivers.

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African ride-hailing drivers and food couriers fought back in strikes and protests against platform practices last year. Uber and Bolt drivers in Kenya and Nigeria protested the platforms' commissions amid rising inflation and fuel costs. In Egypt, food couriers held a two-day strike to demand higher wages in light of inflation. In South Africa, drivers for Uber, Bolt, InDriver and DiDi engaged in an app "switch-off", calling for fair pay and better security measures. At the time, Jacob Mamabolo, transport chief for Gauteng province, hinted publicly that platforms had refused to cooperate with regulators' attempts to mediate.

It has not been clear that platforms have produced sustainable livelihoods and development in Africa, as anticipated by fourth industrial revolution-friendly policies. Instead, big labour platforms have extracted rents from largely already-existing service sectors, such as transport and domestic work, while adding little real value to local economies. Their strategies of market domination, aided by venture capital, have left little room for local innovators or startups to gain a foothold.

Recent months have seen mounting worker victories and platform regulation in the global north. It is possible that such growing regulatory pressure could spur platforms to turn even more to permissive regulatory environments in the global south, and double-down on lobbying efforts. Removing regulatory barriers to their expansion instead of protecting workers is the pathway to

digital imperialism, not inclusive development. In Africa, technological development “solutions” offered by multinational corporations have often served as Trojan horses for labour exploitation.

Dr Kelle Howson is a research associate at the Oxford Internet Institute, University of Oxford, and a consultant at the Institute for Economic Justice, a Johannesburg-based economic thinktank. This article is based on a report first published on [Global Information Society Watch](#)

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## OpinionInequality

**Look at how the 1% are doing right now, and tell me the system isn't rigged**

[Nesrine Malik](#)



The world's super-rich have amassed so much wealth since the pandemic that even a Tory minister can see something is amiss



Illustration by Matt Kenyon

Mon 23 Jan 2023 02.00 EST Last modified on Mon 23 Jan 2023 12.38 EST

You may have forgotten by now, but there was a brief moment during the pandemic when hopes were raised for a new “[roaring 20s](#)”. The Yale sociology professor [Nicholas Christakis](#) predicted that as in the 1920s, after the 1918 Spanish flu, society would embrace indulgence, with a rise in “sexual licentiousness” as well as a “reverse of religiosity”. We were poised to emerge from lockdown randy and flush. We certainly weren’t supposed to plunge, as we have in Britain, right into political crises and strikes, have three prime ministers in as many months, and sit at home too skint to turn on the heating or socialise.

But a roaring 20s is actually happening, just not for most of us. According to [Oxfam’s](#) annual inequality report, released to coincide with the World Economic Forum meetings in Davos, the richest 1% of people have captured nearly twice as much new wealth as the rest of the world combined since the pandemic. Their fortune [soared by \\$26tn](#), increasing their share of new wealth from 50% to two-thirds.

The breakdown of these figures exposes how on a global basis, extreme wealth is accumulated not by innovating or increasing production, but by

taking advantage of rising prices and exploiting labour. In this effort, wealthy people are enabled by lack of regulation and taxation. The result is a bonanza of plunder with no sheriff in town.

This has been happening for a while, but the pandemic accelerated the trend. Rich people benefited from everything – every positive intervention from the state and negative impact of the crisis somehow still ended up increasing their wealth. They benefited from rising costs by using them as an alibi to charge [higher-than-inflation prices](#), then distributing the rewards as dividends instead of higher wages. Food and energy corporations made a killing, [making \\$306bn](#) in windfall profits in 2022, then distributing 84% to shareholders.

They benefited from stimulus packages that pushed up asset prices. They benefited from low interest rates that helped them to expand their property empires. [According](#) to Credit Suisse, lower interest rates and government support programmes resulted in “a huge transfer” of wealth from the public sector to private households, which saw their debts lowered and the value of their assets, shares and properties, rise.

The obscenity of the system is made possible by the dramatically diminished bargaining power of labour. Weak labour is cheap labour. More lucratively, the world’s workers can increasingly be mobilised according to employers’ precise needs, so not a penny is wasted. The purpose is to transform the human worker into a machine that can be switched off when not in use (although at least machines are tended with maintenance). In 2020, Amazon’s UK sales soared by half to £19.4bn. In 2021, an [investigation](#) in Britain found that the company was bypassing its own employment standards by hiring thousands of zero-hours workers through agencies. These workers have no employment protections, their shifts can be cancelled at the last minute, and there is no guarantee of tenure of employment.



An Amazon fulfilment centre in Staffordshire. Photograph: Nathan Stirk/Getty Images

But it is successful tax avoidance that is the strongest pillar propping up global inequality, and its dismantling would be the quickest solution. There is little chance of that happening soon. Tax regimes, like much of the conventional economic wisdom about the benefits of wealth creation to all, are increasingly out of step with not only the needs of poor people, but with what is required for the health of our economies. The political class has been captured by the outdated ideology of trickle-down economics. And if any of those politicians have dissenting thoughts and consider raising taxes, financial elites threaten to abscond with their wealth, or protest that their entrepreneurial ambitions will be extinguished. The media framing redistributive policies as radical or destructive is a powerful shock collar, too. [Oxfam found](#) that 143 of 161 countries actually froze tax rates for the rich during the pandemic, and 11 countries reduced them.

What's most striking about the post-pandemic profit boom is the truly global nature of the problem. It's not only the hope of a world recalibrated by Covid towards stronger public infrastructure that is turning to dust in our mouths. An older dream is dying too: of a post-cold-war globalisation that was supposed to bring us all closer, usher in a utopia of free trade, growth, employment and sustainable development. What this model of globalisation

ended up achieving was standardising ways for wealthy people to pay as little as possible, concentrating economic activity on those with purchasing power and hanging the rest out to dry. Our lives are indeed becoming more similar across the world. In the global south, affluent people now all have access to the same consumer goods and services, from Netflix to Vitamix, and live in new-build developments with names like [Beverly Hills](#) (Cairo), and Bel Air (Nairobi). Poor people are pushed to the margins, the public services they depend on dismantled.

None of this has happened by accident, according to Peter Goodman, the author of *Davos Man: How the Billionaires Devoured the World*. “It’s not an accident,” he tells me, “that our economies have concentrated greater wealth in fewer hands. Quite simply, wealthy people have used their wealth to purchase democracy, to warp democracy in their own interests. They’ve done that through a global template that involves lowering taxes, privatising formerly public attempts to deal with common problems, liquidating the spending that went into things like social services, and then putting that money into their own pockets.” The main power of the billionaire class, Goodman says, is in their creation of values, not value, that maintain a friendly political climate. Davos, he says, is “a prophylactic against change, an elaborate reinforcement of the status quo served up as the pursuit of human progress”.

But the disparities are becoming too stark for these branding efforts to work as well as they used to. Even rightwing politicians are beginning to point out that the promise of social mobility no longer has purchase. Last week, in a speech that very much sounded like the observations of someone who has awoken from a decades-long slumber, UK cabinet minister Penny Mordaunt [said](#) that “many people think things don’t work, at least for them”, adding that “for those with the least, the whole system can seem rigged against them”.

So close and yet so far. The system doesn’t *seem* to be rigged. It is rigged. I guess it’s a step in the right direction that terms which in the past would have consigned a speaker to the pile of conspiracy theorists and commies are making their way into the mainstream. Mordaunt went further. “The very continuation and success of capitalism,” she said, “hangs in the balance.”

But for the powerful tiny minority that owns half the world's wealth, this sort of capitalism is succeeding better than ever before. What hangs in the balance, as the billionaires' riches increase, is their ability to argue that it's working for us too.

- Nesrine Malik is a Guardian columnist
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**OpinionMen**

## **Men, guard your friendships – heed the warning of the Banshees of Inisherin**

[Tim Dowling](#)



The Oscar contender may be set in the Ireland of a century ago. But it offers a very modern lesson on how fragile male bonds can be



Colm (Brendan Gleeson, left) and Pádraic (Colin Farrell) in *The Banshees of Inisherin*. Photograph: Everett Collection Inc/Alamy

Mon 23 Jan 2023 03.00 EST Last modified on Mon 23 Jan 2023 08.40 EST

The premise of the film [The Banshees of Inisherin](#) – now attracting awards like a magnet – is encapsulated in an early exchange between the two main characters: Colm abruptly ends his longstanding friendship with Pádraic, who, understandably, seeks an explanation.

“I just don’t like you no more,” says Colm.

“You do like me,” says Pádraic.

“I don’t,” says Colm.

Although many of the codes of straight male friendship are unspoken, there are two obvious breaches of protocol here. First, one never ends things overtly – the demands of male friendship are traditionally so low that it would be more work to break off an acquaintance than to maintain it. It would certainly involve more talking.

Second, among men, not liking someone is no particular barrier to lifelong friendship. It's hard to even think of such a relationship in those terms. Do I actually like this guy? Does he like me? How would I even know? We spend all the time we're together insulting each other. Why would it matter?

What follows in the film is a grisly dissolution of a friendship (in a bid to escape Pádraic, Colm threatens to chop off his own fingers) that we, the audience, have never known in its prime. But because it's a friendship between two men, we can guess what it was like: companionable, fundamentally unserious and wholly reliant on proximity or shared interests – in this case, going to the pub at 2pm every day. And all of it shrouded in a fog of comforting irrelevance. This, apparently, is what Colm can no longer abide about Pádraic. "I just don't have a place in my life for dullness any more," he says.

Men like to think that because our friendships are slow-growing, studded with barbs, and require little tending, they are durable, like a drought-resistant hedge. But in reality they're terribly fragile; untended, they often simply shrivel up. They may seem flexible, but they're not constructed to withstand much in the way of change.

When the writer and performer Max Dickins got engaged to his girlfriend, it triggered a crisis – he couldn't think of a close enough male friend to serve as his best man. Some of the most obvious candidates, it transpired, were people he hadn't spoken to in ages. His male friendships had, one by one, slipped away. He embarked on an investigation that became a funny and engaging book – [Billy No-Mates](#): How I Realised Men Have a Friendship Problem.

Dickins instantly recognised something familiar in [The Banshees of Inisherin](#), even though it's set on an island off the coast of Ireland a century ago. "I thought it was one of the best portrayals of male friendship, and also of male mental health, I've seen on the screen," he says. "It's pretty rare that a friendship, especially a male friendship, is the absolute centre of a narrative."

It's not, as you may have gathered, a terribly flattering portrayal of male friendship. Neither is the one in Dickins' book, at first. The friends he re-

established contact with always seemed to insist on social settings that gave the meeting an ulterior purpose – a sports bar, or some kind of activity – rendering direct communication unnecessary. In terms of conversation there was a predominant mode, what Dickins calls, “the jazz of casual brutality that men reserve for people they like”.

You may recognise this picture of male friendship: emotionally illiterate, devoid of ritual, wavering between light-hearted abuse and total silence. More than anything else, our friendships seem unthought-through. Nobody quite seems to know what they want from them, or what they need.

But if you’re a man, it’s hard not to also feel a certain affection for this arrangement, or to think that maybe it is, in some sense, exactly what’s required. “We can overthink friendship a little bit,” says Dickins, “and kind of get obsessed about this idea that you have a best friend that is for ever and will always be present and the perfect cipher for you.” Male friendships are more like a kind of travel, he says, with the two of you side by side, eyes fixed on some shared destination. “When men lose that spot on the horizon, often that friendship will become less close,” he says, “because that is the juice in it. That is what’s pushing it forwards and keeping it together.” Male friendship is also like a club – members come and go, leave and rejoin.

The supposed insufficiency of male friendship has spawned a lot of movements and groups over the years, some pitching formal male bonding rituals, others trying to re-confer a traditional sense of masculinity that the modern world has somehow robbed from us. A lot of the “mythopoetic” male movements – typified by Robert Bly’s book Iron John – have aged poorly. But there are still plenty of gurus out there – Jordan Peterson, say – purporting to tell hapless men hard truths when they’re really just telling them what they want to hear: that men are the true victims of victim culture.

What Dickins learned – and his book amply demonstrates – is that male friendships, like all friendships, require regular maintenance to keep them going. As a man you may well find your closest male friends are simply the ones prepared to do all the social heavy lifting. As for the friendships themselves, well, you won’t know what you’re missing till they’re gone; for all their emotional opacity and genial cruelty, male friendships are still vital.

As Dickins writes (paraphrasing the American sportswriter [Ethan Strauss](#)):  
“Yes, masculinity is a little bit toxic – that’s what I like about it.”

But be careful – it’s all fun until somebody loses a finger. Or several.

- Tim Dowling is a regular Guardian contributor
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## [Pakistan](#)

# Tens of millions without power in Pakistan as national grid fails

Energy minister says outage was caused by voltage surge in south of grid



A man starts a generator outside his shop in Karachi, Pakistan during a country-wide power breakdown. Photograph: Akhtar Soomro/Reuters

*Reuters in Islamabad*

Mon 23 Jan 2023 08.56 ESTFirst published on Mon 23 Jan 2023 04.07 EST

Pakistan's national grid suffered a major breakdown, leaving millions of people without electricity for the second time in three months and highlighting the infrastructural weakness of the heavily indebted nation.

The energy minister, Khurram Dastgir, said the outage on Monday was caused by a large voltage surge in the south of the grid, which affected the entire network.

Supplies were being partially restored from north to the south, he added, nearly six hours after factories, hospitals and schools reported outages. The grid should be fully functioning by 10pm (1700 GMT), Dastgir said, adding: “We are trying our utmost to achieve restoration before that.”

It took hours to restore power after the last major outage, in October. A senior ministry official blamed this outage, and the frequent blackouts that Pakistan’s 220 million people suffer, on its ageing grid.

“There’s an underlying weakness in the system,” said the official, who declined to be named as they were not authorised to speak to the media. “Generators are too far from the load centres and transmission lines are too long and insufficient.”

Like much of the national infrastructure, Pakistan’s grid needs an upgrade that the government says it can ill afford.

Pakistan has enough installed power capacity to meet demand, but it lacks resources to run its oil-and-gas powered plants – and the sector is so heavily in debt that it cannot afford to invest in infrastructure and power lines.

“We have been adding capacity, but we have been doing so without improving transmission infrastructure,” Fahad Rauf, the head of research at Karachi-based brokerage Ismail Iqbal Industries, said.

China has invested heavily in Pakistan’s power sector as part of a \$60bn (£48bn) infrastructure scheme that feeds into Beijing’s “belt and road” initiative to develop land and sea trade routes in Asia and beyond.

The outage affected swathes of the country. In Peshawar, a city of more than 2.3 million people, some residents said they had no drinking water because their pumps were powered by electricity. Telecom companies and several hospitals said they had switched to backup generators, but disruptions remained.

“I am facing a lot of problems because of the power outage,” said Mohammad Khurram, a Karachi resident who was accompanying his sick mother-in-law at a city hospital. “I have to keep bringing her in and out of

the building because the X-ray machines and other testing units are affected.”

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## [India](#)

# India invokes emergency laws to ban BBC Modi documentary

Government accused of ‘censorship’ over ban on film about PM’s role in violence during 2002 Gujarat riots



Narendra Modi, then chief minister of Gujarat, answers questions before a supreme court-appointed panel investigating riots in Gandhinagar in 2010. Photograph: Ajit Solanki/Associated Press

*[Hannah Ellis-Petersen](#) in Delhi*

Mon 23 Jan 2023 02.59 EST Last modified on Mon 23 Jan 2023 05.19 EST

The Indian government has invoked emergency laws to block a BBC documentary examining the role of the prime minister, [Narendra Modi](#), during riots in the western state of Gujarat in 2002.

Controversy has erupted in [India](#) over the first episode of the two-part programme, India: The Modi Question, which tracked his rise through the

ranks of the Bharatiya Janata party and his appointment as chief minister of Gujarat.

The [BBC](#) also uncovered memos showing that Modi's conduct was criticised at the time by western diplomats and the British government, including in a government report which found that the riots had "all the hallmarks of an ethnic cleansing".

Modi has been haunted for decades by allegations of complicity in the violence that took place during the Gujarat riots, which broke out after 59 Hindu pilgrims died on a train that had been set on fire. The fire was blamed on the state's Muslim population.

Almost 1,000 Muslims died in violence across the state. Police were accused of standing by and Modi of not doing enough to protect the minority community from the Hindu mobs and even tacitly supporting the Hindu extremists. He has denied accusations he failed to stop the rioting and in 2013 a supreme court panel said there was insufficient evidence to prosecute him.

The first episode of the documentary was broadcast in the UK on Tuesday last week. It has not aired in India but its content – including unauthorised video clips – have been circulating on social media. It prompted a vehement response from the Modi government, which has described the documentary as "a propaganda piece designed to push a particular discredited narrative".

"The bias and lack of objectivity and frankly continuing colonial mindset are blatantly visible," said Arindam Bagchi, spokesperson for the foreign affairs ministry.

The documentary was also criticised in a joint statement by more than 300 former judges, bureaucrats and prominent figures who accused the BBC of pushing a British imperialist agenda and "setting itself up as both judge and jury to resurrect Hindu-Muslim tensions".

It was also raised in the UK parliament, where the Labour MP Imran Hussain challenged the prime minister, Rishi Sunak, over the British

government's alleged knowledge of Modi's role during in the violence. "I am not sure that I agree at all with the characterisation," responded Sunak.

Over the weekend, India's ministry of information and broadcasting issued directions banning any clips from the episode being shared under legislation introduced in 2021 that allow for the "blocking of information in case of emergency".

Kanchan Gupta, an adviser at the ministry, said the government had ordered Twitter and YouTube to take down dozens of accounts that had been airing clips of the Modi documentary on the basis that it was "undermining the sovereignty and integrity of India" and "making unsubstantiated allegations".

"Videos sharing BBC World hostile propaganda and anti-India garbage, disguised as 'documentary' on YouTube, and tweets sharing links to the BBC documentary have been blocked under India's sovereign laws and rules," Gupta said in a tweet.

The BBC has said in a statement that its documentary was "rigorously researched according to highest editorial standards".

The decision to block the documentary comes amid an increasingly challenging environment for media and freedom of the press under the Modi government, with critical journalists and media subjected to state and judicial harassment. Last year, India slipped eight places in the press freedom index to 150 out of 180 countries, its worst position on record.

The ban on the BBC documentary was met with outrage by opposition politicians, who accused the Modi government of censorship. Mahua Moitra, an MP for opposition party Trinamool Congress, tweeted a link to a clip, writing: "Shame that the emperor and courtiers of the world's largest democracy are so insecure. Sorry, haven't been elected to represent world's largest democracy to accept censorship."

Asaduddin Owaisi, the president of the All India Majlis-e-Ittehadul Muslimeen party, questioned why a documentary on Modi was blocked

while another upcoming film venerating Gandhi's killer, Nathuram Godse, was being released unchallenged.

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## [France](#)

# France protests: man lost testicle after clashes with police – lawyer

French law enforcement facing renewed accusations of excessive force in aftermath of widespread protests against pension reform



A man lost a testicle after clashes with police at protests in Paris, France, against the raising of the retirement age, his lawyer said. Photograph: Christophe Petit-Tesson/EPA

*Guardian staff and agencies*

Sun 22 Jan 2023 20.02 EST Last modified on Mon 23 Jan 2023 05.05 EST

Doctors had to amputate the testicle of a young man who got clubbed in the groin by a police officer during demonstrations in Paris last week, according to the man's lawyer.

Images and footage from Thursday's demonstrations circulating online show a policeman hitting a man on the ground between the legs, and then leaving.

The man is seen holding a camera.

The incident occurred during a surge of violence at [a mostly peaceful march](#) attended by tens of thousands of people opposed to the government's plan to raise the age of retirement. About 1 million people marched in cities across France on Thursday.

The 26-year-old, identified in the French press as an engineer, said he was knocked to the ground, allegedly by an officer, while taking photos during a confrontation between demonstrators and police. Another officer charged at him and allegedly planted his club in the man's groin.

Lawyer Lucie Simon said she was filing a complaint on behalf of her client for "voluntary violence that led to mutilation by a person vested with public authority".

"It was such a strong blow that he had to have a testicle amputated," she said, adding that the engineer was still in hospital.

"This is not a case of self-defence or necessity. The proof is in the images we have and the fact that he was then not arrested."

The engineer, who lives on the French Caribbean island of Guadeloupe, "is still in shock and keeps asking why" he was wounded, the lawyer added.

Paris Police Chief Laurent Nunez ordered an inquiry into the exact circumstances of the incident as outrage grew over what appeared to be a case of excessive force from French police, a longstanding complaint.

The man told the Libération newspaper he was suing "so that this stops, because I'm not the first person to be subjected to violence by police."

Government spokesperson Olivier Veran told a local broadcaster that he felt "empathy" for the young man.

But he stressed "the need to understand the conditions in which this intervention occurred".

The interior ministry said 80,000 people marched in Paris on Thursday, as part of nationwide protests against President Emmanuel Macron's plan to extend the retirement age from 62 to 64.

The hard-left CGT union however said it counted 400,000 protesters in the French capital.

French law enforcement agencies have long been peppered with excessive use of force complaints. Police unions contend their members often are the victims of violence committed by some people they are meant to protect.

The 2020 beating and clubbing by three police officers of a [Black music producer, Michel Zecler](#), as he left his Paris studio was a catalyst for limited reforms. The most recent change was the appointment last year of a magistrate to head a unit that investigates allegations of police abuse. Police officers previously led the unit.

French President Emmanuel Macron ordered changes in 2021, saying that “we have nothing to fear from greater transparency.”

That same year, French lawmakers passed a “global security” law reinforcing certain law enforcement powers. The most controversial article, which initially limited video or other images of security officers, was watered down to make it a crime to identify security officers “with the manifest goal of attacking their physical or psychological integrity.”

*Agence France-Presse and Associated Press contributed to this article*

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## New Zealand politics

# New Zealand's Chris Hipkins vows to focus on inflation 'pandemic' and 'fairer' tax system

Incoming prime minister echoes Jacinda Ardern's promise to cut back Labour's agenda to focus on cost of living issues



New Zealand's incoming prime minister Chris Hipkins has pledged to narrow Labour's reforms to focus on the cost of living crisis. Photograph: Marty Melville/AFP/Getty Images

*Tess McClure in Auckland*

[\*@tessairini\*](#)

Sun 22 Jan 2023 18.26 EST Last modified on Sun 22 Jan 2023 18.32 EST

New Zealand's next prime minister, [Chris Hipkins](#), has promised to cut back government reforms to focus on the "global pandemic of inflation".

Speaking to media on Monday morning, the [prime minister-to-be](#) promised to “run the ruler” over the government’s work programme and cut inessential reforms to focus on the economy. In the final months of 2022, [Jacinda Ardern made similar commitments](#), in a tacit admission that the government’s packed legislative agenda may have become a distraction from the rising cost of living – a core issue worrying voters.

“The public feel we’re doing too much, too fast,” he said, in a series of early-morning radio interviews. “We need to focus in on some of those bread-and-butter issues that New Zealanders are certainly focused on at the moment, including issues like the cost of living, the effects of the ongoing global inflation pandemic that we’re experiencing at the moment,” he told RNZ.

“We just have to make sure that we’re putting our resources into the things that are going to make the biggest difference and that are the most important.”

New Zealand’s inflation rate remains high, with food prices up 11.3% year-on-year in December – the biggest increase in more than three decades.

Hipkins has not yet said which policies will face the bonfire – those priorities are likely to be set on Wednesday, when the newly-sworn-in prime minister will meet with cabinet for the first time.

Among those possibly facing the guillotine, however, is the effort to merge New Zealand’s public-funded media entities into a single, BBC-style giant. There has also been speculation about the future of Three Waters: a large-scale reform of ageing water infrastructure that has morphed into a controversial proxy debate over co-governance with Māori of public assets and Indigenous sovereignty in New Zealand. Hipkins said on Monday that Three Waters would probably proceed, because scrapping it would result in thousands of dollars in increased rates.

The incoming leader also hinted at the possibility of changes to New Zealand’s tax system, saying “we should always look at how we can make the tax system fairer”.

“I think overall there are some New Zealanders who perhaps aren’t contributing their fair share,” he told [hosts of The AM Show](#). Early in Ardern’s term, she had ruled out a capital gains tax, land tax on family homes, or wealth tax. Critics on the left said those decisions, along with strict fiscal responsibility measures, hamstrung the government when it came to achieving large-scale social reforms, like the mass building of state housing.

Hipkins said his government would keep to Labour’s tax commitments for this term – which is no new taxes outside the new 39% tax rate, but said the tax system needed some change.

