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Headlines tuesday 30 august 2022

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Russia-Ukraine war: Kremlin-appointed Kherson leader reportedly flees to Russia; first grain ship docks in Africa – as it happened

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[Ukraine](#)

Ukrainian adviser warns progress will be slow as southern counterattack begins

Zelenskiy aide claims troops have broken through Russian defences in several areas of frontline near Kherson

Zelenskiy vows to take back Russian-controlled areas in counteroffensive – video

[Isobel Koshyw](#) in Kyiv and [Pjotr Sauer](#)

Tue 30 Aug 2022 11.19 EDTFirst published on Mon 29 Aug 2022 19.21 EDT

A senior presidential adviser has told Ukrainians not to expect rapid gains, after his country began what it said was a long-awaited counteroffensive aiming to retake the southern province of Kherson from Russian forces.

Ukrainian troops had broken through Russian defences in several areas of the frontline near Kherson city, Oleksiy Arestovych, an adviser to President [Volodymyr Zelenskiy](#), claimed.

However, in a Telegram post, Arestovych cautioned against any expectations of a quick win, describing the offensive as a “slow operation to grind the enemy”. “Of course, many would like a large-scale offensive with news about the capture by our military of a settlement in an hour,” he wrote. “But we don’t fight like that … Funds are limited.”

The offensive was first announced on Monday by a spokesperson for Ukraine’s southern command, Natalia Humeniuk, who said it was taking place in “various directions”. Humeniuk said the operation needed “silence” as media attention could affect the results.

So far, Ukraine's authorities have not issued detailed information about the counteroffensive. At a press briefing on Tuesday, Humeniuk said Ukraine's forces had succeeded in damaging bridges that join Kherson across the river, rendering them "impassable for heavy machinery".

Two Ukrainian fighters on the frontlines in Kherson, who have oversight of events, described a situation that differed from the Ukrainian officials' statements. According to them, fighting is taking place in Kherson region, but it is not the major counteroffensive being touted by Kyiv.

Ukraine's authorities first announced the beginnings of a broader counteroffensive in July and since then, they have gained relatively little ground. Ukraine has reported capturing 40 villages – a village in Ukraine can be several streets or just one. Ukraine has, however, reported successfully destroying several ammunition depots and Russian headquarters in the Kherson region.

CNN reported on Monday, quoting a Ukrainian military source, that four villages in Kherson region had been recaptured. The Ukrainian news site NV said it had only [managed to confirm](#) the liberation of one of the villages. NV reported that two were still occupied and it was unable to confirm the status of the fourth village.

Unverifiable videos of explosions have been posted on Telegram groups in Kherson city and the neighbouring occupied town of Nova Kakhovka. Ukraine's southern command, meanwhile, said Russia had suffered heavy losses in the last 24 hours, both in terms of fighters and equipment.

The US state department [cited](#) an anonymous Pentagon official saying he did not want to "characterise the actions there as a counteroffensive just yet" and that it would take 24 to 36 hours for the clarity to emerge.

The soldiers on the frontline in the Kherson region who spoke to the Guardian asked to remain anonymous because they are not allowed to talk to the media without permission. One soldier said there was no counteroffensive, the other said that battles were taking place but to halt a Russian offensive launched last week.

Humeniuk said the fighters are not qualified to give assessments about operations and that such public comments should be left to high-level commanders.

The soldiers' accounts could not be verified but they appear to be in line with reports by the [Wall Street Journal](#) earlier this month that neither Ukraine nor Russia has what it needs for a decisive offensive. Instead "both are preparing for positional warfare".

"There is no counteroffensive and there won't be," said a fighter who has been serving on the frontlines in Kherson region since March. "There might be an imitation of one but there won't be a real one. We absolutely do not have the weaponry for one."

"The Russians feel completely comfortable in their positions ... they are not scared of us; there's no reason to be scared of us," the fighter said.

"For each missile that we launch, they launch 50, 40, 30. Of course, the proportions can change depending on the situation," he said. "We don't have offensive equipment. You can't launch an offensive with [US-made rocket system] HIMARS."

A commander also serving on the frontlines in Kherson said there were currently battles going on north of Kherson city and in the Beryslavskyi district to halt a Russian offensive that had started last week.

"These are planned actions to hinder the enemy's actions," he said.

He added, however, that efforts by Ukrainian forces over the last few days had yielded some successes.

"It has been noticed that [Russian] units have retreated closer to the [River] Dnipro. Some [of their units] are crossing to [Ukraine's left bank]."

The commander said the Russians were now trying to regain their positions using missile strikes, including on Mykolaiv, the main city next to the frontlines. He said that the Russians did not have enough strength for a ground operation but could change the situation with a "missile terror".

“They are preparing to strike right now from Skadovsk and Oleshkiy,” he added, two towns in the occupied Kherson region.

Zelenskiy did not address the counteroffensive specifically during his Monday evening address, but said: “The occupiers should know: we will oust them to the border. To our border, the line of which has not changed.”

Shortly after the announcement of the counteroffensive, on Monday afternoon, advisers to Ukraine’s presidential administration appeared to roll back on the announcement, asking for restraint from the media and commentators in order not to raise public expectations.

One, Mykhailo Podolyak, warned politicians, experts and opinion leaders not to speculate about the progress of a military operation before Ukraine’s defence ministry and army issued official statements.

“I understand our wishes and dreams ... But war is not ‘content’. Let’s filter information and work professionally out of respect for our defenders,” he wrote on Telegram.

The deputy head of the Russian-installed administration in the occupied Kherson region, Kirill Stremousov, said in a telephone interview that “everything in Kherson was under control”, claiming that Ukrainian spies and saboteurs were killed near Kherson’s Tavriiskyi neighbourhood on Tuesday.

Earlier in the day, reports emerged that Stremousov had left Kherson after a video he posted appeared to [indicate](#) that he was in Voronezh, a Russian city 600 miles from Kherson.

When asked by the Guardian about his location, Stremousov said that he was “travelling around Russian cities, meeting different people for work”.

“I don’t have to sit [in Kherson]. I am the deputy head of the region and have the opportunity to move around ... These are working trips.”

“Kherson will remain my base,” he added, denying that he left Kherson out of safety concerns.

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Stremousov became the most senior Russian-appointed official in Kherson, after the local governor, Volodymyr Saldo, was taken to hospital amid a suspected poisoning earlier in the summer.

Stremousov’s apparent departure from Kherson comes after another Russian-appointed official in the region, Alexei Kovalev, was shot dead in his home over the weekend.

In the past months, a number of Ukrainian nationals appointed by Russian forces in occupied territory have been killed or wounded in apparent partisan attacks.

Russia’s defence ministry acknowledged a Ukrainian offensive had been launched in the Mykolaiv and Kherson regions but said it had failed and the Ukrainians had suffered significant casualties, the RIA news agency reported. The “enemy’s offensive attempt failed miserably”, it said.

A Ukrainian barrage of rockets left the Russian-occupied town of Nova Kakhovka just east of the city of Kherson without water or power, officials at the Russian-appointed local authority later told the outlet. The Guardian could not confirm their claims.

The Kremlin press secretary, Dmitry Peskov, said on Tuesday that Russia’s “special military operation” was going to plan, when asked at a press

briefing to respond to news of the counteroffensive.

On Monday, a mission from the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) arrived in Kyiv, according to Ukraine's foreign ministry. The mission was to travel to the Zaporizhzhia nuclear power plant in Russian-occupied territory for an inspection and to give technical assistance. The plant has been damaged by fighting. Russia captured it in early March but it is still run by Ukrainian staff.

The world was on edge last week when fighting cut off vital electricity supplies to the plant, disconnecting it from the grid for the first time in history.

The IAEA mission will spend four days at the plant, leaving on Saturday, according to the Wall Street Journal. It remains to be seen if the mission will be able to travel, as shelling continues in and around the nuclear plant. Both sides trade blame for the attacks. Ukraine claims they are false-flag attacks.

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Ukraine

Explainer

Ukraine claims counteroffensive in the south – explained

Kyiv says attempt to retake ground is under way but Russia has dismissed its prospects of success

- This piece is extracted from our First Edition newsletter. To sign up, [click here](#).
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Ukrainian servicemen prepare a Grad multiple-launch rocket system to fire towards Russian positions in Kharkiv earlier this month. Photograph: Anadolu Agency/Getty Images

[Archie Bland](#)

Tue 30 Aug 2022 03.13 EDT Last modified on Wed 31 Aug 2022 00.09 EDT

How did Ukrainian officials frame the attack in Kherson?

At a briefing reported on Monday afternoon, Nataliya Humenyuk, a spokesperson for Ukraine's southern command, said an offensive in Kherson, the only regional capital Russia has been able to secure since the war began, was under way. Her comments came after video circulated that apparently showed a soldier from the Russian-run self-proclaimed republic of Donetsk saying Ukrainian forces had broken through.

The Guardian's Isobel Koshiw in Kyiv [reported comments echoing Humenyuk's last night](#) from Oleksiy Arestovych, a senior adviser to Volodymyr Zelenskiy. Zelenskiy himself did not refer to the attack specifically in his nightly address. But the Ukrainian president said: "The occupiers should know: we will oust them to the border. To our border, the line of which has not changed."

Other Ukrainian officials echoed those claims. Sergiy Khlan, a local deputy and adviser to Kherson's regional governor, said it was "the beginning of the end of the occupation of Kherson region" and "a prepared, well-balanced start of a counteroffensive".

How do they say it has gone so far?

Arestovych said Ukrainian troops were attacking Russian defences along the frontline and claimed they had broken through in several places. He also said ferries on the west bank of the Dnieper River, which are being used to supply Russian forces in the territory, were being shelled.

[The BBC reported](#) officials in Kyiv claiming that US-supplied HIMARS rocket systems had been used to destroy three bridges across the Dnieper as well as temporary bridges created by Russian forces. The BBC also said a Ukrainian operational group in the region claimed a Russian-backed regiment had left its positions and Russian paratroopers had fled.

Ukrainian officials declined to give details of the attack, citing operational security. But their claims could not be independently corroborated. While witnesses reported blasts in the cities of Kherson and Nova Kakhovka, the extent and success of Ukrainian operations are yet to be confirmed.

The [Financial Times reported](#) remarks from John Kirby, a US national security spokesperson, who said Ukraine's actions had "already had an impact on Russia's military capabilities" because Moscow had been forced to divert resources to the region from the east of the country.

This [at-a-glance piece](#) gives a wider picture of the situation in Ukraine this morning, including news of a team of International Atomic Energy Agency inspectors [en route to the Zaporizhzhia nuclear power plant](#) in southern Ukraine, where Kyiv claims Russian occupiers are violating nuclear safety protocols.

What does Russia say?

Russia's state-owned news agency Ria cited the defence ministry in Moscow as acknowledging that Ukrainian troops attempted an offensive in the southern Mykolaiv and Kherson regions. A senior official in Nova Kakhovka told Ria that civilians had been ordered to take refuge in bomb shelters.

The Russian defence ministry said Ukrainian forces had sustained significant casualties and claimed the "enemy's offensive attempt failed miserably". The FT reported that Sergei Aksyonov, the Moscow-appointed governor of Crimea, said on Telegram that the claimed counterattack was "the latest fake [news] from Ukrainian propaganda" and said Ukraine's forces were "taking extremely severe losses".

Again, it is not yet possible to verify these claims, and Russia routinely inflates the scale of Ukrainian losses in its updates. Recently, western and Ukrainian intelligence have noted a buildup of Russian troops and equipment in the region, potentially suggesting Russia was preparing its own offensive.

What are the prospects of success?

Humenyuk told reporters that Russian forces were strong in the region – and that even though morale was low among their ranks, “it was too early to relax”. In comments on his Telegram account reported by the Guardian’s Samantha Lock [on the live blog](#), Arrestovych characterised the action as “a planned slow operation to grind the enemy” and said: “This process will not be very fast, but will end with the installation of the Ukrainian flag over all the settlements of Ukraine.”

Ukraine’s ability to conduct its claimed counteroffensive has been greatly enhanced by the provision of weapons by the west, and Russian positions in the region have been under artillery barrage for weeks and cut off from their supply lines.

But it is too early to say whether those successes will translate to victory on the ground. A US official [quoted by the New York Times](#) said the Pentagon “remained cautious about whether Ukraine’s current military capabilities were sufficient to make significant gains”.

Why is an attack in Kherson significant?

Kherson has huge symbolic and practical significance as the only regional capital to have been secured by the Russian invaders – and if Ukraine can entirely cut off enemy forces on the western bank of the Dnieper, they will have a realistic prospect of success.

That would disrupt Russian attempts to proceed with a sham referendum designed to give credibility to Moscow’s claims that residents of Kherson and other parts of southern Ukraine wish to be part of Russia. For more on how that prospect is viewed by citizens in Kherson, read [this piece](#) by Shaun Walker and Pjotr Sauer from earlier this month, in which one interviewee says: “No one thought about [a referendum] before the war. Now it will be a referendum at gunpoint.”

There has been a growing sense that if Kyiv is to retake the city, it must do so as a matter of urgency: changing weather – including rain that will make

the countryside muddy and far harder for ground troops to traverse – in the autumn means there is a powerful incentive to launch a counteroffensive now. There are also fears European support could fade as the impact of high energy prices begins to take hold.

Success in any operation to take Kherson could break a long period of deadlock – and persuade western allies that it is worth continuing to provide the arms and funding that Ukraine needs. But if an attack fails, Ukrainian morale would be undermined, and Russia's plans to bring the south of the country under its full control would be reinforced.

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[Russia-Ukraine war at a glance](#)[Ukraine](#)

Russia-Ukraine war latest: what we know on day 188 of the invasion

Ukrainian troops mount long-awaited counteroffensive in Kherson; UN team en route to inspect Zaporizhzhia nuclear power plant

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A man stands next to the ruins of his home, destroyed by a Russian strike in Mykolaiv, Ukraine, on 29 August. Photograph: Ümit Bektaş/Reuters

[Samantha Lock](#), [Joe Middleton](#) and [Léonie Chao-Fong](#)

Tue 30 Aug 2022 13.41 EDTFirst published on Mon 29 Aug 2022 20.42 EDT

- Ukrainian troops are [mounting a long-awaited counteroffensive](#) in the southern region of Kherson, military officials have said. “Today

we started offensive actions in various directions, including in the Kherson region,” Ukraine’s southern command spokesperson, Natalia Humeniuk, said on Monday. She declined to provide more details about the offensive but said Ukraine’s recent strikes on Russia’s southern logistical routes had “unquestionably weakened the enemy”.

- **Ukraine’s president, Volodymyr Zelenskiy, has urged Russian soldiers to flee for their lives after his forces launched an offensive to retake southern Ukraine.** Kyiv’s forces have broken through Russian defences in several sectors of the frontline near the city of Kherson, a senior adviser to Zelenskiy claimed. Oleksiy Arestovych said Ukrainian forces were shelling ferries in the Kherson region that Moscow was using to supply Russian-occupied territory on the west bank of the Dnieper River. A separate Ukrainian military source told CNN that its forces had taken back four villages near Kherson after breaking through the frontline in three places, with the main target being Kherson.
- **The Kremlin has insisted that its so-called “special military operation” in Ukraine is going to plan despite the news of Kyiv’s counteroffensive in the south.** The Kremlin spokesperson Dmitry Peskov said: “The special military operation continues, it continues methodically, and in coordination with the current plans. All objectives will be fulfilled.”
- **Ukrainian forces have heightened artillery fire in the south, according to British intelligence.** Several brigades of the Ukrainian armed forces increased the weight of artillery fire in frontline sectors across southern Ukraine early on Monday, the UK Ministry of Defence said in its latest report. Ukrainian long-range precision strikes continue to disrupt Russian resupply.
- **Kherson has been hit by a partial power outage and a partial shutdown of the water supply, Russian state news agencies have cited pro-Russia officials as saying.** Traffic lights and building lights have been [reported to have failed](#) in the Moscow-held region, according to Russian media.

- **The first shipment of grain from Ukraine to the drought-stricken Horn of Africa since the war began has docked in Djibouti.** The UN-chartered vessel Brave Commander is carrying 23,000 tonnes of Ukrainian wheat and will soon be followed by [another vessel carrying 7,000 tonnes](#). The total shipment, which will be unloaded in Djibouti and transported to Ethiopia, is enough to feed 1.5 million people for a month.
- **A team of inspectors from the UN nuclear watchdog arrived in Kyiv on Monday night [en route to the Zaporizhzhia nuclear power plant](#) in southern Ukraine.** The International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) chief, Rafael Grossi, said a team would visit the plant from Wednesday to Saturday. “We must protect the safety and security of Ukraine’s and Europe’s biggest nuclear facility,” Grossi tweeted. Missiles and shells are frequently hitting areas around the power station and nearby towns, prompting fears it may be too dangerous for the mission to proceed. The Kremlin said the IAEA mission was “necessary” but has ruled out vacating the site.
- **A key adviser to Ukraine’s president has accused Russian forces of deliberately shelling corridors for the UN nuclear watchdog inspectors to reach the Zaporizhzhia plant.** Mykhailo Podolyak said [Russia](#) was attempting to force the IAEA mission through Crimea and parts of the Luhansk and Donetsk regions temporarily occupied by Moscow’s forces.
- **The European Commission has said it will donate 5.5m potassium iodide tablets to Ukraine amid fears that fighting in the area of the Zaporizhzhia plant could lead to nuclear catastrophe.** The commission said it had received a request from the Ukrainian government for potassium iodide tablets [“as a preventive safety measure”](#) to increase the level of protection around the nuclear plant.
- **Ukraine has deployed a fleet of dummy rockets to trick Russian forces into wasting expensive long-range missiles on pointless targets, according to reports.** [At least 10](#) Russian cruise missiles have reportedly been fired by Moscow’s naval fleet in the Black Sea at the dummy targets, which are made of wood but look like US-supplied

advanced rocket launcher systems when spotted by Russian drones, the Washington Post reports.

- **Germany and France have issued a joint warning against a ban on tourist visas for Russians, saying such a step would be counterproductive, reports Reuters.** The split on tourist visas will be at the heart of a meeting of the bloc's foreign ministers in Prague on Tuesday and Wednesday as they discuss what further steps they can take to punish Russia for its six-month-old invasion of [Ukraine](#). Defence ministers meeting in Prague are likely to agree in principle on the less controversial step of organising joint military training missions for Ukrainian troops.
- **Russia's Gazprom has informed the French utility company Engie that it is reducing its gas deliveries** owing to a disagreement between the parties over contracts, adding to concerns related to energy supplies.
- **At least four people were killed and four wounded in Russian shelling of Kharkiv,** the regional governor said. Writing on Telegram, Oleh Synehubov said: “As a result of the shelling of the central part of Kharkiv, at least 4 people died and 4 more were injured.”
- **European Union defence ministers are set to pave the way for the establishment of an EU training mission for Ukrainian forces, the bloc's top diplomat, Josep Borrell, said.** Reuters reports that Borrell said: “The situation on the ground continues to be very bad. Ukraine needs our support, and we will continue providing support. A general, overall political agreement (on the training mission) is what I think we have to get today ... I hope we will have a political green light for this mission.”
- **Russia has faced “numerous failures” with Iranian-made drones acquired from Tehran this month for use in the war, according to a senior US administration official.** The official, who spoke on condition of anonymity, said the US understood that Russia had received the delivery of Mohajer-6 and Shahed-series unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs) over several days this month. The official said it was

likely to be part of a Russian plan to acquire hundreds of such vehicles, reports Reuters.

- **Russian forces have killed two people and injured four others in Donetsk, the region's governor said on Telegram.** Pavlo Kyrylenko said the two people were killed in Rozdolne and Pivnichne.
 - **Russia is struggling to find more soldiers to fight in Ukraine and has expanded recruitment efforts by eliminating the upper age limit and by tapping into prisons.** “Many of these new recruits have been observed as older, unfit and ill-trained,” a Pentagon official told journalists on Monday. Russia’s president, Vladimir Putin, decreed last week that his army would increase in size by about 10%, to 1.15 million service personnel, starting from January next year.
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2022.08.30 - Spotlight

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‘People are tired of being ignored while the rich get richer’: Bernie Sanders on anger and hope in the US and UK

[Owen Jones](#)



‘Why, with all this new tech, are we not seeing an improved standard of living?’ ... Bernie Sanders at a unionisation rally in Richmond, Virginia. Photograph: Julia Rendleman/Reuters

The Vermont senator rose from the political margins to become hugely influential within the American left. As he prepares to speak at a London rally, he explains why unions on both sides of the Atlantic must reassert their power



Tue 30 Aug 2022 05.00 EDT

Both are unlikely political sensations who were long consigned to the fringes: Bernie Sanders, an octogenarian US senator who inspired an army of voters far younger than himself; and [Mick Lynch](#), a former blacklisted construction worker and child of Irish immigrants who, as the leader of the Rail, Maritime and Transport Workers union (RMT), shot to national prominence when he humbled [hostile but underinformed broadcast journalists](#). “I think Lynch is touching a nerve,” Sanders says.

The de facto leader of the US left has swung his considerable political heft behind a new campaign – [Enough Is Enough](#) – launched to fight Britain’s mounting cost of living crisis, which was [founded in part by Lynch and the RMT](#). It has certainly touched a nerve: at a recent rally in Clapham, south

London, many of those who had queued around the block were turned away for lack of space. “Enough is enough”, funnily enough, is an expression we use a lot here,” Sanders says. “People are sick and tired of often working longer hours for low wages; sick and tired of their kids having a lower standard of living than them; and they’re sick and tired of billionaires getting richer and richer while they fall behind.

“Why, with all this new tech out there, are they not seeing an improved standard of living? Why not more equality, rather than less equality? Why are living standards deteriorating, not improving? Lynch is asking that, Enough Is Enough is asking that – and it’s hitting a nerve, because people are tired of being ignored while the rich get richer.”

Political cut-through is something Sanders knows a lot about, but it was only something he really achieved in his 70s. Born into a working-class Jewish family in New York, he became the mayor of Burlington, Vermont, at 40, later becoming a House representative and a senator. A longstanding independent, albeit one who has frequently allied with the Democratic party, Sanders championed causes long eschewed by mainstream Democrats, such as universal healthcare, the abolition of student fees, workers’ rights and the anti-war movement. But his dramatic rise – when he was transformed from a marginalised figure to a frontrunner for the Democratic presidential nomination in 2016 – was driven by two major factors.

One was the financial crash, which exposed inequalities and insecurities that disproportionately fell on the backs of younger Americans. The other was the expectations raised by the election of Barack Obama in 2008, which, for millions of Americans with stagnating living standards, ultimately felt dashed. Although neither his 2016 or 2020 bids succeeded, they mobilised a movement that revitalised the US left and transformed it into a major political force in the Democratic party and beyond.

This brings his attention back to a perennial passion – and what he wants to talk to me about: the prospects of the US labour movement. We speak over the phone, but he hits all his rousing lines with the zest of a platform rally. The thread that runs through all his answers is class politics. This is less of a novelty in progressive politics on the British side of the Atlantic – to rousing

cheers at a recent Enough Is Enough rally, Lynch proclaimed: “[The working class is back](#)” – but it was long considered alien in a US that peddled a myth of classlessness. This was a politically convenient myth in a country where, Sanders notes, three rich men have more wealth than the poorest half.

But the Brooklyn-born Vermont senator has a new mission: to deploy his political weight behind efforts to unite the struggles of the US and British labour movements. On Wednesday, Sanders will bring his trademark oratory to [an RMT rally in central London](#).



Sanders as mayor of Burlington in 1981. Photograph: Donna Light/AP

The labour movements in the US and Britain are significantly weaker than most of their western counterparts. In the US, trade unions had been long hobbled by “red scares” and anti-union so-called “right to work” laws, but they were severely weakened under Ronald Reagan, whose administration, in 1981, [fired more than 11,000 striking air traffic controllers](#) to send a salutary lesson to other workers. Today, little more than one in 10 US workers are unionised. British trade unionism did not suffer such a comprehensive rout, but the number of organised workers – about a quarter of the workforce – is half the level of the peak in 1979.

Does Sanders believe both labour movements are learning lessons? “I think what we’re beginning to see here in the US is a significant acceleration of trade union organising,” he says. “We are seeing more workers organising in unions, filing with the National Labour Relations Board [NLRB] to get certification – more than for a very long time.”

What has made him particularly optimistic is workers’ struggles in the union deserts of Starbucks and Amazon. Sanders recently joined striking Starbucks workers on a picket line in Boston. After [more than 85 union organisers were fired by the coffee chain](#) in recent months – the NLRB has filed multiple complaints against the firm – his support has boosted the national profile of the fight. “In Starbucks and Amazon, hundreds are joining unions – in Amazon, [they’re taking on Jeff Bezos](#), the second wealthiest person in the world. We’re seeing struggles in university campuses, hospitals, nurses – we’re seeing unprecedented organising compared to what we’ve seen in recent years.”

But he touches on an apparent contradiction: “While the middle classes decline while the rich become richer and richer, there’s more support for the trade union movement in the US – people feel much stronger about unions than previously.” And he is right: last year, 68% of [Americans told pollsters they approved of unions](#), the highest level since 1965, while polling in the UK has shown that most working-age Britons [back the current wave of strikes](#). Yet that hasn’t translated into most joining a union. Why?

“In the US, corporations make it very hard for workers to exercise their constitutional rights to form a union,” Sanders says. “[Last Wednesday], the NLRB found Starbucks had fired workers and rescheduled those shop workers who were forming unions – which is illegal. We are seeing companies threatening workers that they’ll go to China. There’s massive corporate opposition to workers forming unions in the country.”

He highlights another formidable barrier: “We’ve got a media in the country which is certainly not sympathetic to unions, which will very rarely discuss the benefits of unions, like better working conditions, wages, pensions, et cetera, et cetera. The media is obviously owned by a handful of large corporations who don’t talk about class issues, economic issues. All of that contributes to making it harder for workers to become organised.”

But there is a tradition of militancy among US workers, despite attempts to scrub it out, not least in the 1950s under McCarthyism. During the Great Depression of the 1930s, waves of strikes rippled across US society. Does Sanders see a parallel? “Yes, I do. In the 1930s, there was a massive increase in organising and membership, and workers fought valiantly – they did sit-ins, took on powerful interests. What we are seeing now is real frustration in terms of inflation accounting for wages, with the average US worker earning less than almost 50 years ago – taking into account productivity gains, slightly worse than then. That’s insane!”

Given the likes of Starbucks have so long succeeded in suppressing labour organising, why has there been a blaze of activity? “I’ll tell you why, in my view: a lot of Starbucks workers are younger people. Many of them have college degrees and they’re looking around them: their wages aren’t keeping up with inflation, they can’t afford housing or healthcare or student debt, they’re falling further and further behind compared to their parents, and they’re standing up to the owner of Starbucks – Howard Schultz – saying: ‘You’re worth \$4bn! What’s your problem with allowing us to organise workers?’ And his response is simply to try and fire workers and intimidate them. To some degree, this is a multiracial generational fight – primarily of younger people, but not exclusively – standing up to a billionaire.”

Starbucks has denied all allegations of retaliation. A spokesperson told the Guardian previously that “these individuals are no longer with Starbucks for store policy violations. A partner’s interest in a union does not exempt them from the standards we have always held. We will continue enforcing our policies consistently for all partners.”



A pro-Vietnam war protest in May 1970 that descended into the Hard Hat Riot. Photograph: Stuart Lutz/Gado/Getty Images

But the relationship between the US labour movement and younger progressives has not always been harmonious, to say the least. In the 1960s and 1970s, US labour was led by the gruff former plumber George Meany, a zealous supporter of the Vietnam war, who relished denouncing student protesters as “kookies”. The nadir came in the form of the so-called Hard Hat Riot of 1970, when hundreds of construction and office workers [physically attacked student protesters in New York](#). Is there hope this time for solidarity between trade unionists and the rising US younger left?

“That kind of unity is something we are working on very hard,” says Sanders. “I’ve now held three rallies with progressive union leaderships – with Sean O’Brien, the new president of the Teamsters, and Sarah Nelson, the president of the Association of Flight Attendants – in Chicago, Philadelphia and Boston. What we see at these rallies is unionists coming together with younger progressives – and the unity of those forces, young people fighting for economic and racial justice with a union movement, has incredible potential. To answer the question: it’s absolutely imperative we bring them together – and we are trying to do that.”

When US workers fought bosses in the 1930s, they enjoyed the advantage of the sympathy and political muscle of the president, Franklin D Roosevelt. Joe Biden has repeatedly vowed to be “the most pro-union president ever”, but his career has long been wedded to establishment and “centrist” factions in the Democratic party. Sanders says he knows the president “reasonably well” and points to the 110-page policy platform his team hammered out with Biden’s campaign team in 2020, with taskforces covering areas ranging from healthcare to the environment.