“There are people now working really, really hard, some of them might be working multiple jobs … They are contributing enormously to New Zealand and to our prosperity but they are feeling that they’re not able to get ahead. We need a tax system that recognises this, that actually makes sure that those who are really striving, who are putting in the hard yards, actually feel the reward for that,” he said.

Hipkins was formally selected by Labour’s caucus this weekend, to replace Ardern after the prime minister’s shock resignation last week. He will be sworn in on Wednesday.

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This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2023/jan/23/new-zealands-chris-hipkins-vows-to-focus-on-inflation-pandemic-and-fairer-tax-system>

[Israel](#)

## Huge protest in Israel over rightwing government's judicial changes

Estimated 100,000 people took to streets in Tel Aviv in what protesters described as ‘fight for Israel’s destiny’



Crowds of protesters wave Israeli flags during a demonstration in Tel Aviv.  
Photograph: Eyal Warshavsky/Sopa Images/Rex/Shutterstock

*[Bethan McKernan](#) in Jerusalem*

Sun 22 Jan 2023 11.56 EST Last modified on Mon 23 Jan 2023 02.21 EST

An estimated 100,000 people took to the streets of Tel Aviv on Saturday night in what protesters described as a “fight for Israel’s destiny” over sweeping judicial changes proposed by the new far-right government.

Israel’s longtime prime minister, Benjamin Netanyahu, returned to office last month at the helm of a coalition of conservative and religious parties that make up [the most right-wing government in the country’s history](#).

The new administration has accused Israel's supreme court of leftwing bias and overstepping its authority. It is seeking to curb the court's powers by severely restricting its ability to overturn laws and government decisions and giving the Knesset more control over judicial appointments.

The Tel Aviv protest, along with smaller demonstrations in Jerusalem, Haifa and Beersheba, were sparked by fears that the far-reaching proposals undermine democratic norms. Since Israel has no formal constitution, the supreme court plays an important role in keeping government ministers in check.

Netanyahu – himself on trial on corruption charges, which he denies – has defended the plans. His opponents say the proposed changes could help the prime minister evade a conviction or even see the case dropped altogether.

Israeli opposition leader and former prime minister, Yair Lapid, as well as several other figures from across the country's political spectrum, addressed demonstrators in central Tel Aviv on Saturday as the crowd waved the blue and white national flag and held placards reading "No to dictatorship".

"We have here in the streets representatives of many groups who don't usually come out to protest, but they are here, even sworn rightwingers," said one speaker, the celebrated novelist David Grossman.

"This immensely diverse group is prepared to put aside its differences, and fight this existential fight ... In its 75th year, Israel is in a fateful struggle for its character, for its democracy and for the status of its rule of law."



A protester holds a placard in a demonstration in Tel Aviv on Saturday night.  
Photograph: Eyal Warshavsky/Sopa Images/Rex/Shutterstock

Noya Matalon, 24, a law student at Tel Aviv University, said: “The last big protest movement in Israel was about taking Netanyahu down, but it’s not a matter of right and left any more. Everyone – Arabs, Jews, even people who agree we need some reforms to the judicial system – everyone is saying they are scared.”

The musician Ollie Danon, 23, cancelled a show scheduled for Saturday night so he and audience members could join the protests instead. “There’s a crisis in engagement in politics here after five elections in a short space of time. There was a sense it was just all about Bibi,” he said, using Netanyahu’s nickname.

“This is bigger than Bibi now, though; it’s an emergency situation. I believe the supreme court does need reform. Its rulings usually support the occupation [of the Palestinian territories], and somehow now it’s the left wing who are out protesting to defend it. It’s all absurd.”

Saturday’s gatherings build on similar demonstrations over recent weeks, including one in Tel Aviv last weekend that drew 80,000 people, nationwide

protests by students, and one outside a Tel Aviv court. Roee Neuman, one of the organisers, said more street protests are planned, as well as strike action.

“I am optimistic things can change, even if I am not optimistic about the state of Israel at the moment. We are going to increase our efforts: we are coordinating strikes in sectors that would never normally get involved, like lawyers, doctors and the tech industry. We can block roads.

“It’s difficult to predict what will happen, but I think if it starts hitting the economy they will have to listen.”

In addition to the growing protest movement, the prime minister has faced pressure from Israel’s attorney general after a ruling last week that disqualified key ally Aryeh Deri from holding a government post because of a conviction of tax offences.

Netanyahu was [forced to fire the Shas party leader](#) during Sunday’s cabinet meeting, declaring as he did so that “the high court decision ignores the will of the nation”.

The coalition also faced an early test on Friday in the form of a disagreement between cabinet members over dismantling a new Jewish settlement in the [occupied West Bank](#).

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## Headlines tuesday 24 january 2023

- [Nadhim Zahawi Former Tory minister calls for Tory party chair to step down](#)
- [Live Nadhim Zahawi under fresh pressure to quit as senior Tory says he should ‘stand aside’](#)
- [US Half Moon Bay: at least seven dead in another California mass shooting](#)
- [Live Russia-Ukraine war: Ukraine officials resign amid corruption claims; Germany receives Poland request to re-export tanks](#)

**Nadhim Zahawi**

## **Former Tory minister calls for Nadhim Zahawi to step down**

Caroline Nokes says party chair should let investigation take place as story has become a distraction

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

'It's a distraction': former Tory cabinet minister calls on Nadhim Zahawi to 'step aside' – video

*[Jessica Elgot](#) and [Peter Walker](#)*

Tue 24 Jan 2023 09.11 ESTFirst published on Tue 24 Jan 2023 04.25 EST

A former Conservative cabinet minister has called for [Nadhim Zahawi](#) to step down as party chair while an ethics investigation takes place into his tax affairs.

The former immigration minister Caroline Nokes said the story had become a distraction for the Tories and the prime minister and that Zahawi should “step aside” for the greater good.

It comes as Sunak’s official spokesperson refused to say whether he believed Zahawi had been consistently honest about his tax affairs, saying this should be established in an investigation by the PM’s ethics adviser.

On Monday, Sunak instructed his ethics adviser, Sir Laurie Magnus, to investigate Zahawi’s tax affairs but [faces growing pressure](#) over whether he knew about the HMRC inquiry when he appointed Zahawi to his cabinet.

It has emerged that Zahawi resolved a multimillion-pound tax dispute with HMRC by paying a penalty during his short time as chancellor under [Boris Johnson](#).

Nokes said she welcomed the investigation because there are “too many unanswered questions” about the affair but said Zahawi could not survive the onslaught of negative front pages.

“When you become the story, it’s a distraction from anything else the government’s trying to do,” she told TalkTV. “There are countless examples of good, competent cabinet colleagues who got themselves in a mess, who have resigned and in some instances returned just a few months later, and I think in order to get this cleared up, Nadhim should stand aside and let the investigation run its course.”

Asked on Tuesday if Sunak was confident Zahawi had always told him the truth over tax, the prime minister’s spokesperson said there had not been discussions between the pair “on that specific level of detail”.

Asked if Sunak believed Zahawi had been honest more generally, the spokesperson said: “I don’t have much to add beyond what the prime minister set out yesterday. There is some ongoing work now by the independent adviser to ascertain the facts. And I think it’s right that he’s allowed to carry out that work, rather than me cutting across it.”

No 10 sources have argued that when ministers are vetted before appointment, [HMRC](#) officials only say whether someone has a tax matter outstanding, and nothing else, meaning Sunak would not have been warned.

However, a source in the government has told the Guardian No 10 had been aware of a penalty as part of a settlement with HMRC when Sunak appointed Zahawi, who is also a Cabinet Office minister, to the role. Downing Street has formally denied the claim.

This system would also strongly indicate that Johnson was warned about Zahawi’s tax affairs but nonetheless appointed him as chancellor, and so in ultimate charge of the UK’s tax system, something [previously reported](#).

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The policing minister, Chris Philp, sent out to speak for the government on Tuesday, said he did not think it was appropriate for Zahawi to recuse himself. He told BBC Breakfast: “I think it is reasonable that where there is an investigation, the person concerned is allowed to continue serving while that investigation continues.

“We do have a principle, don’t we in this country, innocent until proven guilty. That applies to a whole range of different circumstances. But I don’t think it is fair to jump to any conclusions before the investigation has concluded.”

Philp repeated No 10’s claim that Sunak was told there were “no outstanding issues” in relation to Zahawi’s tax affairs when appointing him Conservative party chair in the autumn.

“As far as I’m aware, the point at which Nadhim Zahawi was appointed to his current position by the current prime minister, the prime minister was not aware of the previous back and forward earlier in the summer,” he told Times Radio.

“And he was told there were no outstanding issues – taxation issues – applicable at that time. Obviously subsequent to that, particularly over the weekend just gone, a number of questions have arisen, have come up publicly. And it is in response to those that the prime minister has quite rightly announced this independent investigation.”

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**Politics live with Andrew Sparrow**  
**Politics**

# No 10 declines to say Sunak confident Zahawi has always told him truth about his tax affairs – as it happened

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## [California](#)

# Half Moon Bay: at least seven dead in another California mass shooting

Two attacks in agricultural area near Half Moon Bay come within days of shootings in Monterey Park and Central Valley

California: footage shows police detaining Half Moon Bay shooting suspect – video report

*Guardian staff and agencies*

Mon 23 Jan 2023 22.34 ESTFirst published on Mon 23 Jan 2023 21.17 EST

Seven people have been killed in an agricultural region of northern [California](#), authorities said on Monday, the latest shootings to rattle the state in recent days.

Two fatal shootings took place at a mushroom farm and a trucking firm on the outskirts of Half Moon Bay, a coastal community about 30 miles south of San Francisco, officials said.

Deputies responding to a call found four people dead and a fifth victim wounded at the first location in Half Moon Bay, then found three more dead at the second location nearby, Sheriff Christina Corpus told a news conference on Monday evening.

“This is a devastating tragedy for this community and the many families touched by this unspeakable act of violence,” said Corpus.

Police have arrested a suspect, named as 67-year-old Zhao Chunli, in connection with the shooting.

The shootings are being treated as related, although the connection between the locations was not immediately clear. Dave Pine, the president of the San

Mateo county board of supervisors, said the suspect was employed at one of the businesses and called him a “disgruntled worker”.

The shooting followed the [killing of 11 people](#) over the weekend at a ballroom dance hall in the southern California city of Monterey Park, near Los Angeles. It also comes on the heels of [a shooting in California's Central Valley](#) last week, where six people, including an infant, were killed in the small town of Goshen.



A suspect is arrested by law enforcement personnel after a mass shooting in Half Moon Bay. Photograph: Abc Affiliate Kgo/Reuters

The San Mateo county sheriff's office said it first received reports of a shooting just before 2.30pm and found four people dead from gunshot wounds at the first scene. Shortly thereafter, officers found three more people dead from gunshot wounds at a second location about 5 miles (8 km) away, Capt Eamonn Allen said in a news release.

The office did not share any information about the connection between the two locations, and the motive for the shooting is not known, Allen said.

About two hours after first responding, a sheriff's deputy found the suspect, Zhao, in his car at a sheriff's station in Half Moon Bay. He was taken into

custody and a weapon was found in his vehicle. The sheriff's department believes he acted alone, Allen said.

## Map

Half Moon Bay is a small coastal city with agricultural roots now home to about 12,000 people. The city and surrounding San Mateo county area is known for producing flowers as well as vegetables. The county allows cannabis farming in certain areas.

State senator Josh Becker, who represents much of San Mateo county, called the area “a very close-knit” agricultural community. “We’re still trying to understand exactly what happened and why, but it’s just incredibly, incredibly tragic,” Becker said.

Other public figures spoke out in shock at the killings, which also mark the nation’s sixth mass killing – that is, with at least four fatalities excluding any perpetrator – just 23 days into the new year.

“We are sickened by today’s tragedy in Half Moon Bay,” Pine said in a statement. “We have not even had time to grieve for those lost in the terrible shooting in Monterey Park. Gun violence must stop.”

“Two hours ago I joined my colleagues on the Capitol steps for a vigil for the victims of the shooting in Monterey Park,” tweeted Marc Berman, a member of the California state assembly. Before we’ve even had a chance to mourn them, there is yet another mass shooting – this time in Half Moon Bay. In my district.”

California’s governor, Gavin Newsom, described it as “tragedy upon tragedy”.

“At the hospital meeting with victims of a mass shooting when I get pulled away to be briefed about another shooting. This time in Half Moon Bay,” the governor tweeted.

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[\*\*Ukraine war live\*\*](#)[\*\*World news\*\*](#)

# Russia-Ukraine war live: Germany to send Leopard 2 tanks to Ukraine, reports say — as it happened

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## 2023.01.24 - Spotlight

- ['I jumped off the hangover hamster wheel' Midlife drinkers who gave up booze – and got happy](#)
- ['It was terrifying' GP tells of dash to A&E amid ambulance delays](#)
- [Analysis Zahawi and Johnson's wealthy friends are an image problem for Sunak's Tories](#)
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## **‘I jumped off the hangover hamster wheel’: midlife drinkers who gave up booze – and got happy**



‘Instantly, I started to feel better’ ... Sharon Hartley

In the UK, those aged 55 to 75 are the heaviest drinkers, with the generation below not far behind. But many are turning their backs on alcohol and discovering surprising benefits



[Emine Saner](#)

[@eminesaner](#)

Tue 24 Jan 2023 01.00 EST Last modified on Tue 24 Jan 2023 05.41 EST

Sharon Hartley considered herself a fairly average drinker. She had followed a similar pattern to that of other people she knew in their mid-40s – teenage drinking that continued at university and in her 20s, then drinking at home in her 30s and 40s. “It crept up on me and I got to 44 and I thought: when was it deemed normal to be drinking a bottle of wine a night? And maybe opening it a bit earlier – not at 8pm, when the children have gone to bed, but 5pm, when you’re making dinner for the family.”

She didn’t consider herself to be addicted to alcohol, but says: “I knew my relationship with alcohol wasn’t going in a good direction.”

Hartley, now 49, had tried [dry January](#), and sober October – the month-long campaigns that encourage people to cut out alcohol – but would be looking

forward to the following month, when she could “drink my body weight in rosé”, she says. “I knew in order to experience a life without alcohol, I had to take a longer break.”

She decided on a 90-day challenge, starting on a Monday in 2018, with a raging hangover, on the first day her children were back to school. “It had been another really boozy summer and I thought: today it starts.”

It was hard at first, because drinking had become such a habit. “But then, step by step, something weird started to happen. Instantly, I started to feel better because I wasn’t waking up feeling below par every day. I used to brag that I didn’t get hangovers, but I think because of the frequency of my drinking, I lived in a constant state of hangover.”

The benefits that came with that 90-day break have led me to say I will never drink again, and that removing booze from my life has been the best thing I’ve ever done

She took a selfie of herself that first day, and then another each week, watching her face deflate, the blotches on her skin disappear, the whites of her eyes become clearer. “The benefits that came with that 90-day break have led me to say I will never drink again, and that removing booze from my life has been the best thing I’ve ever done.”

An estimated 17% of adults in the UK are taking part in [dry January](#) this year, and now may be the point where you have given up, or are counting the days until the end of the month. But just maybe you are considering extending your abstinence into February, and beyond, after discovering the joys of sobriety after years of drinking.

Joanne Midgley, 61, had done a few month-long alcohol-free challenges, just to have a bit of a break from the amount she and her husband were drinking at home, before going back to drinking almost immediately.

“Normally, I would have been waiting for the first of February, and had all the lovely gins lined up, ready to go again,” she says. Last year was different. She had partly been influenced by posts about being sober on

social media and in newspaper articles, and her mindset shifted. “I thought, I’ll just do another month.” For Midgley, giving up completely has been easier than trying to moderate her drinking.

People have felt sorry for her, she says. “But it’s not about loss for me, it’s about what I’ve gained,” she explains. “Don’t feel sorry for me; I feel sorry for you. I was that person when I was drinking who was gutted if somebody turned up and they were on antibiotics or they were pregnant.”

Midgley has lost weight, and has more energy – and more friends, after joining some local sober groups Bee Sober and Sober Butterfly Collective. “My days are longer; my world got bigger.” Now she can drive to the other side of the city, rather than having to plan how to get back after a drink or – more likely – just remaining near home.



‘A lot of my health issues cleared up’ ... Kate Beavis

Kate Beavis, 50, a menopause awareness campaigner, also gave up drinking after her second attempt at dry January, in 2015, with a loosely held thought that she would try to continue it for a year. “I didn’t think I would last, but I felt so much better. A lot of my health issues cleared up. I now realise some of my menopause symptoms got better. I felt so much more able to look

after my family and run my business, and that helped drive me forward with not drinking.”

She says she sleeps better, has more energy and motivation, and finds it easier to control her mood. Her back pain eased, simply because she wasn’t sitting on the sofa drinking several glasses of wine every night, which had become a reward for getting the kids to bed – something “very normal for lots of people, particularly women”. When it got to the end of the year, people assumed she would have a celebratory New Year’s Eve drink. “It would’ve been pretty stupid. If you gave up smoking for a year, you wouldn’t have a celebratory cigarette. So then I just carried on.”

To begin with, she says, it could be tricky to go out with friends. “People used to give me a lot of grief: ‘Why aren’t you drinking. You’re so boring.’ Which I did not expect, but it’s probably more about them than me.”

People still ask her why she doesn’t drink. “That can get quite annoying. I could be pregnant, it could be for religious reasons, I could have a health condition, I could be an alcoholic – it’s quite invasive to ask. Still, people are fascinated by it.”

For James, who is in his mid-50s, what finally convinced him to ditch the booze was waking up hungover after a workplace Christmas party. He had been a social drinker, and also drank at home three or four nights a week. “It was beginning to affect my health – just getting out of bed was harder,” he says.

Having stopped drinking, James loves not having hangovers. “You feel brighter, more alert, especially in the mornings.” He has noticed how much time he has – drinking seemed to take up more hours than it should, either thinking about the experience or recovering from it. He uses the time thus released for pursuing hobbies. “The main thing it’s made me realise is it’s so endemic in British culture – people drink all the time and you see, when you stop doing it, how ridiculous it is. But when somebody says: ‘I don’t drink,’ people are still aghast.”

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‘It’s like rocket fuel, it’s life-changing’ ...Andy Garwood. Photograph: Jim Higham/Sussex Sport Photography

Since Andy Garwood, who is also in his mid-50s, gave up drinking alcohol – he was a daily drinker, knocking back gin and tonic at home after a day running his construction business – he has changed his life. He has become a sober coach, helping others to give up alcohol, and has done triathlons and climbed mountains. “You think you’re giving something up, but you gain so much,” he says. “All these ailments I told myself were just about getting old, back pains, miraculously cleared up. It’s like rocket fuel, it’s life-changing.”

People Andy’s age are the nation’s biggest drinkers – the 55 to 75 age group, with the second-biggest consumers belonging to the group below, 35 to 55. Several factors lie behind this, according to Richard Piper, the chief

executive of [Alcohol](#) Change, a charity that campaigns to reduce alcohol harm. One is life stage: drinking usually starts as a social activity when people are in their teens or 20s. After that, many people will have children and drink at home, where they will often drink more or more regularly, and perhaps start earlier in the day. On top of this, there are generational cohorts whose members share similar characteristics, not just their age. Members of some cohorts “just drink more – and the group currently 55 to 75 is the heaviest-drinking cohort we’ve ever seen. The cohort of 35 to 55 is second.”

The historical trend, Piper says, is that generations tend to react to each other. “That’s what’s happening – younger people are drinking less. That’s a reaction against the two cohorts above them. There’s a sort of natural rejection of our parents’ choices.”

Societal shifts in the past few decades have contributed to higher alcohol consumption in those older cohorts. [Women](#) started drinking more, and people started drinking at home. Supermarkets made alcohol easily available, and affordable.

We also know far more about the harm alcohol causes, he points out – younger people may recognise this, but so do increasing numbers of older people. “People are asking: ‘Why am I doing this? I’m not getting a lot out of this, and I’m doing it by habit, not by choice,’” says Piper. There are inequalities within this – he says it tends to be women, rather than men, who are cutting down or giving up, and it tends to be “wealthier, more wellbeing-conscious parts of the population, whereas working-class populations and communities are not, at the same level, exposed to those kind of messages, or are finding it harder to make the change. We’re not clear yet what’s leading to the problem.” There are also racial inequalities, he says, which his organisation is researching.

Mark stopped drinking two years ago; he was, he says, an addict. He used alcohol and cocaine to self-medicate his low self-esteem, lack of confidence, childhood trauma and then a stressful job in finance. “Alcohol in the City is a common theme,” he says. He had stints in rehab, and says it was easier to come off cocaine than alcohol. “Friends drank. The worst part was walking into a supermarket and seeing alcohol. Over time, that did lessen because I

realised how much I'd gained by not drinking, and the possibility that I would lose everything if I started again."

Counselling helped in terms of the issues that had led to the drinking and drug-taking; his wife was a big support, he got a dog, met new people. "I feel much more comfortable in myself, therefore I don't need alcohol. I'm happy now. I've never been happy before."

For Michael, who says he was "a functioning alcoholic", drinking never seemed a big problem. He hadn't been excessively drunk since he was a teenager, and got up at 5.30am every day to exercise, but the daily consumption of beer and wine was adding up. "You kid yourself that it's fine," he says.

In 2020, when Michael was in his late 40s, he stopped, and still feels great about it more than two years later. "I would never touch it again, which feels bonkers to me, because I could never have seen myself doing that," he says. "I would have understood the reasons why I should stop, but I wouldn't be able to relate to that frame of mind to be able to be free of it." His mental health has improved and he lost weight and to begin with he used an app that showed him how much money he was saving.

At one point, Michael started to microdose with magic mushrooms to fill some of what alcohol was doing for him. "They seemed to break the pattern of behaviour and habit, and probably there is a human need, I think, not to get inebriated but to change how you feel about reality. I was looking for other ways to enjoy myself, I guess."

Others haven't taken quite such an extreme step – James realised he had to give some advance thought to what he would order at the pub, to make it easier not to slip back into ordering a pint of lager (for him, it used to be soda with ice, but now alcohol-free beer is better, and more widely available).

"I had a preconception that a life without alcohol meant it would be boring, miserable," says Sharon Hartley. "You could never socialise. How could you navigate a wedding, birthday, any sort of celebration without a glass in your

hand?” Each time she went to one of those events, it got easier. “I started to enjoy new hobbies, meeting new friends. There’s a whole sober world that I didn’t know was there, this amazing community of other people. It’s lifted the lid on my world. I now have a confidence that I thought came from alcohol, but it turns out I never needed it. It makes you braver, it makes you try new things.”

She went back to working in broadcasting, and [presents her own show on BBC Radio Lancashire](#), as well as hosting a podcast, [Over the Influence](#), about life alcohol-free. “You don’t have to say: ‘I’m an alcoholic’ in order to reassess your relationship with alcohol. There are people that just drink on a weekend, people that have a glass of wine every night, people that are binge drinkers, but they want to change.”

Most of the people who listen to her shows and join her wider online community are over 40. “People that don’t drink are classed as boring, but after 30 years of drinking, I think drinking becomes quite boring. It gets to the point where you think: ‘Is this it?’ I just wanted to jump off that hangover hamster wheel of hell.” It was only meant to be a brief break from the booze, she says. “But the longer I went, the easier it got, the more positive changes came into my life. I totally and utterly fell in love with sobriety.”

*Some names have been changed*

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**NHS**

## **'It was terrifying': GP tells of dash to A&E amid ambulance delays**

Yorkshire doctor faced choice of 'stay and play' or 'scoop and run' with patient on brink of cardiac arrest



Yorkshire ambulance service declared a critical incident in December because of extreme pressure on services. Photograph: Adam Vaughan/EPA



*As told to [Denis Campbell](#)*

Tue 24 Jan 2023 03.00 EST Last modified on Tue 24 Jan 2023 03.09 EST

“The patient was at serious risk of dying in my GP surgery. But there was no ambulance available. So we had to drive her to A&E and hope she didn’t die on the way.”

A GP recalls the dramatic action he took recently for a patient at risk of having a cardiac arrest because she could not breathe.

In his own words, he details his frantic attempt to save a life:

“I am a GP partner practising near Huddersfield, West Yorkshire. On the Friday before the new year, 30 December – a normal day for ambulance services; not a strike day – I got a frightening insight into just how precarious a state this most vital of [NHS](#) care services is now in.

At 9.45am, a GP colleague of mine in the room next door saw a lovely lady in her early 60s with a serious lung condition, accompanied by her husband. I saw my colleague in the corridor. She was ashen-faced and asked me to fetch our portable oxygen kit at once. I summoned a third doctor. We realised the poor lady was critically unwell, with an oxygen saturation level

at below 60%. This is incompatible with life as it poses an imminent risk of cardiac arrest.

Our receptionist made a 999 call to the Yorkshire ambulance service (YAS) and asked for an immediate response because the patient's condition involved an extreme risk to life. She was told there were significant delays in response times and it would be at least an hour before an ambulance came. When she called the YAS a second time, they again could give no clear ETA.

The lady's husband helped us connect her to our oxygen cylinder and her saturation level began to rise as we delivered the maximum possible amount from our small cylinder.

I was torn. Should we wait for an ambulance, with the patient's oxygen running out – what we call “stay and play” – or make a dash with her to A&E, about 20 minutes drive away – a “scoop and run”? I opted for the latter because of longstanding delays with YAS response times, which have been worse this winter.

We helped the lady to her husband's car, still connected to the oxygen. I was worried that she would have a cardiac arrest at any moment and summoned a first-year medical student volunteer to ride in the car so we could communicate via mobile phone while I drove ahead.

Halfway there I realised that, in my panic and with no previous experience of an incident like this, I had made a potentially catastrophic error. I had left our defibrillator at the surgery. I was convinced the poor lady would arrest and it would be my fault. My anxiety rose further.

I was unsure which entrance at Huddersfield Royal Infirmary would provide the fastest access to A&E and made a further error in my confusion, which added more precious minutes to our journey.

I had rung the A&E from my car and they were on standby when we joined the ambulance queue outside the unit. Hospital staff took our patient straight into the resuscitation area, and a very professional and calming A&E nurse

and colleague began working on her immediately. The lady survived and was discharged home a few days later.

I drove the medical student back to our surgery via a coffee shop. But I struggled to drink my coffee as I was welling up with tears, shaking and in an anxious state. I wanted to appear calm and strong in front of my student colleague. When we got back I updated our surgery team then locked myself in a toilet and cried for a while. I also did some breathing exercises, listened to some calming music and got on with the rest of my day which, this being the NHS's winter of hell, was busy.

The whole experience had been terrifying. It's awful to see how NHS ambulance services can no longer respond quickly to 999 calls. That is putting patients at obvious risk, as is very sick people being trapped in the back of an ambulance for hours outside an A&E. It's no wonder the Royal College of Emergency Medicine, which speaks for A&E doctors, thinks that [500 people a week are dying avoidably](#) while they wait for urgent care.

These delays are happening more and more often. Yet neither NHS England nor the Department of [Health](#) and Social Care has given patients or GPs caught up in such situations any advice on what to do. Given the danger to patients, and risk that GPs may get into trouble too, they should do that ASAP. Should you "stay and play" or "scoop and run"? More are doing the latter.

I'm only 58 but I'm retiring in March. I can't cope any more with the stress and overtime being a GP involves, doing the job of two people, while [GPs](#) are criticised regularly by the rightwing media. I can't do the job properly any more as I am too overloaded and don't really see the point when my patients are being harmed by delays across the NHS and care services."

- The writer is a member of the grassroots network [GP Survival](#)
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**Conservatives**

**Analysis**

## Zahawi and Johnson's wealthy friends are an image problem for Sunak's Tories

[Pippa Crerar](#)

The PM may struggle to sell solidarity to the public in light of revelations about tax affairs and ministerial access



Nadhim Zahawi provided contact details for Richard Sharp, now the BBC chair and then an adviser to Rishi Sunak, after being asked for help by David Cameron in 2020. Photograph: Tim Hammond/No 10 Downing Street

Tue 24 Jan 2023 01.00 EST

At the Conservative party conference in 2021, [Nadhim Zahawi](#) met a multimillionaire Canadian businessman who had spent his career in the

education sector and, sources said, was interested in discussing it with the former education secretary.

It was not an unusual meeting for party conference, where ministers regularly rub shoulders with lobbyists and campaigners in their various patches at events organised by the Tory party and by external groups, as well as in the bars and restaurants of grand hotels.

However, the individual in question was Sam Blyth, a distant cousin of [Boris Johnson](#) who, just eight months earlier, had agreed to guarantee a loan of up to £800,000 to help fund the prime minister's lifestyle.

There is no suggestion that the conversation was planned, or that Zahawi knew about the loan agreement when he met Blyth. In fact, when the Guardian first asked his spokesperson about it, we were told that he had no recollection of meeting him.

Blyth, however, confirmed that the pair had met. He said: "I didn't seek out a meeting with the education minister, although I did meet him in passing. Boris Johnson knew nothing about this incidental meeting before, during or afterwards."

The Tory chair's spokesperson then clarified: "Mr Zahawi was introduced to Mr Blyth during a brush-by at party conference. As education secretary, many people interested in education policy were interested in talking to him."

Yet this all raises important questions about access to ministers.

It also illustrates the extraordinarily tangled web of connections at the top of the Conservative party – a point underlined by the controversies surrounding Johnson's financial arrangements and Zahawi's tax affairs.

In a separate controversy, Zahawi – previously a business minister – failed to tell his then department about WhatsApp messages with David Cameron, who contacted him in 2020 in order to lobby for the now-collapsed finance company Greensill.

It emerged last year that Zahawi had provided contact details for [Richard Sharp](#), now the BBC chair and then an adviser to Rishi Sunak, but also a friend of Zahawi's, after being asked for help by Cameron.

Sharp was once Sunak's boss at Goldman Sachs and was also an economic adviser to Johnson when he was mayor of London. The card-carrying Tory has also donated more than £400,000 to the Conservative party.

Blyth, who was also friends with Sharp, is said to have raised the idea of acting as the former prime minister's guarantor in late 2020 and asked him for advice on the best way forward.

Sharp contacted Simon Case, the head of the civil service, who advised him to stay out of the discussions as he was applying for the BBC role, which he got the following spring.

According to reports, Sharp, Blyth and Johnson had dinner together at Chequers before the loan guarantee was finalised, although they deny the then prime minister's finances were discussed then.

Johnson was given the go-ahead for his loan arrangement by Case, on the explicit basis that there was no conflict of interest or even the risk of one.

These wealthy men at the top of, and linked to, the Tory party, look as if they belong to an elite club that benefits them all, but that no outsider could be part of. And there lies the real problem for Sunak, as he tries to persuade the public that their priorities are his government's too.

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[Japan](#)

[Analysis](#)

## **Japan PM's solution to dire birthrate has already been rejected by young**

[Justin McCurry](#) in Tokyo

Fumio Kishida says lifting the birthrate 'cannot wait' yet policies stick to scripts that have so far failed to address the country's population crisis



On Monday, Japan's prime minister Fumio Kishida said the country's low birthrate and ageing population pose an urgent risk to society. Photograph: Charly Triballeau/AFP/Getty Images

Tue 24 Jan 2023 01.34 EST Last modified on Tue 24 Jan 2023 02.11 EST

Fumio Kishida is not a politician given to dramatic pronouncements. But this week he issued a stark warning to the Japanese people: have more children, or risk dragging their country into the depths of dysfunction.

His shift in persona from bland career politician to doomsayer in chief is a reflection of the demographic crisis facing Japan, one of the fastest-ageing countries on earth.

As he pointed out in a 45-minute speech to parliament on Monday, the number of births in Japan is estimated to have sunk below 800,000 last year.

“Japan is on the verge of whether we can continue to function as a society,” he said, adding that addressing the stubbornly low birthrate “cannot wait and cannot be postponed”.

Kishida’s language was striking, but his audience does not appear to be listening.

Overcoming Japan’s demographic crisis has proved insurmountable for occupants of the Kantei – the prime minister’s office – long before Kishida moved in last autumn.

The population of the world’s third-biggest economy has been in decline for several years, and suffered a record fall of 644,000 in 2020-21, according to government data. It is expected to plummet from its current 125 million to an estimated 88 million in 2065 – a 30% decline in 45 years.

The birth rate remains at 1.3 – the average number of children a woman will have in her lifetime – way below the 2.1 needed to keep the population stable. And the number of over-65s continues to grow – now accounting for more than 28% of the population.

The government’s response has been a two-pronged approach that combines crass entreaties to “go home and multiply” with financial incentives for couples who heed the call.

For all his implied warnings of a dystopian, hollowed-out Japan, Kishida is largely sticking to a script that has already been roundly rejected by young Japanese.

Policies that address structural obstacles to raising the birth rate were absent from his policy speech. Instead, he spoke in general terms about a “child-first social economy”, spearheaded by a new children and families agency.

Under loose plans that reportedly won’t be outlined until March, families will receive bigger child allowances and working parents will have access to more after-school childcare. There will be reforms that will make it easier for parents to take leave to raise families – all funded by a promised doubling in spending on children that will be finalised in June.

But Japan’s previous efforts to encourage people to have more babies have had limited impact. Subsidies for pregnancy, childbirth and childcare have failed, while some experts complain that politicians target parents who already have children while failing to ask themselves why young people are reluctant to start families.

They are talking about women like Nao Imai, a university student who told the Guardian late last year why the patter of tiny feet probably wouldn’t be part of her future. “I used to think I would be married by 25 and a mother by 27,” she said. “But when I look at my eldest sister, who has a two-year-old girl, I’m afraid to have children.

“When you have a child in Japan, the husband keeps working but the mother is expected to quit her job and look after the children. I just feel that it’s hard to raise children, financially, mentally and physically. The government says it will provide better support for families with young children, but I don’t have much faith in politicians.”

Her skepticism goes to the heart of Kishida’s challenge – one on which he has chosen to stake considerable political capital as he battles record-low approval ratings.

Because Imai is not alone. A survey by the Nippon Foundation released just before he addressed MPs found that only 16.5% of people aged 17 to 19 believed they would get married, even though a much larger proportion wanted to do so.

As the Mainichi Shimbun pointed out, young Japanese have not suddenly become preternaturally resistant to marriage and family life. The problems arise, the newspaper said in a recent editorial, when their ambitions meet economic reality.

“In Japan, families with children bear a heavy economic burden,” it said. “The high cost of education, such as cram school and university tuition, is a major reason why people are not having an ideal number of children. Child allowances help families raising children, but they do not lead to a fundamental correction of economic disparities.”



Japan's previous efforts to encourage people to have more children have had limited impact. Photograph: Yoshio Tsunoda/AFLO/REX/Shutterstock

As long as successive conservative governments continue to shun immigration as part of a potential solution to chronic labour shortages and the increasing strain on funding for health and social security, the consensus is that the answers must come from within.

Yet Kishida's speech was short on specifics on the long-term pressures couples say are making them think twice about having bigger families, or any children at all: the cost of compulsory and higher education, the rising cost of living and, poorly paid and unstable jobs for non-regular workers,

and punishingly long working hours that make a healthy family life practically impossible.

The Yomiuri Shimbun, a natural ally of Kishida's party, shares their skepticism. "If [the low birthrate] continues, the number of future workers will continue to decline, and society will lose its vitality," it said in an editorial days before his speech.

"But how many more people will want to have children if the existing cash benefits are simply expanded? The effectiveness of this measure is open to question."

While Japan waits for its prime minister to flesh out the details, his Liberal Democratic party colleagues continue to send out a very different message. Only last week, Taro Aso, a former prime minister with a history of gaffes, blamed the low birth rate on women who marry too late to make larger families a realistic proposition.

Kishida warned that Japan had reached a "now or never moment" to address its shortage of children. If experience is any guide, the smart money must be on the latter.

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## **China's shrinking population: what it means for the rest of the world - expert panel**

[Helen Sullivan](#)



A woman holds a child as she walks across a street in Hangzhou. China's population shrank last year for the first time in more than six decades and the world's most populous country faces a looming demographic crisis. Photograph: AFP/Getty Images

From climate change to women's rights, what effect will the demographic time bomb at the heart of China's economy have?

Mon 23 Jan 2023 20.43 EST Last modified on Mon 23 Jan 2023 20.44 EST

China has entered a period of “negative population growth”, an important moment in the history of the country. As recently as 2019, the UN projected the population would peak in 2031-32, but despite major government efforts to reverse the trend, [China has now begun](#) what is expected to be a long period of population decline.

The ongoing shift in demographics could have a profound effect on everything from how the economy operates to Xi Jinping's legitimacy. The Guardian spoke to experts about the implications for everything from climate change to the Chinese Communist party.

## Climate change

“There has long been talk of the need for economic restructuring through a gradual shift towards higher value, cleaner, more advanced hi-tech and services sectors, away from dirtier, low cost, high volume, low value addition manufacturing jobs.

“This demographic trend further reinforces the idea that it is about the quality of economic growth not just quantity of brute output. The good news is that moving away from fossil fuel and pursuing what [China](#) termed ‘ecological civilisation’ would help China improve the quality of its economic growth thereby also raising the quality of life for its shrinking population.” **Bernice Lee, Hoffmann distinguished fellow for sustainability and research director, futures, at Chatham House.**

## Women’s rights

“To boost fertility rates, the government should take measures that mitigate the motherhood penalty, i.e, offering women with children benefits and protections in the workplace, so that they would not be afraid of being penalised at work because of marriage and childbirth.

“However, given China is not a robust welfare state and with the slowdown of the economy, these gender-equalising measures that require the state’s investment and the redistribution of resources to women may not be what the state prioritises.

“What has been happening is that, on the one hand, experts and policymakers are encouraging young people, especially women, to get [married] earlier and have more children – which does not seem to work (marriage and fertility rates have been progressively dropping despite what the experts have to say), and on the other hand, employers are discriminating against women as [they] are perceived to have more care burdens and are thus deemed as secondary workers.” **Yige Dong, assistant professor in the department of global gender & sexuality studies, University at Buffalo, SUNY**

## China’s status as a global superpower

“The slowdown in Chinese economic growth is an interesting real world experiment in whether economically successful countries appear more threatening than ones that are struggling. Are external threat perceptions driven more by a country’s policies and actions or by its economic capabilities? And once foreigners conclude that China is a threat, will they be willing to adjust these conclusions if China no longer appears to be an economic powerhouse?”

“China’s population decline and ageing population … is a reminder of America’s great advantage in being open to talented, hardworking immigrants from around the world.” **Susan Shirk, author of Overreach: How China Derailed its Peaceful Rise.**

## The global economy

“In the short term, a reopening [Chinese economy](#) should provide an important source of strength for the rest of the world economy this year at a time when major western economies are grappling with higher inflation and interest rates and the war in Ukraine.

“Beyond the next year or so however, the ability of the Chinese economy to be the engine of global growth that it has been in the past looks increasingly in question.” **Roland Rajah, director of the Indo-Pacific Development Centre at the Lowy Institute**

## The Communist party

“An ageing population … will reduce China’s tax revenue and contributions to pensions, all of which will affect the extent in which the party-state can provide for its citizenry. The unspoken social contract between the party and its citizenry is the provision of increased standards of living without political liberalisation. [Longitudinal research](#) (until the pandemic) indicates that for the most part Chinese citizens are on the whole satisfied with the central government but this is somewhat predicated on its ability to deliver material goods.

“Whether the party-state can continue to do so given the demographic changes is now open to question.” **Dr Jennifer Hsu, research fellow at the Lowy Institute**

### Chart comparing India and China’s populations

## The Chinese economy

“For China, the speed at which the population is ageing whilst it transitions to a middle-income economy is one of the concerns … China will get old before it gets rich.

China’s working age-to-dependency ratio increased from 37% in 2010 to 45% in 2021, meaning that for every 100 people, 45 required support. Working age is defined as ages 15 to 64.

“This demographic trend can also be expressed in the worker-to-retiree ratio. In 2020, there was 3.74 working-age people per retiree, but this ratio is projected to decline to 1.68 by 2045. This will have huge implications for the economy in terms of stress on China’s health system and pension shortfalls, thus impacting areas of economic growth. Innovation … tends to be led by a younger workforce, not an ageing one.” **Dr Jennifer Hsu, research fellow at the Lowy Institute.**

“The key thing is the declining birthrate. This means China will have fewer workers in the future and that will reduce how big we expect China’s economy to ultimately be in the future, other things being equal.

“We already knew that China’s workforce has been shrinking since around the middle of last decade and that the fertility rate is well below that needed to maintain a stable population size. But the latest numbers show that the birthrate has continued to decline quite rapidly. So the picture on China’s demographic problems keeps getting worse.

“The ability of the Chinese economy to be the engine of global growth that it has been in the past looks increasingly in question.” **Roland Rajah, director of the Indo-Pacific Development Centre at the Lowy Institute**

Graphic

## Xi Jinping

“For Xi, this trend was noted in his report to the 20<sup>th</sup> National Congress of the Communist party of China in 2022: ‘We will improve the population development strategy, establish a policy system to boost birthrates, and bring down the costs of pregnancy and childbirth, child rearing, and schooling.’ But we have seen little ... success with China’s move towards a two- and three-child policy.

“If the party is unable to deliver a better life for its citizenry this will challenge not only the party’s legitimacy but also that of Xi Jinping.” **Dr Jennifer Hsu, research fellow at the Lowy Institute**

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## 2023.01.24 - Opinion

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- Britain treasures the Parthenon marbles, but consider this: returned to Greece, they could be more valuable?
- Zahawi, Sunak, Johnson: this is rule by plutocrat. It's like a stench that's worse each day
- If the path to wellness is either jade eggs and semen facials or a walk in green space, I'm off for a stroll

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[\*\*Opinion\*\*](#)[\*\*Feminism\*\*](#)

# Cate Blanchett's Tár is an abusive boss, but her story has much to tell us about feminism too

[Susie Orbach](#)

Beyond the superficial row, there is a debate to be had about progress, pitfalls, and a character who seems emblematic of her generation



‘She works hard. She is serious. She can’t, however, do vulnerability.’ Cate Blanchett as Lydia Tár. Photograph: Courtesy of Focus Features

Tue 24 Jan 2023 04.41 EST Last modified on Thu 26 Jan 2023 08.32 EST

Following claims of [misogyny](#), the debate about Tár – the film starring Cate Blachett as Lydia Tár, a famous, fictional and sexually predatory classical conductor – has been reframed in terms of power, not gender. But is that right?

Yes and no. We can't ignore that she is a woman of a particular generation. Thirty years younger than [second-wave feminists](#) (my generation) who came of age in the early 1970s, she is not identified as the much smaller group of third-wavers, yet she fits that age group. If we take Tár as emblematic of her generation, we may better understand her character and the costs she faced.

Second-wave women knew that their power was problematic. They knew it was scary to take it up. They knew that as they endeavoured to do so, they would encounter internal constraints and taboos. Judgments would come from themselves if they risked doing so. Judgments would come from others as they dared to move forward.

What became critical in second-wave feminism was the joining together of women to understand the many conflicts – internal and external – that would ensue from breaking out of the expectations they had imbibed. We knew we needed one another as we attempted to break through these barriers. It wasn't easy, but when support for personal and social change occurred it made us anew.

Of course, there were downsides. There was a tendency to walk in step, to not break ranks, to move forward in a literal phalanx in a new form of sisterliness that could, at times, stifle. Individual women taking up space could be experienced as threatening (as well as admired). Judgments would come from others as they dared to move forward and yet, it *was* managed.

When it came to parenting, second-wavers recognised that, in order to give their daughters the world, they needed to find a way to convey to them that conflict and fear would be part of what awaited them. The world would not be their oyster without that knowledge.

For the generation of women who grew up 10 to 20 years after the second wave, who were influenced by feminist ideas without having been in consciousness-raising groups, the noble longings they had for their daughters and students meant they foisted ambition and support for being “great” and “going for it” on them, while inadvertently leaving out the cost of inner conflict and doubt and the scariness of taking up space. [Girl power](#) was the mantra.

Tár embodies that generational ambition. She is a huge talent. She is fierce in her passion for music. She works hard. She is serious. She can't, however, do vulnerability. When her daughter is bullied, she beats down the bully, perhaps as much to silence the scared part of herself. When a [student in a masterclass](#) questions knowledge based on the fecund composer Bach, she tries to invite him in, to show him Bach's genius and musical questioning, to give this young man what she didn't have in her training, but it backfires.

Tár appears fearless, even ruthless. She has a softness, yes, but we sense it is towards those who don't have what she has. Then she is hurt by them or tires of them and discards them. Perhaps she can only tolerate a little of seeing needs that can't be met.

Watching this film put me in mind of another current film, [Women Talking](#), in which we witness the individual women of an isolated Mennonite colony struggling to speak up, to speak of their experience – much of it abject – and to come together to decide on scary action. It reminded me of the second wave, of daring to speak, to differ, to be difficult, to be tetchy, to be accepted, and yet find a way to work with one another, recognising complexity and difference. That struggle is what led many of us to psychoanalysis and to reconfigure it, to understand how the outside got in and the inside got out. It led other second-wavers to rethink history, art, science, education, technology, theatre and so on.

The many internal conflicts of being raised a girl these days – and boy, too – are as costly, limiting and not simply expansive as we may hope. It's no surprise that emotional literacy and therapy, once ridiculed or hidden behind doors, are now prized. The young, the old: we all need to listen. We all need to be heard, to manage the complex multiple inequalities that are structural and internal.

- Susie Orbach is a psychotherapist, psychoanalyst, writer and social critic
- *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*

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## **Britain treasures the Parthenon marbles, but consider this: returned to Greece, could they be more valuable?**

[Charlotte Higgins](#)



Politicians fear that handing back disputed would asset-strip the British soul. The truth is, it might enrich us



The Parthenon sculptures in the British Museum, 9 January 2023.  
Photograph: Richard Gardner/REX/Shutterstock

Tue 24 Jan 2023 03.00 EST Last modified on Tue 24 Jan 2023 12.53 EST

What do we talk about when we talk about cultural restitution? In popular discourse in Britain, returning artefacts to their communities of origin is almost invariably framed as a loss. Minds leap to a vision of our museums violently pillaged: walls bare, sculpture courts deserted, store rooms despoiled – a fascinating reversal of how at least some (albeit, to be fair, a tiny minority) of museum objects in the UK were actually acquired.

There is a constant fear, in this kind of thinking, that the restitution of one object necessarily leads to the restitution of all objects, that *après moi, le déluge*. Returning the Parthenon sculptures to Athens – to use a not-so random example – “would open the gateway to the question of the entire contents of our museums”, as Michelle Donelan, the culture secretary, put it [in a BBC interview](#) earlier this month. It would be, she said, “a very slippery slope to go down”. She described the sculptures as “assets of our country”. Losing the Elgin marbles, according to this kind of formulation, would lead to a kind of asset-stripping of the British soul.

I don't think she's right. Restitution claims hover over a tiny minority of objects in British collections: the [British Museum](#), for instance, has around 8m objects in its collection, of which around 80,000 are on display in Bloomsbury at any given time. The Parthenon sculptures are exceptional in all kinds of ways – not least because of the manner in which meaning and myths have attached themselves to the carvings over the centuries so thickly, so ineradicably, that the objects seem to be like Glaucus, the fisherman-turned-sea god in Plato's Republic, who's hardly recognisable because of the barnacles and seaweed that have clung to him over the years. (The idea that a British politician might view them as an “asset of our country” would seem utterly bizarre to the Athenians who built the temple – but so would the notion, developed in the 19th century, that they contain the very essence of Greek nationhood.)

There is no other artefact in a UK museum that operates in quite the same way as the Parthenon assemblage in the Duveen Gallery of the British Museum; nothing else that arouses so many passions and disagreements; nothing that is capable, even, of occasionally souring relations between two otherwise friendly nations.

Leaving aside the “thin end of the wedge” argument for a moment, consider this: what if that act of restitution was regarded not as a loss, but as a gain?

The objection to this point of view may seem immediate and obvious: objects are objects; they occupy physical space; you either have them or you don't. But practical evidence suggests something rather different. Take, for instance, [Manchester Museum](#) – a university organisation unbound by the kind of legal constraints that prevent the British Museum from deaccessioning objects. This museum, housed in a magnificent Victorian building by Alfred Waterhouse, is home to a remarkable collection ranging from ancient Egyptian and Sudanese artefacts through to, in its vivarium, a small breeding population of the [variable harlequin toad](#), a creature critically endangered in its home territory of Panama.

Next month the museum reopens [after a £15m renovation](#). And not just a physical renovation, but an ethical one, too. Its director, Esme Ward, told me that she has been determined to broaden the definition of the idea of “care” that sits at the heart of the idea of curatorship. She believes that curatorship

should go beyond the basic obligation of a museum to preserve artefacts; it should also care for its community.