“What the president recognised is that there was, and is, a movement of working people, of young people, who are sick and tired of the status quo, and I think, when we did the American Rescue Plan [to help the US through the pandemic], it was one of the most consequential pieces of legislation for working people in modern history. When we did the Build Back Better legislation [a huge package of measures related to social policy and the climate crisis], it had the support of the president for a multibillion-dollar transformational programme, and it was sabotaged by a couple of conservative senators, but he said: ‘I will stand by the working people of the country and take on the big monied interests.’”



In a presidential candidate debate with Joe Biden in February 2020.
Photograph: Brian Snyder/Reuters

This differs from some of the more pessimistic narratives about Biden from the US left, which is still reeling from Sanders' two presidential-nomination defeats. But his optimism springs not so much from naivety about Biden as from a firm belief in the ability of struggles from below to bend the powerful to act in workers' interests. "You're seeing a progressive movement of people in every state of this country which is beginning to go beyond incremental politics, asking: 'How does it happen that every rich country on Earth – including the UK – has universal healthcare, while we have a dysfunctional system? Why in other countries is university education free, when in this country it's outrageously expensive?'"

I put it to him that his campaigns tapped into discontent, but magnified it and gave it direction. "What my campaign did was to raise issues, and the establishment suddenly discovered millions of people not happy with the status quo who wanted transformational change," he says. Sanders gives the example of the president last week committing to cancel up to \$10,000 (£8,500) of student debt. "Did it go as far as I wanted? No, but is it a significant step forward to alleviate the terrible burden that young people are suffering? Yes, it will help a lot."

Another example is the recently passed Inflation Reduction Act, which, among other things, lowers prescription drug prices and promotes clean energy. "Again, it didn't go as far as we campaigned on, but, on many of those issues, part of what we demanded has been implemented."

What next for the US left? The youthful optimism of this 80-year-old senator appears limitless. Next, he says, they will grow the labour movement and tie it to the progressive movement. "You may or may not know, but, come January, in terms of politics, there will be a stronger underlying progressive presence in the House than at any time in modern history. We are seeing accomplishments at the political level, at the organising level, so we are making progress."

Yet all of this relies on forcing a president to go beyond his comfort zone. Sanders remains one of the most popular politicians in the US, and his campaigns encouraged a galvanised US left to dare to dream of achieving outright political power. What lessons would a future campaign learn from

his attempts, which transformed political debate in the US, but failed to secure him the presidency?

Sanders does a laugh anyone will recognise – the “I do not want to talk about this now” laugh. “That’s a long question – a very long question!” Again, he highlights his campaigns’ signature accomplishments – underlining that “a significant part of society is not happy with the status quo, that they’re sick and tired of income and wealth inequality and they want fundamental changes in our economic and political system”. But he clearly believes he was hobbled by establishment hostility. “When you take on the political establishment and the media establishment and the corporate establishment … it’s not an easy thing to do. We need time and we certainly didn’t have that luxury.”

I wonder, too, if he recognises that Enough Is Enough has emerged in large part because of a vacuum left by a Labour leadership that has abandoned any pretence of transformative change. Sanders is diplomatic. “I think it’s not dissimilar to what we’re seeing in the Democratic party here – I’m not commenting on the Labour party; I don’t know enough,” he says. Referring to traditional left-of-centre parties struggling in the global north, he adds: “Because working-class people are increasingly alienated from the political process, those parties are not delivering for them. That’s why the Democrats have a choice to make: are they the party of the working class or the elite?”

The legacy of Sanders, surely, is that he brought together otherwise fragmented and disillusioned pockets of discontent into a highly visible and articulate movement with confident demands. Maybe – just maybe – he can help pull off the same trick by helping to unite the increasingly assertive labour movements on both sides of the Atlantic.

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Spat at, abused and run off the road: why do some people hate cyclists so much?



‘Why do drivers not thank us?’ ... Helen Pidd cycling in Manchester city centre. Photograph: Christopher Thomond/The Guardian

Bike riders have always faced aggression from car drivers. But they now find themselves on the latest front in the culture wars – with anger whipped up by the rightwing press



[Helen Pidd](#)

Tue 30 Aug 2022 00.57 EDT Last modified on Tue 30 Aug 2022 03.50 EDT

I felt like a bit of a legend when I started cycling in [London](#) 18 years ago. Everyone was always congratulating me on my bravery. “Oh, you wouldn’t catch me on a bike,” people would say if they spotted my helmet or the cycling shorts peeking out beneath my dress. “Far too dangerous.”

To be fair, it was quite hairy at times. Cycle superhighways were yet to be invented; bike lanes were marked out in paint, at best, rather than protected by any kind of physical barrier; and cab drivers still seemed surprised to see me. Young and dumb enough to believe myself invincible, I rather enjoyed the sense of peril, timing my turns to avoid getting wiped out by a bendy bus and feeling like a warrior princess at the end of every commute. I was sometimes on the receiving end of catcalls – “Lucky saddle!” or “Ride me instead!” – but no one seemed to actively hate me. Those were the days.

Fast forward to 2022 and [Greater Manchester](#), where I now live, and I recently had a conversation with a driver whose opening gambit was: “If I

had my way I'd put all cyclists up against the wall and have them shot." As a journalist I've become accustomed to abuse on social media from people I've never met. But this guy was saying it to my face. He ran a walking group and saw cyclists as the enemy rather than allies in a car-centric society.

A few months earlier I'd noticed another man persistently calling me an "absolute prick" on Twitter. He would copy in Andy Burnham, as if the mayor of Greater Manchester cared who my haters were. My crime, it emerged, was [campaigning with a local group](#) to make our suburb of Stockport a bit safer and nicer to walk or ride a bike around.

It was the bike bit he seemed to object to. He accused me of being an incomer set on "ruining our village – she's not from here and she's not welcome". I quickly worked out who he was. I don't usually engage with trolls but since he was local I sent him a message saying I knew who he was, what business he ran, and suggested he meet me face to face to call me a prick. He deleted his profile.



Not-so-hi-vis? Cyclists struggle in traffic at Waterloo in London.
Photograph: format4/Alamy

All of that was before the Daily Mail ran a front-page story earlier this month that claimed the government wanted to introduce numberplates for cyclists, and crack down on two-wheeled speeding. “There is a growing belief among ministers that riders should abide by the same speed restrictions and other road rules as motorists amid a cycling boom.” The transport secretary, Grant Shapps, was quoted saying he wanted “a review of insurance and how you actually track cyclists who do break the laws”.

It was a quiet news day and suddenly every radio phone-in had a topic sure to light up their hotlines. Never mind that neither idea stands up to more than a moment’s scrutiny. [Only last year](#) the Department for Transport ruled out any sort of bicycle registration system on the basis that the costs would outweigh the benefits, and that it would deter many people from cycling, particularly if riders (including children) had to cover the costs. Then there are the practical difficulties: registration plates would need to be large enough to be seen by cameras and other road users, and there is not generally enough space on bikes to allow for this. There is a reason [only North Korea](#) has persisted with licence plates.

As for stopping cyclists speeding: you can only do that if you insist all bikes are fitted with accurate speedometers. Would it really be worth it when most people can’t cycle fast enough to break even a 20mph speed limit? There are already laws to punish cyclists who cause an accident through their reckless riding. Remember [Charlie Alliston, who went to jail](#) after killing a woman in London when riding a bike with no front brakes?



Bike-car gridlock at a junction on Oxford Street in London's West End.
Photograph: Monica Wells/Alamy

At [British Cycling](#), which looks after the interests of 150,000 ordinary cyclists as well as training Britain's Olympians, a decision was taken not to engage in what bosses saw as "a needless culture war which only serves to increase the already sky-high hostility and aggression we face on the roads". But as the day went on, Nick Chamberlin, British Cycling's policy manager, started to get calls from members feeling the heat.

"Six different British [Cycling](#) members in different parts of the country told us they had a copy of that Daily Mail held out of a window at them that day, as they were abused," says Chamberlin. "They were sworn at and in one case a lady was spat at, and there was various incomprehensible abuse of the 'we're going to get you' type, and they had that paper waved at them." He says members have reported an increase in "punishment passes", where drivers deliberately pass them closely to give them a scare.

Talk to anyone who rides bikes in Britain regularly and they will probably have at least one story of deliberate driver aggression. The unlucky ones will have the scars to prove it. The really unfortunate ones are no longer with us. But are things really getting worse? Why do some people hate cyclists so much?

In 2020, only 1.8% of traffic mileage in Britain was from cyclists. But in the Netherlands, 27% of all journeys are by bike

The weird thing is that, compared with most other European countries, hardly anyone here cycles, so all the noise about cycling is wildly disproportionate to the number of people doing it. From 2015 to 2019, cycling accounted for just 0.9% of all traffic mileage in Britain. That doubled in 2020 when the pandemic hit, to 1.8%. Recent [figures from the Department for Transport](#) suggested a further increase this year as fuel prices rose, with cycling levels in England rising by 47% on weekdays and 27% on weekends in the five months to the end of July. That's still chickenfeed compared with the Netherlands, where 27% of all journeys are by bike.

Given how few of us saddle up in Britain, it can be difficult to understand why we inspire such vitriol. Why do drivers not thank us for not adding another metal box to their traffic jams, instead of getting irritated when we skip to the front of the queue? Why are they not grateful that we are keeping our hearts healthy, saving the NHS a fortune?

Some may say we are just too damn smug. Others cannot stand the sight of our bottoms in Lycra as we wait in front of them at the lights. Sarah Mitchell, chief executive of Cycling UK, another membership organisation, thinks that special cycle clothing helps drivers to “other” cyclists, leading [Australian researchers](#) to report a few years back that a third of people see cyclists as “less than fully human”.

“People can behave aggressively towards cyclists because they see them as dehumanised,” Mitchell agrees. “One of the things I feel I have a responsibility to do as a leader of Cycling UK, and as a woman, is to cycle around in ordinary clothes.”

Some believe the wearing of hi-vis and helmets encourages drivers to behave badly. [One memorable study](#) from Dr Ian Walker of Bath University found that cars passed closer to cyclists who were wearing helmets. They also gave riders a wider berth if they thought they were women (he wore a long blond wig for that part of the experiment).



‘Cycling is just easy walking’ ... Chris Boardman. Photograph: Mike Lawn/Shutterstock

When he became Greater Manchester’s walking and cycling commissioner in 2017, former Olympic champion [Chris Boardman](#) decided he was not going to allow himself to be photographed in Lycra any more. Nor would he wear a helmet if just pootling around town, even when filming segments on his bike for ITV4’s Tour de France coverage.

“A lot of people in this country – not other countries – see cyclists as middle-aged men in Lycra. I want it to be my daughter going to the park, and just moving around without having to drive. That’s an image that I think we need to prioritise,” says Boardman, recently appointed by Boris Johnson to be England’s active travel commissioner.

He also decided to stop using the word cyclist, preferring “person on a bike” because it is a reminder there is a human in the saddle. “Cycling is just lazy walking,” says Boardman. “That’s how we need to see it. That’s what it is in the Netherlands, where 60% of kids ride to school every day. They don’t do it because they’re cyclists. They don’t think of themselves as disciples. They just go to school and cycling is the easiest way to do it.”

Boardman will not be drawn on whether he thinks the culture war on cyclists is leading to more aggression on the road, saying he deals in statistics, not anecdotes, and that there is “statistically proven 70% support for active travel, even if it takes some space away from driving”.

In London, where there are protected cycle lanes across the city and cycling has boomed, particularly among women and people of colour, many people report feeling safer on two wheels. Isabel Hardman, a journalist and broadcaster, says: “It feels pleasant enough to take a child on a cycle commute now. Drivers are more aware of cyclists and I’d say the rise in women on bikes makes cycling culture more enjoyable, too. I’m no longer the only woman at traffic lights, and it feels less like a crazed Strava contest.”

People still question her decision to saddle up, she says: “You get a lot of ‘Is that safe?’ comments from people if you cycle with a kid, whether in a seat or cargo bike. My response is: ‘Well, it depends on how safely *you* drive, doesn’t it?’”



Manchester lawyer and cyclist Jane Bedford, who has been a recent victim of two aggressive verbal attacks while riding her bike. Photograph: Christopher Thomond/The Guardian

Jane Bedford, a lawyer in [Manchester](#), grew up in a household without a car and has cycled all her life. She thinks she receives more abuse now when out on her bike, citing two scary experiences from the past six months alone. In one, she was followed to her flat by an angry man who drove at her in his Mini. Her crime? To exclaim “Dude!” after he blocked her path when he was leaving the McDonald’s drive-through. He had a child in the front seat but that didn’t stop him driving his car at her, then shouting at her to “Shut up, you fat woman.”

Chamberlin points out that cyclists have an unfair reputation for being aggressive simply because they often shout back when they are threatened by drivers. Cars pose an existential threat to cyclists in a way that doesn’t apply the other way around, he says: “The cyclist experiences something much more unpleasant, much more threatening and terrifying than an occupant of a vehicle. That’s why when you threaten a cyclist, they may have a massive rush of adrenaline and swear back at you. That’s why the interaction sticks in the brains of both sides in a way that other road rage doesn’t.”

The fact that space is slowly being taken away from cars to make way for protected bike lanes may be making drivers resentful, says Bedford. Last month, she burst into tears when a man in an Audi shouted at her for not using a new segregated lane when she left it to turn right.

“I’ve been cycling in Manchester for the last 15 years and I’d say that in the last two years, I’ve noticed a definite decline not just in driving standards, but also an increase in aggression. Close passes. And not really giving a lot of consideration to cyclists,” she says.

Bedford handles cyclist claims for Leigh Day solicitors and says she has noticed an increase in inquiries from cyclists in the last six months “centred around aggression”. The day we speak she has been reviewing a claim from someone who had been involved in a verbal altercation with a driver who then rammed into the back of them and drove off.



A rider on one of London's cycle superhighways. Photograph: Nathaniel Noir/Alamy

Any cyclist who claims they never see others pedalling merrily through red lights or on the pavement is probably not telling the truth. But as the lead for fatal road accidents for the National Police Chiefs' Council, Det Ch Supt Andy Cox, says, the anti-cycling hysteria is out of all proportion to the danger cyclists pose to society. [According to the DfT](#), cars are the vehicle type most often involved in fatal collisions when members of other parties are killed, followed by lorries and vans. Very few other road users – [four pedestrians in 2020](#) – are killed in collisions with cyclists.

Also in 2020, 141 cyclists were killed in road accidents in Great Britain, compared with 618 car occupants. Yet less than 2% of all traffic mileage was made by bikes, compared with 73% by cars and taxis.

“It is a very, very rare event for cyclists to cause the death of somebody else. So, proportionately speaking, our focus should be on the vehicle,” says Cox. “I think we need to reflect on that number of cyclists dying each year. That’s a shocking amount of devastation that’s not needed, not acceptable. And I think drivers just need to think about that when they decide to push by.”

That's why he thinks that most road traffic enforcement should focus on drivers. "I always say we should enforce proportional to risk. So, for example, if cycling kills less than 1%, our enforcement should broadly match the risk it poses, so less than 1%. We should enforce cycle offences where appropriate, such as red light breaches, because of the risks they pose to themselves and others. But I think we should focus and really draw attention to the greatest likelihood of harm, and that is vehicle related."

Why bike lanes don't make traffic worse

When influential newspapers are intent on whipping up a culture war, pitting cyclists against everyone else, can we hope for more enlightened attitudes? Boardman thinks anti-cyclist rhetoric will soon run out of road, as our streets become clogged with motor traffic to the point of gridlock: [almost 60bn more miles](#) were driven on UK roads in 2019 than 10 years ago.

"We have to think about what outcomes we want," he says. "The question that is never asked in all of this is: if you make driving easier, will you create the kind of place where you want to live? If you win, then what?"

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Kwasi Kwarteng

Ghosts of Empire: what Kwasi Kwarteng's book tells us about him

A 2010 book on the British empire by the man set to be chancellor shows a very different worldview to that of some of his Tory colleagues



Kwasi Kwarteng's conclusions in *Ghosts of Empire* are quietly, firmly critical of Britain's global legacy. Photograph: Rob Pinney/Getty Images



[Amelia Gentleman](#)

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The [British empire](#) was an anti-democratic, poorly governed institution that created some of the world's worst geopolitical flashpoints. Steeped in public school snobbery, it otherwise had very little unifying ideology.

“Much of the instability in the world is a product of its legacy of individualism and haphazard policymaking,” [Kwasi Kwarteng](#) concludes in *Ghosts of Empire: Britain’s Legacies in the Modern World*, published a few months after his election in 2010 as the MP for Spelthorne. He claimed to be sidestepping the “sterile debate” over whether “empire was a good or bad thing”, but the book’s conclusions are quietly, firmly critical.

There is nothing contentious about his arguments, and his narrative has none of the fury of Sathnam Sanghera’s *Empireland*, but the book was still described as controversial by some reviewers on publication, simply because it was seen as startling that a Conservative MP would reject Niall Ferguson’s then recent boosterish revisionist take on empire.

Ghosts of Empire has been less closely scrutinised than Kwarteng's subsequent publication, Britannia Unchained, which he co-wrote with fellow MPs including Liz Truss, Priti Patel and Dominic Raab. But now that he is widely expected to be named chancellor within days, the business secretary's back catalogue is being pored over for insights into his political worldview.

The Conservative party's culture war on empire continues to rage. While Kwarteng's rejection of nostalgia for empire is barely remarkable, it makes him an outlier among senior Tories. In a [Spectator piece in 2002](#), Boris Johnson wrote that the African continent "may be a blot, but it is not a blot on our conscience", adding: "The problem is not that we were once in charge, but that we are not in charge any more."

Michael Gove said too much history teaching was informed by postcolonial guilt, and these sentiments have been echoed by newer ministers. Suella Braverman claimed recently that "the British empire was a force for good", pointing to the "administration, the civil services, the infrastructure, ports, railways, roads". Kemi Badenoch said that while "terrible things" happened under the empire, there were also "good things" and "we need to tell both sides of the story". Nadhim Zahawi agreed that children should be taught about the empire's supposed benefits, arguing: "Iraq was left a legacy of a British civil service system that actually served the country incredibly well for many, many decades."

In his book, Kwarteng rejects any attempt to portray the British empire as an enlightened liberal force promoting democracy around the world. "Far from being harbingers of liberal pluralism, the servants of empire were naturally at home with the idea of human inequality, with notions of hierarchy and status."

What else does the book reveal about Kwarteng? As the new prime minister's closest colleague, how might this perspective help shape the new government's thinking?

Firstly, he is very well informed about this subject. It is sad that this is remarkable, but it is significant at a time when it has been accepted that civil servants and politicians have become so ignorant about Britain's colonial

past that the Home Office is in the process of devising an education module designed to instruct officials about the legacy of empire.

Accepting a series of recommendations designed to ensure her department avoided a repeat of the Windrush scandal, Patel promised to launch a mandatory training session on race, empire and colonialism for all staff. There was official recognition that the ignorance of politicians and officials on this subject had led in part to the scandal in which thousands of people who moved to Britain from its former colonies were wrongly classified as being in the country illegally.

Presumably Kwarteng's readiness to confront the failings of empire will make him unsympathetic to the cheerleading patriotism of his colleagues – a relentless positivity that has led, for example, to officials [refusing to make public](#) a Home Office-commissioned history of immigration legislation that concluded: “The British empire depended on racist ideology in order to function.”

Kwarteng's book studies six areas in detail – Iraq, Kashmir, Burma, Sudan, Nigeria and Hong Kong – looking at how catastrophic mistakes by British colonial administrators continue to make large parts of the world dangerously unstable. He describes how the establishment of the puppet Hashemite dynasty in Iraq was a disaster and how British colonisers' rash decision to install a Hindu maharajah to rule over Muslim-majority Kashmir had dire consequences.

He has a particular fascination with analysing the establishment roots of the administrators (we learn a lot about which prep school, public school and Oxbridge college the colonisers attended, and whether they were more taken with cricket or Eton fives).

His chapter on Sudan reveals that of the 56 senior administrators taken on between 1902 and 1914, 27 had a blue from Oxford or Cambridge; they played polo in Darfur, organised lavish balls in Khartoum, and their chaotic administrative decisions had calamitous results.

You would hope that his familiarity with the fallout from mistakes made by colonial administrators might give him a different perspective on Britain's

responsibility towards people crossing the Channel to seek asylum in the UK.

There are currently as many as 1,000 people from Sudan and South Sudan in Calais hoping to cross to the UK, according to Care4Calais; the vast majority of them do not have money to pay people smugglers for places on the small boats crossing the Channel, and spend longer trying to smuggle themselves into lorries. Will his understanding of the roots of the conflict make him more thoughtful about the wisdom of threatening to dispatch those who risk their lives to seek sanctuary here to asylum processing centres in Rwanda?

The book is well written and full of memorable detail. We learn that Lord Kitchener's weird father had such an aversion to bed linen that he forced his family to use newspapers instead of blankets.

We discover that General Charles Gordon was delighted to be posted to Sudan, declaring before he left: "I dwell on the joy of never seeing Great Britain again, with its horrid, wearisome dinner parties and miseries." If Kwarteng's budget statements are written in an equally lively style, it will be a source of some happiness for lobby correspondents.

Kwarteng (educated at Eton, Cambridge and Harvard, and born to Ghanaian parents) offers a biting analysis of hierarchy and snobbery that moulded the empire, detailing which rank of Indian princes were allowed to send Christmas cards or albino tiger skins to Queen Victoria, and setting out the table of precedence in Hong Kong's colonial administration, which made clear that the superintendent of prisons was seven points lower in the rankings than the manager of the railways.

He divides administrators between cads and bounders and reliable, unassuming, understated operators. Colleagues should assume he will be watching for any modern echoes of bureaucratic absurdity and storing them up for his memoirs.

His sharpest criticism of empire is of the "anarchic individualism" that ran through it. "The reliance on individual administrators to conceive and execute policy with very little strategic direction from London often led to

contradictory and self-defeating policies, which in turn brought disaster to millions,” he writes. There are moments where you wonder if the criticism of the inconsistent, haphazard way that Britain’s imperial rule was imposed might equally be applied to the Conservative party’s reshuffle-heavy rule of the UK over the last decade.

This article was amended on 30 August 2022 to correct a reference to Kwasi Kwarteng being educated at Oxford University. He attended Trinity College, Cambridge.

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Good mourning Britain: how chillout music soundtracked the death of Diana



Licence to chill ... the UK airwaves were briefly taken over by the Aloof and Sabres of Paradise. Illustration: Guardian Design

When Princess Diana died 25 years ago, Radio 1 replaced its entire playlist. Why did it decide that a 10-minute ambient epic was the best choice for a

royal elegy?

Phil Harrison

Tue 30 Aug 2022 03.00 EDT

What was the soundtrack to Diana, Princess of Wales's death? Surely Elton John's [Candle in the Wind 1997](#)? After all, it's the biggest-selling UK single of all time. But no: if you were listening to Radio 1 – and back in late summer 1997, tens of millions still were – the musical backdrop to Diana's death was downbeat trip-hop and ambient techno. It was Apollo 440. It was the Sabres of Paradise. It was the Aloof. It was chillout music.

Radio 1 had long been sensitive about its playlists at moments of national crisis: during the first Gulf war, for example, Phil Collins's In the Air Tonight was one of many songs banned for somewhat tangential reasons. At the point of Diana's death, there was already a sense that the station's "Obituary CDs" (which then were literally a set of compilation CDs of tasteful instrumental music, kept in a cupboard in each studio) needed an upgrade. Not too upbeat, not too bleak and, crucially, lacking any lyrics that could be interpreted as offensive, chillout was the perfect music to accompany a national tragedy.

This largely instrumental genre had originated in the aftermath of the ecstasy-infused [second summer of love in 1988](#). Poised somewhere between bliss and melancholy, compilations of chillout and downtempo music had been offering soft landings to overstimulated ravers for almost a decade. Now it was repurposed; introduced to listeners with no experience of its illicit origins.



Sad songs say so much ... Elton John singing Candle in the Wind at the funeral of Princess Diana in 1997. Photograph: Anwar Hussein/WireImage

It seems fitting that one of the oddest periods in recent British history should have this tonally awkward broadcasting conundrum embedded in its DNA. The mid-90s were a hedonistic, flippant, slightly wild time. The excesses of Cool Britannia were reaching terminal velocity – as characterised by the unwieldy bloat of Oasis's third album [Be Here Now](#), which was released just days before the tragic car accident in Paris. Even to non-royalists, Diana's death felt like something painfully and incongruously real, cutting through the frivolity of the era. A hangover was probably inevitable. But how was it for those musicians either consciously or inadvertently involved in soundtracking this sudden outpouring of sadness and confusion?

"The night of her death we'd been out to a club," remembers the Aloof's Jagz Kooner, somewhat inevitably. "The following day, I thought I should put the radio on, to see what was going on. They were playing a couple of things on a loop. There was that Puff Daddy tune [I'll Be Missing You], then something else, then the Aloof and then back to Puff Daddy again! I thought the radio was broken! In the end, we were on repeat, several times an hour, for days and days. It helped feed me for a while!"

The Aloof were a London-based outfit whose mixture of electronica and dub had coalesced in the aftermath of the acid house explosion. The track that became an unwitting ode to Diana was a 10-minute instrumental epic called The Last Stand – which had emerged as a reworking of their single One Night Stand. Fittingly, its origins were rooted in another aspect of mid-90s excess – production values. Thanks to the self-conscious grandeur of bands such as Oasis and Manic Street Preachers, string sections were de rigueur. “We’d recorded a 32-piece orchestra for One Night Stand,” says Kooner. “The original tune has vocals, drums, bass, synths and all sorts going on. It doesn’t let the strings have their moment of glory.” The Last Stand is a demonstration of the maxim that less is more – possibly an idea that the culture had forgotten in the previous years.



Dead set ... Jagz Kooner (left), with Andrew Weatherall and Gary Burns in Sabres of Paradise. Photograph: Steve Double/Camera Press

Over at Radio 1, in a variety of ways, order was emerging from chaos. The station had just experienced Matthew Bannister’s revolution with older, more staid DJs being replaced by a raft of younger, edgier voices. This was an overdue cleaning of the stables but not without its problems. Would the recently arrived breakfast DJ Chris Moyles find the right tone during a period of national mourning? Could Mark Radcliffe and Marc “Lard” Riley temper their sometimes abrasive irreverence? To prevent the nation from

finding out the hard way, Jeff Smith, who was head of music policy at the time, got to work on updating the obituary CDs and artists such as the Aloof got their moment in the spotlight.

The sheer scale and intensity of public reaction to Diana's death took everyone by surprise. This was not an atmosphere in which presentational or musical faux pas would have been easily forgiven. Former Radio 1 Newsbeat presenter Tina Ritchie now looks back on the week with amazement. "I was sent to Kensington Palace to do vox pops with the people who had gathered," she says. "I was standing among these flowers, basically justifying my existence. There was a really hostile attitude towards the press. Basically, once they saw me with a microphone, I might as well have murdered her."

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However, at Radio 1, there was also a tacit recognition of being part of history. Ritchie's husband, presenter [Nicky Campbell](#), was one of the station's big beasts at the time. While he describes the general mood there as "poleaxed" by the news, he also hints, wryly, at a tiny, unspoken element of professional pride creeping into DJs' reactions. "[Station executive] Kate Marsh at Radio 1 was allocating roles," he says. "And she told me she wanted me to present a special two-hour programme of music and memories. It was like I'd been given the crown jewels. And then I found out that [Simon] Mayo had been given the job of being there on the day [of the funeral] and reporting on it. It produced a festering jealousy that I've never quite recovered from!"

Looking back on this bizarre period, all parties still view it with a degree of incredulity. Campbell regards the outpouring of angry grief as a harbinger of the century to come. “You could probably mark the reaction to Diana’s death as the first significant kickback against the so-called mainstream media, he says. “It wasn’t quite ‘The Bilderberg Group and Bill Gates are controlling everything’ but it was certainly a case of trust starting to go.”

Kooner, too, remains gently bewildered by the memory of the hysteria. “That week I had to go to San Francisco because I was doing a gig there,” he says. “I was sitting on the plane between LA and San Francisco, next to this American lady. She was devastated, and she was asking how we all felt. I didn’t want to be rude but I can’t really share that sort of grief. Obviously it was sad that two kids had lost their mum. But I didn’t know her.”

Even if he struggles to share the extreme emotion, the death of royalty remains a strange footnote in Kooner’s career. In addition to the Aloof, he was also a member of electronic group the Sabres of Paradise alongside Gary Burns and the late [Andrew Weatherall](#). When the Queen dies, their track Haunted Dancehall (Nursery Remix) will reportedly be among the tracks on rotation. Is there a particular component of his music that lends itself to such moments? “I don’t know but it’s really weird and it freaked me out when I found out,” he says. “I might have to put it on my gravestone! Purveyor of Monarchy Death Music!”