The revamped Manchester Museum will do this in new ways, some of them very simple – the fact that there will be proper space for people with severe disabilities, the fact that the picnic area for visitors who can't afford to eat in the cafe is a lovely and welcoming room, the fact that the museum is already used as a specialist college for young, neurodiverse adults. (To those who say this sort of thing is pure modern wokery and not a job for this kind of institution, Ward points back to a distinguished history of socially responsible museums including the [Manchester Art Museum](#). Organised on Ruskinian principles in industrial Ancoats in the late 19th century, it offered a “poor man’s lawyer” and clubs for children and disabled people, alongside its collection of beautiful artworks.)



Manchester Museum, ahead of its reopening after a £15m refurbishment, 19 January 2023. Photograph: Oli Scarff/AFP/Getty Images

In this definition, or expansion, of the idea of curatorship, it only makes sense that a museum should regard itself as having ethical responsibility towards, say, indigenous communities from whom some of its collections are drawn, she argues. And so, after long conversations and exchanges, in

2020, Manchester Museum [returned 43 sacred objects](#) to the Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies.

When Ward speaks about this, she speaks only of the gain to the institution. Above all it is a gain in knowledge; the kind of haptic, experiential knowledge of place and use that can be absent from dry descriptions of artefacts in museum catalogues. The gain is also by way of a relationship with the Australian institution – one that may result in long-term cooperation, including possible loans to Manchester. And even considered in bald binary terms, her museum has “lost” only 43 collection items out of around 4,000 relating to Aboriginal communities.

None of this is ever straightforward. In her BBC interview, Donelan touched on the complexities of return, and she is certainly right about that. The question of to whom objects should be returned when the communities who made them are gone or transformed, or when there may be competing claims in the country of origin, is not simple. (A mischief maker, for example, might cheekily suggest that the Parthenon sculptures should be “returned” to Istanbul, since Athens was under Ottoman rule when Elgin removed them.) All that is before you even get on to the intricacies of establishing how objects were originally acquired, especially when “legally” or “within the law at the time” may be doing a lot of work to smooth over conditions that may well have been unjust or coercive. Each object is different; each object requires its own attention and demands its own research.

As far as the Parthenon sculptures go, it’s possible that recent speculation – and for some, wild hope – may have led to [exaggerating](#) how close Britain and Greece are to agreeing a settlement. The latest British Museum position – and as usual, there’s a touch of the delphic oracle about it, in its opacity if not its poeticism – [states that](#) “we operate within the law and we’re not going to dismantle the museum’s collection as it tells the story of our common humanity. We are however looking at longterm partnerships, which would enable some of our greatest objects to be shared with audiences around the world. Discussions with Greece about a Parthenon Partnership are ongoing and constructive.”

Make of that what you will. For my part, I do think things are shifting, but perhaps not in a direction of simply “restitute” or “keep”. Maybe the route out is not binary – perhaps to see the surviving portions of the Parthenon frieze and pediments reassembled, it will need [Greece](#) and Britain both to lend their sculptures to a third country. I don’t know; but what I do know is that to break the impasse, the usual ways of thinking, and the usual ways of framing ideas about cultural restitution, are going to have to change.

- Charlotte Higgins is the Guardian’s chief culture writer
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**OpinionPolitics**

## **Zahawi, Sunak, Johnson: this is rule by plutocrat. It's like a stench that's worse each day**

[Polly Toynbee](#)



The Tory chairman's £5m tax 'error' shows how the other half lives it up, and the murkiness of politics run by and for the super-rich



Nadhim Zahawi has faced criticism for his tax arrangements. Photograph: Leon Neal/Getty Images

Mon 23 Jan 2023 12.45 EST Last modified on Thu 26 Jan 2023 08.32 EST

“Let me tell you about the very rich,” F Scott Fitzgerald once wrote. “They are different from you and me ... Even when they enter deep into our world or sink below us, they still think that they are better than we are.” For that reason they will always be an awkward fit in the world of democratic politics.

The past few days have provided ample reminders of what happens when the very rich take control. The stench emanating from this government reprises John Major’s last days of “sleaze”. But the sums of money back then look paltry compared to the extraordinary finances of the multimillionaires who now fill the Tory benches.

Nadhim Zahawi’s mysterious “[error](#)” in failing to pay capital gains tax landed him with a walloping 30% penalty; he agreed to repay an estimated £5m reportedly [while chancellor](#), collecting everyone else’s taxes. No normal citizen could be “careless” about such a sum, so it’s time for Rishi Sunak to come clean about exactly what he knew about Zahawi’s tax affairs when appointing him party chair. Zahawi had been nominated for a gong in

the new year honours list, but following the usual due diligence, his name did not appear, reports the [Sun on Sunday](#).

Many will remember his startling expenses claim 10 years ago, when he was obliged to pay back money wrongly claimed for [heating his horses' stables](#). He declared himself “mortified” at that “error” concerning a £5,000 bill, so presumably he feels a thousand times more mortified over an error a thousand times greater. Since he claims that HMRC called his tax non-payments “careless and not deliberate”, let’s see the correspondence – as there was nothing “careless” about his multiple legal threats to Dan Neidle of Tax Policy Associates, who investigated his tax affairs.

Back in Major’s sleaze days, the “cash for questions” scandal saw MPs taking bribes in brown envelopes from Mohamed Al-Fayed for asking parliamentary questions. How much? A mere [£2,000 a time](#).

By the time Owen Paterson resigned in 2021 for improper lobbying – he was facing a 30-day suspension amid a parliamentary investigation – cumulatively he had received [at least £500,000](#) in payments. But that was small potatoes compared with the shock discovery at the time that Sunak was chancellor of the exchequer, his wife, Akshata Murty, may have avoided paying [up to £20m](#) in tax, with her non-dom status implying that her permanent residence was outside the UK; meanwhile Sunak [held a US green card](#) that implied he would be living in the US.

Then there was Sajid Javid’s former life as a £3m-a-year Deutsche Bank purveyor of collateralised debt obligations (CDOs). It was reported in 2014 that he made use of the bank’s “dark blue” tax loophole in the Cayman Islands, which helped bankers to avoid tax on huge bonuses. A judge found the scheme to be “sophisticated attempts of the [Houdini taxpayer](#) to escape from the manacles of tax”. (Javid denied receiving any tax advantage from the scheme at the time.) It’s no surprise that [Ayn Rand’s The Fountainhead](#) is his favourite book – it’s a song for the survival of the fittest, in which individualism triumphs over collectivism. And it’s no surprise either that this former health secretary now calls for a debate about ending a “free at the point of delivery” NHS, writing approvingly about payments for GP and A&E visits.

Tax avoidance is legal, but the ranks of super-wealthy politicians never understand that standards of civic virtue for politicians are far higher than what is merely “legal”. Like Major’s “back to basics” drive, Sunak asked for trouble when he [pledged](#): “This government will have integrity, professionalism and accountability at every level.” Dithering over firing Zahawi shows that he has no idea what that means: the very rich really are different.

Nothing more about Boris Johnson can shock us, I thought, but the revelation that he put forward Richard Sharp as BBC chair only weeks after Sharp had helped to arrange a loan guarantee of £800,000 is breath-taking. Elsewhere, “a high-profile Tory MP has been reported to police over claims of expenses fraud”, relating to housing, [reports the Sun](#).

This tide of money swirling around Tory benches contaminates all politics. And so it was good to hear Rachel Reeves tell the BBC’s Laura Kuenssberg that a Labour government would “clean up this mess, drain the swamp, because frankly, it stinks”. This revival of sleaze is Labour’s cue to purge all tax avoidance for the rich, a political licence to close loopholes and all the jiggery-pokery that is available to wealthy people but not to PAYE citizens. The party should grasp the example of these zillionaire Tory tax avoiders to show why capital gains and unearned income should be taxed at the same rate as hard-earned wages; Labour should clamp down on everything offshore for any public office-holder or company holding a government contract.

Evidence of tax distortions benefiting only the rich mount up by the week. The Institute for Fiscal Studies’ TaxLab lists an array of wasteful tax reliefs. The latest example comes from the Resolution Foundation thinktank, which has [identified](#) “five terrible tax breaks”, used by just 70,000 individuals, that deprive the public realm of £4bn.

It notes that the UK’s “myriad tax reliefs are hugely expensive and yet are rarely assessed for their efficacy or value for money”. Tax reliefs together cost £195bn in 2020-21. As for the five obscure tax reliefs, which concern business and agricultural inheritance: “There is little evidence that these policies have encouraged more people to save, and conclusive evidence that rich individuals have gained the lion’s share.” Tax Justice UK proposes the

following reforms: equalising capital gains with income tax to raise £14bn a year; applying national insurance to unearned income, which would recoup £8.6bn per year; taxing wealth over £10m at 1% to raise £10bn per year; and cutting inheritance tax loopholes, which would raise £1.4bn. Labour's promised end to non-dom relief yields £3.2bn.

Calls for taxing wealth are growing: Nobel laureate in economics Joseph Stiglitz is the latest to argue for a [70% top tax rate](#) on the super-rich, plus 2-3% on hyper-wealth (more than \$50m) after the post-Covid wealth boom. Widening inequalities worsen in a society where inheritance, not talent, is becoming the main route to super-riches in what he calls “the sperm lottery”. Oxfam last week [reported](#) that two-thirds of the new post-pandemic surge in wealth had gone to the top 1%.

All this gives Labour the reason why, when in power, its first budget needs to scrape off the worst tax-relief barnacles. This wouldn't be about “raising taxes” but simply setting the system to rights, and cleansing the memory of this country's rule by plutocrat.

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

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[Opinion](#)[Green space](#)

## If the path to wellness is either jade eggs and semen facials or a walk in green space, I'm off for a stroll

[Hannah Jane Parkinson](#)



A new study confirms the benefits of nature for good mental health. That's why preserving open spaces for all is vital



Brockwell lido in Brockwell Park, south London. Photograph: Alex MacNaughton/Alamy

Tue 24 Jan 2023 01.00 EST Last modified on Tue 24 Jan 2023 08.00 EST

Unless one has managed to avoid the internet, commercial television and those [ubiquitous Tess Daly billboards](#), one hallmark of 21st-century culture will have become apparent to readers: the rampant monetisation of what has become known as “wellness” (capitalism always needs a neologism), a global industry [worth \\$1.5tn](#) and growing at 5% to 10% a year.

Healthcare and wellbeing as big business is, of course, not new, whether useless quackery or legitimate scientific breakthrough. From the “[miracle remedies](#)” of the early 20th century to cigarettes [marketed as health products](#); from the synthesis of chlorpromazine in the 1950s, [revolutionising psychiatric medicine](#), to gamechanging [antiretroviral therapies](#) for HIV. We’ve had leeches and we’ve had Jane Fonda 80s workout tapes, but we’ve also had penicillin and organ transplants. It wasn’t, however, until the late 2010s that Gwyneth Paltrow [started putting jade eggs up her vagina](#) and “[semen facials](#)” became a thing. Which rather took it to another level.

But this month, [one Finnish study](#) joined an increasing body of evidence advocating a back to basics approach when it comes to wellbeing (ie not

putting jade eggs up one's vagina). Researchers found that access to green spaces in urban areas correlated with lower rates of depression, anxiety, insomnia, asthma and high blood pressure.

Working on the basis that taking prescription drugs was a reasonable indicator of poor health, people who visited green spaces or blue spaces (bodies of water) three to four times a week were 33% less likely to be taking mental health drugs; 36% less likely to be on blood pressure medication; and 26% less likely to be on asthma medication. (The study did not assess whether increasing access to green or blue spaces resulted in an uptick in the health of participants measured in another way.)

The theory that access to nature is beneficial has a long history – did you ever meet a hysterical woman or coughing elder in literature who wasn't sent to take the mountain air? – but, perhaps as a reaction to more outre wellness takes, increasingly broken healthcare systems and the saturation of tech, wholesomeness is back. The interest in "[forest bathing](#)" (taking a walk in a forest to people who aren't Instagram influencers, and *shinrin-yoku* to longtime fans in Japan) and the boom in [open- and cold-water swimming](#) are strong indications, as is the huge popularity of local events such as [parkrun](#).

Unfortunately, a decade of austerity and privatisation in the UK has resulted in a decline in access to such spaces, [especially for the poorest people in society](#), who already have worse health outcomes. Fields in Trust, a charity that buys green spaces to protect them in perpetuity, [found that 2.8 million people](#) in the UK live more than 10 minutes' walk from a public green area. In the six years to 2012, the UK [lost 54,000 acres of green space](#), most of it to housing. There is a desperate and catastrophic shortage of housing in this country, but one suspects that [flogging 215 school playing fields](#) between 2010 and 2019, when the NHS calculated that in 2016 nearly [30% of two- to 15-year-olds in England were overweight or obese](#), isn't the ideal solution.

The decline in access to such spaces is in contrast with an increase in [social prescribing](#), which can include GPs and specialist workers referring patients to the likes of gardening clubs (a practice that has [both supporters and detractors](#)). For gardening to be prescribed, however, gardens have to exist.

Communities, though, are fighting back against declining access. This year, [a number of lidos have been allocated funding](#) to reopen after effective campaigning. And people who have been underrepresented in certain community and recreation spaces (often because of discrimination) are coming together [and setting up groups](#) to ensure that this is no longer the case.

There's an argument that social prescribing is a distraction from the horrendous fact that [7 million people in England are waiting for NHS treatment](#), and I certainly do not advocate the throwing out of prescription medications (which I personally feel I benefit from, as do many others). It is true that our understanding of the efficacy of certain drugs is continually evolving, particularly in psychiatry. But banishing severe depression or anxiety by eschewing clinically proven drugs and taking a nice stroll is not the end goal here. I say this as a dedicated cold-water swimmer (How do you know someone goes cold-water swimming? They'll tell you about it.)

There's obviously a clear dividing line between saying that a brisk walk will do one good and believing that positive thinking and a dip will cure all, but, as with most things in life, it's a combination. [As the pandemic taught us](#), natural spaces are to be treasured, for reasons both of health and social cohesion. In internet parlance, we should all "[go touch grass](#)".

- Hannah Jane Parkinson is a Guardian columnist
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## [Turkey](#)

# Sweden cannot expect Turkey's support for Nato membership, Erdogan warns

Tensions between the two countries have been further inflamed after a copy of the Qur'an was burned in a protest in Stockholm over the weekend



Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan Photograph: Anadolu Agency/Getty Images

*Guardian staff and agencies*

Mon 23 Jan 2023 21.08 EST Last modified on Mon 23 Jan 2023 21.16 EST

Sweden could not expect Turkey's support for its Nato membership, the Turkish president has warned, days after a copy of the Qur'an was [burned in a Stockholm protest](#).

Protests near the Turkish embassy in Sweden's capital on Saturday have heightened tensions with Turkey, whose backing [Sweden](#) needs to gain entry to the military alliance.

The protest had been given prior approval by Swedish authorities, although the burning of the book itself had not.

“Those who allow such blasphemy in front of our embassy can no longer expect our support for their [Nato](#) membership,” Erdogan said in his first official response after a cabinet meeting.

“If you love members of terrorist organisations and enemies of Islam so much and protect them, then we advise you to seek their support for your countries’ security,” he added.

Saturday’s protest followed similar scenes in Sweden earlier this month when Kurdish protesters hung an effigy of Turkish president Recep Tayyip Erdogan from a lamp-post.

Swedish foreign minister Tobias Billstrom declined to immediately comment on Erdogan’s remarks, telling Reuters in a written statement he wanted to understand exactly what had been said.

“But Sweden will respect the agreement that exists between Sweden, Finland and [Turkey](#) regarding our Nato membership,” he added.

Swedish leaders roundly condemned the protest but defended their country’s broad definition of free speech.

“Freedom of expression is a fundamental part of democracy. But what is legal is not necessarily appropriate. Burning books that are holy to many is a deeply disrespectful act,” prime minister Ulf Kristersson [tweeted](#) on Saturday.

“I want to express my sympathy for all Muslims who are offended by what has happened in Stockholm today.”

However, Erdogan said the burning of the Muslim holy book was a hate crime that could not be defended by free speech.

“No one has the right to humiliate the saints,” he said in nationally televised remarks.

Sweden and Finland [applied last year to join Nato](#) following Russia's invasion of Ukraine, but all 30 member states must approve their bids. Ankara has previously said Sweden in particular must first take a clearer stance against groups it sees as terrorists, mainly Kurdish militants and a group it blames for a 2016 coup attempt in Turkey.

Turkey and Hungary are the only Nato members not to have ratified the Sweden and Finland's historic decision to break their tradition of military non-alignment.

US state department spokesperson Ned Price said Finland and Sweden are ready to join the alliance, but declined to comment on whether Washington thought Erdogan's comments meant a definitive shutting of the door to them.

"Ultimately, this is a decision and consensus that Finland and Sweden are going to have to reach with Turkey," Price said.

Price told reporters that burning books that are holy to many is a deeply disrespectful act, adding that the United States is cognisant that those who are behind what took place in Sweden may be intentionally trying to weaken unity across the Atlantic and among Washington's European allies.

"We have a saying in this country – something can be lawful but awful. I think in this case, what we've seen in the context of Sweden falls into that category," Price said.

Jens Stoltenberg, the secretary general of Nato, condemned Erdogan's position on Sweden.

In an interview with German title Die Welt, he said that "freedom of expression, freedom of opinion is a precious commodity, in Sweden and in all other Nato countries. And that is why these inappropriate acts are not automatically illegal."

The Qur'an-burning was carried out by Rasmus Paludan, leader of Danish far-right political party Hard Line.

Paludan, who also has Swedish citizenship, gave an hour-long speech against Islam and immigration before setting fire to a copy of the Qur'an.

Several Arab countries including Saudi Arabia, Jordan and Kuwait denounced the event. Turkey had already summoned Sweden's ambassador and cancelled a planned visit by the Swedish defence minister to Ankara.

*Reuters and Agence France-Presse contributed to this report.*

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## [Astronomy](#)

# Exotic green comet not seen since stone age returns to skies above Earth

Comet C/2022 E3, which orbits the sun every 50,000 years, will be closest to us next Wednesday and Thursday



Comet C/2022 E3 (ZTF) could be visible to the naked eye as it whizzes past Earth, astronomers have said. Photograph: Dan Bartlett/Nasa/AFP/Getty Images

[Ian Sample](#) Science editor

[@iansample](#)

Mon 23 Jan 2023 17.29 EST Last modified on Tue 24 Jan 2023 06.41 EST

An exotic green comet that has not passed Earth since the time of the Neanderthals has reappeared in the sky ready for its closest approach to the planet next week.

Discovered last March by astronomers at the Zwicky Transient Facility at the Palomar Observatory in California, comet C/2022 E3 (ZTF) was calculated to orbit the sun every 50,000 years, meaning it last tore past our home planet in the stone age.

The comet, which comes from the Oort cloud at the edge of the solar system, will come closest to Earth on Wednesday and Thursday next week when it shoots past the planet at a distance of 2.5 light minutes – a mere 27m miles.

Comets are balls of primordial dust and ice that swing around the sun in giant elliptical orbits. As they approach the sun, the bodies warm up, turning surface ice into gas and dislodging dust. Together, this creates the cloud or coma which surrounds the comet's hard nucleus and the dusty tail that accompanies it.

Images already taken of comet C/2022 E3 reveal a subtle green glow that is thought to arise from the presence of diatomic carbon – pairs of carbon atoms that are bound together – in the head of the comet. The molecule emits green light when excited by the ultraviolet rays in solar radiation.

Astronomers armed with telescopes have captured [stunning pictures](#) of the comet in the past month, showing the body's head, dust tail and the longer, more tenuous ion tail.

But the cosmic ice ball has recently become [bright enough to see with the naked eye](#), at least in very dark, rural areas with minimal light pollution.

Since mid-January, the comet has been easier to spot with a telescope or binoculars. It is visible in the northern hemisphere, clouds permitting, as the sky darkens in the evening, below and to the left of the handle of the Plough constellation.

It is heading for a fly-by of the pole star, the brightest star in Ursa Minor, next week.

The window for spotting the comet does not stay open long. While the best views may be had about 1 and 2 February, by the middle of the month the

comet will have dimmed again and slipped from view as it hurtles back out into the solar system on its return trip to the Oort cloud.

This article was amended on 24 January 2023 to remove a mention of the comet's dusty tail stretching "behind" it. Comet tails point away from the sun.

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## Myanmar coup

# Rohingya and Myanmar coup survivors launch legal complaint in Germany against junta

Survivors of alleged abuses at hands of military unite in universal jurisdiction case over atrocities they say amount to genocide



Myanmar's junta faces a raft of legal actions, accusing it of crimes against humanity. Photograph: AFP/Getty Images

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

Tue 24 Jan 2023 01.42 EST Last modified on Tue 24 Jan 2023 01.44 EST

A criminal complaint against individuals linked to Myanmar's military has been filed in [Germany](#) by survivors from ethnic groups across Myanmar, in what activists say is a show of unity that once seemed unthinkable.

Sixteen survivors and witnesses of military abuses joined NGO Fortify Rights to file a criminal complaint with the federal public prosecutor general of Germany under the principle of universal jurisdiction, which allows the prosecution of mass atrocities in one country, even if they happened elsewhere.

“We deserve to have access to justice. We all know the impunity the military has been enjoying for so many years. This is the time to [end] the impunity,” said Nickey Diamond, a complainant in the case and a member of the board of directors at Fortify Rights.

The document is not publicly accessible, however senior [Myanmar](#) military figures are accused of genocide, war crimes, and crimes against humanity, according to Fortify Rights. The complaint also requests that the German authorities open a “structural investigation” into the situation in Myanmar, which could lead to the documentation of further allegations not covered by the complaint.

There are various legal cases against Myanmar’s military including one in the [international court of justice case](#) genocide against the Rohingya Muslim minority, an investigation by the international criminal court, and separate universal jurisdiction cases filed in Argentina and Turkey.

Activists say the complaint filed in Germany is unique because of the diverse range of ethnicities represented, and because it seeks accountability both for the military’s [brutal crackdown against Rohingya](#) in Rakhine state in 2016 and 2017, and for alleged crimes perpetrated by the military in other regions across the country after it ousted the democratically elected government of Aung San Suu Kyi in 2021.

“This will be the first universal jurisdiction complaint which will talk about crimes against many ethnic groups and that is what makes this a really unique effort towards justice and accountability,” said Pavani Nagaraja Bhat, a human rights associate with Fortify Rights.

“The Myanmar military has been violating rights across the country and the evidence that we have been able to collect shows that there is a pattern of abuse and violations that have been perpetrated by the junta systematically against civilians on a very large scale,” she said of allegations in the complaint.

The complaint also reflects shifted attitudes among different ethnic groups, said Diamond. In the past there was little sympathy towards the Rohingya people among the Bamar majority, with many believing the military’s claim that it was fighting terrorism, but now there is far greater unity against the junta. “The people have truly seen [the military’s] true colour and true face,” he said.

Over the past two years the military has unleashed a [campaign of terror](#) in an attempt to crush widespread opposition to the coup, launching airstrikes, torching villages and arresting more than 17,000 people.

The complainants, who filed their case on 20 January, want the German prosecutor to open an investigation, collect and preserve evidence, and issue arrest warrants.

The complainants range from students and scholars, to farmers, human rights defenders, business peoples, former village heads and homemakers. They represent several ethnicities including Arakanese (Rakhine), Bamar, Chin, Karen, Karenni, Mon, and Rohingya, according to Fortify Rights. “This type of ethnic unity would have been totally unthinkable before the coup,” said the group’s director, John Quinley III.

According to the group, the complaint alleges that some members of the Myanmar military systematically killed, raped, tortured, imprisoned, disappeared, persecuted, and committed other acts that amount to genocide, crimes against humanity, and war crimes. It includes “substantial evidence” indicating that some military figures knew about their subordinates’ actions but did not attempt to stop them, or to punish perpetrators of such crimes.

The federal prosecutor’s office, which will decide whether to proceed with the complaint, did not respond to a request for comment by Associated Press. Any resulting court case could be a lengthy process.

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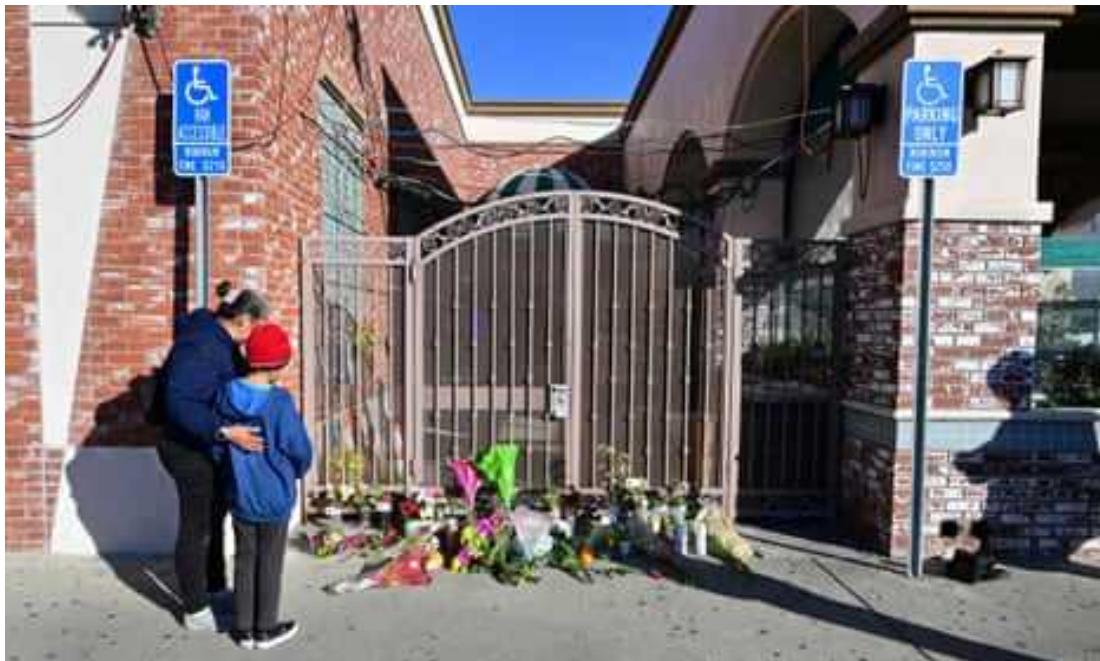
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## Monterey Park shooting death toll rises to 11, including dance hall manager



A makeshift memorial site in front of the Star Dance Studio in Monterey Park, California, on Monday. Photograph: Frederic J Brown/AFP/Getty

## Images

California officials name two of those killed, while friends and colleagues say much-loved ‘Mr Ma’ was among dead

*[Lois Beckett](#) in Los Angeles and [Richard Luscombe](#)*

Mon 23 Jan 2023 20.01 ESTFirst published on Mon 23 Jan 2023 12.17 EST

The death toll in a mass shooting at a ballroom dance studio in [California](#) has risen to 11 people, after health officials said that one of the people wounded in the shooting had died.

Authorities said the motive for what one lawmaker called “the worst mass shooting in Los Angeles county history” remains unknown. The 72-year-old shooter died by suicide the morning after the attack, authorities said, after being stopped by police in a nearby town. Law enforcement officials searched his home in Hemet, and found a rifle, hundreds of rounds of ammunition, and evidence that he was manufacturing homemade gun silencers.

The gunman had “a limited criminal history” but had been arrested in 1990 for illegal gun possession, the Los Angeles county sheriff, Robert Luna, said on Monday.

“Did he plan this? Was it the day of? Was it a week before? What drove a madman to do this? We don’t know,” Luna said, saying that detectives were continuing to examine the case.

Whether the gunman was related to any of his victims, or motivated by jealousy or relationship problems, remains under investigation, Luna said.

People who knew the shooter told news outlets that he did have a personal connection to Star Ballroom, the first dance studio he attacked, and that he had met his ex-wife there while dancing two decades ago. Evidence showed the gunman had used a large capacity magazine to fire at least 42 times during his attack on a ballroom dance studio, Luna said. Officials said 10 people died and 10 people were injured at the scene, one of whom later died.

As of late Monday, the identities of only five of the 11 victims had been made public. Authorities named three women who had died: My Nhan, 65, Lilan Li, 63, and Xiujuan Yu, 57, and one man, Valentino Alvero, 68. The names of other victims have not yet been released, as family members are still being notified, Luna said.

According to friends and colleagues, the beloved manager of the dance hall was also among the 11 victims of Saturday's gun massacre, which took place during a lunar new year celebration in Monterey Park, a majority Asian American community in the Los Angeles area.

Ming Wei Ma, known to instructors as "Mr Ma", died when a 72-year-old gunman entered the Star Ballroom and opened fire. A friend [told CBS News](#) that Ma "was the first to rush to try to stop the shooter".

The report of Ma's death was corroborated by Dariusz Michalski, a professional ballroom dancing instructor at the Star Ballroom, who [posted to Facebook](#) a photograph of the two together with a heartfelt tribute to a man he called his "friend".

"Mr Ma, your love, joy for people will never be forgotten," he wrote. "Your dance and signing passion will never disappear. We will never forget your shout in the studio: 'I love you.' You will be greatly missed. I love you my friend."



The Star Dance Studio in Monterey Park, California, where 11 people were killed as they celebrated lunar new year. Photograph: Frederic J Brown/AFP/Getty Images

One of the survivors, a 73-year-old woman, was released from the hospital on Monday, LAC+USC medical center said in a statement late in the afternoon.

Monterey Park police chief Scott Wiese, who faced questions about why it had taken his department so long to release information about the shooting in the hours after the Saturday night attack, said the carnage had left their small department shaken.

Wiese said he and other members of the department were now focusing on “officer wellness” and making sure the first responders, who had run into a dance hall filled with people who had been injured or shot to death, were getting support.

## New details about the gunman

Authorities identified the gunman as an Asian man named as Huu Can Tran. He had lived in the Los Angeles area since at least the early 1990s, and had operated a trucking business, according to public records.

Authorities said that minutes after opening fire at the Star Ballroom, the shooter appeared at a second dance studio in nearby Alhambra, where he was [disarmed by a single worker](#) now hailed for saving lives.

The weapon confiscated was a “a 9mm caliber semi automatic Mac 10 assault weapon”, with unspecified modifications, Luna said. The sheriff previously said the weapon was likely illegal under California law, but noted on Monday that the legality of specific weapons, weapon modifications and ammunition types has changed over time.

More details about Tran have begun to emerge. Henry Lo, the mayor of Monterey Park, once described as the first suburban Chinatown, told CNN on Monday that the shooter was “a frequent attendee of the dance hall”.

Several people who knew the shooter, including his ex-wife, told media outlets that he had a “hot temper”, and was sensitive about how he was perceived. The police department in the California town where he lived said he had repeatedly visited a police station in early January to complain that his family had tried to poison him.

Tran’s ex-wife said she had met him while dancing at the Star Ballroom two decades ago, and that he had offered her dance lessons, CNN reported. The news outlet said it was not naming his ex-wife because of the sensitivity of the incident, and that the couple had divorced in 2005.

His ex-wife said he was never violent towards her, but that he “would get upset if she missed a step dancing because he felt it made him look bad”, [CNN reported](#).

A longtime tenant of Tran’s in Los Angeles described him as an aggressive and suspicious person who had few friends, and said that ballroom dancing was his only social activity. The tenant told Reuters that Tran complained that people at the Star Ballroom studio were talking behind his back.

“He was a good dancer in my opinion,” the tenant said. “But he was distrustful of the people at the studio, angry and distrustful. I think he just had enough.”

Authorities were still investigating how the shooter obtained the weapons he used, as well as investigating any warning signs or changes in his behavior in the weeks prior to the shooting.

In early January this year, the shooter made two visits to the lobby of the police department in Hemet, California, where he lived, “alleging past fraud, theft, and poisoning allegations involving his family in the Los Angeles area 10 to 20 years ago”, the department said in a statement.

“Tran stated he would return to the station with documentation regarding his allegations but never returned,” the department said.



The California governor, Gavin Newsom, stands near the scene of the shooting in Monterey Park.

The Los Angeles county sheriff's department had searched the shooter's Hemet residence, local police said.

Public and business records showed that the 72-year-old had run a trucking company with an address in Monterey Park, and that he had lived in the Los Angeles area since at least the 1990s.

## Attack at ‘vibrant’ community centers

The ballroom dance studios that were targeted, one in Monterey Park and a second in nearly Alhambra, were praised as vibrant social centers, whose patrons included many middle-aged and elderly couples who loved to dance.

Relatives of My Nhan, one of the women killed at Star Ballroom, said on social media that they were “broken” by her death.

“It’s still sinking in what happened to Mymy,” the family said in a statement posted to Twitter by Dallas-based WFAA reporter Tiffany Liou, who said the tragedy had struck “close to home” and that her husband’s family was “hurting beyond measure”. Liou said Nhan was the first of the victims shot and killed.

The statement continued: “She spent so many years going to the studio in Monterey Park on weekends. It’s what she loved to do. But unfairly, Saturday was her last dance.

“If you knew her, you knew her warm smile and kindness was contagious. She was a loving aunt, sister, daughter and friend. Mymy was our biggest cheerleader.”

The statement, signed by “the Nhan and Quan family”, concludes with an expression of gratitude for people’s thoughts and prayers, and the support of neighbors and community.



A makeshift memorial outside of the ballroom studio in Monterey Park, California. Photograph: Caroline Brehman/EPA

The department said that three additional victims from the shooting were still being treated at the LAC+USC medical center. “One remains in serious condition. The other two are recovering,” the department said.

Others who attended lessons at the Star Ballroom painted a picture of a friendly, community-based facility that acted as a de facto social club for locals and dance enthusiasts. The shooting took place during what should have been a “joyous” event celebrating lunar new year, according to Elizabeth Yang, a Monterey Park lawyer who took classes there.

“The whole city of Monterey Park went from celebrating to everyone being fearful and scared,” Yang [told the South California Press-Enterprise](#). “We are devastated.”

Yang said the “elegant” dance hall’s owners and instructors engaged well with students, who kept in touch with each other outside classes through online messaging applications and social gatherings such as Saturday’s celebration.

The Monterey Park killings were among 36 mass shooting in the US so far this year, according to the Gun Violence Archive. [The archive](#) classifies

shooting in which at least four people are wounded or killed – not counting any attackers – as mass shootings. There were [three other mass shootings](#) that injured at least four people during a single twelve-hour period this past weekend, according to the Gun Violence Archive: two in Louisiana, and one in Mississippi.

At 72, Tran was the second-oldest mass killer in the US over the last nearly 20 years, According to [a database](#) compiled by the Associated Press, USA Today and Northeastern University. In 2011, a 73-year-old murdered five people in Yuma county, Arizona, before killing himself.

The Violence Project, which tracks a subset of public mass-casualty shootings in the United States, identified another shooter in his 70s, a retired miner who killed five people in a store in Kentucky in 1981, in an incident [motivated by a personal dispute](#).

The median age of mass shooters in the Violence Project's database is 32. Almost all of them were men.

*[Ramon Antonio Vargas](#), Reuters and the Associated Press contributed reporting*

- *This article has been amended to clarify that Tran visited the Hemet police department twice in January 2023, not once more than 10 years ago. He was making allegations about incidents that occurred 10 to 20 years ago, Hemet police said.*

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## California

# **'It perpetuates fear': Monterey Park shooting compounds trauma in Asian American communities**

The tragedy revived fears, anxiety and trauma of the last three years of the pandemic, which saw a surge in anti-Asian hate



A person visits a makeshift memorial site in front of the Star Dance Studio in Monterey Park, California. Photograph: Caroline Brehman/EPA



[Sam Levin](#) in Los Angeles

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Mon 23 Jan 2023 21.50 ESTFirst published on Mon 23 Jan 2023 21.29 EST

On the evening of the lunar new year, Ny Nourn gathered with loved ones to eat lobster at a restaurant in Monterey Park, the southern California city known as America's first suburban Chinatown.

Her partner's grandmother had died earlier that week, and the family came to the Taste of MP on Saturday to grieve and pay tribute to her: "She would want us to be together, and we wanted to honor her legacy and memory." Nourn was comforted by the tables around her jam-packed with as many as six generations of families: "That's what lunar new year is about – family and celebration."

Thirty minutes later, the joy of the holiday was shattered when, one block away on the thoroughfare of Garvey Avenue, a man entered a ballroom dance studio and opened fire, killing at least 11 victims, all in their 50s, 60s and 70s. The massacre, the deadliest in recent memory in California, has sent familiar shockwaves across the country, which has already experienced more than 30 mass shootings in the first month of 2023.

But for Monterey Park and Asian American communities in California and throughout the US, the tragedy was particularly painful to absorb, reviving the fear, anxiety and trauma of the last three years of the pandemic, which saw a [surge in anti-Asian hate incidents](#) and two other mass shootings that primarily affected Asian victims. In March 2021, a man killed eight people in a series of Atlanta area spa shootings, six of whom were [women of Asian descent](#). Then in June 2022, a man [opened fire](#) in a Taiwanese church in southern California, killing one person and wounding five. And last week, an 18-year-old Indiana University student was [stabbed](#) in a racially motivated attack.

The circumstances of the three mass shootings and [11,000 hate incidents](#) against Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders during the pandemic were distinct, with motives of the attacks not always clear. In Monterey Park, a majority Asian American city east of Los Angeles, the shooter has been identified as a 72-year-old Asian man who authorities say died of a self-inflicted gunshot and may have intentionally [targeted](#) some victims at the dance studio while randomly killing others.



A view of the entrance of the Star Ballroom Dance Studio. Photograph: David Swanson/Reuters

Regardless of the motives, the cumulative impact of this violence, community organizers said, was intense anguish and stress for Asian Americans. Saturday's massacre and the aftermath was also a reminder of how vulnerable senior citizens are, how difficult it can be to mourn when these cases are politicized, how limited the mental health resources are for immigrant and refugee populations, and how PTSD and [vicarious trauma](#) can go unaddressed in these communities.

"With the significant amount of anti-Asian hate, there's been this feeling of a lack of safety and being under threat," said Manjusha Kulkarni, co-founder of the group Stop AAPI Hate, which has tracked harassment and discrimination against Asian Americans since the start of the pandemic. "Lunar new year is a time of rejuvenation and renewal, and also was the beginning of putting some of what happened with Covid and anti-Asian hate behind us. So to be hit in the first month with another attack is especially devastating." She said it had been hard to process that senior citizens were victimized, noting a [recent survey](#) showing that the vast majority of Asian American elderly residents reported feeling that the US was becoming more dangerous for them.

"An incident like this exacerbates these feelings of stress, anxiety and depression, and I'm concerned about the trauma and PTSD that comes from having something so horrific happen, especially in your backyard."

As of Monday evening, authorities had [identified](#) four of the fatal victims, My Nhan, 65, and Lilan Li, 63, Xiujuan Yu, 57, and Valentino Alvero, 68, with friends also identifying a fifth victim Ming Wei Ma, a beloved manager at the dance studio known as "Mr Ma".

## **'We need more resources'**

Eddy Zheng, a community [organizer](#) and founder of New Breath Foundation in Oakland, said he was reflecting on how AAPI communities have historically struggled to discuss and address mental health impacts of the ongoing traumas they have endured.

For so many AAPI communities, it's not only mourning the incident itself but also bracing ourselves for the violence of the response

### *Sarah Lee*

“For many communities of color, especially people living in poverty, sometimes violence is normalized, because we see these types of shootings again and again,” Zheng said. “For the AAPI community, it feels like there’s really no way to find the right words and right ways to seek help and try to make sense of what has happened. And for the refugee and Asian American immigrant population that came to this country as a result of war and foreign policy, they’ve lived through intergenerational traumas without culturally competent therapeutic and mental health supports.”

After three years of anti-Asian hate incidents, he continued, “It really perpetuates this fear that they are not safe. We need more acknowledgment on how important it is to address this lack of support for immigrant, refugee and monolingual populations, and we need more resources.”

In the wake of the latest attack, there have been familiar calls by some officials for expanded police presence in Asian American neighborhoods.

But Sarah Lee, a senior community organizer with the Immigrant Legal Resource Center, who has worked with AAPI people who are criminalized and negatively impacted by law enforcement, said those calls have only compounded the stress of the Monterey Park tragedy.

“Over the weekend, it was such a difficult rollercoaster to celebrate the lunar new year and then hear about this incident,” she said. “For so many AAPI communities, it’s not only mourning the incident itself but also bracing ourselves for the violence of the response that comes with police or politicians trying to scapegoat our communities or pit us against other communities.”



Star Ballroom Dance Studio, site of the deadly shooting, sits empty.  
Photograph: Caroline Brehman/EPA

Amid escalating fears of anti-Asian violence in the Bay Area, some [Asian American and Black community groups](#) came together to push back against responses that promoted anti-Black racism and police expansion, which activists said could further endanger communities of color without preventing violence.

“It feels like there’s little space for us to collectively mourn, because of how quickly people politicize moments like these,” Lee said.

For AAPI organizers, it was also exhausting to figure out how to respond, Zheng added: “We feel bombarded, but we have to show up to this type of tragedy and violence. People are really stretched thin, and this adds to the stress and trauma even for people that are doing direct services to try to support the community and address this type of violence.”

Joon Bang, the CEO of Iona Senior Services, who has long worked with Asian American seniors, said it was overwhelming to try to grapple with the tragedy. He noted how after the Atlanta shootings, he called his mother to process what had happened and ended up moving cities so he could be closer to his grandmother and mom.

“It made me reflect on how short and fragile life really is, and recognize the need to support the older adults in my life,” he said. “People have to show up as human beings and neighbors for the older adults in our communities wherever we are … And we have to create spaces where they can receive support and also communicate to older adult communities that there is access to resources.”

We have to understand the root causes, and we need to focus on community-based solutions and have healing dialogues within our own communities

### *Ny Nourn*

Nourn, who was dining in Monterey Park just before the shooting, said she loves visiting the city because of the vibrant culture: “This shooting really hit home for me … It’s a community of Chinese and Vietnamese immigrants and refugees that have really not assimilated, but it’s their own community that they’ve built for themselves.”

The longtime [organizer](#) and survivor of domestic violence said she hoped that Asian American communities would find ways to grieve and not allow politicians or law enforcement to take over the conversation. She said she also hoped people would not shy away from having difficult conversations about misogyny, interpersonal violence, mental healthcare and strategies that can prevent violence: “We have to understand the root causes, and we need to focus on community-based solutions and have healing dialogues within our own communities.”

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# **Eleven killed and 11 wounded in Russian missile attacks; Wagner group classified as criminal organisation by US – as it happened**

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## Ukraine

# **Ukraine ‘cannot be broken’ says its top general after Russian missile attack**

General Valery Zaluzhny says Ukraine successfully downed 47 of the 55 missiles launched by Russia following west’s offer of tanks

- [Russia-Ukraine war – latest news updates](#)

Russian mass missile attacks day after west agrees to send tanks to Ukraine – video report

*Daniel Boffey in Kyiv*

Thu 26 Jan 2023 10.58 ESTFirst published on Thu 26 Jan 2023 03.55 EST

Ukraine’s top general vowed that his country would not be “broken” after the successful downing of 47 of the 55 missiles launched by Russia in a mass attack that followed [the western offer of tanks](#).

General Valery Zaluzhny, commander in chief of the Ukrainian armed forces, said 20 of those intercepted had been heading to the Kyiv region, where one 55-year-old man was killed and two injured by falling fragments.

As a result of the Russian assault from air and sea on Thursday morning, the 13th such missile barrage of the war, a total of 11 people died while a further 11 were wounded, a spokesperson for the emergency services said.



People stand near a crater where a missile landed in the village of Hlevakha, Ukraine. Photograph: Ed Ram/The Guardian

“The goal of the Russians remains unchanged: psychological pressure on Ukrainians and the destruction of critical infrastructure,” Zaluzhny wrote on the Telegram social media platform. “But we cannot be broken!”

Huge explosions had shook Kyiv at 10.06am local time and raid sirens had sounded across the country.

The targets of the strikes appeared primarily to be electricity plants and substations. A number of cities had already taken the precaution of turning off the electricity supply to mitigate the level of damage as reports emerged of bombers and cruise missiles heading towards Ukrainian targets.

The previous night Ukraine’s air defences had shot down 24 Iranian-made Shahed “kamikaze” drones.

Ukraine’s prosecutor general’s office said three people had been killed in Zaporizhzhia, in the south-east of Ukraine.



Women talk near a missile landed in the village of Hlevakha Photograph: Ed Ram/The Guardian

“At 3.40am, the Russian military from the S-300 air defence system launched a missile attack on a critical infrastructure facility in the Zaporizhzhia district,” the statement said. “Three people died, seven more were injured.”

Maksym Marchenko, the regional head of Odesa, a city in southern Ukraine, said the attacks on his oblast had caused “significant problems with electricity supply.”

Bridget Brink, the US ambassador to Ukraine, tweeted: “Another cruel attack, same strategic failure. Waves of Russian drones and missiles can’t stop Ukraine’s heroic defenders, its brave people or our determined, unified support.”

On Wednesday, US president Joe Biden had [approved sending 31 M1 Abrams tanks](#) to Ukraine, after weeks of speculation. The reversal of the US’s position came after Germany confirmed it would make 14 of its Leopard 2A6 tanks available to Ukraine and give partner countries its permission to re-export other tanks.

Berlin's decision unlocks offers by Canada, Finland, Spain, the Netherlands, Portugal, Poland and Norway to provide Ukraine with their own German-manufactured Leopards. About 300 tanks are expected to be provided.

Yuriy Sak, an adviser to Ukraine's defence minister, said the latest attacks highlighted the value of the tank pledges from the west.

He told BBC Radio 4's Today programme that the sooner such hardware was received, "the sooner we will be able to end this missile terror and restore peace".

In Moscow, Kremlin spokesperson Dmitry Peskov condemned the move by Nato allies, claiming it amounted to involvement in the conflict.

He said: "There are constant statements from European capitals and Washington that the sending of various weapons systems to Ukraine, including tanks, in no way signifies the involvement of these countries or the alliance in hostilities in Ukraine.

"We categorically disagree with this, and in Moscow, everything that the alliance and the capitals I mentioned are doing is seen as direct involvement in the conflict. We see that this is growing."



At the site where a missile landed Photograph: Ed Ram/The Guardian

Germany has said it will seek to deliver the Leopard 2 tanks to Ukraine by early April, while Poland ‘s government said the tanks could arrive in “a few weeks”.

Speaking in response to the offer of the heavy armour, Ukraine’s president Volodymyr Zelenskiy had said speed and volume of supply are key. “Speed in training our forces, speed in supplying tanks to Ukraine. The numbers in tank support,” he said in his nightly video address.

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**Politics live with Andrew Sparrow**  
**Politics**

# Nadhim Zahawi gives HMRC approval to speak to investigation into his tax affairs – as it happened

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## Nadhim Zahawi

# Treasury was aware of investigation into Nadhim Zahawi's finances, sources claim

No 10 says 'categorically untrue' that Rishi Sunak knew about tax fine at time of appointment



Rishi Sunak has appointed an ethics adviser to look into Nadhim Zahawi's dealings with HMRC. Photograph: Tim Hammond/No10 Downing Street

[Anna Isaac](#) and [Pippa Crerar](#)

Thu 26 Jan 2023 01.00 EST Last modified on Thu 26 Jan 2023 03.11 EST

The matter of who knew what about Nadhim Zahawi's dealings with the taxman and when in Whitehall and No 10 is the subject of intense scrutiny and could yet define Rishi Sunak's premiership.

Sunak has sought to [put down suggestions](#) he was aware that Zahawi paid a penalty to HMRC prior to his appointment as the Conservative party's chair on 25 October 2022.

The prime minister initially told the House of Commons last week that Zahawi had already addressed the matter “in full”. But after the Guardian revealed on Friday that a penalty had been paid, the prime minister’s spokesman refused to confirm that Sunak had been told of this detail by Zahawi or officials.

Zahawi paid an [estimated total of £5m](#), including interest, about £3.7m in tax owed and penalty of 30%, a source told the Guardian.

Sunak told MPs on Wednesday: “The issues in question occurred before I was prime minister.”

He added: “The usual appointments process was followed, no issues were raised with me when he was appointed to his current role and, since I commented on this matter last week, more information has come forward. That is why I have asked the independent adviser to look into the matter.”

‘Hopelessly weak’: Keir Starmer attacks PM over his handling of Zahawi’s taxes – video

The matter of Zahawi’s dealings with HMRC is now subject to investigation by his ethics adviser, the [newly appointed Laurie Magnus](#), who has been asked by Sunak to “get to the bottom of everything, to investigate the matter fully and establish all the facts and provide advice to me” on whether Zahawi broke the ministerial code.

Sunak’s version of events is set against more than two years of discussions of Zahawi’s financial dealings at the highest levels in Whitehall, among Sunak’s own former department, the Treasury, and his former and current cabinet colleagues.

The former prime minister, Boris Johnson, and home secretary, Priti Patel, were notified of a National Crime Agency (NCA) investigation into Zahawi

as early as 2020, the Guardian understands. The investigation did not lead to any action and there is no suggestion of wrongdoing.