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/music/2022/aug/30/how-chillout-music-soundtracked-the-death-of-princess-diana>

2022.08.30 - Opinion

- The age of the ‘car is king’ is over. The sooner we accept that, the better
- I’ve learned to appreciate tomato sandwiches, and to relish culinary beef
- I went to the seaside and left my husband at home, swimming in sewage
- The first task for a Prime Minister Truss: get Sunak back into cabinet

OpinionTransport

The age of ‘the car is king’ is over. The sooner we accept that, the better

[John Vidal](#)

Accidents and pollution are making road vehicles untenable. With public transport and ride-sharing, their demise can’t come soon enough

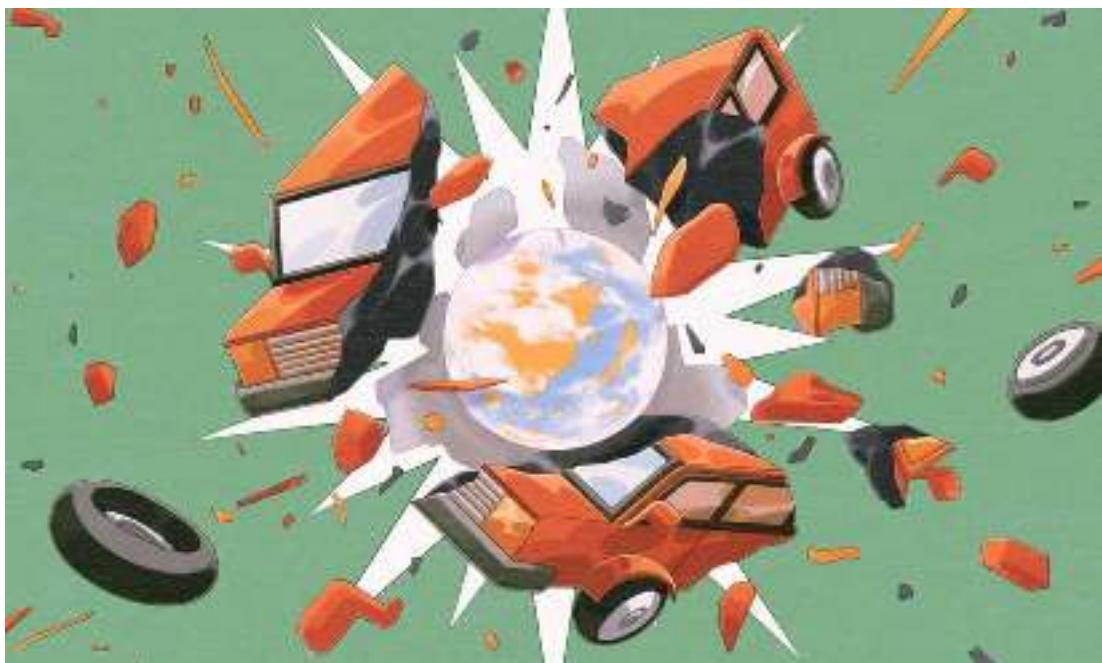


Illustration: Mojo Wang/The Guardian

Tue 30 Aug 2022 03.00 EDT Last modified on Fri 2 Sep 2022 08.23 EDT

In 1989 a group of Chinese government urban planners came to Europe on a fact-finding mission. They were widely praised for curbing car use – the country of 1 billion people, after all, had just a few million vehicles; the bicycle was king; its city streets were safe and the air mostly clean. How did they manage to have so few cars? asked their hosts, grappling as ever with chaotic British streets, traffic jams and pollution.

“But you don’t understand,” replied one of the delegation. “In 20 years, there will be no bicycles in China.”

He was nearly right. China’s breakneck development has been led by mass car ownership. It now has 300m cars – and what was once the kingdom of bikes is now the land of 20-lane motorways, more than [100,000 petrol stations](#) and scrap metal yards. Beijing, Shanghai and most other cities are choked with traffic, their air is some of the worst in the world, and their hospitals are full of children with asthma and respiratory diseases. China, like every other country, is having to rethink the car.

The worldwide love affair with the car, which promised consumers convenience, status and freedom, is over. The reality from Hotan to Hull and Lagos to Lahore is that the car is now a social and environmental curse, disconnecting people, eroding public space, fracturing local economies, and generating sprawl and urban decay. With UK temperatures hitting highs of 40C this summer, this reality has become impossible to ignore. Instead of the prospect of speed and cheap mobility, consumers now get soaring costs, climate breakdown and air pollution, the devastation of nature, mounting debt, [personal danger and ill health](#), and the most serious energy crisis in 30 years.

Now the [World Health Organization is worried](#). Car accidents are the eighth highest cause of death for people of all ages, and the leading cause among young people aged 5-29 worldwide. At least 1.3 million people die in car accidents every year, with a further 20 to 50 million people sustaining injuries, often at phenomenal personal and financial cost.

Here in Great Britain, 24,530 people were [killed or seriously injured](#) on roads in 2020/21. The [cost of all accidents](#), including an estimate of those not reported to the police, was around £28.4bn in 2020, or around 16% of the current NHS budget. In the US it is even worse: government figures show that traffic accidents and their knock-on impacts cost nearly \$1tn (£800bn) a year, and that more than 624,000 people died in fatal crashes between 2000 and 2017. That compares with the 535,000 American military personnel estimated to have died in both world wars. In China, 250,000 people a year die in accidents.



‘Beijing, Shanghai and most other cities in China are choked with traffic.’ Heavy pollution hangs over elevated motorways in Shanghai. Photograph: Johannes Eisele/AFP/Getty Images

But we may be reaching “peak car”, the point at which the world is so saturated with vehicles – and cities and individuals are so fed up or financially stretched by them – that they are banned or voluntarily given up. As UK petrol hits £2 a litre and it costs £100 to fill up a tank – on top of the thousands of pounds paid out in loans and taxes to own a car in the first place – it is unsurprising that young people especially [are eschewing them](#) and taking to other forms of transport.

The auto-magic that has entranced societies for a century has gone. When the cost of living crisis started to bite, Ireland, Italy and others (although not the UK) [cut public transport fares](#) by as much as [90%](#) (in Germany). Spain has gone a step further, announcing that train travel on many routes will be [free from September](#) to the end of the year. Global car sales, already stuttering before the pandemic, are now declining in China, Russia and Germany. UK [new car sales](#) have fallen for five months in a row and the level of UK car ownership has now fallen [for two consecutive years](#) – the first successive drops in ownership in more than a century.

From here on, it looks like death by 1,000 breakdowns for the private car. Just as the coach and horse were pushed out by automobiles 120 years ago, so the car is being steadily evicted from world cities by the authorities or by public revulsion. As thousands of jubilee street parties showed, car-free streets are popular, and the surest and best way to save money, improve health and make cities quieter and more livable. [A recent report](#) from the Centre for London shows how low-traffic neighbourhoods, introduced widely during the pandemic to encourage walking and cycling, reduce car use and make roads safer. Wales has [slashed the default speed limit](#) on residential roads from 30mph to 20mph.

Countries may have little choice but to reduce car use. There is wide agreement that car mileage must be cut [by at least 20%](#) by 2030 just to meet climate targets. Milan, Paris, Hamburg, Copenhagen and most European cities are now either banning cars from their centres on a large scale or making it prohibitively expensive to drive in them. They are pushing at an open door. London car ownership is reducing – and recently, 50,000 Berliners asked the city to impose the [world's largest car ban](#), covering 34 sq miles.

In this urban century, where nearly 70% of people are expected to [live in built-up areas](#) within 30 years and the global population is expected to grow by another 3 billion by 2100, the private car makes little economic or social sense. Ride sharing apps, car sharing, e-bikes and scooters are all hastening the car's demise. City leaders, as well as health, transport and environment groups, are now calling for it to be made easy and affordable for people to leave the car at home or get rid of it – and for cities to be reimaged so that people can access key things like food and health centres on foot or by bike.

It is time for cities to take advantage of lessons learned during the pandemic and the unfolding energy, environment and cost of living crises, and start to design themselves not around the car, but around the bicycle and the pedestrian. But it is also time for those who deify the car, and continue to aggressively assert its place in our social and economic hierarchy – and its untrammelled right to road space – to understand that a page has been turned. The sooner they accept that, the easier the future and their part in it will be.

The car as we know it is fast becoming extinct; it is a relic of a former age. Sitting in a traffic jam in a ton of metal that belches pollution and costs a fortune will surely be seen by future generations as not just stupid, but criminal.

This article was amended on 2 September 2022 to clarify details about the cost of road accidents. The 2020/21 figures for fatalities or serious injuries were for Great Britain, not the UK. The cost cited was for not just these types of accidents, but all accidents. And the original cost cited was for 2016; this has been updated to the 2020 figure to provide a more direct comparison with the accident figures, and the NHS budget comparison has been amended accordingly.

- John Vidal is a former Guardian environment editor
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OpinionSandwiches

I've learned to appreciate tomato sandwiches, and to relish culinary beef

[Rebecca May Johnson](#)

Policing what should go between two slices of bread means missing out one of life's pleasures: breaking all the food 'rules'



'Wildly varying photos of "tomato sandwiches" flooded my timeline.' Dakos, a traditional Cretan dish of rusk, Mizithra cheese, tomato and olive oil. Photograph: Nikolas Kokovlis/NurPhoto/Rex/Shutterstock

Tue 30 Aug 2022 05.00 EDT Last modified on Tue 30 Aug 2022 13.03 EDT

Every few months, someone on social media proclaims a rule about how an ingredient or dish should be cooked or eaten, as if it were gospel. *The only way to cook X is ... You should never eat X ... X is a cursed dish ... The only acceptable time to eat X is when ...* In response other users erupt in anger, upset and excitement, and declare a plethora of ways in which they reject the

rule. The rule is stupid! Out with the rule! The rule misunderstands everything about cooking!

Personally, I eat up culinary beef – as a spectator, at least. The latest row revolved around a question: is a tomato sandwich a real sandwich? A few weeks ago, the American writer Geraldine DeRuiter inflamed opinion with a single tweet (since deleted). “I’m sorry, food Twitter but a ‘tomato sandwich’ is not a sandwich, you just don’t have the ingredients to make a BLT.”

Rebuttals came thick and fast for days. There were two distinct ways I took pleasure in this furore: first, in the period during which the tomato sandwich debate was “live”, I read about hundreds of methods for putting tomatoes with bread and saw dozens of [photographs of delicious-looking sandwiches](#). Cultural histories of tomato served with bread, and regional traditions of “tomato sandwich season” were shared and defended. I was given an opportunity to learn about the varied contexts in which people eat two ingredients of which I am very fond. Recipes abounded; it was though I was eating as I read.

Second, the affront of this rule provoked me into thinking about my own understanding of a tomato sandwich, and then of sandwiches at large. And I wasn’t the only one. Food writer and Vittles founder [Jonathan Nunn](#) countered DeRuiter with [a different rule](#), saying that “a tomato sandwich is not only a thing of beauty, it’s literally the only time tomatoes are allowed in sandwiches”, and proceeded to give *his* recipe: “toasted, possibly buttered bread. one, plump, sliced tomato, olive oil, salt, pepper. half a jar of mayo. maybe a single anchovy, as a treat”.

I thought about Nunn’s rule. I disagreed that a tomato sandwich was the only viable occasion on which to include the red fruit. A sandwich with tomato that I often make involves bread, thick butter, salami and tomato. Recently, too, I have taken nostalgic joy in “salad sandwiches”: crisp lettuce, cucumber, tomato, cheese or ham, butter or margarine, maybe some cress. But also, I realised that I had not previously considered mayonnaise an important component in a tomato-based sandwich. I planned to try Nunn’s recipe with a tomato from my allotment.

As wildly varying photos of “tomato sandwiches” flooded my timeline, I asked myself: what *is* a sandwich? Of course, the fun is in the fact that any new rule I might make about the definition of a sandwich will provoke the creation of other rules by other people. Arguably, a sandwich is a site for the pure play of rules, where the only basis for rule-making anyone need observe is: do I like it? Even if there is a long embedded rule about how to make a sandwich, it is inevitable that each person who enacts this tradition will intervene with their own revised understanding, their own palate, shaped by their own situation in life.

However, here I go with, at the very least, an opinion about sandwiches that I might even call sandwich theory. What I like about sandwiches is how the bread operates as a structure that “holds” us and gives space to our needs at different times. When I am feeling in need of comfort: cheddar, butter and my mother’s lemon and pear chutney. If I want to teleport the feeling of being at a greasy spoon: fried egg and ketchup, with a cup of strong tea as an extension of the sandwich, sipped in between bites. To relive the memory of being in Barcelona with my friend Zoë: boiled egg and sliced raw tomato with salt and pepper.

The reassuring boundaries of a sandwich embolden those who otherwise lack confidence or experience in the kitchen. My father, who usually defers to my mother in culinary matters, loves to experiment with manifold condiments and pickles, and takes great pleasure in making a fish finger sandwich.

In my first book I wrote about making the same recipe a thousand times over a 10-year period. I followed and then broke the rules of a recipe over and over again, like a prolonged version of the Twitter sandwich arguments. Documenting this process became a way of writing about how I had lived in that decade, and the people I had met.

More than anything, I’ve learned that the making and breaking of rules about how we eat is a way of advocating for ourselves – of insisting on our own difficult and delicious ways of living.

- Rebecca May Johnson is the author of [Small Fires](#) and co-editor of Vittles
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OpinionWaste

I went to the seaside and left my husband at home, swimming in sewage

[Zoe Williams](#)



He wanted me to stay when the drains backed up and left the garden submerged in a foul pond. Obviously I still went



'No joke' ... a worker heads down a drain looking for a pipe blockage.
Photograph: Keith Morris/Alamy

Tue 30 Aug 2022 02.00 EDT Last modified on Tue 30 Aug 2022 13.02 EDT

I had four teenagers all packed and ready to go to Ramsgate, and I was doing a quick final scout around the house for where the terrible smell was coming from. I love seeing a teenager with an overnight bag. You just know they've forgotten the real stuff (toothbrush, pants) and remembered the dumb stuff (crochet hooks, spare headphone case). And they look so proud and independent.

In fact, the smell was outside the house, a backed-up drain that had made a zen-looking but appallingly foul pond of the garden. Mr Z came back from work and identified this, just as we were all leaving. "Do you want me to stay?" I said, with a lot of heavy upwards inflection to indicate that no way on earth was I going to. "Well, yes," he replied.

"You think I'm joking," he said. There should be some pre-nuptial course on when not to laugh. "I'm not joking." But this was one drain, and one terrible odour: it wasn't a two-man job, I reasoned. Besides, I had all these teenagers with their little bags.

In fact, it turned out to be a five-man, three-day job. The first day was the simple but unlovely task of shovelling eight sacks of shit and getting rid of it. Really, the only way it could have been more like an aphorism brought to life is if Mr Z had had to eat it. It was unbelievably disgusting work, obviously considerably worsened if your helpmeet was motoring down the M2 and one had had to call a longsuffering handyman and spend all afternoon apologising to him.

The second day was spent waiting for the drains experts, who are in incredibly high demand, since, apparently, this problem is London-wide. The heatwave compacted the detritus and then the heavy rain dislodged it all. Or something. To make matters worse, I wasn't even properly listening when I phoned. The third day was the experts arriving. They had never seen older pipes, they said. They estimated that they hadn't been cleaned since 1821. "Does that mean there were 200-year-old turds in there?" I asked, genuinely curious. "You think this is a joke," Mr Z said. "This is not a joke." It was all finally resolved about five minutes before we walked back in the door, having spent 72 hours pinballing between the arcade and Spoons. I mean, I did some ironing. But I'm not sure how I come back from this.

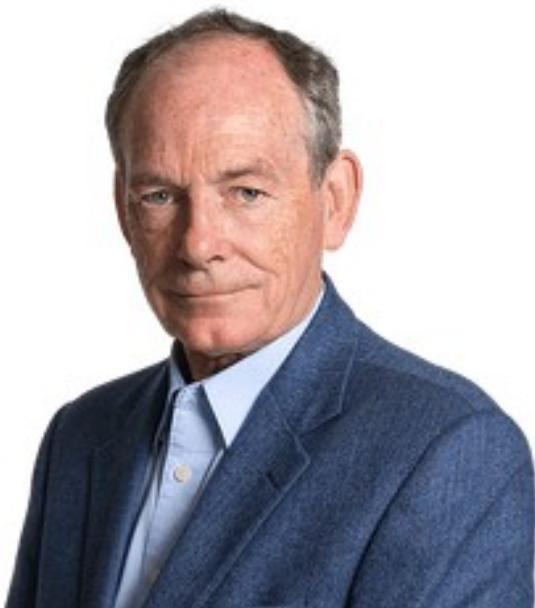
- Zoe Williams is a Guardian columnist
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[**Opinion**](#)[**Conservative leadership**](#)

The first task for a Prime Minister Truss: get Sunak back into cabinet

[Simon Jenkins](#)



Her rival to the Tory throne would at least bring some coherence to an otherwise extraordinarily lightweight front bench



‘Rishi Sunak’s only intellectual equal in the recent cabinet was Michael Gove, who like him despaired of Johnson’s behaviour.’ Photograph: Phil Noble/Reuters

Tue 30 Aug 2022 01.00 EDT Last modified on Tue 30 Aug 2022 09.56 EDT

British politics has this past month been an exercise in torture. Rishi Sunak’s bid for Downing Street is like that of a boxer told at the start of a contest that the judges have already decided he has lost. He has had to fight on while his opponent, Liz Truss, goes on a victory tour. The resulting campaign has so damaged both candidates that Tory members – and the public in general – [would apparently prefer even the discredited Boris Johnson](#) as prime minister. This is the same Johnson who, on resigning two months ago, had an approval rating of [just 19%](#).

Assuming Sunak does indeed lose next week, there remains one thing he could do both for his country and for himself. He could publicly renounce his attacks on Truss, acknowledge her as his party’s chosen leader and offer at once to serve under her. Given their disagreement on economic policy, he might ask to go “offshore” to the Foreign Office in return for a public declaration of loyalty.

On almost every front, Britain currently needs thoughtful and unifying leadership. All Truss has going for her are dismally low expectations. She will inherit from Johnson one of the most lightweight, inexperienced cabinets of modern times. Previous Tory leaders from Thatcher to Major, Cameron and May treated the cabinet as a corporate executive, not as a personal court, embracing critics as well as loyalists. To Johnson, the cabinet was a ramshackle fanclub. Reports are that Truss sees it in [much the same terms](#).

Observers of Sunak's campaign saw him consistently outperforming Truss in debates. He made mistakes, [notably in seeming overaggressive](#), perhaps understandable in the circumstances. But his language has at least been statesmanlike: stressing the need for economic responsibility, and avoiding Truss's barrage of implausible policy cliches. His only intellectual equal in the recent cabinet was Michael Gove, who like him despaired of Johnson's behaviour. Of those remaining, barely three merit serious ministerial office: perhaps Greg Clark, George Eustice and Sajid Javid.

Over the past three decades, Tory party politics has become a battlefield littered with the corpses of leadership feuds. From Major to Hague, Cameron, Osborne and now Johnson, all have been consigned to their memoirs before even reaching 60. Johnson ruthlessly decapitated an entire generation of his party's youthful talent, including Amber Rudd, Nicky Morgan, Damian Green, Dominic Grieve, Jeremy Hunt, Rory Stewart, Jesse Norman and David Gauke. That is the cabinet this country needs right now.

Britain's current emergency is the result of three policies followed by Tory governments: Brexit, the pandemic lockdown and sanctions against Russia – the last admittedly a Nato obligation. Recovery from each will need intelligence and courage of a high order. As yet, Truss has shown little sign of either. She has shown the superficiality of a student politician and won at best the half-hearted enthusiasm of her own party. That party [trails behind Labour](#) in the polls, while she lacks any wider popular support. She needs all the help she can get.

Most immediately, she needs to reach out to Sunak. If he can act with generosity and dignity, if he can rise above the fray and play his cards right,

he will benefit his party and his country – and in the longer run surely himself.

- Simon Jenkins is a Guardian columnist
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[China](#)

Rain eases China's record heatwave but fresh energy crisis looms

Weather agencies warn of flooding as analyst warns a winter energy crunch is 'highly likely'



China's meteorological agencies warned of heavy rain, bringing a risk of flash floods
Photograph: Anadolu Agency/Getty Images

[Helen Davidson](#) in Taipei

[@heldavidson](#)

Tue 30 Aug 2022 01.51 EDT Last modified on Tue 30 Aug 2022 14.53 EDT

Rain across central [China](#) this week is expected to relieve the country's worst heatwave on record, but weather agencies are now warning of potential floods, while analysts say the energy crisis exacerbated by the months-long drought is not over.

Almost half of China has been affected by the latest heatwave, the [hottest since record-keeping began in 1961](#). Hundreds of temperature records have been broken, and the heat has exacerbated the effects of low rainfall, drying up rivers and reservoirs across the country.

Light to moderate showers have moved into central and southern China, and were expected to intensify this week, according to China's meteorological agencies (CMA). It said moderate to heavy falls were expected from southern Gansu down to Yunnan and across the drought-stricken Sichuan basin, bringing a risk of flash floods. In Sichuan on Monday more than 110,000 people in Sichuan had been relocated to safer areas.

After a period of significantly lower-than-average rainfall, some areas would now see up to twice as much rain as usual, the agency said. The CMA said the rains would help replenish reservoirs, but it still maintained drought warnings.

High temperatures are expected to ease on Wednesday for areas in southern China.

The heatwave sparked huge demand for electricity as hundreds of millions of people turn to air conditioning, which in turn [has led to major power shortages](#). Across affected cities and provinces, authorities suspended or rationed electricity supply to factories, shopping malls, high-rises, and public transport.

Li Xi, a resident of central Chongqing, told the Guardian that residents of his high-rise apartment block were able to use their air conditioning but areas outside the city and public spaces were rationed.

“Without AC it’s terrible at home … I just stay at home all day long and go out in the evening after sunset,” he said. “The Chongqing city takes some measures to save the power – the supermarket is only open from 4pm to 9pm … Even in the subway the elevator is turned off, and we have to take the stairs.”

The heat, combined with power and water shortages, had a debilitating impact on regional and farming areas, and on vulnerable groups including elderly people and those working outdoors.

Andrew Polk, an analyst with Trivium China, said the demand for electricity had overwhelmed provincial power grids, and warned it was “highly likely” the coming winter would see another regional power crunch.

Polk said the lack of water in the Yangtze river and dozens of tributaries, during what is supposed to be the wet season, had severely affected power supply in Sichuan – which draws 80% of its electricity from hydropower – and downstream regions.

Cooler temperatures would lower household demand for electricity and ease rationing of commercial and industrial power, but it was only temporary.

“Officials have had to uncork reservoirs to avert agricultural, river transport and ecological disasters,” he said.

“Chances are high that Sichuan will again run low on hydropower by year end – even if the heatwave ends immediately ... Sichuan is now at such a water deficit that it would take a meteorological miracle to reach anything approaching normal levels for winter power production.”

Analysts have said centres such as Sichuan would probably have to boost reliance on energy from fossil fuel in the short term, until the development of renewable sources caught up. On Tuesday the official People’s Daily newspaper warned of the need for regions to prepare for increasing extreme weather events driven by global heating, including drought and floods.

Additional reporting by Xiaoqian Zhu

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Chinese economy

China's biggest property developer Country Garden sees profits plunge 96%

The company blames the ‘severe depression’ in the property market and says ‘only the fittest will survive’



Workers at a construction site in Beijing. Photograph: Thomas Peter/Reuters

[Martin Farrer](#)

Tue 30 Aug 2022 02.12 EDT Last modified on Tue 30 Aug 2022 06.09 EDT

China's biggest property developer Country Garden Holdings has reported a 96% drop in profits, blaming a “severe depression” in the country’s crisis-hit property market in which “only the fittest can survive”.

The company, which is listed in Hong Kong, said preliminary net profit collapsed from 15bn yuan (\$2bn) to 612m yuan (\$88m) in the first six

months of the year thanks to the housing market crisis that is slowly engulfing the [Chinese economy](#).

Country Garden, which boasts thousands of property projects and a footprint in nearly 300 municipalities, has seen its shares plunge more than 70% this year and the stock dropped another 2.3% on Tuesday to stand at HK\$2.54.

It had warned earlier that profits could fall up to 70% and the even bigger than expected drop came with a grim warning in a statement to the Hong Kong stock market.

“In 2022, the property sector faced myriad challenges, including the market’s weakening expectations, sluggish demand and a fall in property prices,” [the company said](#).

“All these exert mounting pressure on all participants in the property market, which has slid rapidly into severe depression. The harsh business environment in which only the fittest can survive means even higher requirements for businesses’ competitive strength.”

China’s property crisis began to rear its head nearly a year ago when the second biggest developer, Evergrande, said that it might not be able to meet repayments on the offshore, dollar-denominated part of its massive \$300bn debt mountain.

At the time, market watchers believed that companies such as Country Garden – which did not have such high borrowings – would not be tainted by the problems.

But the debt contagion has spread from Evergrande throughout the enormous \$60tr Chinese property market, bringing a 40% drop in sales, falling prices, and a mortgage strike by homeowners angered by the non-completion of homes for which they have paid upfront.

The bleak outlook has been compounded by the zero-Covid lockdowns that have strangled economic activity all over China in the past 12 months, and

Country Garden also blamed the recent extreme weather for upsetting profits.

The company's problems have also seen its majority shareholder – Yang Huiyan, daughter of the founder – [lose half her \\$24bn fortune.](#)

However, the company still managed to strike an optimistic note and said there was hope for an upturn in fortunes because urbanisation of the population was still progressing.

“China’s economy has proven resilient and its strong fundamentals for long-term development remain intact,” ti said. “The country’s new type of urbanization still has a long way to go and the desire for a good life will always remain dear to people’s hearts. The real estate industry will always exist.”

“We will persevere and remain hopeful despite adversity. Country Garden keeps its feet on the ground as it works hard to get through a harsh winter and anticipates the arrival of spring.”

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Crime - Australia

The Teacher's Pet podcast: husband guilty of murder in four decade-old Australian cold case

Hit podcast examines Chris Dawson's extra-marital affair with teen student and 1982 disappearance of wife Lynette Dawson



Christopher Dawson has been found guilty of the 1982 murder of his wife Lynette Dawson. An Australian true crime podcast 'Teacher's Pet' sparked renewed public interest in the case. Photograph: Supplied

[Christopher Knaus](#) and [Nino Bucci](#)

Tue 30 Aug 2022 04.42 EDT Last modified on Tue 30 Aug 2022 16.25 EDT

An Australian former teacher who was the subject of an investigation by a wildly popular true crime podcast has been found guilty of the 1982 killing of his wife.

The New South Wales supreme court [on Tuesday found](#) Christopher Dawson, 74, guilty of murdering his former wife Lynette Dawson, who he had wanted to leave so that he could pursue an uninterrupted relationship with a teenage schoolgirl known in the trial as JC. Dawson pleaded not guilty and has always maintained his innocence.

Lynette Dawson's body has never been found and her disappearance from Sydney's northern beaches remained a mystery for almost four decades, until a 2018 true crime podcast, named The Teacher's Pet, triggered a groundswell of public interest.

The podcast, which was downloaded tens of millions of times and reached number one in podcast charts in Australia, the UK, Canada, and New Zealand, explored Dawson's extramarital affair with a 16-year-old student, failures in the [initial police investigation](#) into his wife's disappearance, and the unwillingness of prosecutors to charge Dawson, despite two coronial inquests concluding she was dead and that her husband was most likely responsible.

Months after the podcast began, police [conducted a forensic excavation](#) at the former Sydney home of Dawson, searching for Lynette Dawson's body. The search failed to uncover any new evidence, but in December 2018, police charged Dawson with murder.

Prosecutors alleged that there was a strong circumstantial case, despite the failure to find Lynette Dawson's body. They argued Dawson was motivated by a desire to continue an unfettered relationship with the teenager referred to in court only as JC, who he met while working as a physical education teacher at her school.

The case and the [huge amount of publicity associated with the podcast](#) raised significant concerns about Dawson's ability to receive a fair trial. He unsuccessfully argued that the pre-trial publicity should cause his trial to be publicly stayed.

The trial proceeded before a single judge, Justice Ian Harrison, instead of a jury, to alleviate concerns about prejudice.

Dawson did not give evidence during the two-month trial, which finished on 11 July.

In handing down his verdict on Tuesday, Harrison said he was “left in no doubt” about the murder of Lynette Dawson.



Christopher Dawson arrives at the supreme court of New South Wales in Sydney. Photograph: Bianca de Marchi/AAP

“I am satisfied beyond reasonable doubt that the only rational inference [is that] Lynette Dawson died on or about 8 January 1982 as a result of a conscious or voluntary act committed by Christopher Dawson,” the judge said.

Harrison rejected the possibility Lynette Dawson voluntarily abandoned her husband and children to vanish without a trace. He dismissed claims Lynette Dawson had been seen alive after January 1982 or that she had contacted her husband.