It is unclear if there was any relationship between the NCA investigation and the ultimate settlement arrived at with [HMRC](#) by Zahawi, which was related to shares in YouGov, a company he founded.

Sources claim that, in June 2022, senior officials at the Treasury and Sunak, then chancellor, were made aware of a freedom of information request from the Financial Times that was due to receive a response suggesting that fewer than five ministers' tax affairs were under investigation.

In a follow-up email to the Financial Times on 23 June last year, HMRC corrected the freedom of information response, saying that there was no such investigation and that a mistake had been made in suggesting there was.

However, a subsequent phone call was made to a journalist at the Financial Times clarifying that a minister was indeed under investigation, the Guardian understands.

Sources claim that Sunak was informed at that time, in June, that this minister was Zahawi. An outline of the investigation was provided to the then chancellor, they claim. In that outline, a general point was made that in such cases a penalty payment might be levied as a range of possible outcomes.

Other Whitehall sources confirmed that it is was ordinary practice that very high-risk freedom of information request responses are flagged to the private offices of ministers and press offices of departments. This is to allow discussion of the potential fallout for the government.

A No 10 spokesperson said: “This claim is categorically not true. The prime minister was never informed who the individual was or any details of the case, as is usual HMRC processes.” Of the claim that Sunak knew about the penalty at the time of Zahawi’s appointment, on Monday a government spokesperson also said: “This claim is categorically untrue.”

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On 5 July, Zahawi was appointed chancellor amid a flurry of activity in No 10 after Sunak and the health secretary, Sajid Javid, quit in a sensational attempt to force out Johnson in the aftermath of the partygate scandal.

Despite the fraught conditions, Johnson was made aware of a tax investigation by officials, sources claim.

On 6 July, the Independent reported that Zahawi was the subject of an NCA investigation.

On 9 July, the Independent reported that Zahawi was the subject of an investigation by HMRC. The same day it was reported by the Observer [that a red flag](#) had been raised over his appointment to cabinet over his financial dealings.

A spokesperson for Zahawi said at the time: “All Mr Zahawi’s financial interests have been properly and transparently declared.”

These articles were shared among cabinet ministers and read by officials at the Cabinet Office, as well as across Westminster and Whitehall, according to a variety of sources. It is not denied that Sunak was aware of the reporting at that time.

It has been reported that Zahawi arrived at a settlement agreement with HMRC while he was chancellor, a post he was stood down from in a cabinet reshuffle on 6 September after just 63 days in the role.

Sunak was appointed prime minister in October last year after the brief but chaotic reign of Liz Truss, and Zahawi was among his first cabinet

appointments.

One key question for the prime minister is whether he was told about a settlement with HMRC and that this settlement included a penalty at the time of appointing Zahawi – months before he spoke at the House of Commons on Wednesday last week.

A source told the Guardian that Downing Street was informed of the penalty and settlement with HMRC prior to Zahawi's appointment as chair of the Conservative party. Number 10 has strongly denied that this was the case.

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## Airline emissions

# Flying shame: the scandalous rise of private jets

Last week, Rishi Sunak flew from London to Blackpool – his third private jet trip in 10 days. He's far from the only one using air travel for short journeys. Just how much damage is this doing?



Rishi Sunak boards an RAF plane to travel from London to Leeds.  
Photograph: No 10's Flickr account



[Emine Saner](#)

[@eminesaner](#)

Thu 26 Jan 2023 01.00 EST

It was a Labour spokesperson who said the prime minister was behaving “like an A-list celeb”, after Rishi Sunak made his third trip by private jet in 10 days. Last week, he flew from London to Blackpool in a 14-seat RAF jet – a 230-mile journey that would have taken about three hours by train. The week before, he did the same to Leeds, which he could have done in two and a half hours by train, but which wouldn’t have looked nearly so glamorous – to go by the ludicrous photograph of him looking important and being saluted as he boarded the aircraft.

Private planes are up to 14 times more polluting, per passenger, than commercial planes and 50 times more polluting than trains, according to a report by Transport & Environment, a European clean transport campaign organisation. “It goes against the fact that the government has [committed to net zero by 2050](#),” says Alice Ridley, a spokesperson for the Campaign for Better Transport. “They have said they want to see more journeys by public transport, walking and cycling. Taking a private jet is extremely damaging for the environment, especially when there are other alternatives that would be far less polluting and would also be cheaper.”

Private planes carry far fewer passengers, while about 40% of flights are empty, simply getting the aircraft to the right location. Flying short distances also means planes are less fuel-efficient.

“A private jet is the most polluting form of transport you can take,” says Matt Finch, the UK policy manager for Transport & Environment. “The average private jet emits two tonnes of carbon an hour. The average European is responsible for [emitting] eight tonnes of carbon a year. You fly to the south of France and back, that’s half a year in one trip.”

Transport & Environment says the UK is the biggest private jet polluter in Europe, accounting for nearly 20% of emissions, followed by France (although the US accounts for the vast majority of all private jet flights). While there has been a slowing after the highs that were seen during Covid, when the wealthiest turned to private jets when commercial carriers shut down – or to avoid crowds at airports – levels of private jet travel are still higher than before the pandemic, and many companies are reporting growth.



Bernard Arnault, the chief executive of LVMH, pictured in 2004. He has since sold his private jet to avoid scrutiny. Photograph: Marc Deville/Gamma-Rapho/Getty Images

“Since September last year, we’ve seen a 10% to 15% decline compared to the previous year,” says Richard Koe, the managing director of WINGX, the private-aviation data analysts. “But if you look at January 2023, it’s a little bit more than 10% above where it was in January 2019. That’s some solid growth.”

[A study last year](#) for Airbus Corporate Jets found that 65% of the large US companies interviewed regularly used private jets; one-third had started during the pandemic and nearly three-quarters said they planned to use private jets more in the next two years. Last year was a [record year](#) for sales of private aircraft. Clearly, despite environmental concerns, there is still substantial interest – in less than two weeks’ time, a global private-aviation conference is being held in London.

Private aviation is, says Koe, “a really immature industry that caters to a tiny proportion of very wealthy people”. But private jets are becoming more accessible. Some charter companies will allow you to book a seat on an “empty leg” – a repositioning flight, or the plane returning to base after a one-way flight – for much less than the cost of chartering your own jet. Chartering a plane from the UK to the south of France, for instance, costs in the region of £13,000. All of this, warned a [Transport & Environment report](#), is likely to be hooking new customers, normalising this form of luxury travel and increasing demand.

“Once you take your first private flight, you don’t want to do anything else,” says Kenny Dichter, the chief executive and chair of Wheels Up, a US-based private aviation company. “The convenience, ease and level of service are hard to top.”

In the UK, private jets tend to use small, private airports, mostly concentrated around London, such as Biggin Hill and Farnborough – from there, it is a short helicopter ride into the capital. Dichter says: “While flying private is certainly a splurge, it’s not solely the province of the super-wealthy.”

Why doesn’t someone who flies a private jet have to pay fuel duty?

*Matt Finch*

They might be people who are booking a special trip, or adventure travellers “looking for the next big thrill in a hard-to-reach location”. His business clients, he says, have found that “the time saved by flying private helps them get more done, see more of their clients and employees and build their businesses”.

How sensitive are they to criticisms about the increased emissions from private aviation? “It’s certainly something that’s of growing importance across the industry,” says Dichter, who says they are looking at ways to reduce their carbon emissions “through the use of sustainable and alternative fuels”, although there is no prominent mention on their website of an environmental plan.

The super-rich largely seem immune to flight-shaming, although they are more sensitive to privacy issues. Social media users, using publicly available flight data, have been [tracking celebrities](#) and business people and publicising each flight, along with its carbon impact. Of the jets tracked by the account CelebJets, the plane owned by Taylor Swift was found to have made the most flights, emitting more than 8,000 tonnes of carbon. (A spokesperson for the singer denied that Swift was on every flight, saying her plane is loaned out to others.) The boxer Floyd Mayweather Jr was next, followed by Jay-Z. The Canadian rapper Drake, meanwhile, [owns a Boeing 767](#) – a commercial-scale airliner.

In December, Elon Musk suspended the CelebJets Twitter account, along with ElonJet – both run by a coding student, Jack Sweeney – which tracked his own private jet. ElonJet has since [returned to Twitter](#), but no longer tracks Musk’s jet in real time (although it does on Sweeney’s Instagram account). Musk, meanwhile, has put in an order for a [Gulfstream jet](#), according to reports. Bernard Arnault, the chief executive of the luxury group LVMH, [sold his private plane](#) to avoid scrutiny. “The result now is that no one can see where I go, because I rent planes when I use private planes,” he said in a radio interview last year.

One common justification for the use of private jets – often euphemistically called business jets – is that they are critical to the efficient functioning of big business, and therefore economies, but that doesn’t stand up to scrutiny, says Finch. “The misconception is that it’s business people flying to do

massive deals, which are going to change the course of an organisation and raise 10,000 people's wages," he says. "That's just not true."



The Canadian rapper Drake owns a Boeing 767. Photograph: @champagnepapi/Instagram

Transport & Environment's report found that, in Europe, private jet usage peaks in summer, with some of the most popular airports being Nice and Ibiza. Finch says: "Either there's all of a sudden a lot of business deals happening in August around Nice, or ..." A wry pause. "It's really hard to say they're going to Ibiza for business."

The other justification is that private jets account for only 2% of all aviation emissions, but environmental campaigners point out that the sector is growing, many flights are unnecessary and the journey could be done by a commercial carrier or by train, and that private jet use undermines the message the rest of us get about cutting emissions.

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What would Finch like to see happen to curb the rise of private jet travel? “First, no jet fuel is taxed, although the EU have just put proposals in place. But, for me, start taxing private jet fuel tomorrow. These guys can afford it; the average private jet owner is a billionaire. You have to pay fuel duty when you put petrol in your car – why doesn’t someone who flies a private jet around have to pay fuel duty?”

Ridley would like to see increased air passenger duty (APD) for private jet passengers. “They’re not being asked to pay extra for the privilege of flying by private jet,” she says. At the end of last year, the Campaign for Better Transport called for a “super” APD tax on private jet passengers, calculating that it could raise about £1.4bn each year. “We’d like to see that money that the taxation raised go towards public transport, which would benefit more people.”



A British company has launched a private service for people who want to fly with their pets. Photograph: Joe McBride/Getty Images

But, in a strange way, the people flying in these polluting machines could be the ones to accelerate greener air travel, argues Finch. Private jet users are “the ones who can afford to innovate. At the moment, we’ve got test electric and hydrogen-fuel-cell planes in existence. There was a [19-seater hydrogen-fuel-cell plane](#) last week that flew over the skies of England. Progress is happening [and they are becoming] more ready for commercial use.”

Private jets – because they are smaller and fly shorter distances – are particularly suited to this new technology. It would take only a few billionaires putting orders in to get the market moving, Finch says. So, should we be grateful, then, to private jet users? It seems a stretch. Finch says: “At the moment, there is no mechanism to force private jet buyers to buy, or even to consider, zero-emission aircraft.”

How sensitive is the sector to criticism about its environmental impact? “It’s quite different in the US than Europe,” says Koe. “In Europe, the industry is super-sensitive to it. At most of the networking events and conferences, you find sustainability as the top item on the agenda: how the industry can respond, how it can mitigate, how it can innovate.”

In the past quarter, Victor, a private air charter company based in the UK, saw a 5% increase in bookings from new clients. Since June last year, all Victor flights have offered sustainable aviation fuel (SAF), a biofuel often made from waste products such as cooking oil. The company previously offset flights, but now says SAF is its focus.

“I have the role as co-CEO of an on-demand private jet business and I care about the environment, and therefore I’m using my position, hopefully, to show what is possible,” says Toby Edwards of Victor. “There’s absolutely a cohort of our customers who want to do whatever they can when booking an aircraft to reduce their carbon emissions, and buying sustainable aviation fuel is a far better choice for private flyers than offsets.”



A zero-emissions ZeroAvia plane on a test flight. Photograph: ZeroAvia

Edwards says one in five of his customers choose SAF when booking; the company's internal target is to get that to one in four. Others are more critical – SAF will have absorbed carbon over its lifecycle, but it is not totally carbon-neutral, due to the energy required to refine and transport it. Also, when a plane uses it, it delivers CO<sub>2</sub> to the atmosphere in the same way fossil fuels do.

As it stands, the private jet craze shows little sign of abating. This month, a service was launched by a British company offering private jets for pets, after noticing how many requests it was getting from people wanting to bring their cat or dog on board. Adam Golder founded G6 Aviation in 2021, to offer private air travel to wealthy people who had been grounded by the pandemic, many of whom have continued to fly privately. "You can get somewhere on your own schedule within a day and be back home," he says. "Everything's bespoke around your trip. If you want to do several cities in a day, you can."

G6's pay-per-seat service, K9 Jets, hopes to run its first flight between New Jersey and London in April. Its flights can take up to 10 people and 10 dogs (depending on the size of the dog), says Golder. G6 has had 2,000 people express interest in the past few weeks. Golder is not expecting seats to be

booked by the super-rich; they might be people who are relocating from the US to Europe and are willing to pay about £8,750 for a seat out of, for instance, the proceeds of their house sale. “There’s been quite a lot of stories about mishaps happening when people’s pets are in cargo,” says Golder. “People are more than ever willing to spend more and fly with their pets on a private jet.”

To environmental groups, however, this is another symptom of the gaping disconnect between the desire for exclusive luxury travel and the urgent reality of the climate crisis. “We’re talking decades before we’re looking at the kind of [aviation] technology that could solve the climate issue,” says Ridley. “At the moment, there’s no way to reduce climate emissions from aviation other than flying less.”

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**Oscars 2023**

## **Paul Mescal's latest role: global film star**

Irish actor, 26, has been nominated for an Oscar for *Aftersun* role but still coaches Gaelic football in home town



Paul Mescal, nominated for an Oscar for his performance in *Aftersun* in now playing Stanley in *A Streetcar Named Desire* in the West End. Photograph: Alex Bramall/The Observer



Rory Carroll Ireland correspondent

@rorycarroll72

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When Paul Mescal was studying drama at Dublin's Lir Academy he yearned to play Stanley Kowalski, the thuggish lead character in *A Streetcar Named Desire*.

Loughlin Deegan, the course director, told Mescal he was more suited to play the sensitive, courteous Mitch and that to have any chance of ever playing Stanley he would have to be brave and take risks as an actor.

Mescal did not protest or take offence. "OK," he said.

A few short years later Mescal is now playing Stanley in a London stage production that is about to transfer to the West End and is coming to grips with an additional role: global film star.

The 26-year-old was this week ominated for an Oscar for his performance in the drama Aftersun, topping a clutch of accolades that have established Mescal in the indie A-list and invited comparisons to Marlon Brando.



Paul Mescal with Frankie Corio in a scene from *Aftersun*, for which he has been nominated for an Oscar. Photograph: AP

For Deegan it is testament to Mescal's dedication. "The talent was very evident from the get-go. The other aspect is how grounded he is, that sense of inner confidence and self-awareness."

Instead of bristling at the suggestion he was not a natural leading man, Mescal took risks in workshops and productions, stretching his range and approach, said Deegan. "He is utterly focused on building the character from the text and honouring the work."

International audiences first saw that in 2020's [Normal People](#), the television adaptation of Sally Rooney's novel, when Mescal played Connell, the self-doubting teenage lover of Marianne, played by Daisy Edgar-Jones.



Marianne, played by Daisy Edgar-Jones and Connell played by Mescal, in a scene from Normal People. Photograph: Element Pictures/Enda Bowe/Hulu

It may have helped that Mescal, like the character, came from a small Irish town and played Gaelic football.

Overnight he became a heartthrob. He does interviews as required but does not court social media or give any sense of wanting to be a celebrity. Quite a feat given he has been in a relationship with the US singer [Phoebe Bridgers](#).

“I’d describe him as a humble charmer,” said Aoife McGreevy, a manager at The Roost, Mescal’s local pub in Maynooth, County Kildare, [Ireland](#).

“He is nearly the talk of the town. Maynooth feels like it’s on the map because of him. But he’s very laid back – a normal Irish boy who became really famous but is still an Irish boy.”

On visits home Mescal slots back into a tight-knit family: his police officer mother Dearbhla, school teacher father Paul, and two siblings. “The family are such nice people, just down to earth,” said McGreevy.

Aidan Minnock, a neighbour and family friend who coached Mescal at the local Gaelic Athletic Association (GAA) club, said at the age of 14 Mescal gave up hurling and rugby to focus on Gaelic football.



Paul Mescal and Anjana Vasan in *A Streetcard Named Desire*. Photograph: Marc Brenner

“In football and life in general he’s very determined, very driven. He had a brilliant attitude to training, he applied himself and wanted to be the best.”

Mescal was a precocious left-back and took command even when playing with older boys at club and county level, said Minnock. “He was a great reader of the game, very coachable, he listened and put into practice what he was coached.”

Mescal continued in a game even after suffering a broken jaw. The injury eventually ended his playing days but on visits home he coaches youth players and mixes with GAA friends.

Deegan thinks Mescal’s rootedness has helped him to navigate fame. “It has really prepared him to respond to this tsunami of [attention](#) and to stay focused on the work.” He deeply researches roles but abjures method acting extremes, said Deegan.

Mescal has so far shunned blockbusters and focused on quieter, more challenging fare – a supporting role in Maggie Gyllenhaal’s directorial debut [The Lost Daughter](#), as a man accused of sexual assault in [God’s Creatures](#)

and then as a troubled father in *Aftersun*. His most mainstream role is in the forthcoming sci-fi drama *Foe*, starring alongside Saoirse Ronan.



Olivia Colman and Paul Mescal in a scene from *The Lost Daughter*.  
Photograph: Netflix/AP

Moments after the Oscar nomination was announced on Tuesday, Mescal was on a WhatsApp call to his family. “To see his face and to see him so shocked and so joyous, I’m so grateful. I’m very grateful,” his mother [told RTE](#).

Dearbhla Mescal is soon to start treatment for multiple myeloma, a type of bone marrow cancer, but hopes to join her son in Los Angeles for the Oscars ceremony in March.

It was important to share a child’s joy, she said. “You move mountains for them because you want them to achieve in whatever they are doing. You just want them to be as happy as they can be.”

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## [Games](#)

# Can video games change people's minds about the climate crisis?

A new wave of game makers are attempting to influence a generation of environmentally conscious players. Will it work, and is it enough?



Seeing the trees but not the wood? ... *Horizon: Forbidden West*. Photograph: Sony

*Lewis Gordon*

Thu 26 Jan 2023 04.30 EST Last modified on Thu 26 Jan 2023 04.32 EST

“It was scary. It made you realise how, despite all the sophistication of modern society, we’re still reliant on water falling from the sky.” Sam Alfred, the lead designer at Cape Town-based video game studio [Free Lives](#), vividly remembers his city nearly running out of water. During 2018, the area surrounding South Africa’s second largest city suffered months of dwindling rainfall. Dams were unable to replenish themselves at the rate its inhabitants required. Water was rationed. Businesses shut. The situation

even called for its own grim version of the Doomsday Clock: hour by hour, the city ticked ever closer to [Day Zero](#), marking the end of its fresh water supply.

[Terra Nil](#), the video game that Alfred has been developing since 2019, is a response to these terrifying events. Dubbed a “city-builder in reverse”, it foregoes the consumption and expansion of genre classics such as Civilisation and SimCity to paint a picture of environmental restoration. Starting with arid desert, it’s up to the player to rewild a landscape using various technologies – a toxin scrubber, for example, or a beehive. At light-speed, and with eye-massaging flushes of emerald green and azure blue, the environment transforms into lush vegetation. Terra Nil’s simplicity is as beautiful as its visuals, offering the satisfaction of a colouring book while doling out a clear-eyed critique of environment-wrecking extraction.

With Terra Nil’s story of “climate positivity”, Alfred is part of a burgeoning wave of game makers attempting to both educate players on the dangers of the climate crisis while stretching perceptions of what is possible in response to it. Niantic, the maker of Pokémon GO, has used the real-world setting of its augmented reality game to spearhead a [tree-planting](#) initiative. Ubisoft, meanwhile, staged an in-game [climate march](#) for [Riders Republic](#) players, and is set to unleash a [virtual forest fire](#) to demonstrate the devastating real-world effects of such arboreal disasters. The idea with each of these ventures is to use video games as tools of moral instruction.



Terra Nil. Photograph: Free Lives/Devolver Digital

For the past three years, a United Nations project called [Playing for the Planet](#) has catalysed these efforts with its annual Green Game Jam. Deborah Mensah-Bonsu, founder of partner organisation [Games for Good](#) and organiser of the jams, believes video games are perfectly placed to encourage changes in mindset and behaviour. “The idea of player agency is a really big piece [of the picture],” she says. “Within other mediums, it’s more of a passive experience. With games, you get to be part of a story – you have a say in its outcome.” She sees two sides to what the organisation is calling “green content.” On the one hand, “It’s trying to help players understand these different subjects.” On the other hand, it’s giving them “agency to take action.”

In the hidden object game June’s Journey and arcade fighter Brawlhalla, these actions amount to purchasing in-game items whose proceeds are then donated to environmental charities such as Ecologi. For deeper engagements with the brief, you have to look at titles such as snowsports utopia Riders Republic or another Ubisoft title, [Anno 1800](#), the kind of grand city-builder that Terra Nil riffs on. Anno 1800’s [ecological twist](#) is an environment that reacts to the player’s expansionist actions. Creating monocultures depletes soil fertility, while overfishing destroys marine populations; each demand on the environment carries a consequence that could decide a city’s fate.

David Attenborough's [wonder](#) for the natural world permeates the [Horizon](#) series, each immaculately rendered blade of grass or clump of moss a tiny act of veneration. And dark climate dread looms in the primordial landscapes of [Death Stranding](#). However, there's a [dark contradiction](#) at the heart of these blockbuster games: the very extraction that Terra Nil rallies against sustains players' and the industry's thirst for increasingly high-fidelity graphics. Every cutting-edge [console](#), graphics card, and processor is the product of many carbon-intensive processes, including the mining of [rare earth minerals](#).

When Sony [pledges](#) to plant trees for every "Reached the Daunt" trophy earned by players of [Horizon: Forbidden West](#), an effort promoted as part of the 2022 Green Game Jam, it raises the spectre of [greenwashing](#). Sony recently announced that it was [accelerating](#) its net zero commitments by 10 years, but 2020 emissions stemming from the use of its TVs and game consoles were the highest they've been since 2016, according to its [2021 sustainability report](#). Furthermore, an eye-watering 17.1m tons of CO<sub>2</sub> were created over the course of its products' life-cycles, with a further 1.4m tons emitted from the company's business sites. Next to these numbers, it's hard to see tree-planting as anything other than trivial.



Hideo Kojima's [Death Stranding](#). Photograph: Kojima Productions

Radical ideas are needed if the games industry is to collectively decarbonise, and Playing for the Planet hopes to advise companies on how to do just that in the coming years. Kara Stone, a designer and assistant professor at Alberta University of the Arts, is already working on a quietly radical alternative from her south-facing apartment balcony in Calgary: a [solar-powered web server](#) that players will be able to stream her games from. The first is called Known Mysteries, a deduction game set in a near-future Canada held captive by massive oil companies. Stone says it's partly inspired by her home of Calgary, a city she describes as the "oil capital of Canada".

It will feature "recycled" visuals sourced mostly from 1970s industrial and nature films; Stone is compressing the images so that the game can fit on the tiny solar-powered web server she's making using a panel bought off Craigslist, a Raspberry Pi microcomputer, and an old car battery. Stone's work gently challenges the idea that increasingly high-resolution graphics, whose rendering requires [ever-larger amounts of electricity](#), is the indisputable future for games. And because it runs on a solar server in the often dark and cloudy climate of Canada, players may be unable to access her game 24/7. "Not everything has to be accessible to everybody at every single moment," Stone says. "I'm not really too concerned if it goes down for even a few hours a day every day ... Full access to every user is such a capitalist mindset."

Stone isn't trying to convince an audience of anything, she says; "that's a condescending place to come from." Jonathan Hau-Yoon, art lead on Terra Nil, is similarly uninterested in changing people's minds, preferring to show players an alternative to the status quo and let them do the rest. He references the futurist Monika Bielskyte, who thinks about "[protopian](#)" rather than utopian futures – a world of plural futures, rather than just one. "It's very much the idea of creating positive things to inspire imaginations," Hau-Yoon says. "To think in terms of possibilities."