“The whole of the circumstantial evidence satisfies me that Lynette Dawson is dead, that she died on or about 8 January 1982 and that she did not

voluntarily abandon her home,” the judge said on Tuesday.

Lawyers for Dawson said Harrison could not find their client guilty beyond reasonable doubt, in part because the police had failed to properly investigate reported sightings of Lynette Dawson. They also argued the alleged motive made no sense because killing his wife would only create more problems for Dawson.

Harrison dismissed claims by Dawson that his wife had called him after the alleged date of her death as “lies”.

Harrison also dismissed several reported sightings of Lynette Dawson which occurred after 8 January 1982.

Between 10 and 12 January 1982, Harrison found Dawson picked up JC from South West Rocks, took her back to Sydney and told her: “Lyn’s gone, she’s not coming back, come back to Sydney and help look after the kids and live with me”.

Dawson’s lawyer, Greg Walsh, told the judge after the verdict that his client would probably apply for bail before his sentencing hearing. A date has not been set for that hearing. Walsh also said Dawson will probably appeal against the conviction.

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2022/aug/30/the-teachers-pet-podcast-husband-guilty-of-in-four-decade-old-australia-cold-case>

[Media](#)

The Teacher's Pet: hit podcast thrust Lynette Dawson's 1982 disappearance into the spotlight

Hedley Thomas's true-crime series about a Sydney teacher and his wife captured the world's attention and paved the way for a murder trial

- [Chris Dawson found guilty of murdering wife Lynette in Sydney 40 years ago](#)
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The Teacher's Pet podcast investigated the disappearance of Lynette Dawson, a 33-year-old mother of two from Bayview in Sydney's north. Photograph: NSW Police



Amanda Meade

Tue 30 Aug 2022 04.06 EDT Last modified on Tue 30 Aug 2022 07.42 EDT

The Teacher's Pet podcast, which has been inextricably linked with the murder trial of Christopher Michael Dawson, won the highest accolade in Australian journalism for Hedley Thomas and Slade Gibson and has been downloaded 60m times internationally.

The judges who awarded the pair the 2018 Gold Walkley award said the Australian newspaper's 220,000-word podcast "uncovered long-lost statements and new witnesses, and prompted police to dig again for the body of Lyn Dawson, who disappeared from her home in 1982".

On Tuesday, Dawson, 74, [was found guilty](#) of murdering his former wife Lynette four decades ago on Sydney's northern beaches. Dawson has always maintained his innocence and after the verdict his lawyer confirmed he would appeal.

New South Wales supreme court Justice Ian Harrison referred multiple times to Thomas's podcast, in particular to the cross-over between the evidence given in court and the interviews those same witnesses had earlier given to Thomas.

He said it was probable, if not certain, that The Teacher's Pet podcast "may in whole or in part have completely deprived some evidence of its usefulness".

Of one witness who was interviewed by Thomas, Shelley Oates-Wilding, Harrison said: "I am unable with any confidence, having listened to the extracts of her lengthy, taped conversations with him, to know what part of her evidence comes from what Hedley Thomas told her, and what part of her evidence comes from what she remembered."

But another witness who took part in the podcast, Julie Andrews, was found to be "reliable and credible". Harrison said listening to tapes of her unedited interview "did not alter my view that her description of the trampoline incident was credible and reliable".

Speaking outside court on Tuesday, Thomas said Dawson should have been charged 40 years ago but the system at the time had failed Lynette.

"Lynette Dawson was missing for eight years and just treated as a runaway mother for that time when the circumstances were so gravely suspicious," Thomas said. "It would not happen today."

When Dawson was charged in December 2018 the then New South Wales police commissioner Mick Fuller sent an email to Thomas saying "you must be pretty happy mate?", according to an earlier decision in the case by Justice Elizabeth Fullerton.

Thomas had by then struck a deal for a miniseries of the Teacher's Pet with Jason Blum's American production company Blumhouse.

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Photograph: Tim Roberts/Stone RF

Was this helpful?

Thank you for your feedback.

In April 2019, on advice from the Office of the NSW Director of Public Prosecutions, and in the interests of a fair trial, the Australian removed the podcast from all platforms. It had already reached No 1 in the podcast charts in Australia, the UK, Canada and New Zealand.

First published between May and August 2018, the 14-part podcast was reported and narrated by the Queensland-based Thomas, already an award-winning investigative reporter for the Murdoch broadsheet. It was produced

by Gibson, a former guitarist for Savage Garden. After Dawson was arrested another three episodes were made.

Thomas began his career in newspapers at 17 as a copy boy at the Gold Coast Bulletin, was a foreign correspondent in London and spent six years at Hong Kong's South China Morning Post before returning to Queensland in 1999. He has seven Walkley awards, including the 2007 Gold Walkley for a series in the Australian highlighting the flawed police pursuit of Mohamed Haneef, a doctor wrongly accused of being a terrorist.



Hedley Thomas outside the NSW supreme court in June 2022 during the trial of Chris Dawson. Photograph: Flavio Brancaleone/AAP

A podcast novice, Thomas began his Teacher's Pet series three years after the unsolved homicide unit established Strikeforce Scriven to reinvestigate Lynette's suspected murder. The popularity of the story shone a spotlight on the case and put public pressure on the police. A few months after it aired Dawson was charged.

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But Thomas's attitude towards Dawson as the likely suspect, and interviews with potential witnesses, threatened to derail a fair trial, Dawson's legal team claimed, and they argued for a permanent stay.

The high court disagreed but Dawson was granted a judge-only trial when the NSW supreme court agreed that "the nature of the podcast and its extremely wide distribution raises real concerns about the fairness of a trial" before a jury.

Thomas gave evidence at Dawson's trial, telling the court he only wanted justice for Lynette and her family and he believed she had been killed by her husband in January 1982.

"And so justice for Lyn meant to you, didn't it, the prosecution of Christopher Dawson," defence barrister Pauline David asked.

"I think that is a fair call, yes," Thomas replied.

Thomas told the court he believed Dawson was the only suspect but denied he had engaged in a campaign to incite prejudice against him.

"If I had uncovered or received information from anybody that disrupted, changed the narrative ... that would have become a very significant part of the podcast," he said.

Thomas [rejected suggestions](#) he influenced potential witnesses by discussing potential movies or miniseries about the case and said it was merely banter during interviews.

“When you held out those deals to them … you appreciated that that would be attractive to them?” David asked.

Thomas said: “Possibly to some, but it might have been very unattractive to others who were introverted or didn’t want to be involved.”

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/media/2022/aug/30/the-teachers-pet-hit-podcast-thrust-a-spotlight-on-lynette-dawsons-1982-disappearance>

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- [Corner shops Rising energy costs ‘will force thousands to close’](#)
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UK cost of living crisis

Nearly a quarter of UK adults plan to keep heating off this winter, poll finds

Findings of survey conducted before announcement of 80% hike in price cap described as ‘national scandal’



A model in a thick jumper holds a hot water bottle. On Friday Ofgem said the price cap would increase this October from £1,971 to £3,549 a year. Photograph: Jon Challicom/Alamy

[Kalyeena Makortoff](#)

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Sun 28 Aug 2022 19.01 EDT Last modified on Mon 29 Aug 2022 00.12 EDT

Skyrocketing energy prices mean almost one in four adults in the UK will not switch on the heating at all this winter, according to a poll, with opposition MPs describing the findings as a “national scandal”.

The survey of more than 2,000 UK adults found 23% would do without heating over the winter months. That figure was even higher for parents with children under the age of 18, with 27% saying they would be forced to leave the radiators cold.

About 70% said they would turn their heating on less, while 11% said they were considering taking out a loan to cover extra costs. That figure rose to 17% for those with children.

The poll was conducted before the regulator Ofgem announced the energy price cap would increase by 80% from October. The decision will take the average gas and electricity bill from £1,971 to £3,549 a year.

The Liberal Democrats, who commissioned the survey, called for further commitments by the incoming Tory prime minister, widely expected to be Liz Truss, to help struggling households.

“Families and pensioners across the country are making heartbreakng decisions because the government has failed to save them,” said the Lib Dem spokesperson for the Cabinet Office, Christine Jardine.

“It is a national scandal that parents are having to choose between heating their homes and feeding their children,” she said. “It shouldn’t be like this. Britain is on the brink of the worst cost of living crisis in a century and yet still Liz Truss and [rival leadership candidate] Rishi Sunak will not scrap the energy price rise.”

The Lib Dems are calling for a further windfall tax on oil and gas companies to partly fund a price cap freeze.

Labour has also put pressure on the Tory leadership candidates, calling for the existing windfall tax introduced in May by Sunak, then chancellor, to be tightened by removing the option to claim tax relief on more than 90% of the levy if the money is reinvested.

However, both Sunak and Truss have [so far refused to consider extending](#) the 25% [energy profits levy](#) introduced after a surge in wholesale prices

fuelled by the invasion of Ukraine and Russia's decision to reduce gas exports.

A spokesperson for the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy said direct support targeted at low-income households, pensioners and those with disabilities would "continue to reach people's pockets in the weeks and months ahead".

"As part of our £37bn package of help for households, one in four of all UK households will see £1,200 extra support, provided in instalments across the year, and everyone will receive a £400 discount on their energy bills over winter," they said.

"The civil service is also making the appropriate preparations in order to ensure that any additional support or commitments on cost of living can be delivered as quickly as possible when the new prime minister is in place."

The survey was conducted by the market research firm Savanta ComRes.

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Politics

Liz Truss ‘not ruling out’ direct financial support for cost of living – as it happened

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Retail industry

Rising energy costs ‘will force thousands of corner shops to close’

Association of Convenience Stores urges chancellor to provide more financial support for small shops



The Association of Convenience Stores said energy bills had surged to an average of £45,000 for its smaller members. Photograph: Justin Kase/Alamy

[Kalyeena Makortoff](#)

[@kalyeena](#)

Sun 28 Aug 2022 12.49 EDT Last modified on Mon 29 Aug 2022 00.13 EDT

Thousands of corner shops will be forced to close due to surging energy costs unless the government steps in with emergency support, a trade body has said.

The Association of Convenience Stores (ACS) has written to the chancellor, [Nadhim Zahawi](#), saying that without financial support its members will be driven out of business. “We will see villages, housing estates, neighbourhoods and high streets lose their small shops,” the letter says.

The trade body, which represents 48,000 local shops employing 405,000 staff, said energy bills had surged to an average of £45,000 for smaller members, a figure more than double what store owners had been paying before renewing their contracts in recent months.

Collectively, it said its members were facing energy bills worth £2.5bn, and needed a support package worth at least £575m to stay afloat.

“The government needs to understand that this is an emergency. Thousands of convenience stores will be forced to make extremely difficult decisions in the face of tens of thousands of pounds of additional energy costs in the coming months, which at best will include cancelled investments, reduced staff hours and increased prices in stores, pushing up inflation even further,” it said. “For some, however, the cost of energy will make the business unviable, and so they will be forced to close unless action is taken to provide meaningful support.”

The rescue package outlined by ACS would include an emergency price cap on electricity for small businesses, and a freeze on further increases in business rates, which ACS also said should be scrapped between October and March.

“We cannot overstate the urgency of the situation faced by our members. These are highly resilient businesses selling a wide range of products and services, adapting to the changing needs of their local communities. ACS does not usually forecast large-scale closures of convenience stores, but we are in all seriousness doing so now,” ACS’s chief executive, James Lowman, wrote in the letter.

A Treasury spokesperson said the government understood that people were struggling with rising prices and was trying to support businesses “to navigate the months ahead”.

“We’ve cut taxes for hundreds of thousands of businesses by increasing the employment allowance and slashing fuel duty. We’ve also introduced a 50% business rates relief for retail, hospitality and leisure businesses, and put the brakes on bill increases by freezing the business rates multiplier, worth £4.6bn over the next five years,” the spokesperson said.

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“We are making necessary preparations to ensure a new government will have options to deliver additional support as quickly as possible.”

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[House of Commons](#)

New Tory leader urged to scrap MPs' break for party conferences amid cost of living crisis

Exclusive: Ministers encouraged to stay at Westminster to devise emergency plans to address cost of living crisis



Boris Johnson speaks during prime minister's questions in July. The Commons is due to go into recess for a month from mid-September.
Photograph: Andy Bailey/UK Parliament/PA

*Aubrey Allegretti Political correspondent
@breeallegretti*

Sun 28 Aug 2022 13.00 EDT Last modified on Mon 29 Aug 2022 00.10 EDT

The next Conservative leader has been urged to scrap MPs' four-week break for party conference season and told it would be "immoral and insulting" to

go “missing in action” during the worsening cost of living crisis.

With the Commons due to go into recess for a month in mid-September for the parties’ annual conventions, ministers were encouraged to remain in Westminster to devise and debate emergency plans for supporting struggling people through the winter.

The Liberal Democrats kick off conference season in Brighton from 17-20 September, followed by Labour in Liverpool from 25-28 September. It is then the turn of the [Conservatives](#) in Birmingham from 2-5 October, before the SNP’s runs from 8-10 October in Aberdeen.

MPs will not be sitting in parliament for almost the duration, with the Commons in recess from 22 September until 17 October, meaning there will be no debates, no new legislation tabled, and no chances to question senior government figures across the dispatch box.

While MPs will still be able to continue working, holding private meetings with ministers or with constituents, the scale of the economic crisis facing the country has prompted the campaigner [Gina Miller](#) to call on Rishi Sunak and Liz Truss to pledge to cancel the conference recess.

She said she was “truly staggered” that the break was still set to go ahead. She said the UK had “endured an administration of the undead over the summer recess”, so “further delay is inexcusable”.

Miller said party conferences “do not serve the people or the public interest” but were instead “shindigs for fans” where attenders “buy influence and make cosy deals”.

Writing to the two Conservative leadership contenders, Miller said: “As the candidates for prime minister, you should urgently speak to the leaders of other parties and agree conference recess will be cancelled so MPs can work on the immediate challenges facing the country.”

Miller, who set up the True and Fair party, said the Commons should sit for a minimum of 40 weeks a year and criticised politicians for “partying whilst millions face destitution”.

She said: “You should be spending your time working for the people of the UK who elect and pay for you, not your party’s members.”

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When parliament is not sitting, the government can ask the Commons Speaker to order a recall. However, such events are rare and usually happen only for a single day in the event of an emergency. The last recalls have been to pass emergency Covid laws, to discuss the fall of Afghanistan to the Taliban, and after the death of Prince Philip.

Truss and Sunak’s campaign teams were contacted for comment.

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2022.08.29 - Spotlight

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[Weddings](#)

Five wedding outfits for just £29! My cheap, ethical, joy-filled wedding



Nell Frizzell and her husband with guests at their wedding. Photograph: Hugh Warwick

From the hugely expensive dress to the imported flowers, the average wedding is a bank-breaking, planet-wrecking affair. There is a greener, less

stressful approach, if you make the most of charity shops, hedgerows and car boot sales



[Nell Frizzell](#)

Mon 29 Aug 2022 05.00 EDT

In some ways, the term “ethical wedding” is as contradictory as, say, “sexy footbath” or “welcome ingrown hair”. And yet, after years of railing against the marital-industrial complex, I still wanted to give it a go. When, in a rather unlikely move, after seven years of cohabitation and nearly five years of co-parenting, my partner and I decided to get married, we were both keen to keep it as environmentally friendly, inexpensive and ideologically sound as we could. If you’re expecting rings woven from toenail clippings and a wedding meal pulled out of a wheelie bin, I’m sorry to disappoint. But the whole thing did cost us around the same as my parents’ wedding in 1992 and about the only thing we bought new was the wine. And we had that delivered by bike.

Our wedding came in two parts. First, there was the legal bit: since the first few months of our relationship played out almost entirely in places located along the 38 bus route, it seemed fitting to do this in Hackney town hall in east London. So my parents, partner, son and I all got the train from Oxford

and on to the tube carrying our wedding gear in rucksacks and holdalls. I got changed in the toilets of a cinema over the road, my ex-boyfriend and his wife were included in our Covid-safe list of 14 guests, my son lay down in the middle of the carpet during the ceremony and chatted loudly to himself to stave off his inevitable four-year-old boredom and I wore an outfit I'd made for a grand total of £8. Including underwear.



Inside the scout hut, decked out for the wedding ... Photograph: Al Kinley-Jones

The average price of a wedding dress in the UK – according to an army of websites specifically dedicated to the noble art of fleecing their readers – is somewhere in the region of £1,300. I made five wedding outfits for a grand total of £29. The first, for our legal section, was made of pale apricot fabric I bought from a market in east London: I sewed three gold hearts down the front – one for my partner, one for my son and one for me. I made a veil out of a £1 offcut and a headband from a charity shop. My shoes cost £1 from a car boot sale. After the ceremony, we all walked around the corner to eat pizza and drink booze in a nearby pub, before getting the train back to Oxford.

The second part of the wedding took place three weeks later and was a slightly bigger affair. By which I mean we spent more than £100 and it

didn't end at 5pm. I was keen to get married somewhere we could cycle to, as we are both virgins who can't drive. And anyway, since, as a fan of breathing and moving safely through the world, I would much prefer people walked, cycled or got the bus whenever they can. Which is how I ended up emailing a scout troop that has a hall down by the river, next to an allotment, where my friend Sharon learned to canoe in the 1970s.

It was perfect. There was a field to camp in, a kitchen, a giant bell (because you just never know), a large pink windsurfing sail hung on the wall, toilets, a kitchen full of mismatched tea towels, and the whole thing opened out on to a shallow, silty stretch of the Thames, overhung with willow trees and blackberries. They let us rent it for two days for less than £1,000 and their only real request was that my partner and I consider volunteering as scout leaders. I decorated the tables with bed sheets and curtains, plates, glasses, cutlery and vases all bought from the charity shops within cycling distance of our house. I stuffed the vases with grasses and wildflowers picked the day before from beside the towpath and my friend hung the room about with beautiful coloured decorations used a few weeks earlier at a mutual friend's memorial.



Nell Frizzell in one of her wedding outfits. Photograph: Al Kinley-Jones

Just by coming to our wedding and eating off those tables, each guest probably inadvertently donated about £2 to either Emmaus, Oxfam, Mercy in Action, the Shaw Trust or our local children's hospice, Helen and Douglas House. Did this mean spending the days before and after the wedding kneeling in my garden, in 34C heat, washing what felt like 1,000 forks and wine glasses in a bucket? It did. But was it worth it to take the whole lot back to those various charity shops, to be sold on again? I think so.

For this wedding, I wanted outfits. Several outfits. I made a white linen dress with the words "An Honest Woman" stitched across the front. I made a veil by recycling that same charity shop headband and a strip of fabric bought from my local high street just a few doors down from Oxford's only sex shop. The night before the wedding, I was to be found refreshing the BBC weather page like a compulsive gambler on a fruit machine – willing the outcome to be different while knowing, deep down, that I was doomed. The forecast for our wedding day, and indeed the preceding three days, was 35C. My sister got married in India in a cooler temperature. And so, with just a few hours to go, I decided to cut up one of our white bedsheets and turn it into a voluminous, short tent of a dress, in which I could sweat merrily without actually sticking to the furniture or, I hoped, passing out. I'd bought a white bikini on eBay for £4, realised it showed about 10% of my pubes and so quickly knocked up a white lace cover-up from a piece of material I'd originally thought might work as a cake cover to keep away the flies. Finally, inspired in no small part by [Gram Parsons' nudie suit](#), I made a pair of trousers and a top covered in applique flowers, hearts and our initials. The fabric came from a local charity that salvages cloth and other materials from businesses that would otherwise end up in landfill. It cost me about £10 and took so long to hand sew all those bloody petals that I listened to the entire audiobook of Jaws while I did it.



The food, provided by the social enterprise Damascus Rose. Photograph: Hugh Warwick

A party isn't a wedding unless you have food and so, after toying with the idea of catering for all 100 guests on my own (until I pictured myself standing in a scout kitchen, in a pair of sports shorts, surrounded by bowls of cucumbers and bags of rice as people started to arrive) I approached [Damascus Rose](#) – a social enterprise supporting refugee women in Oxford. We ate delicious Middle Eastern food, served up by a Syrian woman who, rather out of the blue, asked if she could make a speech halfway through the meal. My mother arrived from Cardiff with three layers of orange and polenta cake, which she then decorated with blackberries picked from the nature reserve behind my house and a figurine my sister made of my partner and me in our new inflatable canoe. Another friend made three sensational cakes as a gift and, standing behind a folding table in a wet bikini (like many of the guests, I'd just been swimming), I served them to our overheated and shade-hungry guests. It was one of my favourite parts of the whole day.



The wedding cake, baked by the bride's mother and topped with foraged blackberries. Photograph: Al Kinley-Jones

When you are chaotic, ambivalent about weddings and keen to do things ethically, there are inevitably things that get forgotten or missed. The 50 jam jars I had been studiously accumulating and washing for the last six months to fill with tea lights in the evening remained hidden somewhere in a bag. The sweltering temperature inside the hall during the meal became so unbearable that neither I nor my mother got to make our speeches (quite rightly, everyone burst out of the building and into the river after about two hours of slow roasting). I forgot my bike lights and so had to recruit a host of cyclists to head up the hill and collect the chips and mushy peas that were served when the sun went down.

But, in the end, I think we pulled it off. A friend's mum – a former midwife and staunch feminist, who is training to be a funeral celebrant – brought us together for a little informal ceremony of our own making where, against my every intention, I cried. A group of children played handbells borrowed from another married couple. Two old friends offered to take photos during the day and did so, at times, in their swimming shorts. And my husband and I spent our wedding night in a tent, sleeping on either side of an inflatable mattress on which our four-year-old son slowly rotated like a catherine wheel, having forgotten to brush our teeth.

So, is it possible to have an environmentally friendly, ethically sound, inexpensive wedding? Only with hard work, a lot of help from loved ones and by turning a blind eye to mess. You know, kind of like a marriage.

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‘Being an MP was bad for my brain, body and soul’: Rory Stewart on politics, privilege and podcast stardom

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Cryptocurrencies

Crypto crash: how a teacher's dream investment turned into a nightmare loss

Small-scale investors left counting the cost this year after value of digital assets fell off a cliff



A study suggests fewer people see cryptocurrencies as a gamble.
Photograph: Marc Bruxelle/Alamy



Zoe Wood

@zoewoodguardian

Mon 29 Aug 2022 03.00 EDT

“If I’d sold everything, I would’ve had a quarter of a million pounds,” Duncan* says ruefully of the staggering worth of his cryptocurrency holdings at the start of this year.

Like lots of amateur investors, the 47-year-old former primary schoolteacher got into cryptocurrencies in a big way during the coronavirus pandemic, ploughing his life savings into a portfolio that was ballooning in value and that he believed would enable him to get on the property ladder.

“I wanted to get to \$500,000 (£414,000), then take half out. I had over \$300,000 around Christmas,” Duncan says.

However, speaking from his home in Edinburgh, he confesses to having lost almost all of it in the recent [digital assets market rout](#). He is left with a portfolio worth (at the time of writing) about £4,000 – a fraction of the estimated £40,000 he poured in. He remains sanguine: “I’ve got friends who have lost eight-figure sums of money.”

Duncan is one of a growing number of Britons investing in digital assets. At the start of 2021, an estimated [2.3 million people in the UK had crypto investments](#), according to Financial Conduct Authority (FCA) research published last year that is arguably still the most comprehensive official study of its kind. Clearly the number will have increased since then.

The FCA said then that the profile of crypto investors was skewed towards men over 35 and from the AB social grade, with the median holding at about £300 – suggesting a lot of people had only “dipped their toe in the water” as opposed to investing their life savings.

The study revealed cryptocurrencies had become more normalised, with fewer people seeing them as a “gamble”, and more as an alternative or complement to mainstream investments. While ownership is rising, the FCA study, which predated [this year's global cryptocurrency crash](#), pointed to a shrinking level of understanding, suggesting some did not fully understand what they were buying.

Investors considering adding cryptocurrencies to their portfolio must be fully aware that it is a hugely volatile market

Bestinvest's Alice Haine

Alice Haine, a personal finance analyst at the investment platform [Bestinvest](#), says cryptocurrencies are still evolving as an asset class, and are a more speculative investment than investing in the stock market.

“The steep falls seen in crypto values were partly a reflection that it is a market, unlike equities, that is dominated by retail investors,” she says. “With inflation and recession fears growing, many investors liquidated their holdings for fear of further price drops but also to bolster bank balances and savings pots to help them survive the cost of living crisis.”

“Any investor considering adding cryptocurrencies to their portfolio must be fully aware that it is a hugely volatile market to be in, with the price often extremely unpredictable.”

As more small investors get involved, the government is [changing the law](#) to place adverts for crypto assets under the same rules as other financial promotions such as stocks, shares and insurance products. The move follows concerns about misleading cryptocurrency ads.

Meanwhile, MPs on the Treasury select committee recently launched [an inquiry into the role of crypto assets](#) in the UK.

“In recent months the value of most crypto assets has fallen dramatically,” Mel Stride, the committee’s chair, said last month. “We will be investigating the opportunities and risks that crypto presents, where additional regulation may be required, and the lessons the government can learn from other countries.”



A growing number of Britons are investing in digital assets. Photograph: Beata Zawrzel/NurPhoto/Rex/Shutterstock

Duncan was introduced to [bitcoin](#) by a friend in the early 2010s when the value of the cryptocurrency was in the low hundred dollars. He watched as its value took off in 2017, and when it broke through \$10,000, he thought: “This thing must be legit. I’ve got to start buying it.”

He had returned to the UK in 2014 after teaching overseas for more than a decade, and found many of his friends had settled down and bought houses.

“I’d been having a fun life and not saving for the future … Crypto was my chance to catch up.”

In 2017 he was investing £100 “here and there” but in 2018, when the market crashed, he stopped. “I was still interested in crypto and the idea that you could control your financial destiny rather than just trying to save cash.”

From 2019 he started to invest more regularly again and, by the following year, he was stashing £400 a month. It was turning into a healthy nest egg. His early investments were in bitcoin and ethereum but in 2021 he got into Luna and owned “2,000ish” coins that, in May, [dropped in value from \\$85 to below \\$1.](#)

The idea of decentralised finance or “DeFi”, promoted in crypto circles, appealed to a worldview shaped by the 2008 financial crisis.

Even if I had cashed out as late as April, I would have had a quarter of a million

Duncan

“You can do things in DeFi you can’t do in the traditional financial system,” Duncan says, giving the example of how easy it was to borrow against crypto compared with the process involved in securing high street credit.

Duncan admits that he stopped maintaining his spreadsheets once he started doing well. “Even if I had cashed out as late as April, I would have had a quarter of a million,” he says. “No one saw it coming. Actually, that is not true. People saw it coming … the bubble I was in did not see it coming.”

The scale of Duncan’s losses was “stressful” and he is back living with his family. “You know there’s various stages of grief or whatever … Denial was definitely one of the stages but then you accept it. All the paper profits I had, they’re gone – that is in the past.”

Now he is “loth to sell anything … Just because if I do, that locks in a loss.”

He is no longer teaching and, despite his devastating losses, remains convinced that cryptocurrencies will rebound – so much so that he is

pursuing a career in the industry.

After all, he says, people lose money on the stock market all the time. On social media, popular refrains among crypto investors include “we’re still early” and “WAGMI … We’re all going to make it”.

Duncan adds: “We are still early.”

* *Not his real name*

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

A new start after 60: ‘I’ve finally become the artist I always felt I was inside’

Anne Henriksen, 67, ran a crafts shop, worked in the theatre and spent 20 years driving taxis. But she only found her role in life after seeing some stone carvings in an Indonesian temple



‘I am having the best time in my life, ever’ ... Anne Henriksen at home in Totnes, Devon. Photograph: Jim Wileman/The Guardian

[Paula Cocozza](#)

[@CocozzaPaula](#)

Mon 29 Aug 2022 02.00 EDT

Anne Henriksen dreamed of becoming an artist throughout her life. Now, at 67, she says she has finally become “the artist I always felt I was inside”.

Henriksen grew up in Sweden, but the family moved around a lot. “Every year and a half, Dad would apply for higher and higher jobs.” Her father wanted Henriksen to go to university. But when she changed schools at 15, she became unsettled and her grades began to slip.

“Then, just before school finished, I was in a fatal car accident,” she says. Her friend was driving and they picked up two hitchhikers. “Suddenly, somebody came fast round the bend. It was a narrow road and we went into the ditch – a very deep, long ditch. There was a bridge, a telephone pole ...”

Henriksen sat in the ambulance with one of the hitchhikers, who was “pouring blood”. Later, he died. Henriksen “got away very lightly – with slight concussion and a cut on the shoulder”, but everything she understood about life and her place in it changed.

“I thought: ‘I don’t have time to do A-levels and consider becoming a doctor. How can I commit to 10 years of studies when I may not be alive next week?’ Do you see how that could change everything?”

She persuaded her father to let her go to a boarding school about 700 miles away, in northern Sweden, which offered the arts. She stayed there for a year and tried silkscreen printing, ceramics and jewellery-making.

Everything she understood about life and her place in it changed

“I did that for a year” is a refrain of Henriksen’s. Over the next decade or so, she trained to become a nurse, then a youth worker, opened and closed a craft shop, went Interrailing, studied social and political studies on a course for Scandinavian trade unionists, and joined a commune on the Yorkshire moors, where she did woodwork, patching and darning, and worked in a cooperative. At 25, she had a daughter, Jade.

Clearly, she was adventurous and open to new experiences. But was Henriksen searching for something with all these changes? Had she acknowledged to herself that she wanted to be an artist?

“I don’t think I dared to dream that big,” she says. “That seemed beyond my capabilities.”

After Henriksen parted with Jade’s father, she took her daughter back to Sweden. More jobs followed: she worked as a courier and a taxi driver, and spent two years as a props person in a theatre. But the yearning to explore herself as an artist grew.

At 37, she returned to England, with Jade, to start a higher national diploma at Plymouth College of [Art](#) and Design. While finishing her art degree, in which she specialised in large-scale metalworks, she worked as a taxi driver – trading as Anna’s Taxis – in Totnes, Devon, a job she continued to do for the next 20 years. But something still wasn’t right.

“I realised I wasn’t good enough,” she says. At the graduation show, she sold nothing. It must have been a painful realisation. But Henriksen says: “It was valuable.”

She continued to drive the taxi and holidayed each winter, always visiting museums and galleries on her trips. In Indonesia, in 2006, she saw the Borobudur Buddhist temple, where the stone carvings made a huge impression on her. “It was Indonesia that made me think *I could do it*,” she says. By then, she was 51 and she had “tried virtually everything else”.

Eventually, Henriksen enrolled in sculpture classes in Devon. She continued with her taxi business and if the phone rang and the fare was large enough, she left class to take it. At 63, she exhibited at [Delamore Arts](#) in Ivybridge, Devon, and sold her first sculpture. Now retired from driving, she continues to sculpt in her back garden, and exhibits and sells pieces. Next month, her work will be on show at [Lupton House](#) with Devon’s Art Bank Collective.

“I am having the best time in my life, ever. I can do what I like. I’m happy. I’ve achieved what I wanted.”

Henriksen has finally found her medium. “It’s the sound,” she says. “Tap, tap, tap, tap. None of those angle-grinders and bashing big things … You work until something is smooth and the curves look right.”

Tell us: has your life taken a new direction after the age of 60?

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OpinionRishi Sunak

Not too Tory, a little bit Blair and a whole lot of brown: how Sunak's formula failed

Nesrine Malik



In running his leadership like a corporate takeover bid, he looked like a man willing to say absolutely anything to win



Illustration: Nathalie Lees

Mon 29 Aug 2022 01.00 EDT Last modified on Mon 29 Aug 2022 10.25 EDT

Rishi Sunak is not having a good time. And it's not just because he's losing. It's because, in general, he's just not very good at it. And by "it", I mean the human bit of politics, the part where he connects with people as something other than economic units. His campaign, if polling is to be believed, is soon to come to an unsuccessful end. Lowlights include multiple moments in which Sunak attempted to be a man of the people: failing [to pay for fuel](#), failing to name a real [McDonald's breakfast item](#), [joking about](#) his "tan", and a [campaign video](#) (with a Ray Winstone-meets-Danny Dyer voiceover hailing Sunak as the underdog of some kind of action film) so removed from the grave moment the country finds itself in that it verges on sociopathic.

It's all now a far cry from the boy wonder, the Sunak the BBC [portrayed in a Superman outfit](#) (an image so craven that the corporation was forced to remove it), the Sunak as prime minister-in-waiting, who emerged mid-pandemic with buckets of cash and a furlough scheme. Sunak materialised at a moment when large numbers of people, both conservative and liberal, were so desperate for a grown up they were happy with someone who merely appeared to be one, no matter what his politics. To some, he promised the end of the wild Brexit years of reckless bluster; he was the pilot who was

going to land the plane safely. He was “dishy Rishi” who presented, despite his very rightwing politics, as not too Tory, a little bit Blair and a whole lot of brown. That last fact – that he seemed to have the potential to be the first prime minister who was also a person of colour – sprinkled even more stardust on him.

And then Sunak nosedived. Barring a miracle, his prime ministerial bid is soon to be history. And so a moment, please, before the Truss era is upon us, for a Sunak pre-mortem, if you will. The epitaph: finance bro fails to seal the deal.

So what happened? Simply, Sunak’s fetishised qualities were entirely limited to presentation and lacked any moral core. The leadership campaign has been run like a company takeover bid, the pitch to Tory voters like that of a junior associate finding himself unexpectedly in a position to vie for partner, out of his depth, defaulting to earnest cliches about his biggest weakness being that he’s just “too much of a perfectionist”. It is the sensibility of a man trying to pull off the biggest trade of his life if only he can get past some, shall we say, unreasonable shareholders. Let’s tell them what they want to hear, he thinks. Of course, he reassures them, the family name will remain, and we will certainly make sure that the identity of the firm is not diluted. The balance sheet is a mess; he struggles to lie about that, but he can have a good stab at posturing about everything else.

This is why his statements about protecting “our women”, criticisms of “leftwing agitators”, “woke nonsense” and “[bulldozing our history](#)” never seem to quite land. They are slides he was told he needed to add to the deck. And that is exactly what Sunak has really been all along – not a competent technocrat doing his best in a chaotic Johnson government, but a man both propelled by, and then in the final hour utterly exposed by, his willingness to say whatever the deal team needs to say to fend off the competition.

The episodes that truly define the kind of politician Sunak is were not the moments when he appeared authoritative and in touch (when in fact all he was doing was reading from an Autocue in a well-cut suit, making rudimentary noises about the hard time the nation was going through). It was when he was [first off the blocks to defend](#) Dominic Cummings’ flagrant

breach of lockdown rules, when he accused those who called him to account for his actions, the members of a nation that was grieving, shut in their houses, asking for answers, of “trying to score political points”. It was when he backed Johnson over partygate, or now, as he tries to reposition himself as a [heroic lockdown sceptic](#).

His switching between projecting smooth, principled competence and then sharp menace reminds me of a line from the film Margin Call, when Jeremy Irons’s character reveals how to survive a career in buccaneering high finance: “There are three ways to make a living in this business: be first, be smarter, or cheat.” Alas, none have worked for Sunak.

Perhaps Sunak represents a larger failure of the “modern non-ideological conservative,” as William Hague – the man whose safe seat Sunak was parachuted into after a career as a partner in a hedge fund – once described him. Sunak is an ideologue, but only in the sense that he sees politics as merely another branch of finance, rather than the other way round. He has no philosophy, bar the Thatcherite echo that he manifests in a managerial kind of bloodlessness, in his belief that helping to manage the books of his family’s pharmacy counts as a heroic political origin story.

And in a way, that overemphasis on finance is the catch-22 for brown members of the Conservative party. The route to power for people of colour on the right such as Nadhim Zahawi, Sajid Javid and Sunak is commonly through finance and business; by the time they reach Westminster they are already integrated into the elite, their political prospects as minorities de-risked through the enormous wealth they have accumulated. They bring with them a culturally cosmopolitan bearing that is at odds with the appetites of Tory members, who like their wealth old and preferably with a touch of title in the family line – not the new, nerdy, Californian, MBA sort. Not the kind that John le Carré once described, when writing of the slick new CIA tribe, as those who have an “open plan charm” that makes you “sweat at the joints”. Reports from Sunak’s [own team](#) are that he was sunk in early August when, asked a question about what career he would choose as a young graduate, he replied by fawning over the “inspiring and empowering culture of enterprise” on the west coast of America. It was the third time in the space of 10 minutes that he had mentioned California; the event was in Eastbourne.

Nevertheless, history will probably be kind to Sunak, as someone whose rejection signals a self-destructive Conservative party set on its course to indulge fantasy over fact. But his brief popularity shows that others are willing to make an equally squalid settlement: to celebrate someone with no demonstrable interest in or compassion for people, but who can at least manage their nation's decline.

Sunak may have a second act in him, but in the meantime he departs only in disgrace, knowing that it was all for nothing. The deal will almost certainly go to the other bidder, who did less work and was less smart but took the shareholders down the pub and made them laugh. Farewell for now, Sunak. We hardly knew ye – and then, suddenly, we knew ye all too well.

- Nesrine Malik is a Guardian columnist
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[Republic of Parenthood](#)[Parents and parenting](#)

Even in the darkest days of new parenthood, I hold on to the thought that this too shall pass

[Rhiannon Lucy Cosslett](#)



Promises of a glass of wine or leaving the house help me when my newborn and I are crying – though I know how lucky I am



‘Other parents tell me that remembering that you’ll never have to live that day again helps.’ Photograph: Chris Rout/Alamy

Mon 29 Aug 2022 02.00 EDT Last modified on Mon 29 Aug 2022 07.57 EDT

I write this from a pub garden, where I’m wondering if it would be rude to paint my toenails. Having reached a stage of cabin fever that was verging dangerously close to despair, I followed my mother’s advice to buy myself a small treat. In this case, a nail polish in a shade called Cheer Up, Buttercup – without considering that I’d need to somehow find the time to put it on.

Time is something I’ve never had so little of before – 10 minutes to inhale a croissant, a moment to brush my teeth – nor have small snatches of it ever felt in such short supply. None of this is news, of course, but when people talk about parenting being hard perhaps what they are really talking about is how relentless a day feels without a small moment of rest.

With that in mind, I’ve been asking people what gets them through the worst days. The ones where you’re bone tired and both you *and* the baby are crying. One idea, from a medical professional, was to make sure that you leave the house every day on your own, for a breather. If anyone knows how to achieve this, please let me know.

Wine, people suggest a lot. And it's true that wine helps, though I intensely dislike the "why mummy drinks/mummy needs gin" culture (you would never have a sign in your kitchen that said: Diazepam: Mummy's Little Helper!). It has to be exactly the correct amount of wine – enough to cheer you up and take the edge off your stress, but not so much (and it really takes very little these days after months of abstinence) that you then end up hungover while trying to entertain a baby, which is the worst way possible to spend a hangover, with the exception of attending mass when you don't speak the language and aren't even Catholic (as I did in 2005).

Then you have food, which I'll admit that I did once use as a way of breaking up the mundanity of my sad little life. I'd think to myself, "Hmm, might have some cheese on toast later", and dark skies would immediately brighten. Not so any more. Once a source of joy and experimentation, food is now merely fuel, wolfed down lukewarm in a separate room from my husband, who has usually worked hard to feed us, only for me to scarcely remember what I ate.

Social contact, people are big on, too. Which is all very well until you've spent all morning trying to get out to the children's centre only to be told that the class is full. It was a bit bleak watching several other mothers and babies being turned away at the door too, our potential friendships crumbling into dust.

Anyway, you keep trying, because what else is there to do? Other parents tell me that remembering that you'll never have to live that day again helps. Viewing everything as a phase is also useful, and it's true that it does go so quickly, you reflect as you fold up all the newborn clothes to put away or donate, wishing that you hadn't spent so much time in the early days looking at cat memes rather than the adorable, ephemeral neonatal wrinkles that have now vanished from your child's face.

It doesn't feel quick, though, when you are singing Ten Green Bottles at the speed of a funeral lament, just to eke out a few more minutes of sitting down (I also do a very slow, lugubrious version of Twinkle Twinkle Little Star, and am available for children's birthday parties).

I do think that, of all the coping mechanisms, writing this column has, in many ways, saved me. I'm so grateful for all the advice and support from readers. It has given me a community. And as one parent said, in response to my question of what gets you through the hardest days: "Watching the little buggers sleeping. All is forgiven – on both sides." When I look at my baby peaceful in his crib, I feel intense love, but also gratitude. Not everyone who wants a baby gets that privilege, and remembering that stops you moaning too much.

Saying that, it's several days later and my toenails remain unpainted.

What's working

I've loved reading the [children's classic Peepo!](#) to the baby, which he loves. A few years ago the archaeologist [Gabriel Moshenska tweeted](#) about how it's rooted in the material culture of the second world war, and I'm enjoying noting the references on every page: a gas mask, a ration book, a portrait of Churchill.

What's not

Having an indoor cat – Mackerel's choice, not ours – and a baby in one flat is proving rather challenging, as I discovered this week when I trod barefoot in cat sick while changing a nappy. As many new parents find, having more space is suddenly a priority.

- Rhiannon Lucy Cosslett is a Guardian columnist and author
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Why I quitSex

I'm a 37-year-old man not having sex. That's my choice, and I'm happy with it

Anonymous

After a breakup I found hooking up with men transactional and depressing. I won't have sex until I fall in love again



'Whenever a friend disappears, returning later to find themselves blocked by the man they had been intimate with only hours before, I find it depressing.'

Photograph: Roderick Schuchart/Alamy

Mon 29 Aug 2022 05.00 EDT Last modified on Tue 30 Aug 2022 04.27 EDT

A few days after Christmas 2016, I stopped having sex.

It wasn't a grand statement or lifestyle choice. Nor was it an attempt to find life's deeper meaning. It wasn't even really a conscious decision. It came about through circumstance during a breakup. Weeks became months, which

became years. And here I am, six years later, a 37-year-old man not having sex.

And you know what? I'm happy.

That's not to say the causes of my abstinence were not painful, and my reasons for giving up sex completely are deeply personal and not entirely easy to explain.

I remember the last time I had sex with absolute clarity. I didn't realise at the time, but I was on the brink of my world falling apart. I had been with my fiance for seven years and was very much in love. We had got engaged a few months previously.

But that last time we had sex – or rather, tried to have sex before he gave up, tired, irritable and with his heart and mind clearly elsewhere – I knew, somehow, that would be the last time.

When we finally broke up, a few months later, sex was naturally the last thing on my mind. I did what most people do after leaving a partner, and threw myself into my career, socialising and family. Anything but men – and certainly anything but sex.

If I'm honest, though, it's deeper than that. I've never been entirely comfortable with sex and intimacy for a variety of reasons, and I think my reasons for giving it up stem from well before that relationship, which was my first.

For one thing, I've always suffered to some extent with body image issues. As a teenager I never felt completely comfortable with my physical appearance – certainly not my appearance naked. School changing rooms were a nightmare, and I became acutely self-conscious.

Being a gay man further complicated matters. I lived my teenage years in the closet, and sex with men remained a mystery right up until my early 20s. I lost my virginity late, at 23, and met my only long-term partner a couple of years later. The sex I came to know best was sex with someone I loved.

But somewhere along the line in that relationship, I began to associate sex with stress. Myself and my partner both worked long hours in demanding jobs, so our moments together were often fleeting. The less sex we had, the more focus we put on it, and the more tension it caused when one or both of us felt the other wasn't enjoying it.

The moment finally came, in late 2016, where we both just stopped trying. I left that relationship and entered the single world with my negative views of sex having been cemented.

Sex as a single man is, of course, entirely different from sex in a relationship, and the way dating had changed during the years I was with a partner came as a shock. Society's approach to sex seemed to have changed. Many of my friends were in open relationships, more than happy to satisfy their physical needs with a handsome stranger before returning home to the one they say they love.

Tinder, Grindr, Bumble and a vast array of other apps have transformed the dating world. Sex is more accessible than ever before – it's become almost transactional, without emotion, and I find myself instinctively rebelling against it. Whenever a friend disappears during the evening, returning later to find themselves blocked by the man they had been intimate with only hours before, I find it depressing.

I know how this all sounds. I am routinely and relentlessly mocked by friends for my views on sex – and I understand that completely. To be honest, I am surprised myself. Sex is, after all, the ultimate pleasure. Why deny yourself that? Am I just overthinking it?

Sex may be one of life's most pleasurable experiences, but it is also one of the most intimate. To waste that intimacy with a stranger seems futile. Sex is best when it is an expression of love. Until I fall in love again, my abstinence will continue. And I'm happy with that.

- This article was amended on 29 August 2022 to remove the pseudonym byline placed on it in an earlier version.

- *Do you have an opinion on the issues raised in this article? If you would like to submit a letter of up to 300 words to be considered for publication, email it to us at guardian.letters@theguardian.com*
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LGBTQ+ rights

Being gay, I was deeply sceptical about marriage – but then I conducted a wedding for my two best friends

[Amrou Al-Kadhi](#)

We live in a world that continually punishes us for who we are, so to see this celebration of queer love felt like a radical act



Just married ... Amrou Al-Kadhi, centre, with friends Hugh Wyld, left, and Tom Rasmussen. Photograph: Courtesy of Amrou

Sun 28 Aug 2022 09.00 EDT Last modified on Sun 28 Aug 2022 20.51 EDT

This summer, I was given the job of marrying my two best friends. We all became close through a drag troupe we started at university and now, here they were: my two drag sisters, my unconditional queer siblings, two of my favourite people in the world, marrying each other after years of unrequited love, unadulterated passion and many trying circumstances – and I had the

mammoth responsibility of conducting the ceremony. Having been deeply sceptical about marriage for years – and single my entire adult life – I was dubious about whether I could do the job justice.

As young queers at university, we had followed the fashionable discourse about how marriage was a “heteronormative construct that shackles us all” and how, as gay people, we were liberated from such arcane traditions, following our own path of true autonomy and forming relationships outside the Hallmark romance framework that has brainwashed the world. The three of us spent our 20s getting into as much trouble as we could: playing drag gigs in the middle of the countryside to hostile crowds, performing sets on the most obscure stages at Glastonbury while inebriated beyond belief, and generally dedicating our lives to drag, queer friendship and the pursuit of creativity. We believed our queerness was a gift – a kind of prophecy that allowed us to bypass the desires that trapped so many other people.

Of course, none of this thinking was original. For decades, the gay community has been wrestling with the question of marriage: should we be fighting to assimilate into such a homogeneous institution, or should we be celebrating relationships on our own political terms? The fear from some factions is that aspiring to marriage might dull the more anti-institutional tenets of what it means to be queer. In my younger years, I lived in these abstract polemics, believing them to be paramount to my identity and life. But then I found myself, at 32, conducting a wedding for my two best Judys (friends) in a not untraditional ceremony. And, in truth, it felt like the most radical act of all. Screw the polemics.

For religious and cultural reasons, I was raised to believe that, in identifying as queer, my very being was a carnal aberration and that the world saw me as defective. I was told this many times, by teachers, relatives, religious instructors – I was once told by a family member that my sexuality made me “impossible to love”. This remains the reality for many queer people, whether or not they are told so in such extreme terms. We live in a world that continually punishes us for who we are and, as a result, queer relationships can be extraordinarily tricky – there’s so much trauma circulating, and navigating through it can be a huge task. So to watch two queer people I love dearly come out the other side, promising to love each

other for the rest of their lives, felt victorious. It is always a triumph when queer people who have been taught to hate themselves finally believe they deserve another's love. It was one of the most hopeful days I've ever experienced.

Globally, it feels as if we are slipping backwards in relation to LGBTQ+ rights. Anti-trans legislation is gathering support at alarming speed in the US. Florida's "don't say gay" law bans all mention of sexuality in schools and the supreme court, having annihilated bodily autonomy for women and pregnant people, seems poised to eviscerate gay rights. The UK, too, has seen trans people conscripted into a horrifying culture war (see the Tory leadership race), with hate crimes against LGBTQ+ people escalating in recent years. In this precarious time, a queer love so powerful that it brings hundreds of people together in a field to witness and honour it deserves not only a ceremony but a defiant parade. I know it was supposed to be the happiest day of my friends' lives, but it was also the best day of mine.

- Amrou Al-Kadhi is a drag performer, actor, screenwriter and author. Glamrou is at Soho theatre, London W1 from 5-10 September

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/aug/28/being-gay-i-was-deeply-sceptical-about-marriage-but-then-i-conducted-a-wedding-for-my-two-best-friends>

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[Bali](#)

Bali bomb maker Umar Patek claims it was a ‘mistake’ to be involved in the attacks

Ahead of his expected early release, Umar Patek takes part in an interview from prison, saying he hopes to deter millennials from the ‘radicalism virus’



Convicted Bali bomb maker Umar Patek gave an on-camera interview from the Porong jail about his involvement in the 2002 nightclub bombings.
Photograph: Facebook | [lapassurabaya](#)

*Samantha Lock
@Samantha_Lock*

Mon 29 Aug 2022 00.28 EDT Last modified on Mon 29 Aug 2022 01.23 EDT

Bali bomb maker Umar Patek has claimed it was a “mistake” to become involved in the 2002 attacks that killed more than 200 people.

In a 20-minute interview from inside the Indonesian jail from which he [could soon be released](#), Patek said he “disagreed” with the plan to bomb two nightclubs.

In the since-deleted 20-minute [video](#), Patek can be seen talking to the Porong prison governor as the two men stroll through the prison grounds.

“This morning I joined our brother Umar Patek, our friend in Block F,” governor Jalu Yuswa Panjang says as he introduces the 52-year-old former member of the al-Qaida-linked terror group Jemaah Islamiyah.

“Today we are going to talk to him about, who exactly is Umar Patek?”

Patek, whose real name is Hisyam bin Ali Zein, said he regretted his involvement in the 2002 nightclub bombings, and wanted to help deradicalise young terror convicts.

“My mistake was to be involved with the Bali bombing,” he said. “I told them I was against it. But they were 95% done with the project … 950kg of explosives were packed and ready, and they insisted on going ahead with it.”

“I didn’t come to [Indonesia](#) to join the Bali bomb project. Even when I found out about it I was so against it, I disagreed with it. I asked the others at the time, what were the reasons for the attack plan. There were no reasons.”



Patek, whose real name is Hisyam bin Ali Zein, said he regretted his involvement in the 2002 nightclub bombings. Photograph: Romeo Gacad/AFP/Getty Images

It is not clear when the interview was taken but video footage was uploaded to the Porong prison official YouTube channel on 27 August.

On 17 August, Patek was [granted a sentence reduction](#) after serving two-thirds of his 20-year prison term and showing progress towards reform, Teguh Wibowo, spokesperson of the law and human rights ministry office in East Java confirmed.

“He has dutifully undergone a deradicalisation programme and behaves well in the prison,” Wibowo said.

However Australia’s prime minister, Anthony Albanese, said the decision would “cause further distress” to families of those caught in the bombings, which killed 88 Australians.

“I feel a great deal of common distress, along with all Australians, at this time,” he said. “He was responsible for death and destruction on a major scale. And this decision by the Indonesian government will add to the trauma that families are feeling at this time.”

Patek was jailed for his role in building the bombs that ripped through the Sari Club and Paddy's Bar in October 2002, [killing 202 people, including 88 Australians.](#)

The West Jakarta district court concluded that Patek played an important role in building the explosives used in the bombings. He was also sentenced for his involvement in attacks on Jakarta churches on Christmas Eve 2000, in which 19 people were killed.



Convicted Bali bomb maker Umar Patek has taken part in an on-camera interview from jail about his involvement in the 2002 nightclub bombings.
Photograph: Facebook | lapassurabaya

Patek admitted he helped make the bombs, but said he did not know how they would be used. Prosecutors argued that he helped to assemble the suicide vests, as well as the detonating cords and boosters connected to the explosives. He was spared the death sentence after collaborating with the police and apologising to the victims' families.

Upon his release, Patek says he wants to work with young convicted terrorists to help stamp out radicalism in Indonesia.

"I'd like to work with millennials because they're the ones more prone to get infected by the radicalism virus," he said.

The video prompted anger among those who lost friends and family in the attacks.

Jan Laczynski, who lost five friends in the bombings, told Nine's Today show on Monday that he initially thought the video was a hoax, describing the footage of Patek laughing and smiling as "horrific" and "unbelievable".

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Air France/KLM

Two Air France pilots suspended after fight in cockpit prompts cabin crew to intervene

Scrap comes to light after French air watchdog cites fuel-leak incidents in saying some of airline's pilots not properly following safety protocols



An Air France Boeing 777-300. Two pilots with the airline have been suspended after fighting in the cockpit on a Geneva-Paris flight in June. Photograph: Gonzalo Fuentes/Reuters

Associated Press in Paris

Sun 28 Aug 2022 20.52 EDT Last modified on Sun 28 Aug 2022 21.04 EDT

Two Air France pilots have been suspended after physically fighting in the cockpit on a Geneva-Paris flight in June, an Air France has official said on Sunday. The flight continued and landed safely, and the dispute didn't affect

the rest of the flight, the official said, stressing the airline's commitment to safety.

Switzerland's La Tribune reported that the pilot and co-pilot had a dispute shortly after takeoff and grabbed each other by their collars after one apparently hit the other.

Cabin crew intervened and one crew member spent the flight in the cockpit with the pilots, the report said.

News of the fight emerged after France's air investigation agency, BEA, issued a report on Wednesday saying that some Air France pilots lack rigour in respecting procedures during safety incidents.

It focused on a fuel leak on an Air France flight from Brazzaville in the Republic of Congo to Paris in December 2020, when pilots rerouted the plane but did not cut power to the engine or land as soon as possible, as leak procedure requires. The plane landed safely in Chad, but the BEA report warned that the engine could have caught fire.

It mentioned three similar cases between 2017 and 2022, and said some pilots were acting based on their own analysis of the situation instead of safety protocols.

Air France said it was carrying out a safety audit in response. It pledged to follow the BEA's recommendations, which include allowing pilots to study their flights afterward and making training manuals stricter about sticking to procedure.

The airline noted that it flew thousands of flights daily and the report mentioned only four such safety incidents.

Air France pilots unions have insisted that security is paramount to all pilots and defended pilot actions during emergency situations.

The BEA also investigated an incident in April involving an Air France flight from New York's JFK airport that suffered flight control problems on

approach to its landing in Paris.

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[Gibraltar](#)

Better late than never: Gibraltar ‘becomes’ city after 180-year delay

Research to update record of cities in UK and overseas territories reveals Gibraltar was awarded status in 1842 but omitted from list



The Rock of Gibraltar. Photograph: Artur Bogacki/Alamy

[Vivian Ho](#)

Sun 28 Aug 2022 17.30 EDT Last modified on Sun 28 Aug 2022 17.36 EDT

Residents of [Gibraltar](#) smarting at missing out on gaining city status in a recent competition have been handed an unexpected surprise: it has been one for the last 180 years.

Gibraltar was among 39 places across the UK and British overseas territories [ying to win city status](#) as part of the Queen's platinum jubilee celebrations in a competition last year, up against sites ranging from Alcester to Wrexham, via the Cayman Islands.

Unfortunately for Gibraltarians, they were unsuccessful in their attempt – or so they thought. In publishing a fresh record of the 81 places that have so far achieved the special status, including the eight new designations awarded as part of the competition – and through researching the National Archives – the government learned that Queen Victoria had actually awarded Gibraltar city status in 1842, but it was omitted from the official list of recognised cities.

Bangor, Colchester, Doncaster, Dunfermline, Milton Keynes and Wrexham were all awarded city status through the competition, along with Douglas on the Isle of Man and Stanley in the Falkand Islands.

Boris Johnson declared it “excellent” to see Gibraltar’s reaffirmation as a city, describing it as a “huge accolade” to its “rich history and dynamism”.

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Traditionally, city status was associated with having an Anglican cathedral, but these days the monarch can choose to elevate towns based on the advice of the government. The smallest recognised city in the UK is St David's in Wales, which boasts a population of 1,841.

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/aug/28/better-late-than-never-gibraltar-becomes-city-after-180-year-delay>.

Global development

Living on scraps: the Zimbabwe children who eke out a living from rusty metal

Nearly half of all children in the crisis-hit country have had to drop out of school to earn enough to eat. For some, collecting scrap metal offers a meagre living



Boys struggle to make a living by delivering scrap metal to a yard in Hopley near Zimbabwe's capital, Harare. Photograph: Nyasha Chingono

Global development is supported by



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[Nyasha Chingono](#) in Harare

Mon 29 Aug 2022 02.45 EDT Last modified on Tue 30 Aug 2022 06.07 EDT

The rattling of metal can be heard yards away from the scrapyard. A steady trickle of people struggle in: small children laden with sacks of tins and bits of car engines, and adults with handfuls of jagged objects, unidentifiable beneath the rust.

Some push handcarts as scrapyard attendants take turns to weigh the metal brought in, then hand over a few dirty US dollar notes in return.

Children are regulars amid the hustle and bartering that Zimbabwe's poorest are resorting to in order to eat. With the economic crisis ever deepening, Unicef says [47% of Zimbabwean youth have now dropped out of school](#).

Most of the children here in Hopley, 10 miles (16km) from the capital, Harare, have not been in class since the Covid pandemic began and [are not returning due to rising poverty](#).

Colin Mapuranga (not his real name), 15, and his brother Mike are at the scrapyard, in torn T-shirts and shorts, and tell a tale of hardship in troubled

Zimbabwe. Colin and Mike keep an eye on the scale as it reaches 30kg. For that, and their five hours of collecting it, they are handed US\$10 (£8.50).