The question is whether any of this can move the needle on players' attitudes towards the climate crisis. According to [new data](#) collected through a number of mobile titles by Mensah-Bonsu and Playing for the Planet, the answer tentatively suggests it can. Of 389,594 respondents (split evenly across men and women with the greatest number between the ages of 21 to

39), 78.6% believe that gaming could help them learn about the environment and 35.4% want to see more environmental content in their games. Nearly two-thirds of respondents (61.1%) said they would be motivated to pay for environmentalist content if it added to their in-game experience, supported a good cause, or taught them something new.



ABZU. Photograph: 505 games

Mensah-Bonsu stresses the research is far from “the final word on the subject”. She says further studies with greater academic rigour are required, but it’s the first step in validating work that, until now, was unproven. At the very least, Mensah-Bonsu says, the research shows that engaging with the climate crisis isn’t a turn-off for players. Establishing causation would be harder: many have tried to find a link between games and player behaviour when it comes to [video games and violence](#), at great length and even greater cost, and none have succeeded.

Regardless of whether it changes minds or behaviour, there’s an appetite from game makers and players alike to engage with the ongoing threat of global heating. Games such as [ABZU](#) and [Alba: A Wildlife Adventure](#) – ecological fables set in the ocean and on land – are among many that show us a way of seeing the world that isn’t through an aiming reticle.

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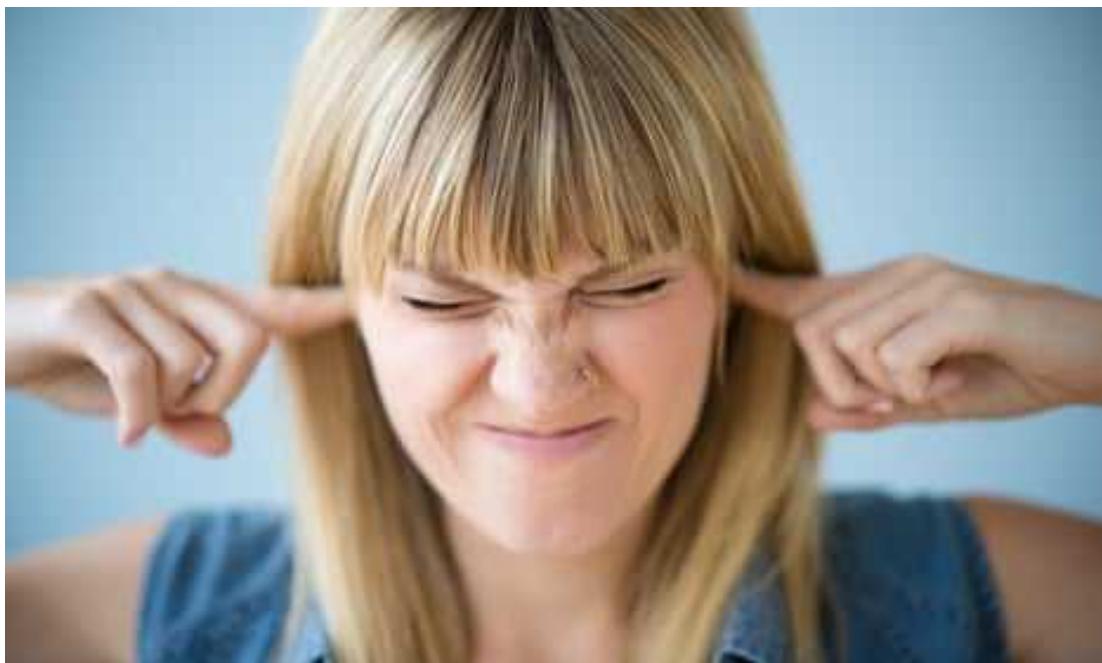
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## Life and style

# Misophonia: how ‘sound rage’ destroys relationships and forces people to move home

Sent into apoplexy by whistling noses? Can’t bear the sound of people eating? You could be one of the many people affected by this potentially debilitating condition



Woman blocking ears with fingers Photograph: Jamie Grill/Getty Images/Tetra Images RF

*[Ellie Violet Bramley](#)*

Thu 26 Jan 2023 02.00 EST Last modified on Fri 27 Jan 2023 10.40 EST

As a teenager, I remember being moved almost to tears by the sound of a family member chewing muesli. A friend eating dumplings once forced me to flee the room. The noises one former housemate makes when chomping

popcorn mean I have declined their invitations to the cinema for nearly 20 years.

I am not proud of myself for reacting like this – in fact, I am pretty embarrassed – but my responses feel unavoidable. It is probable that I have misophonia. According to a forthcoming scientific paper from King's College London, so do 18% of people in the UK.

Otherwise known as “sound rage”, misophonia is “a decreased tolerance to certain sounds” says [Dr Jane Gregory](#), a clinical psychologist at the University of Oxford who co-authored the paper and counts herself among the 18%.

Sound triggers are usually repetitive, she says. It is not about “the volume of the sound or necessarily the acoustic pattern”, but what it means to the observer. Eating sounds are most commonly reported, closely followed by so-called throat sounds. (Gregory is driven spare by the sound of pigeons.)



Eating sounds are the most commonly reported triggers of misophonia.  
Photograph: Daniel Day/Getty Images

“Chewing, crunching, snorting, sniffing, throat clearing, nose whistling, heavy breathing,” rattles off Dr Zach Rosenthal, who runs the Centre for

Misophonia and Emotion Regulation at Duke university in Durham, North Carolina. “These are all relatively ordinary everyday things that people need to do, but in people with misophonia they are experienced as highly aversive.”

That “aversive reaction” can take the form of physical changes such as increased muscle tension or heart rate, or emotional responses such as irritability, shame and anxiety. It brings on a fight, flight or even a freeze response where, according to Gregory, “you get a really strong adrenaline reaction and it tells you that you’re either in danger or you’re being violated”.

Only about 14% of the UK population are aware of misophonia, according to the King’s College London paper. Perhaps one of the reasons, Gregory suggests, is simply that it is hard to talk about. “You are essentially telling someone: ‘The sound of you eating and breathing – the sounds of you keeping yourself alive – are repulsing me.’ It’s really hard to find a polite way to say that.” Maybe [the movie Tár](#) will help: its protagonist, played by Cate Blanchett, has an extreme reaction to the sound of a metronome.



Driven to extremes ... Cate Blanchett stars as Lydia Tár. Photograph: Courtesy of Focus Features

Theories about how misophonia develops are exactly that. “A lot of people say they had always been a little bit sensitive to sound, but then they remember a certain time when it suddenly got a lot worse,” says Gregory. Rosenthal says it typically presents itself in late childhood or early teens and is often associated with family members. “People ask me all the time: ‘Why my family? Why my parents?’” The explanation feels comfortingly logical: “You’re not blaming, you’re not judging – you were probably just around them the most.”

You might have clocked a sibling eating baked beans, say, then once you have noticed it your brain begins to look out for it. Rosenthal describes the whirlpool: “It starts to be aversive and then I pay more attention to it, and then the more attention I pay to it the more I notice it, and then the more I notice it the more aversive it becomes ...”

The impact can be severe. Gregory knows of relationships that have ended over misophonia; she has encountered people who have moved several times to escape triggering neighbours. Others must pick careers based on where they can work without being bothered by sounds. “If you don’t get any respite from it, you can get desperate,” she says.

You get a really strong adrenaline reaction and it tells you that you’re either in danger or you’re being violated

*Jane Gregory*

Strategies might help, however, such as introducing background noise when eating. Gregory’s husband, who knows better than to eat Monster Munch at home, can tell if she is bothered by a sound, because she will suddenly call out: “Siri, play Taylor Swift!”

Sometimes the best option is to walk away. Gregory suggests then “slowing down your breathing, or just giving your mind a little job to do”, such as playing a game for a minute. By the time you re-enter the room, the sound might be gone, or you might feel better equipped, “because you know what’s coming”.

She also recommends “opposite action – this idea that sometimes the more we avoid something or block it out, the more harmful it feels to us. In CBT [cognitive behavioural therapy], we do the opposite of what you feel like doing.” In this vein, she tries to fight her instinct to glare at her husband, gazing adoringly at him instead: “It’s a way of tripping up your brain and saying: remember that you love this person, remember that you’re not actually in danger.”

I make a note to try this the next time I hear someone eating scrambled eggs.

This article was amended on 27 January 2023. Dr Jane Gregory contributed to King’s College London’s scientific paper on misophonia, not the other way around, as an earlier version suggested. In addition, the paper has been published only in “pre-print” format; the peer-reviewed version is yet to be published.

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## 2023.01.26 - Opinion

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## OpinionNHS

# Want to know the depth of our NHS crisis? Then talk to disabled people needing day-to-day care

[Frances Ryan](#)



It doesn't make headlines, but I've heard from people awaiting regular and long term treatment enduring awful delays and great pain



Photograph: Bill Bragg/The Guardian

Wed 25 Jan 2023 08.30 EST Last modified on Thu 26 Jan 2023 04.13 EST

When a large earthquake is coming, the ground often shakes beforehand. Geologists believe “foreshocks” can occur months or even decades before the onslaught of an earthquake, the Earth slowly rumbling for some before the rest of us are affected.

It is much the same in politics. The sort of social crises we are currently witnessing in Britain are rightly shocking to much of the public – few more so than the [disintegrating NHS](#). To fall sick and not have the safety net of knowing the health service will be able to take care of you is a deep trauma. And yet it is one that disabled people in this country have long been enduring.

Whether it is the waiting lists for [mental health support](#) or the inadequacies of [long-Covid clinics](#), millions of patients with long-term health conditions have been struggling for years to get basic healthcare. The chaotic decline that has befallen acute care in A&E has hit day-to-day services, with effects from delayed consultant appointments and year-long clinic waiting lists to slashed community care.

Mental health bed shortages mean young people need now to have “[attempted suicide several times](#)” before they get a place in an inpatient unit in England. Record delays for [cancer treatment](#) are leaving patients facing lethal waits. Thousands of people with neurological conditions are waiting up to two years to even see a consultant. For them, the ground has long been shaking. It is just that no one else noticed.

Over the past fortnight, I have spoken to disabled people the length and breadth of England and Wales about their wait for care. For them, the [NHS](#) is not an “in case of emergency” service but the engine they rely on to keep their day-to-day life running.

Before she fell ill, Julie was an NHS nurse herself. The 64-year-old now uses a ventilator 12 hours a day because of a severe breathing condition, on top of an adrenal gland disorder, but she has been left without a local consultant for two and a half years. Julie was finally assigned one last year but hasn’t seen her in 10 months. “My condition is life-limiting,” she says. “I’ve felt abandoned, isolated, and that nobody cares about me.”

For Katherine, 31, it’s surgery that she can’t access for two cysts. Constant infections mean she has been surviving with antibiotics on and off for seven years. On top of it all, Katherine has the pain of fibromyalgia and urinary tract infections (UTIs). Her GP says her local pain clinic has shut down and there are no plans to reopen it. “It feels dramatic to say [but I have been] suicidal. I’ve had times when I haven’t left my bed for a month my health is so bad. It’s frightening.”

Over the course of a year, Chris, 65, who has multiple sclerosis (MS), reported 10 UTIs to her GP and blood in her urine. She was in such discomfort that she couldn’t sleep and lost a stone in weight, but still she wasn’t given a referral. Chris was assigned an MS consultant but went years without being able to see him. Tests never materialised: her MS team booked a scan of her bladder in 2021 but it was cancelled. In May 2022, Chris had a fall at home. While she was in A&E, doctors noticed a mass in her stomach. It turned out to be a tumour in her bladder. “She died at home on 10 June,” her daughter Katie tells me.

This is, by any definition, what you might call an institutional collapse, and one that can be traced directly to a decade of Conservative governments underfunding the NHS. Yet, as much as this comes down to resources, it is too easy to pretend this is solely about cash.

Those of us who rely on the NHS for chronic, more complex conditions are likely to have witnessed the impact of poorly joined-up services, limited research and [ableism](#), alongside great care and skill. Just look at the [do-not-resuscitate orders](#) given to disabled people during the height of the pandemic or the controversial Nice guidelines [withholding painkillers](#) from some chronic pain patients. Being treated for a heart attack by the NHS is very different from being treated for ME.

That private healthcare is offered as the solution to any of this – an attitude epitomised by the former health secretary Sajid Javid’s new [call to start charging](#) for GP and A&E visits – is particularly invidious for those who need regular care. It is hard enough to find £250 for a one-off appointment but quite another to have to pay consultants, physios and therapists out of your own pocket every few months. That people with pre-existing health conditions are typically ineligible for private insurance only compounds the fact that those most desperate for care are the ones least able to get it. As Katherine, who has now paid £5,000 in private treatments for UTIs, put it to me: “Disabled people have been saying for years the NHS has been broken but no one listened. Now we pay the price.”

The Labour party is in many ways right that the [NHS needs “reform”](#) in the face of this (as loaded as that term is), but its recent focus – self-referral to specialists and more use of the private sector – is depressing in its misdirection. When you’re reeling from a Parkinson’s diagnosis, you don’t want to hear politicians talking about reorganisation – just a promise you’ll be able to see your consultant regularly.

For all the complexities at play, the scale of the crisis we are seeing is really about the fundamentals of universal healthcare: that when we fall ill, there need to be enough beds to rest in and enough doctors and nurses to treat us.

It is not a grand ambition, no matter how low expectations have been set, but it is one we are increasingly far from realising. Each time a doctor is pulled off elective care to firefight in A&E this winter, waiting lists for chronic conditions will only grow. The number of long-term sick had ballooned to [2.5 million people](#) by last October, in part owing to lack of NHS care, showing all too clearly where we are heading without a change in direction: towards an ever sicker society where the healthcare system not only fails to help but causes more harm.

Sometimes the collapse of the NHS looks like a patient [being declared dead](#) on an A&E waiting room floor. But sometimes it looks like a young woman crying on her sofa in pain. The quiet trembles can be just as shattering.

- Frances Ryan is a Guardian columnist
- Some names have been changed
- *In the UK and Ireland, Samaritans can be contacted on 116 123, or email [jo@samaritans.org](mailto:jo@samaritans.org) or [jo@samaritans.ie](mailto:jo@samaritans.ie). In the US, the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline is [1-800-273-8255](#). In Australia, the crisis support service Lifeline is 13 11 14. Other international helplines can be found at [befrienders.org](#).*

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**OpinionBrexit**

# **Biden's clean energy brainwave paves Britain's way to post-Brexit growth. Dare we copy him?**

[Larry Elliott](#)



Where the US leads in using state aid and subsidies, the EU is now following. But the UK will need a change of mindset



Joe Biden drives a Cadillac Lyriq at the Detroit Auto Show, in September 2022. His Inflation Reduction Act offers tax credits to people buying US-produced electric vehicles. Photograph: Evan Vucci/AP

Thu 26 Jan 2023 03.00 EST Last modified on Thu 26 Jan 2023 09.23 EST

Stagnation nation. That's an apt two-word description of the UK, where after 15 years of sluggish economic performance the prospect is for a shallow recession this year.

Politicians know they have a problem. In the past 13 years, David Cameron, Theresa May, Boris Johnson, Liz Truss and now Rishi Sunak have all proposed different ways of fixing things, none of which have moved the dial that much. Jeremy Hunt says his budget, on 15 March will be all about growth, but don't hold your breath.

One suggested remedy for curing the UK's economic ills that will certainly not be tried any time soon is rejoining the EU. There are those who argue that Britain should go down this route, but they don't include either Sunak or Keir Starmer.

The opposition leader and the shadow chancellor, Rachel Reeves, say they want to secure better relations with the EU, but under a future Labour

government there would be no attempt to be part of the single market or the customs union, let alone an application for full membership.

With both the main parties committed to making Brexit work, the search is on for policies that will not just get the economy moving again but do so in a way that spreads the benefits of growth to the left-behind parts of the country. They could start by taking a look at what Joe Biden is doing on the other side of the Atlantic with his [Inflation Reduction Act](#) (IRA).

The IRA is a bit of a misnomer since it has little to do with tackling the cost of living in the US. Instead, it offers subsidies to companies that set up clean energy plants in the US and generous tax credits for consumers who buy new electric vehicles produced there. It represents protectionism on a grand scale, and it was the [talk of Davos](#) last week.

In the heyday of the drive to open up markets in the 1990s and early 2000s, the IRA would have been universally condemned by those attending the World Economic Forum's annual talkfest. But those days are over, at least for now. The trend is towards deglobalisation, with production either on-shored or sited in a country deemed to be friendly. Tellingly, there were plenty of Davos attendees who strongly backed the IRA. Larry Summers, the former US treasury secretary said it was a "historically positive measure". France's finance minister, Bruno Le Maire, said it was a good thing the US was providing incentives for investment in climate-friendly technology, and that [Europe](#) should do the same.

The EU will find it difficult to emulate what Biden has done, because it is not a fiscal union, but the European Commission [has plans](#) for a new fund to boost green investment, and will relax the rules on state aid, which are designed to promote a level playing field across member states. Having initially raised concerns about the discriminatory nature of the IRA, the EU seems to have come round to an if-you-can't-beat-them-join-them approach.

This makes sense. While the EU could clearly take a case to the World Trade Organization over Biden's use of subsidies, the bigger picture is that it is welcome news that the US is getting serious about tackling global heating. If the IRA encourages other countries to do likewise, all well and good.

That list of countries ought to include the UK. The head of the CBI, Tony Danker, [said earlier this week](#) that it was possible for the UK to lead the world on green growth but only with a change of mindset. Britain, he said was “on the verge of being relegated from the Champions League by the Americans and the Europeans: both [are] in an arms race to win global market share. Not only are they spending money, they’re abandoning regulatory barriers including state aid to win the prize! That’s a lesson for us on what it means to go big.”

Unfortunately, the current UK government is thinking small. Grant Shapps, the business secretary, said in Davos that Britain didn’t need its equivalent of an IRA because it had taken an early lead in renewable energy and the Americans were now playing catch-up. Kemi Badenoch, the trade secretary, made clear her concerns about a global subsidies race in her talks with the Americans and the Europeans.

Realistically, a different approach will require a change of government, and it was notable that Starmer used his visit to Davos to promote his idea for a green prosperity plan – a blueprint for a net-zero transition that would require a more activist state. While it won’t please all Labour supporters, Starmer’s thinking has evolved since the days when he was backing a second EU referendum. Leftwing supporters of [Brexit](#) have always argued that leaving the EU provided an opportunity to use state aid, subsidies, tax breaks and procurement to strengthen the UK’s industrial base, and the Labour leader seems to be slowly warming to some of those ideas.

Clearly, it would be daft to imagine that the UK could ever outspend the US, but it makes sense to borrow for investments that would boost the prospects of faster sustainable growth. Nor does a UK equivalent of an IRA have to break the bank, because, as Danker said in his speech, there are smart ways in which the government can spend money to support green growth.

And if the CBI can get behind funding immature technologies where markets don’t yet operate fully or providing incentives for locally sourced goods, then there is no earthly reason why Labour should not do the same.

- Larry Elliott is the Guardian’s economics editor

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**OpinionReality TV**

## **Imagine: a Love Island for middle-aged, tired, soft-bodied people. I'd watch it**

[Lucy Mangan](#)



ITV's new show *The Romance Retreat* sounds more 'real' than the antics in *Casa Amor*. But just how true-to-life will it be?



The final episode of Love Island series 8, set in Majorca, Spain. Photograph: ITV/REX/Shutterstock

Thu 26 Jan 2023 02.00 EST Last modified on Thu 26 Jan 2023 08.10 EST

There is a [scene](#) in Tina Fey's comedy show *30 Rock* where the small-screen diva Jenna Maroney must reluctantly accept that she has been cast in a YA show not as one of the main characters, but as the ailing mother. Her final line? "I'm 41 now," she says, falling back on the sofa. "Time ... to die." Tina Fey also appears in the famous [Last \\*\\*\\*kable Day sketch](#), from *Inside Amy Schumer*, in which various female actors d'un certain age gather over wine to mark the passing of the days of being cast by male directors.

The cultural obsession with youth – especially in any kind of visual medium like film and TV – is a widely recognised, if not widely addressed, phenomenon. But it is at its most unbending when it comes to the reality show genre. There, in whatever sun-kissed villa or island the participants have been put into in order to discover their soulmates and/or a new strain of chlamydia, anyone over the age of roughly 25 can expect to become den mother at best, or left out in a bathchair in the broiling sun at worst. It is an unspoken rule that anyone over 30 approaching the love palace is shot on sight.

Thus the news that ITVX is launching a new dating show called [The Romance Retreat](#), in which the participants will be single parents nominated by their grownup children, has caused something of a stir. It has quickly come to be labelled “middle-aged Love Island” and one can only hope that it lives up to that brief. Forget those tanned young things, apparently made of sinew and plastic, informing each other loudly of their emotions-simulacra, while bursting out of their boxers or bikinis; imagine, instead, slightly tired, sweet, soft-bodied people offer to make each other cups of tea, try to follow a crime drama on the sofa together, and bang only if they really like each other and can be bothered – two completely separate requirements.

If ITVX has the courage truly to run with this, it could be great: a show filled with sexual tension but also real, normal people who can hold conversations, make proper jokes and bring ... well, something other than chlamydia to the party. The mere idea brings home how conditioned we have become to accept the format itself as immutable and – beyond that – to bow down at the altar of youth.

But reinventing a genre is tough, especially at a commercial channel that must not frighten too many advertisers. And the casting call for “vibrant” single parents is cause to suspect that the channel might not be entirely committed to holding a mirror up to nature. Not that single parents – especially of grownup children, who presumably don’t still need fish fingers and chips shovelled at them every 20 minutes and sports kits found that should be hanging over the chair because that’s where the child was told to put them every time they came home – can’t be vibrant, of course. But it does suggest that it plans to remake exactly what has gone so many times before, simply with a slightly higher age bracket.

There is an opportunity here to do something fun that genuinely hasn’t been seen before – except in isolated glimpses on First Dates, where Fred Sirieix’s Gallic charm ushers a very fair sampling of demographics along the path to hoped-for happiness. But I can’t help but feel that a truly middle-aged [Love Island](#) couldn’t exist. Even if you keep up the gym work, the years strip us of the artifice upon which “reality” shows depend. The joy of ageing is that you stop posing, you stop people-pleasing, you stop lying to yourself and to others. You stop pretending emotions you don’t feel and start

expressing those that you do. It's absolutely wonderful in real life. But would it make great telly? Perhaps not.

But, oh, how I would love for someone to try. Someone to make a reality show that is not just free of narcissists and sociopaths but full of people who don't just care in a wholly different and entirely healthy way. Whose interactions would be muted, but genuine. Who would invite the audience to lean in and listen, rather than merely goggle at the spectacle.

It probably won't happen this time. But who knows to what highs – or, rather, gentle inclines, navigated in comfortable shoes – it may lead?

- Lucy Mangan is a Guardian TV critic
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Opinion**Beach holidays**

## **Who are these people who love to feel sand between their toes? I hate it**

[Adrian Chiles](#)



I adore the sea but what's to love about a grainy, abrasive substance that gets everywhere?



‘Once it’s wherever it is, it’s always there.’ Photograph: NuriaE/Getty Images/RooM RF

Thu 26 Jan 2023 02.00 ESTLast modified on Thu 26 Jan 2023 06.23 EST

I hate sand. I love the coast; being from Birmingham, it’s always filled me with wonder. My Croatian grandad used to say that if you dipped your toe in the sea, you were connected to the whole world. This idea enchants me still. But I say again, I bloody hate sand. It gets everywhere. In sandwiches on the beach as a kid; in my toenails; in my hair; in every last crevice of my body, including my mind. And once it’s wherever it is, it’s always there.

Who are these people who love to feel the sand between their toes? When I walk on a beach, I am hermetically sealed from the knees down, but somehow it finds its way in. I might get myself a Hazmat suit – whatever it takes. It might be the Croat in me. On the Adriatic it’s all rocks. Some of them are decidedly jagged and sharp and difficult to negotiate. But I’ll take lacerated feet over sandy feet all day long.

And another thing: sand is untrustworthy, unreliable. When you go into the sea, the water keeps it in its place, and it’s nice underfoot. But it takes its revenge by hiding the odd razor stone to gash your foot – a wound that will, obviously, fill with sand as soon as you’re on dry land.

Dido once sang, of a holiday romance: “I’ve still got sand in my shoes / And I can’t shake the thought of you.” My version would be: “I’m finding flipping sand everywhere / I never want to see you again.”