Colin Mapuranga sits on a pile of metal in a scrap yard near Hopley, a settlement outside Harare. Photograph: Nyasha Chingono

“It is not much, but it is something,” says Colin, tucking the notes into his pocket. “It’s not easy. We woke early and walked for hours to get metal.”

With the money, they will buy food for the day and maybe something from the piles of secondhand clothes sold in Harare’s open spaces. For now, school fees are a luxury they cannot afford.

Colin says: “We must work harder – maybe one day we will afford to go back to school. Our older sister, who is 18, cannot pay for our fees. She wakes up every day to look for menial jobs. So we must help her or we will starve.”

We barely have enough to eat, but this metal business has helped us get by

Colin Mapuranga, 15

Inflation hit 192% in June, and all but the very rich are struggling. [Children](#) are abandoning school to take up menial tasks to help put food on the table.

An average family here needs 120,000 Zimbabwe dollars (£308) a month to survive, according to the [Zimbabwe Statistical Agency](#), an amount beyond the reach of many. While food prices rise, the currency has also tumbled in value during the first half of the year, and millions face acute hunger, [according to the Famine Early Warning Systems Network](#).

Unicef says that nearly one in three 5-17-year-olds in the country are [engaged in child labour](#).

Child-headed families like Colin's are finding things especially tough. The parents of the three siblings died three years ago, and the children were left to fend for themselves in a small house in Hopley, a settlement created in 2005 after street trader families were displaced from Harare by the late president Robert Mugabe in a clearout of city streets. The initiative was called [Operation Murambatsvina \(Drive Out Trash\)](#).

“We barely have enough to eat, but this metal business has helped us get by. Some days are tougher – you can get as little as \$3 (£2.50) for light metal,” says Colin.

As the brothers leave the scrapyard, Jeremiah Magunda, 42, and his three sons, all under 15, arrive to weigh in their metal. They are disappointed at the reading. They will go home with \$7.

Magunda and the boys have been scrounging for metal objects around Hopley since the onset of Covid. “I came here with my sons to try my luck. We are suffering. I used to be a gold panner, but since I hurt my finger I stopped. My sons have been doing it when I am not around,” Magunda tells the Guardian.



Mercy Muzvidzwa counts her money after making a delivery with her children. Photograph: Nyasha Chingono

Mercy Muzvidzwa, 42, is pushing a wheelbarrow of scrap with her two children. They wake at 5am to scour surrounding neighbourhoods. This is her only source of income, she says. “I have been doing this for the past four years. You cannot just sit at home; life is not that kind, and my children need to eat.

“It is tough to be carrying heavy metal but there are no options. I go out with my children every day, they always help me.”

This scrapyard belongs to local dealer Fungai Mataga. “I buy all the scrap metal here. I sell to steel manufacturers at profit, which is not much,” he says.

Mataga admits that school-age children are his main suppliers. “We have a lot of children and women coming here daily to deliver scrap metal. They still have strength to walk around,” he says.

Under President Emmerson Mnangagwa, who wrested power from Mugabe in 2017, Zimbabwe has witnessed an economic tailspin, with politicians blamed for doing little to ease a hunger crisis that has followed poor rains.

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Mississippi

Mississippi governor declares state of emergency ahead of massive flooding

Flood stage considered ‘major’ at 26ft, but warnings estimate water to reach 34ft in some areas, while others could see 35.8ft of water



The Biloxi River from a bridge on Three Rivers Road, on Thursday, in Harrison county, Mississippi. Photograph: Justin Mitchell/AP

[Maya Yang](#)

Sun 28 Aug 2022 14.49 EDT Last modified on Mon 29 Aug 2022 09.27 EDT

Mississippi’s governor, Tate Reeves, [declared](#) a state of emergency on Saturday as the state braces itself for massive flooding that was predicted for Monday.

“If predictions prove accurate, the Pearl River is expected to crest on Monday, August 29th, at 36 feet,” several feet over what is considered a

major flood stage, Reeves said. “This is 24 hours sooner than originally predicted.”

Usually, a flood stage is considered “major” at 26ft, CNN [reports](#). However, the state’s current flood warnings estimate floods to reach 34ft in certain areas, while others are likely to see 35.8ft of water, threatening homes and businesses in areas that were damaged by severe flooding in 2020 as the global climate crisis continues fueling extreme weather.

“If your home flooded in 2020, there is a high probab[ility] it will happen again,” Reeves said. The governor added: “I want to strongly encourage everyone to remain calm. Be aware, but don’t panic. I encourage individuals in the flood zones to be cautious, take appropriate precautions and evacuate if necessary.”

So far, the state has deployed 126,000 sandbags and put search and rescue teams on standby. Additionally, the [Mississippi](#) emergency management agency has drones in the air to assess water levels along the Pearl River.

Chokwe Antar Lumumba, the mayor of Mississippi’s capital, Jackson, has urged residents in flood zones to pack enough belongings to get them through an evacuation that is several days long. He said law enforcement officers will increase patrols to protect property.

“Don’t allow that to be an impediment for you saving your life and saving the lives of those other individuals in your home,” Lumumba said during a news conference on Friday.

Suzannah Thames, who owns a rental home in Jackson that was filled with dirty, snake-infested flood water when the Pearl River overflowed its banks in 2020, spoke with the Associated Press.

Thames on Friday pointed to a column on the front porch to show how deep the water was then – about up to her waist. She’s now getting ready for another inundation, days after storms dumped torrential rainfall in Mississippi and other parts of the deep south.

Hydrologists predict the Pearl River near Jackson will crest – or reach its peak level before subsiding – by Tuesday somewhat short of the levels it reached two years ago. But emergency officials are telling people in low-lying areas to prepare for homes and businesses to be flooded after river levels increased dramatically as a result of those torrential rains.

Thames hired a crew to move furniture, appliances and other belongings out of the three-bedroom home that she now rents to a newly married couple – a medical student and engineer who plans to stay in a short-term vacation rental.

“We’re fortunate that we have two trailers,” Thames said as she oversaw the move. “There’s people who don’t have anything. There’s people who are going to lose everything.”

Second-year medical student Emily Davis and her husband, engineer Andrew Bain, rent the white-brick home from Thames in north-east Jackson. Davis said the couple knew they were moving into a flood zone, but this is the first time she has ever had to prepare for high water.

“I’ve felt really stressed because there’s so much to do – so much more than I realized,” Davis said as workers hoisted items into moving vans.

Thames said the rental home was covered by flood insurance, and she lives in an elevated house nearby. She said her house is built 4ft (1.2 meters) above the line of a massive 1979 flood.

Thames said she wanted officials to move forward with a long-discussed plan to build another lake near Jackson to control flooding in the capital city’s metro area. The project has stalled amid funding problems and opposition from people downstream along the Pearl River.

The Mississippi floods come amid a summer of extreme weather events that occurred across the country. Over a dozen people died in Kentucky last month as historic [floods](#) in the eastern parts of the state left behind a trail of devastation. Record flooding and mudslides in June forced Yellowstone national park – which spans parts of Wyoming, Montana and Idaho – to [close](#) as numerous roads and bridges were washed out.

Meanwhile, a triple-digit [heatwave](#) in the Pacific north-west last month caused at least four deaths as climate change continues to fuel longer heat spells in a region where such occurrences are rare.

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- [Cost of living crisis Cold homes will cost children's lives and cause long-term damage, warn experts](#)
- [Live Labour policy on energy not 'kicking can down the road', insists Keir Starmer](#)
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- [Ovo Energy Chief calls for 'progressive' scheme for bills similar to tax system](#)

Children

Cold homes will cost children's lives and cause long-term damage, warn experts

Winter 'humanitarian crisis' will damage children's lungs and brain development

- [UK households' spending power to drop by £3,000, warns thinktank](#)



Children face a wave of respiratory illness with long-term consequences, according to a review by Sir Michael Marmot. Photograph: Cavan Images/Alamy

[Robert Booth](#) and [Andrew Gregory](#)

Thu 1 Sep 2022 03.22 EDTFirst published on Wed 31 Aug 2022 19.01 EDT

Cold homes will damage children's lungs and brain development and lead to deaths as part of a "significant humanitarian crisis" this winter, health experts have warned.

Unless the next prime minister curbs soaring fuel bills, children face a wave of respiratory illness with long-term consequences, according to a review by Sir Michael Marmot, the director of University College London's Institute of [Health Equity](#), and Prof Ian Sinha, a respiratory consultant at Liverpool's Alder Hey children's hospital.

Sinha said he had “no doubt” that cold homes would cost children’s lives this winter, although they could not predict how many, with damage done to young lungs leading to chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD), emphysema and bronchitis for others in adulthood.

It comes as the Resolution Foundation thinktank [predicts Britain is facing the deepest living standards squeeze in a century](#), with a typical household losing £3,000 in real-terms income over two years, inflation hitting 15% for the poorest households, and the cost of living crisis lasting into 2024.

It forecasts 3 million more people will be living in absolute poverty, and relative child poverty will hit its highest level since the peaks of the 1990s, in a “frankly terrifying” outlook for living standards.

Huge numbers of cash-strapped households are preparing to turn heating systems down or off when the energy price cap increases to £3,549 from 1 October, and the president of the British Paediatric Respiratory Society, also told the Guardian that child deaths were likely.

“There will be excess deaths among some children where families are forced into not being able to heat their homes,” said Dr Simon Langton-Hewer. “It will be dangerous, I’m afraid.”

In the UK, 45 million people are [forecast to face fuel poverty by January 2023](#), and Marmot and Sinha said “millions of children’s development will be blighted” with lung damage, “toxic stress” that will affect brain development, and deepening educational inequalities as children struggle to keep up with school work in freezing homes. Across all age groups, the cold crisis will cost thousands of lives, they warned.

“It’s simply insupportable in Britain in the 21st century to have so many people that are fuel insecure,” said Marmot, one of the world’s leading experts on public health inequalities. “The government needs to act, and act right now. It’s clear we are facing a significant humanitarian crisis with thousands losing their lives and millions of children’s development blighted, leading to inequalities that will last a lifetime.”

Sinha warned worried parents against wrapping up infants in multiple layers as this can restrict breathing, and said sleeping in the same bed to share bodily warmth – without following the precautions advised by [the Lullaby Trust](#) and [the NHS](#) – could increase the risk of sudden infant death syndrome (Sids). He recommended using winter-weight babygrows, and contacting landlords and health professionals for help if parents are concerned.

[Map](#)

Families already facing fuel poverty told the Guardian how children as young as four have been hospitalised with respiratory illness because of cold and damp. One mother said a doctor found her eight-year-old son’s chronic lung congestion was depleting his brain’s oxygen supply.

“Mould climbing the walls and wrecking cots, and children being hospitalised because of poor housing may sound like the stuff of nightmares, but this is reality for a worrying number of families,” said Polly Neate, the chief executive of the housing charity Shelter.

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Damp contributes to up to 15% of new cases of childhood asthma in Europe and for children with asthma, lung function worsens with every degree drop in indoor temperature below 9C, the World Health Organization has found.

Wholesale gas prices surged from £1.04 per therm in November to £2.71 in June as Russia's invasion of Ukraine and the reopening of the global economy after Covid put pressure on costs. But Marmot also blamed a slowdown in the rate of installation of wall and roof insulation in Britain's often aged housing stock over the last 15 years.

Clare Bambra, a professor of public health at Newcastle University, said the cost of living crisis was on course to become a public health crisis "potentially surpassing the pandemic". She said: "The impacts of rising fuel poverty will be particularly felt in the north – as we have an older population and higher rates of deprivation."

Marmot said: "If we are constantly worrying about making ends meet, it puts a strain on our bodies, resulting in increased stress, with effects on the heart and blood vessels and a disordered immune system. This type of living environment will mean thousands of people will die earlier than they should, and, in addition to lung damage in children, the toxic stress can permanently affect their brain development."

A government spokesperson said: "We are providing £37bn of direct support to reach people's pockets in the weeks and months ahead, targeted at those who need it most. This includes 8 million of the most vulnerable households receiving the second part of £650 this autumn, another £300 going to pensioners in November, £150 for the disabled and £400 for all energy bill payers.

"As the public would rightly expect, we are working closely with the NHS to ensure we are ready for extra pressures this winter, including providing an extra £79m last year to significantly expand our mental health services, enabling more children and young people to get help."

This article was amended on 1 and 2 September 2022. An earlier version said wholesale gas prices surged from £104 per therm in November to £271 in June; this should have been £1.04 to £2.71. Also, a reference to the

potential risks of co-sleeping with young children has been changed to clarify that it is considered safe so long as official advice is followed; the term “cot death” was changed to Sids; and the main image was changed in line with official guidance on children’s use of inhalers/nebulisers.

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Politics live with Andrew Sparrow
Politics

More rail strikes announced for September after talks with RMT and operators fail – as it happened

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UK cost of living crisis

UK households' spending power to drop by £3,000, warns thinktank

Resolution Foundation says rising energy bills will push extra 3 million people into poverty

- [Cold homes will cost children's lives, warn experts](#)



The Resolution Foundation said rising energy bills will cut household incomes by 10%. Photograph: Peter Byrne/PA

[Larry Elliott](#) Economics editor

Thu 1 Sep 2022 01.00 EDT Last modified on Thu 1 Sep 2022 03.02 EDT

Households in Britain will see their spending power cut by an average £3,000 by the end of next year unless the new government acts to counter the biggest drop in living standards in at least a century, research has indicated.

Adding to pressure on Boris Johnson's successor as prime minister to tackle a worsening cost of living crisis, the Resolution Foundation thinktank said soaring energy bills would cut household incomes by 10% and push an extra 3 million people into poverty.

The thinktank said the outlook for living standards was "shocking" and "terrifying", noting that without beefed-up support from the state, the drop in the typical household's income would be twice as severe as that in the global financial crisis of the late 2000s and worse than the 8% drop that followed the oil price shock of the mid-1970s.

low incomes

income on energy

Lalitha Try, a Resolution Foundation researcher, said: "No responsible government could accept such an outlook, so radical policy action is required to address it. We are going to need an energy support package worth tens of billions of pounds, coupled with increasing benefits next year by October's inflation rate."

It came as a separate report warned that a "significant humanitarian crisis with millions of children's development blighted" is on the way without urgent government support to alleviate fuel poverty.

The report, led by Prof Michael Marmot, director of the UCL Institute of Health Equity (IHE), warned that high fuel costs and rising poverty were damaging health and that growing up in cold homes would have "dangerous consequences" for many children now and into adulthood. [Cold homes adversely affect children's development](#), and cause and worsen respiratory conditions and mental health problems.

With prices rising faster than wages, the Resolution Foundation said inflation-adjusted average incomes would continue falling until at least the middle of next year – taking real earnings back to their levels of 2003. Living standards were on course to drop by 5% in the current 2022-23 financial year and by a further 6% in 2023-24 – a two-year decline

unprecedented even during the hardship suffered during the second world war.

The two-decade-long wage depression was a consequence not just of the present high level of inflation, but of more than 15 years of economic stagnation driven primarily by historically weak productivity, the thinktank added.

Liz Truss, the frontrunner to replace Johnson, has made tax cuts central to her pitch to be prime minister but has not ruled out direct financial support to help people struggling with their energy bills. A package is expected before the price cap is raised to more than £3,500 a year on 1 October.

Inflation, as measured by the consumer prices index, is currently at a 40-year high of 10.1% but the Bank of England expects it to climb above 13% in October. The cost of living outlook has worsened since Threadneedle Street announced its forecasts last month and the US investment bank Citi said inflation could reach 18% by the middle of next year.

income projections disposable income

Poorer households faced a higher-than-average inflation rate because more of their income was spent on the two items largely responsible for cost of living pressures – food and energy. The thinktank said by October the least well-off 10% of households would face an inflation rate of 15%.

It added that in the absence of a policy shift or a better economic performance, absolute poverty – where income is insufficient to maintain basic living standards – would rise from 17% to 22% of the population by 2024. The jump from 11 million to 14 million would be the sharpest rise on record.

“Furthermore, absolute child poverty is expected to rocket from 23% in 2021-22 to 31% in 2023-24, an increase of 1 million children”, the thinktank said in a report, In at the Deep End, detailing the cost of living challenge facing the new prime minister.

Real incomes were expected to start rising again once inflation fell back during 2023 but would reverse only part of the decline suffered this year and next, the report said. Average household incomes would be 7% lower in 2024 than in 2019 – comfortably the worst performance during any parliament on record.

Try said: “Britain is already experiencing the biggest fall in real pay since 1977, and a tough winter looms as energy bills hit £500 a month. With high inflation likely to stay with us for much of next year, the outlook for living standards is frankly terrifying.

“Typical households are on course to see their real incomes fall by £3,000 over the next two years – the biggest squeeze in at least a century – while 3 million extra people could fall into absolute poverty.”

Johnson, who leaves Downing Street next week, has warned voters the coming months would be “tough” but the Resolution Foundation warned that the cost of living crisis would stretch into 2024, making it vital the UK grappled with the twin long-term challenges of low growth and high inequality.

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/business/2022/sep/01/uk-households-spending-power-drop-resolution-foundation-energy-bills-warning-poverty>.

Energy industry

Ovo Energy chief calls for ‘progressive’ scheme for bills similar to tax system

Banded subsidy would provide greater support for poor households but taper off for richer users

- [Business – live updates](#)



‘This scheme can’t be open-ended and unlimited. It should be progressive just like the tax system,’ Stephen Fitzpatrick says. Photograph: Jeff Overs/BBC/Reuters

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Thu 1 Sep 2022 03.57 EDT Last modified on Thu 1 Sep 2022 04.50 EDT

The chief executive of UK’s third largest energy supplier, Ovo Energy, has called for the government to introduce a “progressive” scheme for energy

bills that would give greater support for poor households but taper off for richer users, similar to the UK's tax system.

The proposal for a banded energy subsidy is part of a [10-point plan](#) put forward by Stephen Fitzpatrick, whose energy company serves 4.5 million customers.

It would involve reducing the price of energy, but only for a limited amount of use per household, meaning that energy consumption beyond that level would be charged at a higher price. This would aim to prioritise support for poorer customers, since higher-income households typically use more energy, he said.

The proposal is a variation of the "[deficit tariff scheme](#)" already backed by energy firms including Scottish Power, which would involve freezing prices at current levels and cover the difference through a central fund repaid over a number of years.

"The scale of the shock of the recent price rise this winter threatens to tip the economy into a deep recession and will be catastrophic for millions of low income households," Fitzpatrick said on Thursday. "It is right that we find ways to smooth further price increases in the short term.

"But this scheme can't be open-ended and unlimited. It should be progressive just like the tax system," he said.

Fitzpatrick said there would be exceptions, given that some vulnerable customers, such as those who have at-home medical care, would use more energy. However, those customers should be identified through the fuel poverty taskforce and helped through targeted support, Fitzpatrick added.

Overall, his proposed scheme would also incentivise people to cut down on their energy use, the energy boss said.

His proposal comes just days after Ofgem announced the energy price cap would increase by 80% from October, taking the average gas and electricity bill from £1,971 to £3,549 a year.

Speaking to Sky News about energy prices during a visit to the US, the chancellor, Nadhim Zahawi, said he was working with energy firms and non-governmental organisations to ensure that struggling households get financial help. “No one should be cut off because they can’t afford their bills,” he said.

He acknowledged that the current level of government support would not be enough, but stressed that his team was looking at a range of options for the next administration, widely expected to be led by the Conservative party candidate Liz Truss.

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“There’s nothing off the table. We are looking at all the options: everything from the chief executive of Scottish Power talking about help where we need to maybe create some sort of a fund for companies to be able to continue to help their customers, all the way through to making sure we target the help to both households and small- and medium-size businesses and probably some larger businesses.

“One of my concerns is the scarring effect on the economy if perfectly viable businesses in hospitality, in leisure, in high-energy use businesses would actually suffer or no longer exist because of Putin’s use of energy as a weapon,” he said.

The chancellor added he was also working with the Bank of England to provide better liquidity in the wholesale energy market, in hopes that it would reduce the energy price cap by £400-500.

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[Renting property](#)

‘It’s a total disaster!’ How soaring rents, cutthroat competition and unscrupulous landlords are breaking tenants



Illustration: Alexander Naughton/The Guardian

Want to rent a flat or house? Be prepared to queue in the street, get into a bidding war or put down a deposit for somewhere you haven’t even seen



[Elle Hunt](#)

Thu 1 Sep 2022 05.00 EDT Last modified on Thu 1 Sep 2022 08.39 EDT

Katharine had been renting in [London](#) for nearly two decades, almost all her adult life, when she lost her job last year. No longer able to afford £900 a month to rent her one-bedroom flat in Crystal Palace, she relocated to Stratford-upon-Avon.

But she missed the capital. “I’m a Londoner through and through,” says Katharine, 40. “Coming back was a matter of when, rather than if.”

This spring Katharine got a new job and started making moves to return. But any hopes of a triumphant homecoming were quickly punctured. She soon discovered that the sum she had budgeted for a one-bedroom flat well outside the city centre got her much less than it did 12 months ago – if it got her anything at all.

The cheapest properties she could find cost more than £1,000 a month, about £150 above her price range. Those that were listed for less were snapped up, regardless of quality.

Several times Katharine made the five-hour round trip from Stratford to London for viewings, only to find that the flat had already been let – or was

being fiercely contested. “There were literally queues outside,” she says. After three months she realised that she could not afford to wait for a flat that she liked; she would have to chase whatever she could afford. “I was desperate,” she says.

Renters are used to having to make compromises between what’s available and what’s affordable, what will suit for now and what to aspire to. This summer, however, tenants looking for a new home are finding it increasingly difficult.

A shortage of housing and a rise in demand have driven up prices – and not just in London. The Office for National Statistics says that rents increased by 3.2% across the UK in the past year, the fastest rate since the financial crisis.



Illustration: Alexander Naughton/The Guardian

Dan Wilson Craw, the deputy director of Generation Rent, says this summer’s squeeze reflects pressures put on housing through the pandemic. “It’s really shocking to see how it’s still reverberating.” Young people who moved back in with their parents in the past two years are now seeking places of their own; many of those who left cities to work remotely are now wanting to come back, as employers ask them to return to offices.

There has also been increased demand – from those who can afford it – for more space. “People working from home, even if only occasionally, are looking for one more bedroom than they would have sought previously, which has created more competition,” says Wilson Craw.

Meanwhile, the number of homes to let has drastically shrunk. The trade organisation Propertymark found that [availability has halved since 2019](#), due in large part to a mass exodus of private landlords. An unusually high number have sold up in response to factors including high house prices, [legislative reforms to protect tenants and improve conditions](#) (disincentivising rogue operators), and what has been termed “[the great re-evaluation](#)”, with many people rethinking their lives after the pandemic. Lucrative holiday lets are also reducing the availability of property for long-term rent.

The result is more people jostling for fewer rooms – even in places where supply has previously satisfied demand.

A [recent analysis](#), by the property market consultancy Dataloft, found that affordability has plummeted in towns including Rotherham, Bolton, Salford, Walsall and Dudley since the pandemic. Across the UK, it has become commonplace for prospective tenants to be asked how much rent they are willing to pay, with the property going to the highest bidder – sometimes as much as £300 over the asking price.

Those properties on the affordable end are being snapped up unseen, often within minutes of being listed online.



Black mould, often found in badly maintained properties. Photograph: Andrei310/Getty Images/iStockphoto

Imo and a friend, both 25, began their hunt for a two-bedroom flat across north and east London in June. They made 20-odd inquiries, but were fast enough to view only five. “New places would be gone by the end of the day, making viewings near impossible,” says Imo – and each of their three bids was readily exceeded by others.

Eventually they were offered a flat in Newham, east London, not yet on the market. It was listed as furnished but came without beds; it was available a month later than they needed, had a washing machine full of mould and “had not been cleaned in about a month”, says Imo. The estate agent told them they could take it as it came, or find somewhere else. They took it.

“It’s made me very wary to move again,” says Imo. “Agents and landlords are treating this as a game, not considering how it impacts renters.”

Some might say that renting in London has been challenging for years, but a sharp reduction in supply – dating back to at least last summer – has exacerbated the problem. New figures from the estate agent Chestertons show that the number of homes available to rent in the capital fell by 38% in the year to July.

“It’s a total disaster in London right now,” says [John Myers, a co-founder of London Yimby](#) (standing for Yes in My Backyard), advocating for affordable housing. “Rents have jumped, people are just not able to find something they can afford … There’s a real crunch.”

On social media, listings are circulated with unnerving regularity for studio flats where the shower is next to the kitchen sink, or lofts with such low ceilings that you can’t sit up in bed. Though the pictures are darkly comic, the real punchline is the asking price – often, in London, well in excess of £1,500 a month – and the knowledge that someone will certainly pay it.

“It’s a classic kind of shortage economy,” says Myers. “There are a few good-quality flats out there but they cost the earth, and are out of range for anyone on a normal salary.”

Even those on good salaries are finding it hard. “It’s hell,” says Julia, 22. She and her partner, 23, had been planning to move from Cambridge to London this month and have a joint annual income of about £132,000. They do not want to spend more than £2,500 a month on rent, as they hope to buy a home one day. But even that budget no longer stretches to a two-bed in zone two.

“Prices have just gone up so much,” Julia says. “We’re in an objectively very fortunate position, but we’re still struggling to find somewhere within budget.” In the past, “you used to be able to compromise” on available properties, she says; now, hardly anything is within reach. She was shocked to find that the small three-bedroom flat she rented with friends in Maida Vale in 2020, and which “reeked of mouse”, has gone from £2,250 monthly to £3,400 in just two years.

With their relocation only waiting on a place to live, the search has been taking its toll on Julia. “It’s not good for your anxiety to be checking your phone 20 times a day, whenever a property comes up, and deciding if you like it,” she says.



Photograph: designer491/Alamy

Londoners' complaints about renting used to be met with broader indifference as the cost of big-city living. But now, strikingly, the problem is spreading rapidly across the country.

Figures from the property site [Rightmove](#) show that market rents across the UK increased by nearly 12% between the second quarter of 2021 and the same period of this year – equating to an extra £119 a month on average, or £1,428 a year.

Those who had already moved out of cities in search of affordable housing may now be feeling as though the crisis has caught up to them.

Fi left London for Essex four years ago, in part because she has a disability and cannot work full-time. Earlier this year she and her partner, Paul, both 33, decided to look for a place to rent together in his Suffolk home town. They soon realised that they would have to act fast. “The number of people trying to get to each place was just insane,” says Fi.

On the day she ended up in hospital for an operation, the couple had two viewings booked. Fi told Paul to go ahead without her. “I said, ‘We don’t have a choice. We need somewhere to live.’”

One house was more or less ideal; Paul was told that if he was interested he would have to apply on the spot. “It came down to a case of fastest finger first – so I was filling in application forms from my hospital bed,” says Fi. “It’s just the kind of craziness of the rental market that they couldn’t wait.”

Their application was supposedly successful, but, with two weeks to go until their move-in date, they have not been asked to pay a deposit or sign a lease; Fi is still worried that it might fall through. In the meantime, she and Paul are sharing a room at his parents’ house, sleeping in single beds.

“We’re stressed out about it all the time,” Fi says. “We’re supposed to be moving in two weeks and we still don’t know if we’ve got the place and what will happen, or if we’ll have to start from square one again.”

In such an overheated market, landlords can dictate their terms, such as requesting that financial records be included with applications, or for six or even 12 months’ rent to be paid in advance.

Nearly 20% of LGBTQ+ private renters said they felt they had been discriminated against

Tenants for new leases are selected on the basis of uncertain, potentially discriminatory criteria. Katharine feared that her surname, of Slavic origin, would disadvantage her against the competition. “Anybody with a name that’s not Anglo-Saxon will get a little bit paranoid, especially with Brexit,” she says. One [Generation Rent survey found that 19% of LGBTQ+ private renters](#) said they felt that they had been discriminated against on the basis of their gender identity or sexual orientation.

Lucy, 27, explored houseshares and “co-living” homes for her move to London from Manchester, without success. She ended up shelling out for a studio flat in Stockwell, south London. “I’m paying a lot more than I originally intended, but the process was causing me to have sleepless nights,” she says.

When the estate agent asked Lucy to drop the six-month break clause that she had requested in her offer, she agreed – anything, she says, to put a stop

to the insecurity and “the endless scrolling”.

Lucy points to figures from the flat-sharing site SpareRoom, showing that since 2011 it has seen [a 239% rise in 55- to 64-year-olds looking for houseshares](#). Relative to other prospective renters, she was lucky to have options, she says; “Yet I can’t help but be bitter about the overall process.”

Some unscrupulous landlords are capitalising on the crisis by increasing rents mid-lease, confident in the knowledge that if their existing tenants refuse to pay it, others will. A recent Generation Rent survey of private renters found that [45% had been approached about a rent increase](#) in the past year, with one in five (20%) asked for more than £100 a month extra.

Though some successfully negotiated a smaller rise, more were forced to accept their landlords’ terms. Some tenants have seen hikes of as much as 20%, says Wilson Craw. “Alongside rising energy bills, it is ultimately going to lead to people losing their homes,” he says.

On top of the [cost of living crisis](#), the squeeze in the rental market is pushing people into financial hardship or destitution. The homelessness charity Shelter [says inquiries about](#) emergency support have risen 177% since the start of the year.

Already Generation Rent’s survey shows that tenants unable to afford rent rises have been forced out into a hostile market. The group is calling on the government to freeze rents for existing tenancies, immediately suspend no-fault evictions (soon [to be banned](#) under the renters reform bill) and introduce protections for tenants who fall behind on rent for reasons beyond their control.



A ‘microflat’. Photograph: Sergio Azenha/Alamy

Wilson Craw suggests the crisis might force a rebalance of the rental sector. “Landlords are going to start taking a hit because people simply don’t have enough to pay rent, energy bills and everything else.”

Greater taxation and regulation of holiday homes and lets would also ensure they go to tenants, not tourists, while compelling landlords to properly insulate properties would reduce heating costs. But while such measures might help alleviate the immediate pressures of the crisis, they don’t address the root cause.

“In the long term, things will only get better when we start to build more houses,” says Freddie Poser, the director of the Priced Out campaign. “The reason that landlords are able to put the rent up so much is because there is no competition in the sector: there are simply too few places to live.

“We’re calling on the government to tackle not just the short-term crisis, but also face up to the long-term economic damage being wrought by our continued failure to build homes.”

Younger generations in particular are at a disadvantage. According to Dataloft, four in every 10 under-30s are now spending more than 30% of their earnings on rent.

“In a proper world, you wouldn’t have people in their 30s sharing a flat,” says John Myers of London Yimby. “It didn’t used to be this way – and it doesn’t have to be this way.”

Likewise, more social housing will be needed for the increasing numbers who cannot afford market rent. “We need everything: more housing of all types,” he says. “All parts of government need to be pushing on this.”

In the meantime, renters are taking what they can get. Katharine eventually nabbed a one-bedroom flat in Streatham “because I was just refreshing Rightmove every half an hour, for half a month”, she says.

The letting agent had had 30 inquiries about the flat within 30 minutes of it being listed online; Katharine put down a deposit, sight unseen, within 10 minutes. “I realised that I just had to be realistic, and grab whatever was out there that was affordable,” she says.

The flat has proved to be small, and noisy. Katharine hopes to be able to move somewhere more comfortable next year. But, she adds with foreboding: “Who knows?”

All case studies’ names have been changed

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[Joyce Carol Oates](#)

[Interview](#)

‘Every time I write, it’s like the first time’: Joyce Carol Oates on her 61 novels, Twitter storms and widowhood

[Paula Cocozza](#)

At 84, Oates still knows how to strike a nerve. She talks about Babysitter – her new book inspired by a Detroit serial killer – loneliness and her controversial tweet about white male writers



Joyce Carol Oates: ‘I don’t think people’s opinions are very important.’
Photograph: Kyle Kielinski/The Guardian

[@CocozzaPaula](#)

Thu 1 Sep 2022 01.00 EDT

Joyce Carol Oates is on her feet in her study, looking out over woodland in rural Princeton, New Jersey, while her maine coon, Zanche, sprawls atop a swanky white cat tower. We are speaking on video and Oates pans around the room – large, book-lined – to show me it. She lets the camera linger on Zanche, who is amply provided for – she also has her own “catio” garden. “She hopes we won’t interfere with her nap,” Oates says, in a voice that sounds mildly warning. She is friendly, but not in a way that makes her less forbidding.

We are speaking before the publication of her novel *Babysitter*, inspired by a serial killer who murdered children in the 1970s in the suburbs of Detroit, where Oates lived at the time. She is 84, but her work remains exceptionally relevant. The film adaptation of her 2000 novel *Blonde*, a fictionalised account of the life of Marilyn Monroe and “the most difficult novel” she has written, is [to be released on Netflix next month](#), while *Babysitter* is unflinching in its detailing of sexual assault before the #MeToo era. According to her publisher, it is Oates’ 61st novel, although no one seems certain, least of all Oates. She waves away the question as if counting is for people who have nothing better to do.

“It’s like: ‘How many nice meals have you prepared?’ You know, for your family or friends. You take some time to make a nice meal, but you don’t necessarily remember. Maybe it sounds ridiculous, but I’m totally immersed in the work I’m doing today. Every time I write, it’s like the first time,” she says.

The approach has yielded so many books that the epithet routinely attached to Oates is “prolific”. Unfortunately, this suggests that the salient feature of her output is its quantity. Does she mind? “I guess it’s just true. It’s just a fact,” she says. “I never thought that I would even publish one book. If you publish your first when you’re quite young, you feel: wow, maybe there will never be another one. And it was sort of one book at a time. Or one project at a time. ‘If I can just get this finished ...’ I guess I just kept on with that.”

She seems to regard the whole business as unremarkable, yet the maths is mindblowing: nearly 60 years of writing, divided by all those novels, plus

novellas, short story collections, essays and book reviews. And it is not as if she is a recluse. She teaches creative writing at Princeton and this morning has already taken a walk with a group of friends. In the evenings, she watches TV and films, often with Zanche stretched beside her, and she tweets. She has spoken before of her daily runs, an hour each evening, in which her mind “flies” with ideas. These have slowed a little. “Well, I usually run and walk, run and walk,” she says. But her writing metabolism has not faltered.



Oates in 1970. Photograph: Bettmann Archive

Oates says that *Babysitter* – a thriller that is poetically watchful of the mind of its protagonist, especially as she approaches turning points – “is also based on the risks we take in writing: spending years of our life on a project” without knowing what, if anything, the time will yield.

You would think Oates had no such worries now; she has been acclaimed as a writer since her fourth novel, *Them*, won the US national book award in 1970. She has five times been a Pulitzer prize finalist and is often considered “America’s foremost woman of letters” (a description thought to have been coined by John Updike), celebrated for dark and precisely observed fiction that splices violence and tenderness. Even *Blonde*, one of those Pulitzer finalists, is a kind of horror in the way it explores the division between

Monroe as a performer and Monroe as a person. Yet she steadfastly writes “professor” as her occupation when filling in forms, never “writer”. “Well, is that a profession?” she asks. For Oates, it seems more a way of life.

As a young child, growing up on a farm in Millersport, New York, she doodled stories, often featuring chickens and, yes, cats with fur of many hues. It was her paternal grandmother, Blanche, who, seeing her granddaughter’s sympathy with storytelling, organised six-year-old Oates’ first library ticket. She bought her a toy typewriter and then, at 14, a real one. Oates has never written a novel on a computer, nor would she. “If James Joyce had written Ulysses on a word processor, he might still be writing it. Because you can always keep revising and maybe Joyce would never have finished.”

It was Blanche, “my only relative interested in books”, who gave her Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland, for her ninth birthday. Oates has described that novel as “the singular book that changed my life, that made me yearn to be a writer”.

She turns to the shelves behind her. “The book is back there. It’s about this big,” she says, shaping a standard-sized book with her hands. “I used to think it was this big,” she says, throwing open her arms, as if Alice’s changes in perspective have been Oates’, too, as if her own imagination were rearranged in that first encounter. “It’s really a normal book. But to me it was so, so monumental.”

She is on her feet again, reaching across her desk for a framed photographic montage – assembled by her friend, the late Gloria Vanderbilt. It puts Blanche front and centre. She points to the top-right corner of the picture. “There’s a little picture of me as an adult up here, sort of looking ... There’s some flowers and trees ... Gloria understood that my grandmother was central to my life, so she put her in front. And then my mother. And then my father. They are all in my study with me,” she says, then pauses. “Though I’m all alone now.”

Oates’ first husband, Ray Smith, who for more than 30 years edited Ontario Review, a literary and arts journal that he and Oates founded, died unexpectedly in February 2008, while being treated for pneumonia. They

were “inseparable companions”, yet they might never have met if Oates, at 21, had not taken “a very big risk”, the sort “where somebody might say: ‘Why did you do that?’”



Oates with Ray Smith.

She was expected to go to Cornell University with her boyfriend of three years, but she read an article about the University of Wisconsin and “something came over me”, she says. “And I thought: ‘I’m going to this other place.’”

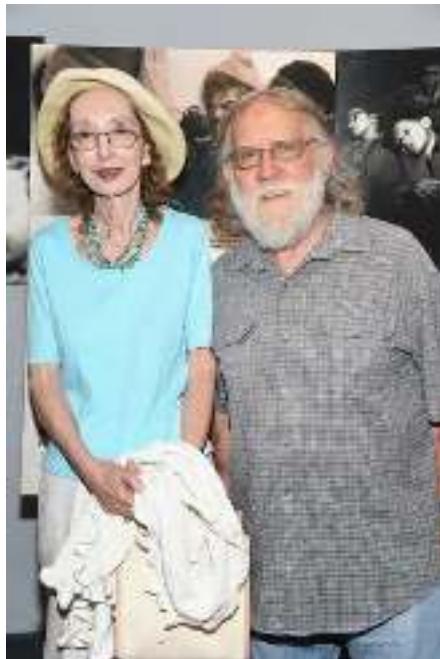
At the time, she could not pinpoint Wisconsin on a map, but the “complete plunge” changed her life. “I would probably have gotten engaged and married to a different person, not a literary person, and it would have really been a mistake,” she says. Instead, she met Smith; they were living together within a month and married within three.

“The stark, implacable, unspeakable, indescribable terror of aloneness” Oates felt after his death is captured in her 2011 memoir, *A Widow’s Story*. But, at the end of the book, she alludes to “a stranger” – in fact, the neuroscientist Charles Gross, a Princeton colleague whom Oates had met at a dinner party. Just over a year after Smith died, they married. But, in 2019, Gross, too, passed away, from cancer.

I can't help wondering if the raw grief that Oates logged in the memoir helped her through the pain the second time around; whether the "survivor's guilt" she detailed grows or subsides. "I can't really talk about it that much," she says.

Well, I say, trying to sound positive, the love contained in the memoir is wonderful: absolute and immense. "I was close to my parents also. I think we shouldn't talk about this," she says. She looks distraught as she pats at tears. Eventually, she says: "I have my kitties." (As well as Zanche, there is Lilith.) "It's hard to talk to widows. It's hard to know how to talk to anyone," she says.

I mention Twitter, to change the subject. "Oh, I don't think about it too much. Twitter is very ephemeral," she says. Oates was criticised recently for tweeting the words of an agent who told her "he cannot even get editors to read first novels by young white male writers, no matter how good". Statistically, publishing retains a strong bias towards white writers, but Oates did not amend her remarks after they made headlines, although she did apologise last year for suggesting that the pronoun "they" would never become "part of general usage". Does she worry about saying the wrong thing, or about the consequences of what she tweets?



With Charles Gross in 2015. Photograph: Gary Gershoff/WireImage

“Well, Ricky Gervais, I think, has the right attitude. He’s very, very funny. He’s brilliant as a comedian. He says somebody can be offended, but it’s just their own opinion … All these things are like hornets. If you don’t really care about it, what’s the difference?”

One difference might be that Oates’ reputation carries a burden of responsibility; that while she regards Twitter as ephemeral, a passing tweet from a literary great can have a lasting impact on others – something she herself acknowledged when she apologised for the remark about pronouns.

“Well, I don’t really care. It’s not anything I’m thinking about,” she says. I suspect that, although the subject has changed, Oates’ thoughts have stayed with Ray, and Charles, and her parents, and others, because she sounds as if she is grieving when she says: “I have a personal life and I have things going on in my life that are important. You know, involving people who are ill or dying. I mean, a lot has happened in real life. To care about a screen or social media, that’s something you do, I think, when you have time for it.

“As soon as a hospital crisis comes in your life, you totally forget about this stuff. When my husband Charlie was ill – six months … I mean, there’s just months and months where nothing else matters. And those times in our lives that you see what really matters, I don’t think people’s opinions are very important. I don’t even care. A matter of surviving for another day,” she says, with an anguished laugh. “Am I still going to be alive tomorrow? Dealing with that existential reality and taking care of people who need to be taken care of? So, if I have energy for anything, it’s for my writing and my work.”

A few days later, still wondering whether *A Widow’s Story* has encumbered Oates, by putting her grief in the public domain, or whether it has helped her, I write to ask. But she replies: “What is there to say about loneliness? Some people report that they feel lonely within their own marriages. Who can say? It’s all so subjective.” Then she adds, brightly, whether in self-talk or advice to others: “Keeping busy, occupied, particularly with work outside the home, like teaching, is probably ideal. Plus domestic pets!” And she sends a picture of Zanche enjoying her catio.

Babysitter by Joyce Carol Oates is published by 4th Estate (£18.99). To support the Guardian and Observer, order your copy at guardianbookshop.com. Delivery charges may apply

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Health

How turning the heat off this winter could damage your health

A survey found 70% of UK adults are planning to heat their homes less, as energy prices soar. But what could be the effect?



Cold air affects the function of the respiratory tract, with problems starting once the temperature drops below about 16C. Photograph: Clive Sherlock/Alamy

[Linda Geddes](#) and [Nicola Davis](#)

Thu 1 Sep 2022 01.00 EDT

Keeping the heating turned off is one surefire way of reducing gas and electricity bills this winter, but it could come at the expense of people's health – particularly those with heart and lung conditions.

According to a [survey](#) of more than 2,000 UK adults, 23% are planning to do without heating this winter, while about 70% said they planned to turn their heating on less. Yet each centigrade degree reduction below 18C in Britain has been [calculated](#) to correspond with an extra 3,500 deaths. Here are the main ways in which cold homes can contribute to worse health.

Cardiovascular disease

Low temperatures cause blood vessels to narrow, putting stress on the circulatory system. “[This] can lead to cardiovascular effects, including ischaemic heart disease (IHD), coronary heart disease, strokes, subarachnoid haemorrhage and death,” according to the World Health Organization’s [housing and health guidelines](#).

A [review](#) of the impact of cold homes on health from the UCL Institute of Health Equity and Public Health England, published in 2014, also highlighted the problem, pointing to data that suggested deaths from cardiovascular disease in England were higher in winter than the average for other times for the year.

Circulatory problems tend to kick in once temperatures fall below about 12C. “[This] results in raised blood pressure, caused by the narrowing of blood vessels, which can lead to increases in blood thickness as fluid is lost from circulation,” the report says. “Increased blood pressure, and increased blood viscosity, can increase the risk of strokes and heart attacks.”

Asthma

Cold air also affects the function of the respiratory tract, with problems starting once the temperature drops below about [16C](#) (61F). Those with existing respiratory conditions, such as asthma or chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD), are at greatest risk.

Sarah MacFadyen, the head of policy and external affairs at [Asthma](#) + Lung UK, said: “Winter is the deadliest season for people with lung conditions, and we’re deeply concerned that energy price hikes will leave tens of thousands of people unable to heat their homes and fighting for breath.

“Breathing in cold air irritates your airways, and your lungs react by becoming tighter, which makes it more difficult to breathe. The cold is a common trigger for people with conditions like COPD and asthma and leads to life-threatening flare-ups and attacks.”

Cold homes are also more susceptible to damp and mould growth, which can trigger allergies, including breathing difficulties in susceptible individuals. Children living in cold, damp and mouldy homes are between 1.5 and three times more likely to develop symptoms of asthma than those living in warm and dry homes, the UCL report says.

A [report](#) published in 2015 for Friends of the Earth noted that while Sweden experienced a colder climate and harsher winters, the proportion of people admitted to hospital with respiratory problems, including asthma, over the previous five years was far higher in England. A key driver, the organisation stressed, was that English homes tended to be a less energy efficient than Swedish ones, as they had less insulation.

Already, Asthma + Lung UK is experiencing an increase in calls to its helpline and visits to its website. MacFadyen said: “We’re worried we’re going to see a sharp decline in the country’s lung health this winter.”

Respiratory infections

Cold homes can also increase the risk of respiratory infections. Certain viruses, such as common cold-causing rhinoviruses, replicate faster in cold noses, while parts of the immune system also become less effective in lower temperatures.

For instance, Akiko Iwasaki at Yale University and her colleagues showed that cells lining the airways of mice produced fewer immune-rallying [interferon](#) molecules at lower temperatures.

This could have serious consequences for people with respiratory conditions, such as COPD, as it may increase the risk of chest infections.

Dr Andrew Whittamore, a practising GP and clinical lead at Asthma + Lung UK, said: “Having a cold home could put people with lung conditions more

at risk of getting a respiratory infection. This is because cold and flu viruses, which can cause respiratory infections, thrive in colder temperatures and poorly ventilated, damp environments. Long-term exposure to colder temperatures and mould can also affect our immune response, hampering our ability to fight off respiratory infections.”

Sleep

Body temperature needs to drop by about 1C to initiate sleep, which is why many people struggle to fall asleep during hot weather. However, trying to fall asleep in a bedroom that's too cold can also be difficult. The main way our bodies reduce their temperature in the run-up to sleep is by increasing blood flow to the extremities. This diverts heat away from the core and causes it to radiate into our environment.

But being too cold causes the blood vessels in our skin to constrict, making it harder to dump this excess heat. According to the Sleep Charity, an ideal bedroom temperature is about 16-18C, although this varies from person to person. Below about 12C, many people may struggle to drop off. Using a hot water bottle to gently warm the feet can help increase blood flow to the skin. Bed socks, and additional layers of clothing and bedding, can also help.

Depression

A [review](#) by Christine Liddell and Ciara Guiney at the University of Ulster found that living in cold and damp housing contributed to a variety of mental health stressors, including persistent worry about debt and affordability, physical discomfort and worry about the consequences of cold and damp for people's health. “Improvements to energy efficiency are often associated with significant improvements in mental wellbeing,” the researchers said.

According to a [report](#) by UCL's Marmot review team, published in 2011, more than one in four adolescents living in cold housing are at risk of mental health problems compared with one in 20 who have always lived in warm housing.

The report also cites an evaluation of the government's Warm Front scheme, which was introduced in 2000 and offered a package of heating and insulation measures to people on certain benefits in England. It found that people's chances of avoiding depression increased as their bedroom temperatures rose.

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OpinionFarming

Eating meat isn't a crime against the planet – if it's done right

[Thomasina Miers](#)



George Monbiot criticised ‘chefs and foodies’ like me for focusing on regenerative grazing. But alternative, lab-grown foods, could have terrible consequences



‘To lump all grazing livestock into one bucket feels unhelpful and misleading.’ Photograph: Peter Flude/The Guardian

Thu 1 Sep 2022 02.00 EDT Last modified on Thu 1 Sep 2022 03.37 EDT

I have huge admiration for George Monbiot, a columnist of this newspaper. His work has highlighted the urgent need to reduce our CO₂ emissions and switch to greener energy. He has also shown intensive farming’s role in the dramatic levels of species decline and biodiversity loss. Much of what he writes I wholeheartedly agree with – but when it comes to the solutions we need to change our farming and food systems, we have radically different takes.

It is indisputable that the farming “revolution” of the 1950s, with its widespread use of ammonia fertilisers and herbicides, pesticides and fungicides, has waged war on nature. These intensive, monocultural ways of producing food are not only contaminating our land and waterways, but are heating up our planet and contributing to a crisis in human health (more people die of diet-related disease globally than smoking, [according to a study](#) published in the Lancet). The animals in factory farms don’t have a great time either. The [decline](#) of insect life is incredibly worrying: without the earthworm, beetle and bee, life as we know it could cease. Topsoils, which we use to grow [95% of the world’s food](#), are depleting [at an](#)

astonishing rate. We need to change the way we eat and produce food, and we need to do it quickly.

Thus far Monbiot and I agree. But in a recent article, [he wrote](#) that organic, pasture-fed beef and lamb are the “world’s most damaging farm products”. He criticises “chefs and foodies” like me for focusing on regenerative grazing, which he calls “rebranded ranching”. His alternative vision includes a revolution in creating food through precision fermentation: growing food in labs from microbes and water. “Before long, most of our food will come neither from animals nor plants, but from unicellular life,” he [wrote in this paper in 2020](#).

Although not averse to the idea of lab-grown food, I am much more for small-scale, community-driven farming because I believe in the potential of food to be a force for good, for human and environmental health. The methods that regenerative farmers such as the writer [Gabe Brown](#) propose have shown how non-intensive livestock, when managed well, can increase topsoil more than previously thought, which can then accumulate biomass (carbon) and retain precious rainwater. The argument put forward by Monbiot that it is not possible to produce enough food this way is often used to decry better food systems, yet according to the Food and Agriculture Organization of the UN, small-scale farmers currently produce about [a third of our food](#).

Monbiot’s enthusiasm for precision fermentation worries me greatly. “Just about all of this [new food technology is heavily funded](#) by [tech oligarchs](#), venture capitalists or the occasional celebrity,” writes the retail podcaster Errol Schweizer in [Forbes](#). Precision fermentation claims to get us off our destructive addiction to cheap meat, but not without potential downsides. These inventions are heavily patented, pushing the future of our food supply further into the hands of an increasingly small and powerful collection of multinational food players..

There is very little transparency about the amount of energy and materials needed to build the system of factories that would be needed to adopt these foods to the degree that their proponents would like. How fossil-fuel dependent are they? How many other chemicals and compounds are needed

to make them, and where will we get them from and how? In our race to look for better systems of food production it is tempting to look for magic bullets, but we cannot afford to ignore the risks.

Ultra-processed foods make up half of [the UK's calories](#), and their health impact gets very little attention from the government or in [medical schools](#). We know that other ultra-processed foods – even some plant-based meat alternatives – are high in protein but can also be very high in salt and fat.

Companies that practise regenerative farming, such as Hodmedod's in the UK, are producing affordable pulses and grains that are rich in protein and fibre, through a cooperative of small-scale farms that almost all use some grazing animals in their systems to aid the nutrient cycle in their soil. In these types of farms, small herds of cattle or sheep graze diverse cover crops, boosting the biodiversity on their land, not reducing it (as Monbiot claimed in his article). The cover crops build back goodness in the soil and remove the need to use pesticides. The presence of livestock adds nutrients through their muck and saliva. They also add the nutrients to our diets: animal fats from grass-fed animals are hard to replace in human diets. Plus, the livestock adds an extra revenue stream for the farmers, making them more resilient.

Through the work we do at the charity [Chefs in Schools](#), I have seen first-hand how it is possible to feed people food that is high in fibre and in flavour, and that costs less than the ultra-processed food children were being fed before. With the right political will (60% of secondary schools are [currently failing school food standards](#) and food plays no role in actual Ofsted ratings), we can feed people on all incomes a better diet, not just through schools but also in hospitals, prisons and social canteens. If we continue to go down the ultra-processed route then food may well continue to make people sick, which, according to Henry Dimbleby's National Food Plan, costs the economy [an estimated £74bn](#).

I love doughnuts and crisps, but we can't live on these alone. I am open to plant-based foods if we can move away from making them with the monocrops that are so destructive to animal life and soils. And I am all for technology, but as long as it works with nature, not against it. We need better

funding for soil science and for feeding proper food to people on lower incomes.

We need to change our diets. We do have to eat significantly less meat. But the evidence of the past 70 years suggests that when we replace nature's complex biology with a tunnel-visioned look at certain aspects of chemistry and ignore others, it has profoundly negative and often unforeseen consequences. In nature the animal and vegetable worlds are never separate – we should learn something from that.

- Thomasina Miers is a cook, writer and restaurateur
 - ***Do you have an opinion on the issues raised in this article? If you would like to submit a letter of up to 300 words to be considered for publication, email it to us at guardian.letters@theguardian.com***
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Hunter Biden

Laurence Fox finds a role equal to his talents: the Breitbart biopic of Hunter Biden

[Emma Brockes](#)



The British actor and champion in the ‘fight against political correctness’ stars in a film fueled by conspiracy theories



Laurence Fox plays Hunter Biden. Photograph: Breitbart/Unreported Story Society

Thu 1 Sep 2022 01.00 EDT Last modified on Thu 1 Sep 2022 23.22 EDT

It has been repeated so often since it was coined in the 2004 film Mean Girls that it has perhaps become an overused formulation. But in the case of Donald Trump, his supporters and the New York Post and their efforts to discredit Joe Biden via his son Hunter, it feels especially apt: guys, stop trying to make [Hunter Biden](#) conspiracy theories happen.

The most recent salvo in the campaign to make Hunter's lost laptop the new Hillary's emails may, at least, bring about a moment of joy for the rest of us. Available for download from 7 September, the movie My Son Hunter is a piece of political porn dedicated to animating the wildest fringes of Trump chat-room banter. To enjoy it, you have only to [submit your email address](#) to Breitbart News, the far-right internet platform that is distributing the film. For those unwilling to see their names on that particular list, I can assure you that the trailer, which dropped last week, is more than you need.

The call sheet is an absolute peach. The film is directed by Robert Davi, who played one of the bad guys in the Goonies and whose previous political work as a director includes "["Demon Sheep"](#)", the attack ad featuring satanic

livestock that helped Carly Fiorina lose to Barbara Boxer in California's 2010 Senate race.

The screenplay is by Brian Godawa, who, two years ago, wrote the confusingly capitalised ObamaGate Movie, about a “deep state plot to undermine the Trump candidacy”, and also writes biblical-themed novels with titles such as Psalm 82 and Judgment: Wrath of the Lamb. The actor John James (Dynasty, the Colbys, the ObamaGate Movie) plays Biden, and Gina Carano – former cast member of the Mandalorian, who was fired from that franchise last year for [making social media statements denouncing mask wearing](#) and [comparing the treatment](#) of present-day Republicans to Jews during the Holocaust – appears as a Secret Service agent trying to save her country from the Bidens.

These gifts are all secondary, however, to the casting of Britain's own [Laurence Fox](#) as Hunter Biden. To enjoy the full impact of this, we need to pause for a moment exclusively to address American readers. It's hard to explain, to the unacquainted, the unique role played by Fox in British national life: an actor who appeared in a popular detective show for years without troubling the public imagination, Fox has, in recent years, inserted himself into the discourse with a range of eye-catching opinions that can be largely summarised as a defense of our era's poorest underdog: the straight, white male.

Credit where it's due: Fox was quite good, 20 years ago, as the fifth lead in Gosford Park. But as the child of the actor James Fox and nephew of the actor Edward Fox, Laurence may be imagined in relation to his family's acting dynasty as a kind of British Stephen Baldwin, only built like an asparagus and with cheeks as hollow as in any painting by Edvard Munch.

In 2020, he was [dropped by his agents](#) after he characterised being described as a “white privileged male” as “racist”, and he has been shown to be [fond of the phrase All Lives Matter](#). Last year, he founded the Reclaim party “to fight against extreme political correctness”, and he stood for mayor of London in 2021, a candidacy as delusional as Marianne “has anyone tried fixing America with *crystals* and bee pollen?” Williamson's run for the

Democratic presidential nomination in 2019, if a good deal less charming. Fox lost his £10,000 deposit after gaining just 1.9% of the vote.

You get the idea – chiefly, that in My Son Hunter, Laurence Fox has finally found material equal to his talents. For British readers, meanwhile, there may be some catching up to be done on the subject of Hunter Biden and the internet. There isn't enough time in the world to fully describe everything that has emerged from this particular screaming hellmouth, but briefly: the source for My Son Biden is what the New York Post calls Hunter Biden's laptop probe, a series of stories that circle around material found on a laptop at a repair shop in Delaware, which was reported by the Post to show connections between Hunter Biden and various Ukrainian and Chinese energy companies, plus some sex stuff I still can't figure out. Stories about the laptop were suppressed by tech companies in the lead-up to the election even though some of them were true, which is why Trump has described it on his Truth Social platform as the "Laptop from Hell coverup". But they have also given rise to a world of conspiracy theories and conjecture, connecting [Joe Biden](#) to Hunter's dealings in ways that have never been proven.

While it's a constant Republican talking point, the story never got much real-world traction outside the Fox News ecosystem. Hence the need to make My Son Hunter, key search terms for which, on the strength of the trailer, should be "cavorting", "underpants", and, to nail that crucial international revenue stream, "Lozza Fox". We can only raise a glass to them all, wish them the very best of online premieres next week, and fervently hope the movie gets the audience it deserves.