How I loathe its hateful rasp on hard floors beneath my feet, or the feel of it burrowed into carpets for perpetuity. If barefoot, I totter on my heels to reduce the sticking area. It doesn’t help to have a sand magnet of a long-haired dog. No amount of hosing or brushing will shift it out of his fur. Yet within minutes he has distributed it everywhere. Before he goes on a beach again he’s off to the dog barber’s for the severest of treatments. I’ll rename him Kojak.

I read that in just one cubic metre of sand there are [roughly 70bn grains](#). Pound for pound, that’s more discomfort and disappointment than any other substance on Earth. I hate sand.

- Adrian Chiles is a writer, broadcaster and Guardian columnist
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## 2023.01.26 - Around the world

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- [Italy Hospital investigated after newborn dies under sleeping mother](#)
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## Ukraine

# **Ukraine's Odesa, the 'pearl of the Black Sea', added to Unesco World Heritage list**

The status will ensure the historic port city is 'preserved from further destruction,' Unesco director-general Audrey Azoulay said



A monument of Odesa city founder Duke de Richelieu is seen covered with sandbags for protection, amid Russia's invasion of Ukraine. Photograph: Alexandros Avramidis/Reuters

*Guardian staff and agencies*

Wed 25 Jan 2023 21.02 EST Last modified on Thu 26 Jan 2023 04.23 EST

The United Nations' cultural agency, Unesco, has added the historic centre of Ukraine's city of Odesa to its World Heritage List, describing it as "the duty of all humanity" to protect it.

The status, awarded by a Unesco panel meeting in Paris on Wednesday, is designed to help protect the port city's cultural heritage, which has been under threat since Russia's invasion.

"As the war continues, this inscription embodies our collective determination to ensure that this city, which has always risen from the heartbreak of the world, is preserved from further destruction," Unesco director-general Audrey Azoulay said in a [statement](#).

The world heritage committee's 21 member states approved the designation with six votes in favour, one against and 14 abstentions.



Odesa Passage in the Ukrainian city of Odessa. Photograph: Oleksandr Gimannov/AFP/Getty Images

Russia repeatedly tried to delay the vote and denounced the eventual decision, saying the only threat to Odesa came from the "nationalist regime in Ukraine".

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskiy, who requested the listing in October to shield the city from Russian bombardment, welcomed the decision.

“I’m grateful to partners who help protect our pearl from the Russian invaders’ attacks,” he [tweeted](#) on Wednesday. Odesa is often described as Ukraine’s “pearl of the Black Sea.”

Since the Russian invasion, Ukrainians have rushed to try to protect the city’s monuments and buildings with sandbags and barricades.

The city was also added to the list of world heritage sites in danger, which [Unesco](#) says “gives it access to reinforced technical and financial international assistance” to protect or, if necessary, rehabilitate it.



A man walks next to the Opera Theatre building in the city centre.  
Photograph: Serhii Smolientsev/Reuters

The agency added that it had already helped with repairs on the Odesa museum of fine arts and the Odesa museum of modern art after damage incurred since the beginning of the war.

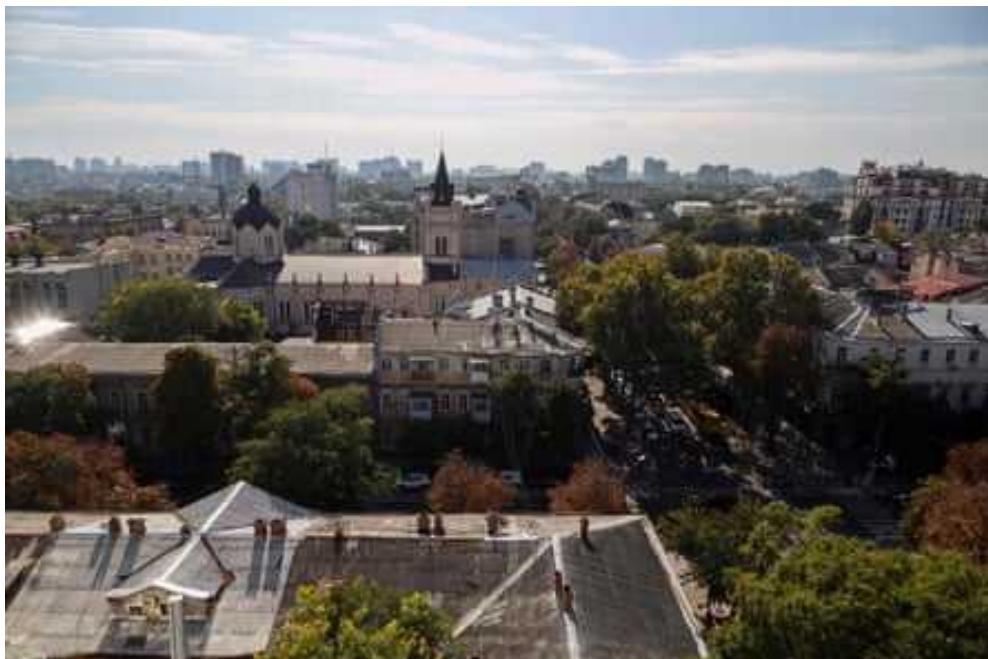
Odesa blossomed after Russian Empress Catherine the Great decreed in the late 18th century that it would be the country’s modern maritime gateway.

Its location on the shores of the Black Sea allowed it to become one of the most important ports in the Russian empire but the extent of Russian cultural

influence on the city is a contentious topic.

A draft decision ahead of the Unesco vote described Empress Catherine II as having “founded” the city, prompting criticism from Ukraine, objecting to what it viewed as a “politicised” description of the city.

Ukraine’s culture minister Oleksandr Tkachenko and Odesa mayor Gennadiy Trukhanov, in an open letter seen by Agence France-Presse, contested this, saying the city thrived long before the Russian empress’ arrival.



A view of the southern Ukrainian city of Odessa. Photograph: Oleksandr Gimannov/AFP/Getty Images

“The continuous development of Odesa as a port city dates back to the 15th century,” they said, and was known as Hadzhybei.

In Moscow, Russia’s foreign ministry accused a group of western countries of pushing through what it called a “politically motivated” decision in violation of standard procedures.

“It was prepared hastily, without respecting the current high standards of Unesco,” the foreign ministry said, stressing that just six countries voted in favour.

Moscow pointed to “the glorious historical past of Odesa as part of the Russian state” and insisted that “the only threat” Odesa faced was from “the nationalist regime in Ukraine” which has taken down a number of monuments in the city.

In December, Ukrainian authorities in Odesa pulled down a statue of Catherine II as part of its efforts to de-Russify the city, after polling residents on what to do with it.

Six other Ukrainian sites have already been inscribed on the Unesco World Heritage List, including the Saint-Sophia Cathedral in the capital Kyiv and the historic centre of the western city of Lviv.

*Reuters and Agence France-Presse contributed to this report.*

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[Italy](#)

## Italian hospital investigated after newborn dies under sleeping mother

Thousands sign petition calling for better postnatal care amid concerns over conditions in maternity units



Ambulances outside Sandro Pertini hospital in Rome in 2020. Prosecutors will examine whether hospital rules were violated. Photograph: Alessandro Serranò/AGF/Rex/Shutterstock

*[Angela Giuffrida](#) in Rome*

Thu 26 Jan 2023 00.00 EST Last modified on Thu 26 Jan 2023 00.02 EST

Controversy is mounting in [Italy](#) over conditions in hospital maternity units after a newborn is believed to have died by suffocation under the weight of his mother who fell asleep after breastfeeding him.

An investigation is under way into the tragedy, which occurred at the Sandro Pertini hospital in Rome on 8 January. The results of the autopsy are

expected within 60 days.

The child was born three days earlier after his 30-year-old mother went through 17 hours of labour.

According to hospital regulations, staff ought to have ensured that the baby was returned to his cot after breastfeeding. Prosecutors will look into whether the rules were violated, as well as allegations of negligence.

Realising that the child was at risk of being suffocated, a woman in a nearby bed reportedly called for help, but the child died before the staff member arrived.

“My client remembers suddenly being woken up and no longer having the baby with her,” Alessandro Piombi, the lawyer of the newborn’s mother, told the news website Fanpage. “She said they took her to a room where they told her the tragic news.”

The child’s father claimed that a request by his exhausted partner for the baby to be taken to the nursery so that she could rest for a few hours was refused.

The Italian health ministry ordered a report on the incident as a petition calling for there to be more checks and better post-childbirth support for families in maternity wards attracted more than 100,000 signatures by Wednesday.

Dozens of mothers have shared their experiences of being “abandoned” in post-childbirth, while unions have decried staff shortages, a situation exacerbated by the coronavirus pandemic.

“It could have happened to anyone,” wrote one woman on social media. “After 15 hours of labour and an emergency caesarean, I fell asleep exhausted with my daughter Giulia on my chest. I woke up screaming because she had gone and I thought she had fallen on the floor, but luckily my mother had put her in the cot.”

The local health authority responsible for the Sandro Pertini hospital said it would cooperate with the investigation but it denied allegations of inadequate post-childbirth service and said there was no shortage of staff in the department.

Healthcare systems are struggling [across Europe](#), with an ageing population, more long-term illnesses and a recruitment crisis taking their toll.

Giovanni Leoni, the vice-president of an Italian doctors' federation, said in December that staff shortages were prevalent across all hospital units, especially since the pandemic triggered an exodus from the profession.

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## **Thousands attend Invasion Day rallies on Australia's national holiday as colonisation debate rages**



People participate at the Invasion Day rally in Melbourne, Australia.  
Photograph: Diego Fedele/AAP

With Australia increasingly uneasy about celebrating its national day, recognition of Indigenous people in the constitution has become a new flashpoint

*Ben Doherty in Sydney  
@bendohertycorro*

Thu 26 Jan 2023 00.49 EST Last modified on Thu 26 Jan 2023 16.29 EST

Tens of thousands of people have marked Australia's national day by attending protest rallies in cities across the nation, amid a rising political and social reckoning with the country's colonial history.

Australia Day – 26 January – commemorates the landing of the British first fleet of convicts at Sydney Cove in 1788, the beginning of the settlement that entrenched European colonisation of the Australian continent.

“We need to stop the lying,” Prof Marcia Langton, a Yiman and Bidjara woman, said on Thursday, arguing that Australia’s national day should not be one that commemorates colonisation. “The biggest lie, of course, is Australia Day. I think we can find an inclusive date and I think we can start to tell the truth about Australia’s history and show some respect for all the survivors of [the frontier wars](#).”



Protestors rally in Melbourne. Australia Day has been a national public holiday only since 1994. Photograph: Diego Fedele/EPA

While the date has been acknowledged since the 19th century, Australia Day has been a national public holiday only since 1994, and has grown increasingly divisive with a broadening public consciousness of the systematic dispossession of [Indigenous Australians](#), the genocidal violence that marked British settlement and the persistent disadvantage and oppression faced by Indigenous people.

On Thursday, rallies were held to mark “Invasion Day”, “Survival Day” and “Sovereignty Day”, in a public sign that activities on 26 January are moving from the fireworks, festivals and flag-waving of the past to become marked by more sombre reflection, protest and, for many, disengagement.



An Invasion Day rally in Brisbane. Australians are increasingly supportive of changing the date of the national holiday. Photograph: Jono Searle/EPA

Increasing numbers of Australians are choosing to campaign to “change the date”. [Councils have forsaken to hold citizenship ceremonies](#) on the day, and the national broadcaster’s annual music poll – previously a 26 January fixture – [has been moved](#) to the nearest weekend.

In Sydney, Wiradjuri woman Lynda-June Coe told the thousands-strong crowd the day marked a “reckoning” for white Australia.

“235 years and we ain’t going nowhere,” she said.

“They tried to wipe us out, still here. They tried to breed us out, still here. They tried to commit genocide on us, still here.”



New South Wales Greens upper house candidate Lynda-June Coe addresses protestors in Sydney. Photograph: Bianca de Marchi/AAP

The prime minister, Anthony Albanese, said on Thursday there was no proposal from his government to move Australia Day to another date, but a [Guardian Essential poll](#) found growing support for a change: 26% of Australians were supportive in 2023, up from 20% a year ago, and 15% in 2019. Advocates argue an eventual change of date is inevitable.

Defenders of Australia Day, such as the conservative opposition leader, Peter Dutton, argue Australia should celebrate its unique blend of Indigenous, British and multicultural histories.

“We shouldn’t be embarrassed or ashamed by who we are, we should be more proud of who we are,” Dutton said. “We don’t need to tear down one part of our history to build up the other.”



The WugulOra morning ceremony is held at Walumil Lawns in Sydney.  
Photograph: Bianca de Marchi/EPA

The moment of reflection on Australia's history and national identity has been particularly acute this year as the country begins to debate a referendum proposed for later in the year that would enshrine an [Indigenous “voice” to parliament](#) in the constitution.

The voice would advise the parliament and government on matters relating to the social, spiritual and economic wellbeing of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

Parliament and government would be obliged to consult the voice on matters that overwhelmingly relate to Indigenous people, but the voice – [proposed to be made up of 24 Indigenous people](#) drawn from across the country – would not be a law-making body.

Rather, it would be a platform for Indigenous people to directly advise all levels of government about laws and policies that affect their lives, the minister for [Indigenous Australians](#), Linda Burney, a Wiradjuri woman, has argued.

“It’s about drawing a line on the poor outcomes from the long legacy of failed programs and broken policies, and listening to Aboriginal and Torres

Strait Islander people.”



Kamilaroi artist Rhonda Sampson’s ‘Diyan Warrane’ artwork is projected onto the sails of the Sydney Opera House at dawn. Photograph: Bianca de Marchi/AAP

Holding a referendum on the voice was an election commitment of the Labor government, which took power last year, but it has faced opposition from outside and within Indigenous Australia.

The Greens senator and First Nations spokeswoman Lidia Thorpe, a DjabWurrung Gunnai Gunditjmara woman, told an Invasion Day rally in Melbourne [the Australian government needed to sign a treaty](#) recognising Indigenous sovereignty before any vote on the voice.

“Do we want to become advisers now? We deserve better than that. We deserve better ... our constitution comes from the soil and the blood of our people. We need peace. We deserve better than an advisory body.

“We want real power, and we won’t settle for anything less.”

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## **Donald Trump**

# ‘Reckless’: Fury among rights groups as Facebook lifts Trump ban

Civil rights groups voice anger at ‘unethical’ decision, while others say the public has an interest in hearing directly from candidates for political office



Meta has said it will allow Donald Trump back on Facebook and Instagram following a two-year ban from the platforms. Photograph: Adrien Fillon/Zuma Press Wire/Rex/Shutterstock

*Samantha Lock*  
*@Samantha\_Lock*

Thu 26 Jan 2023 00.01 ESTLast modified on Thu 26 Jan 2023 00.05 EST

The news that Meta will [allow Donald Trump back on Facebook and Instagram](#) following a two-year ban has been met with fury and indignation among civil rights and online safety advocates.

The former US president will be allowed to [return to the platforms](#) “in coming weeks” but “with new guardrails in place to deter repeat offences”,

Meta's president of global affairs, Nick Clegg, wrote in a [blogpost](#) explaining the decision on Wednesday.

The Anti-Defamation League, the NAACP, Free Press, Media Matters and other groups expressed concern about Facebook's ability to prevent any future attacks on the democratic process or quell misinformation.

"Make no mistake – by allowing [Donald Trump](#) back on its platforms, Meta is refuelling Trump's misinformation and extremism engine," said Angelo Carusone, president and CEO of media watchdog Media Matters for America.

"When Trump is given a platform, it ratchets up the temperature on a landscape that is already simmering – one that will put us on a path to increased violence."

Trump was removed from [Meta](#) platforms after the Capitol riots on 6 January 2021, during which he posted unsubstantiated claims that the election had been stolen, praised increasingly violent protesters and condemned former vice-president Mike Pence even as the mob threatened his life.

Democratic congresswoman Jan Schakowsky said reinstating Trump's accounts "will only fan the flames of hatred and division that led to an insurrection".

"The Capitol community is still picking up the pieces from the January 6th insurrection that Trump ignited, and now he is returning to the virtual scene of the crime," she [tweeted](#).

This is a dangerous decision. Reinstating former President Trump's Facebook and Instagram accounts will only fan the flames of hatred and division that led to an insurrection. Meta has had 'guardrails' in place that have been repeatedly ignored for high-profile accounts.  
<https://t.co/hpoaHu8gNc>

— Jan Schakowsky (@janschakowsky) [January 25, 2023](#)

In a statement explaining the decision to allow Trump to return, Clegg said: “The public should be able to hear what their politicians are saying – the good, the bad and the ugly – so that they can make informed choices at the ballot box.”

“In the event that Mr Trump posts further violating content, the content will be removed and he will be suspended for between one month and two years, depending on the severity of the violation.”

Jonathan Greenblatt, the CEO of the Anti-Defamation League, said that Trump should not be given a platform to “spread hate and incite violence”.

“There is no reason to believe the former president will behave differently now that the platform has reversed his ban. This isn’t a matter of free speech; there are ample services that Trump can use to spread his message. This is a business decision to platform bigotry and divisiveness to drive clicks and engagement, plain and simple.”

Free Press Co-CEO Jessica J. González, described the announcement as a “cowardly and unethical decision” that “will cause incalculable harm”.

She urged Meta to reverse course and said Trump would only continue to use the company’s “powerful tools” to “spread lies and dangerous rhetoric, and incite violence targeted at disenfranchised communities and his ideological enemies”.

“Meta must bear full responsibility for any harm that results from today’s extremely reckless decision,” González said.

Meta initially outsourced its decision about whether to remove Trump permanently to its oversight board: a group of appointed academics and former politicians, that operate independent of Meta’s leadership to scrutinise the company’s moderation decisions.

That group ruled in May 2021 that Trump’s penalties should not be “indeterminate”, but kicked the final ruling back to Meta, and played no role in his readmission to the platform.

Nicolas Suzor, a professor at Queensland's University of Technology School of Law and member of the Oversight Board, told the Guardian that the announcement "follows through on [Meta's] commitments to us to develop clear and accountable processes in high profile cases like this".

"Many other tech companies have not done this work (or have gone backwards recently) and their senior executives still make decisions behind closed doors that impact us all."

However, a group of scholars, advocates and activists calling itself the Real Facebook Oversight Board – operating in opposition to Meta's board – said the decision, "sends a message that there are no real consequences even for inciting insurrection and a coup."

Some free speech advocates have agreed with Clegg, saying it is appropriate for the public to have access to messaging from political candidates.

Jameel Jaffer, executive director at the Knight First Amendment Institute at Columbia University and a former American Civil Liberties Union official, defended the reinstatement. He had previously endorsed the company's decision to suspend Trump's account.

"This is the right call – not because the former president has any right to be on the platform but because the public has an interest in hearing directly from candidates for political office," he said in a statement on Wednesday.

"It's better if the major social media platforms err on the side of leaving speech up, even if the speech is offensive or false, so that it can be addressed by other users and other institutions."

American Civil Liberties Union executive director Anthony Romero said Meta was making "the right call" by allowing Trump back on to the social network.

"Like it or not, President Trump is one of the country's leading political figures and the public has a strong interest in hearing his speech," Romero said in a release.

The ACLU has filed more than 400 legal actions against Trump, according to Romero.

Trump has not indicated whether he will return to the platform but responded to the news with a short statement on Truth Social, saying that “such a thing should never happen again to a sitting president”.

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## [Palestinian territories](#)

# **Israeli forces kill nine Palestinians during West Bank raid**

Palestinian leaders cut security ties with Israel after deadly gun battle at Jenin refugee camp

Palestinians killed as Israeli forces raid Jenin refugee camp in West Bank – video report

*[Bethan McKernan](#) in Ramallah*

Thu 26 Jan 2023 13.45 ESTFirst published on Thu 26 Jan 2023 04.43 EST

Israeli forces have killed nine Palestinians during a raid in the north of the occupied West Bank in the deadliest single day in the territory in years, prompting Palestinian militants to fire rockets from the Gaza Strip and Palestinian leaders to cut security ties with [Israel](#).

A 61-year-old woman and a male civilian were among the dead, the Palestinian health ministry said, and about 20 more people were seriously injured in the violence on Thursday morning. The seven other casualties were claimed by various Palestinian militant groups, and two more people were killed in clashes in Ramallah and East Jerusalem later in the day.

The Palestinian Authority, which governs parts of the West Bank and works alongside Israel to contain militant activity, announced on Thursday night it was suspending security cooperation with the Israeli government – a step it has taken on a temporary basis in the past.

Israel Defence Forces (IDF) soldiers arrived at daybreak at several entrances of the Jenin refugee camp, a militant stronghold in the north of the Palestinian territory, said Sakir Khader, a Palestinian-Dutch film-maker at the scene. Armed Palestinians shot at an Israeli armoured vehicle disguised

as a commercial van, at which point the IDF returned fire and a fierce four-hour gun battle ensued, causing widespread damage, he said.

“I was stuck in the middle of the firefight for hours,” Khader said. “It was crazy. There were snipers and drones and they used a bulldozer to block off a street. It destroyed lots of cars and a public meeting spot.

“At the hospital there are mothers looking for their sons … Everything is still very tense. I have been coming to Palestine all my life and I have never seen something like this.”

### [Map of Jenin refugee camp](#)

The raid’s death toll is the highest in a single operation ever recorded by the [United Nations](#) since the international body’s records began in 2005.

Hamas, the Palestinian militant group in control of the Gaza Strip, along with the smaller group Islamic Jihad, promised a response to the Jenin violence. In the early hours of Friday, six rockets were fired from the Gaza Strip towards southern Israel that were intercepted by missile defences, the Israeli military said.

There was no immediate claim for the rocket fire or reports of injuries. The IDF responded by conducting bombing raids on what it said were rocket-making sites in central Gaza.

UN and Arab mediators have been left scrambling to prevent the violence from escalating, with diplomats saying late on Thursday that negotiations were being held with Israel and Palestinian factions across the West Bank and Gaza Strip in an effort to calm the situation.

Israel’s prime minister, Benjamin Netanyahu, said the country was not looking for escalation, though he ordered security forces “to prepare for all scenarios in the various sectors”.

The IDF said it conducted the unusual daytime operation in Jenin, which ventured deep into the camp, because of intelligence suggesting a cell linked to Palestinian Islamic Jihad was planning to carry out imminent attacks against Israelis.

The army also denied firing teargas at a nearby hospital after video emerged showing children in the paediatric ward choking and coughing. Teargas had probably wafted inside the hospital from the clashes nearby, it said. There were no Israeli casualties.

Thursday's bloodshed is the latest development in [Operation Breakwater](#), a nine-month-old Israeli military campaign that has targeted Palestinian factions in the northern West Bank city and nearby Nablus on a near-nightly basis. It was launched in response to a wave of deadly Palestinian terrorist attacks last spring.

The operation has contributed to the highest death toll in the occupied West Bank since the second intifada, or Palestinian uprising, concluded in 2005, with about 150 Palestinians and 30 Israelis killed last year, according to rights groups. Another 30 Palestinians, among them fighters and civilians, have been killed so far in 2023.

As large funeral processions in Jenin got under way on Thursday afternoon, Palestinian Authority president, Mahmoud Abbas, declared three days of mourning and ordered flags at half mast. A general strike was also declared across the occupied West Bank and Jerusalem, and by lunchtime hundreds of people had headed towards Israeli military checkpoints to protest.

At the Beit El checkpoint near Ramallah, soldiers fired teargas at the demonstrators, some of whom threw stones and set fire to tyres. Three Palestinians in the area were reportedly shot and seriously injured, according to local media.

"It is the same story again and again. The occupation does not stop killing us, so we will not stop resisting," said Nour, a 22-year-old student who wrapped her face in a black and white keffiyeh to protect against the teargas.

Tensions in the decades-long conflict have soared as a result of the escalating violence, and [recent polling suggests](#) that support for the dormant peace process has reached an all-time low on both sides.

The recent election of the [most rightwing government in Israeli history](#) is expected to inflame an already volatile situation. Members of the new Israeli

coalition have pledged to accelerate the building of Jewish settlements in the West Bank – a practice that negates the possibility of a two-state solution – and loosen the rules of engagement for soldiers and police.

US secretary of state Antony Blinken is due to travel to Egypt, Israel and the West Bank next week to discuss the situation.

“With both Israeli and Palestinian leaders, the secretary will underscore the urgent need for the parties to take steps to deescalate tensions in order to put an end to the cycle of violence that has claimed too many innocent lives,” state department spokesperson Ned Price said in a statement.

The United Arab Emirates, China and France have also asked the UN security council to meet behind closed doors on Friday over the violence, diplomats said.

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