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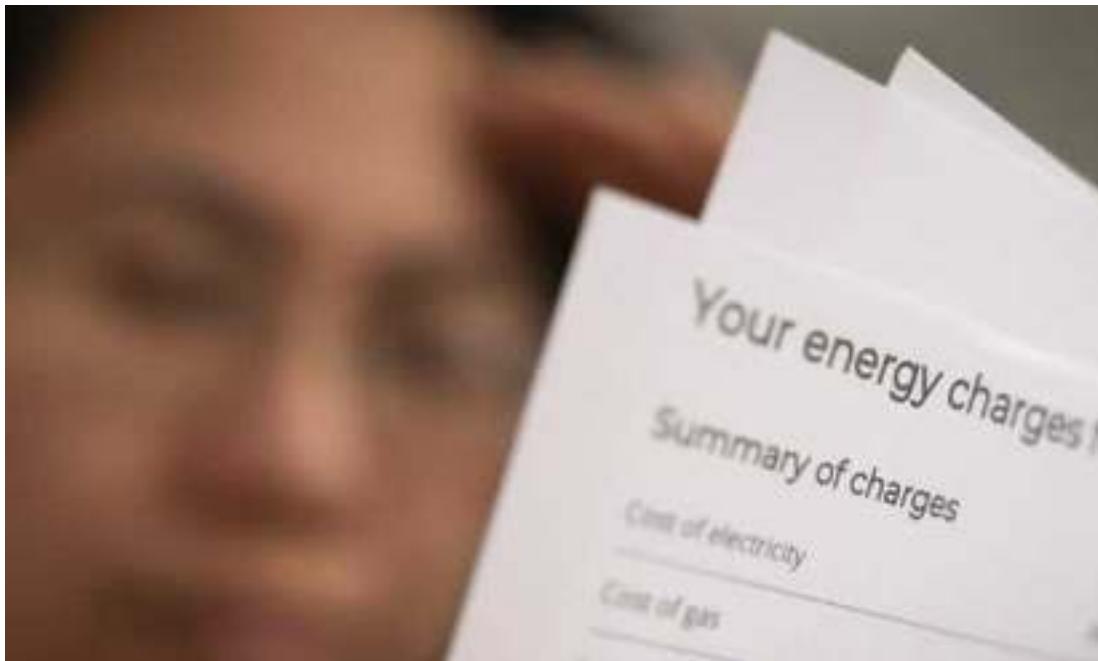
OpinionUK cost of living crisis

A generation of Britons face long-term illness from being cold and poor this winter

[Michael Marmot](#)

When two-thirds of the population face fuel poverty, it is clear that we'll need more than just quick fixes to this crisis

Cold homes will cost children's lives and cause long-term damage, warn experts



'Both being 'cold' and 'poor' will contribute to worse health and greater health inequalities.' Photograph: Danny Lawson/PA

Wed 31 Aug 2022 19.01 EDT Last modified on Thu 1 Sep 2022 06.22 EDT

[All I want is a room somewhere](#)./ Far away from the cold night air .../warm face, warm hands, warm feet. Oh, wouldn't it be loverly.

To Eliza Doolittle's lament we can add, not just "loverly", but healthy, too. George Bernard Shaw, whose play Pygmalion was the source for the film My Fair Lady, was writing about Edwardian London. Yet cold and poor is the reality facing [66% of the population](#) this winter in 21st-century Britain.

Both "cold" and "poor" will contribute to worse health and greater health inequalities. It is a humanitarian crisis. One that will not be solved by tax cuts or removing levies that favour green energy, as seems to be the "solution" proposed by our likely next prime minister. We need to act on the immediate crisis, but we also need to ask how we got here, and what to do to solve the problem of fuel poverty, and its effects on health inequalities, in the longer term.

Fuel poverty has three components: the price of fuel, the quality of housing and ability to pay. The definition used to be having to [spend 10% or more](#) of household income to heat your dwelling to an acceptable level. Some variant of that is still used in Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland. In England, [the definition changed](#), which makes comparisons difficult: a household is fuel poor if the property has a low efficiency rating and the household disposable income, after housing and energy needs, is less than 60% of national median income.

For the cold part of cold and poor, the causal chain is simple. Inflation in general, and the cost of heating, will lead to fuel poverty. Fuel poverty will lead to cold homes. Cold homes will damage mental and physical health. The health effects are considerable, as laid out in our report, Fuel Poverty, Cold Homes and Health Inequalities in the UK, published today by the [UCL Institute of Health Equity](#).

The health effects start in childhood with lungs damaged by cold, but also by mould and damp that tend to accompany cold in substandard housing. Children who live in cold, damp homes have more respiratory illnesses than children who do not. This higher burden of illness is likely to continue through into adulthood.

Cold damages mental health. Children growing up in cold homes have more psychological symptoms than children in warm homes. They also perform less well in school. A combination of days missed through illness, inadequate conditions for study and homework, and the effects of cold on mental health and development all contribute.

One reaction to the finding that cold homes damage mental health and development is disbelief. “In my day,” one senior doctor told me, “when I was a lad, we had ice on the inside of the window. I developed all right.” My thought: think what you might have achieved had you grown up in a warm home. More diplomatically, I said: “When you were a lad, infant mortality was 30 per 1,000 live births, now it is 3.4. The fact that you survived when the rate was nine times higher than it is now, doesn’t mean it was safe or desirable.”

Cold also makes lung problems in adulthood worse. Visits to GPs for respiratory tract infections, asthma attacks, loss of functioning with chronic obstructive pulmonary disease are all linked to cold. Cold affects the heart and blood vessels: the colder the indoor temperature the higher the blood pressure level.

A big issue for the UK is excess winter deaths. In most countries, deaths are higher from December to March than at other times of year. The excess is higher in the UK than in a colder country such as Finland. One possible reason is worse insulation of housing in the UK. It has been estimated that 10% of excess winter deaths can be attributed to fuel poverty and 20% to cold homes.

Cold *and* poor. Fuel poverty is part of poverty. If the price of energy goes up, people at or below the margin will have less to spend on such frivolities as food, rent and clothing. Because food and energy make up such a high proportion of expenditure in poor households, predicted inflation of 11% in the least deprived fifth of households corresponds to inflation of 17% in the most deprived fifth. To those who doubt that cold could affect children’s development and education, add in going to school without breakfast. Add the effects of parents’ mental health on children’s health and development. Put simply, the struggle to make ends meet increases risk of depression. Mental illness in parents is an adverse childhood experience (ACE).

Children who suffer from [four or more ACEs](#) have greater risk of mental and physical illness throughout life; they are more likely to drink, smoke and use drugs; and more likely to engage in violent behaviour.

ACEs do not imply that parents are wicked, more that they are poor. ACEs are linked to income and deprivation: the greater the deprivation the greater the frequency of adverse childhood experiences. Inflation and the catastrophic rise in energy prices does not turn people into wicked parents, it means that they are casualties of the struggle to survive.

To ask how we got here, we need to look at all three components of fuel poverty: the price of energy, the quality of housing, and poverty. The price of energy has more to do with our dysfunctional energy market than it has to do with the war in Ukraine. About [36% of Britain's energy](#) comes from gas, and very little of that gas comes from Russia; nearly 60% of energy comes from nuclear or renewables, so why has the price of energy risen so sharply? The cost of producing energy through nuclear and renewables should not have been affected by the war in Ukraine. People who have studied economics will explain that the price we pay is not related simply to the average cost of producing the energy plus a reasonable profit, but to the marginal cost of supplying the last most expensive unit. If the price of gas goes up, we pay more for energy coming from wind. What? People are going to shiver and go without food this winter because our energy market is crazy.

Second, the quality of housing. Investment in home insulation fell off a cliff in 2013. The government simply took the decision to stop investing in making homes more energy efficient. Third, poverty. We limped into this cost of living crisis with the consequences of a decade of austerity and an economic hit from the pandemic – larger in the UK than in countries that managed the pandemic better. Child poverty, after housing costs, [rose from 27% in 2010](#) to 30% in 2019.

Economists from Paul Krugman to Paul Johnson to Torsten Bell have solutions, going beyond conventional economics, of what we need to do to fix this winter's looming crisis. Now, though, is also the time to deal with the longer-term problems that led us here in the first place.

- Michael Marmot is professor of epidemiology at University College London, director of the UCL Institute of Health Equity, and past president of the World Medical Association
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OpinionSociety

When did everything become ‘awesome’ and ‘amazing’? I blame the Americans

[Adrian Chiles](#)



A simple ‘thanks’ doesn’t cut it any more, even if you’ve just been given a tin of cat food



Just the one tin? You're definitely not awesome. Photograph: Waitforlight/Getty Images

Thu 1 Sep 2022 02.00 EDT Last modified on Thu 1 Sep 2022 09.57 EDT

“Amazing!” she said, as I handed her a tin of cat food. This was the young woman who looks after my neighbour’s cat when he’s away. I was running an errand. It’s nice to be appreciated, but the routine handing over of a tin of cat food is not, in anyone’s book, amazing. What if I’d bought half a dozen tins of cat food? How much more amazing would that have been? Or a dozen tins, a cat bed, a scratching post, and £500 in cash? “Amazing!” wouldn’t cut it; I suppose an “absolutely” would have had to go in front of it. If I threw in some high-end cat treats, I suppose that would necessitate doubling up the adverbs, with a “completely” or some such.

Where is language going? Once upon a time there would have been a “thanks” or “thank you” for the cat food. Bigger gestures might elicit a “thank you very much” and, on special occasions, a “thank you very much indeed” might have been wheeled out. Now the game’s gone, I tell you. We go straight to “amazing”. Or “awesome”. In both cases, as usual, I think we’re on safe ground blaming the Americans. They too, surely, are behind “thank you so much”. It’s now used so often that the “so much” adds nothing; it’s just a standard thank you.

Having disparaged the Americans, I do have a wry liking for Ted Lasso's: "I appreciate you." Nice, although I've not been brave enough to use it yet. The closest I came was last week when a locksmith called Tony played a blinder for me. He turned up in a flash, was nice to my furious daughter and hungry dog, got them into my place and fixed the knackered lock. I tried for an "I appreciate you," but it wouldn't come out. "You're amazing," I said.

- Adrian Chiles is a broadcaster, writer and Guardian columnist
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[**Donald Trump**](#)

Two Trump lawyers could be witnesses or targets in FBI investigation

Christina Bobb and Evan Corcoran face scrutiny over their communications with the justice department, legal experts say



Donald Trump's Mar-a-Lago estate. Photograph: Steve Helber/AP

[**Hugo Lowell**](#)

Wed 31 Aug 2022 23.25 EDTFirst published on Wed 31 Aug 2022 17.44 EDT

Two lawyers for [**Donald Trump**](#) could become witnesses or targets in the obstruction investigation connected to the criminal inquiry into the former president's unauthorized retention of highly sensitive government documents at his Mar-a-Lago resort in Florida, according to legal experts.

The lawyers – Christina Bobb and Evan Corcoran – face becoming ensnared in the investigation because they liaised with the justice department during

the government's months-long effort to retrieve boxes of presidential records and classified documents from Trump's Florida home.

At issue is an interaction that took place on 3 June in which, according to [a court filing submitted by the justice department](#) in a separate but related case on Tuesday, the two lawyers made representations that they had complied with a grand jury subpoena that subsequently proved to be false.

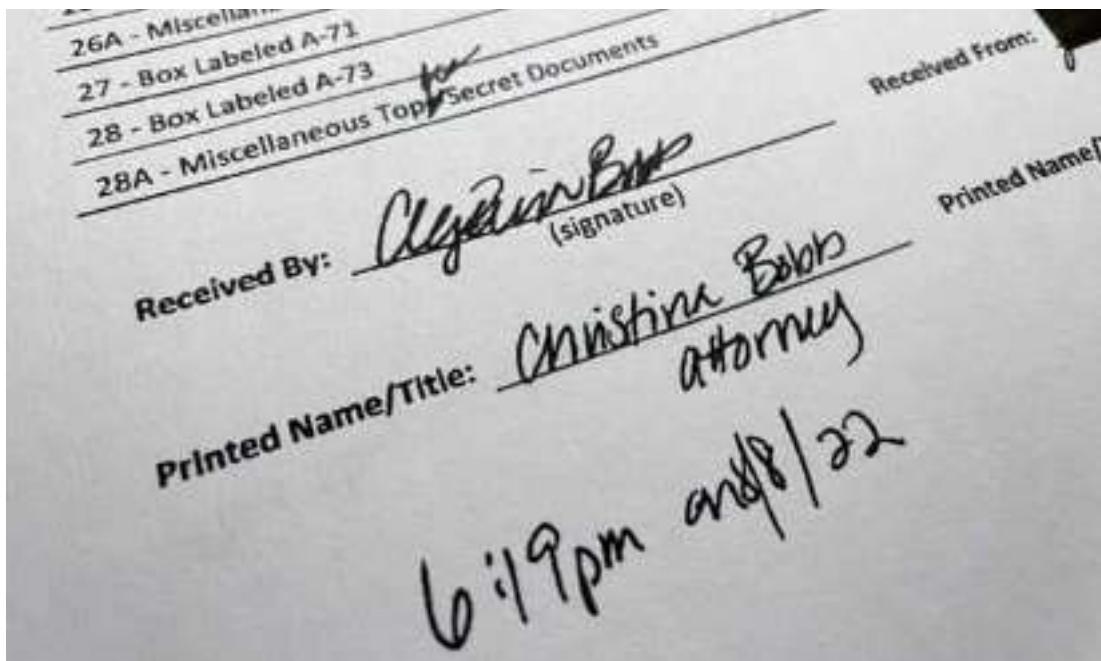
That day, the justice department's chief of counterintelligence, Jay Bratt, and three FBI agents travelled to [Mar-a-Lago](#) to collect the documents that had been subpoenaed, the filing said, and Bobb and Corcoran turned over a taped, Redweld envelope of classified materials.

But before Bratt departed, Bobb produced and signed a letter certifying that all and any documents responsive to the subpoena were being turned over, while Corcoran indicated that the records the government had sought were confined to one storage room, the filing said.

The trouble for the two Trump lawyers is that the justice department then developed evidence through multiple sources that additional presidential and classified documents remained at Mar-a-Lago – which proved to be the case when the [FBI](#) searched the property two months later.

In its own filing on Wednesday night, Trump's lawyers decried the search as having taken place in “the midst of the standard give-and-take” between a former president and the National Archives and Records Administration over presidential records. It said the department had “gratuitously” made public certain information, including a photograph of classified documents taken from the home.

According to [the search warrant](#) and court filings, the justice department is investigating among other crimes whether there was potential obstruction of justice with respect to how Trump and his lawyers have seemingly been resistant to return documents belonging to the government.



An itemized list of property seized in the execution of a search warrant by the FBI at Mar-a-Lago, signed upon receipt by Christina Bobb. Photograph: Jim Bourg/Reuters

The justice department's account of the 3 June episode – what it has described as a “likely” effort to conceal presidential and classified documents sought by the government – raises the prospect that both Bobb and Corcoran could become witnesses in the obstruction investigation.

But the case, and how the justice department might approach the issue, remains complex.

The question for federal prosecutors becomes whether the two Trump lawyers willfully misled the justice department so that Trump could keep the documents, or whether the lawyers made the representations because they themselves were misled by Trump.

To establish the exact circumstances surrounding Bobb’s confidence in signing the certification, and Corcoran’s confidence in his statements, legal experts said, the justice department would probably have to subpoena both of the lawyers for communications and testimony.

Such a step would immediately run into an issue about attorney-client privilege, since the kind of information the justice department would be

trying to extract for a potential obstruction case targeting Trump would be protected communications between Trump and his lawyers.

The privilege exists to protect the rights of defendants who might have committed an offense, since they need to be able to speak candidly with their lawyers about what happened without the fear that prosecutors could use their discussions against them at a trial.

The protection can be removed through the so-called crime-fraud exception. But even if there were a crime-fraud exception in Trump's case, his lawyers could still invoke their fifth amendment right against self-incrimination if they had knowingly misled the government on his behalf.

Ultimately, the issue for the justice department is whether the attorney general, Merrick Garland, gives his approval to move ahead with an extraordinary prosecution for obstruction against the former president, and whether Garland does so against his lawyers.

If Garland chooses to take that step, federal prosecutors would probably move to find ways to compel Bobb and Corcoran's testimony to reveal whether Trump obstructed the return of presidential records and classified materials, the legal experts suggested.

If Garland decides against pursuing an obstruction indictment, then, even though justice department investigators might seek testimony from Bobb and Corcoran anyway, they are unlikely to secure meaningful information unless it also litigates the privilege issues in court.

People close to the former president's top lawyers broadly did not appear to believe either Bobb or Corcoran would be compelled to testify against Trump and remove themselves from the legal team. And as of Wednesday, neither had retained their own counsel, one of the people said.

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[Malaysia](#)

Wife of Malaysia's jailed ex-PM handed 10 years in prison for bribery

Rosmah Mansor convicted of receiving over £1m to help a firm get a schools business contract



Rosmah Mansor, wife of Malaysia's former prime minister Najib Razak, had been accused of soliciting bribes. Photograph: Lim Huey Teng/Reuters

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

Thu 1 Sep 2022 05.31 EDT Last modified on Thu 1 Sep 2022 05.41 EDT

The wife of the former Malaysian prime minister Najib Razak has been sentenced to 10 years in prison for soliciting and receiving bribes in exchange for government contracts, one week after her husband was sent to prison for corruption linked to the [multibillion-dollar 1MDB scandal](#).

Rosmah Mansor, 70, had pleaded not guilty to three charges of soliciting bribes and receiving 6.5m ringgit (£1.3m) in exchange for helping a

company secure a contract to provide solar power to schools.

The high court judge Mohamed Zaini Mazlan said prosecutors proved their case beyond reasonable doubt. The judge added that her defence was “bare denial and unsubstantiated”.

Rosmah also faces a fine of 970m ringgit. She can seek bail while she appeals against the judgment.

The verdict on Thursday comes just over a week since [Najib began a 12-year sentence](#) for breach of trust, abuse of power, and money laundering in a conviction linked to the 1MDB scandal, one of the world’s biggest financial frauds.

Najib and Rosmah have faced various charges since he lost an election in 2018 amid public anger over huge corruption during his administration.

In the aftermath of their election defeat, the couple sought to leave the country by private jet, according to a flight manifesto leaked at the time. They were banned from travelling by the country’s then leader, Mahathir Mohamad.

Police [raids on several properties linked to Najib](#) revealed further details of their opulent lifestyles. Police seized hundreds of designer handbags, including 272 Hermès bags estimated to be worth nearly \$13m, as well as 1,400 necklaces, 423 watches, 2,200 rings, 1,600 brooches and 14 tiaras.

Rosmah’s corruption case is not related to the [1MDB](#) scandal.

Prosecutors had argued Rosmah exerted influence over government spending, despite having no official position, and helped a company secure a 1.25bn ringgit contract to provide solar energy panels to schools on Borneo.

They accused Rosmah of seeking a bribe of 187.5m ringgit and receiving 6.5m ringgit from an official of the company that won the project in 2016 and 2017.

Her former aide, who was jointly charged with Rosmah but later testified for the prosecution, portrayed her as an influential figure who was often lobbied by businesspeople seeking government contracts. The aide testified Rosmah was feared by civil servants and requests from her staff were often carried out quickly.

Witnesses said a special department, called First Lady of [Malaysia](#), was set up to handle Rosmah's affairs. The court heard she spent 100,000 ringgit a month to hire online propagandists to deflect criticism of her lavish lifestyle, the Associated Press reported.

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Rosmah has said she was framed by her former aide as well as government and company officials involved in the project.

Najib is being held at the country's largest prison in Kajang, which holds up to 5,000 prisoners. The prisons department has denied claims that VIP inmates were granted more comfortable living arrangements, such as air conditioning and access to TV and internet.

His daughter, Nooryana Najwa, was mocked on social media this week after she reportedly lamented that her father would be missing his usual Starbucks order. She said on Instagram that she could not face ordering from the chain because she knew her father, stuck in prison, would be missing his caramel macchiato. Some responded online by announcing they would make sure to buy the drink the next day.

Najib faces four other corruption cases. Rosmah also faces 17 charges of money laundering and tax evasion for illegally receiving 7.1m ringgit between 2013 and 2017 in a separate case linked to 1MDB, though her trial has not yet begun.

The 1MDB scandal has led to corruption investigations around the world, including the US, Singapore, and Switzerland.

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/sep/01/wife-of-malaysias-jailed-ex-pm-handed-10-years-in-prison-for-bribery>.

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[Taiwan](#)

Taiwan shoots down drone off Chinese coast for first time

Action near islet comes after Taipei vowed to take tough measures to deal with increase in such intrusions



The drone entered restricted airspace over Lion Islet (pictured), also known as Shiyu Islet. Photograph: Carl Court/Getty Images

Reuters in Taipei

Thu 1 Sep 2022 03.52 EDT Last modified on Thu 1 Sep 2022 03.55 EDT

Taiwan's military has shot down for the first time an unidentified civilian drone that entered its airspace near an islet off the Chinese coast, after the government vowed to take tough measures to deal with an increase in such intrusions.

Beijing, which claims Taiwan as its own against the objections of the Taipei government, has [held military exercises](#) around the island since early last

month in reaction to a visit to Taipei by the US House of Representatives speaker, Nancy Pelosi.

Taiwan's government has said it will not provoke or escalate tensions but has been particularly angered recently by repeated cases of Chinese drones buzzing islands controlled by Taiwan close to China's coast.

The defence command for Kinmen, a group of Taiwan-controlled islands opposite the Chinese cities Xiamen and Quanzhou, said in a statement released by Taiwan's defence ministry that the drone entered restricted airspace over Lion Islet just after midday local time (0500 BST).

Troops on the islet tried warning it away but to no effect, so shot it down, with the remains landing in the sea, it added.

Taiwan fired warning shots at a drone for the first time on Tuesday shortly after President Tsai Ing-wen ordered the military to take "strong countermeasures" against what she termed Chinese provocations.

Speaking to the armed forces earlier on Thursday, Tsai said China was continuing to use drone intrusions and other "grey zone" tactics to try to intimidate Taiwan, her office cited her as saying in a statement.

Tsai again emphasised that Taiwan would not provoke disputes but that did not mean it would not take countermeasures, the statement added.

"She has also ordered the ministry of national defence to take necessary and strong countermeasures in a timely manner to defend national security," it said.

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“Let the military guard the country without fear and with solid confidence.”

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Suez canal

Suez Canal briefly blocked again after another ship, Affinity V, becomes stuck

Tanker blocked canal for hours, close to where Ever Given container ship became stuck, disrupting supply chains for a week



The Affinity V in the Suez Canal after it was refloated by tug boats.
Photograph: Suez Canal Authority (sca)/Reuters

[Martin Farrer](#)

Wed 31 Aug 2022 21.17 EDT Last modified on Thu 1 Sep 2022 03.39 EDT

A tanker getting stuck used to be more the domain of niche business news, but that was before the Ever Given, so all eyes were soon on the Affinity V tanker's plight in the Suez Canal.

On Wednesday, the 250-metre long Affinity V tanker was bound for Saudi Arabia when it ran aground close to the same spot in the narrow southern section of the canal in Egypt [where the Ever Given container ship caused a](#)

[week-long halt to traffic](#) in March 2021, dominating global headlines and paralysing supply chains.

The plight of the Singapore-flagged vessel raised alarm bells reminiscent of the kind of delays that forced the owners of the Ever Given to pay compensation of more than \$200m to the Suez Canal Authority.

But this time tugboats were able to refloat the ship in the space of a few hours, the canal authority said, and navigation was returned to normal in the channel.

3/ VIDEO UPDATE: [#AFFINITYV](#) is freed!

She got grounded, freed, maybe-grounded again, and now very gingerly under tow southbound in the [#SuezCanal](#).

Cause unclear. But I've narrated an animation of the initial incident.
pic.twitter.com/tM9Mc2FZzB

— John Scott-Railton (@jsrailton) [September 1, 2022](#)

George Safwat, a spokesman for Suez Canal Authority, told a Egyptian government-affiliated Extra News satellite television that the Affinity ran aground at around 7.15pm local time on Wednesday, and was refloated five hours later, he said.

Safwat said there was a problem in the vessel's steering systems that caused it to run aground. He said the vessel sailed from Portugal and was en route to Saudi Arabia's Red Sea port of Yanbu.

About 12% of world trade runs through the canal, which is the fastest route between Asia and Europe.

According to ship monitoring service TankerTrackers, the Aframax tanker Affinity V seemed to have lost control in the Suez Canal while heading southbound. "She temporarily clogged up traffic and is now facing south again, but moving slowly by tugboat assistance," TankerTrackers tweeted.

At around 17:00 UTC today (2022-08-31), the Aframax tanker AFFINITY V (9645401) seemed to have lost control in the Suez Canal while heading southbound. She temporarily clogged up traffic and is now facing south again, but moving slowly by tugboat assistance. via [@MarineTraffic pic.twitter.com/ECstNLPtbc](#)

— TankerTrackers.com, Inc. (@TankerTrackers) [August 31, 2022](#)

The ship is 252 metres long and 45 metres wide, making it smaller than the 400-metre-long Ever Given, and has a registered tonnage of around 110,000. It was also thought to be only carrying around 40% of its total capacity – a factor that could have made it easier to refloat.

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/sep/01/suez-canal-ship-stuck-blocked-again-affinity-v>

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[Libya](#)

Libyans have lost faith in political class, US diplomat says after Tripoli clashes

UN security council hears bleak assessment of country's prospects after violence between militia in capital



A man in Tripoli surveys the damage from the fighting in which more than 32 people were killed. Photograph: Yousef/AP

[Patrick Wintour](#) *Diplomatic editor*

Thu 1 Sep 2022 00.00 EDT Last modified on Thu 1 Sep 2022 00.28 EDT

Libyans have lost faith that the political class and its allied militias and mercenaries are willing to end their robbery of the nation's wealth, a senior US diplomat has warned, after some of the worst violence in Tripoli in years.

More than 32 people were killed and 150 wounded in clashes in the capital last week between militia allied to the rival prime ministers Abdul Hamid

Dbeibah and Fathi Bashagha.

Dbeibah's Government of National Unity, which he has run since last year and which controls the western part of the country, has been based in Tripoli since the fall of Muammar Gaddafi's regime in 2011, while Bashagha has run the eastern part of the country since March, backed by the military strongman Khalifa Haftar.

Bashagha-allied militia, including a brigade commanded by a wealthy gangster called Haitham al-Tajouri, entered Tripoli to try to topple Dbeibah's government, but were soundly defeated.

Jeffrey DeLaurentis, a senior adviser to the US mission at the United Nations, gave a bleak assessment of Libya's prospects at a meeting of the UN security council on Monday.

Libyans, he said, "are losing hope that their country can be free of corruption and foreign influence, that the armed forces can be unified, and that foreign fighters, forces and mercenaries will be withdrawn. They are deprived of basic public services while the powerful cut deals to divvy up hydrocarbon revenues in accordance with their own interests, particularly to militias controlled by various factions, robbing the Libyan people of their national wealth."

The UN debate presented few fresh ideas, apart from calling on the security council to agree urgently on a new UN special envoy for Libya. Libya has lacked an envoy since November because of political divisions. The Senegalese diplomat Abdoulaye Bathily has been proposed, but has been blocked by some Libyans who fear he will be ineffective.

The security council also heard that the UN panel of experts had named Turkey as one of the countries blatantly violating a UN arms embargo.

Tarek Megerisi, a Libya expert at the European Council on Foreign Relations thinktank, said last week's violence marked the first time heavy weapons and artillery had been used in central Tripoli during the current

impasse. “The outcome leaves Dbeibah stronger for now, but only underlines the need for a still absent political process,” he added.

UN-sponsored national elections – a real possibility a year ago and seen as the only route to giving political leaders and institutions a fresh mandate – look further away than ever.

National elections were to be held on 24 December last year, but disagreements about their constitutional basis and those entitled to stand led to their indefinite postponement, creating a dangerous vacuum that has been filled by a renewed military battle for power. Many politicians are against holding elections, since defeat risks depriving them of access to power, patronage and resources.

Dbeibah, appointed by a UN-sponsored body in February 2021 as a stopgap prime minister, has said he would not leave until the vote is held, effectively entrenching himself in power. He claimed his government was subject to planned aggression at the weekend from inside and outside.

Bashagha, recognised in February as prime minister by the Tobruk-based parliament, the House of Representatives, blamed corruption on the part of Dbeibah for the continued power of militias in Tripoli. “Dbeibah was the one who exploited the state’s resources to support armed groups,” he said.

Haftar, the leader of the self-styled Libyan National Army based in the east, expressed his displeasure at the setback for Bashagha, a relatively recent ally. Seemingly unwilling to accept the reverse, he called for Libya to be saved, but did not specify how this could be achieved.

Bashagha denied involvement in the weekend violence, but militia groups supportive of him have now been repelled three times in efforts to enter Tripoli.

Karim Mezran, from the Atlantic Council, described Libya’s militia as “criminal organisations totally dedicated to power and money, and the grabbing of resources at any price. It is a mistake to think of these as political ideological organisations, but instead mafia organisations that have a vested interest in preventing the development of a functioning state.”

The fighting also has short-term geopolitical implications. Giorgia Meloni, the far-right frontrunner in Italy's elections, has used the Tripoli violence to reissue her call for an EU-led mission to install a naval blockade across northern [Africa](#) and prevent migrants reaching the Italian coastline.

In the first six months of this year, 27,633 refugees and migrants arrived in Italy by sea, compared with 20,532 in the same period in 2021, according to figures from the UNHCR.

The appointment of a forceful yet balanced new special envoy is seen as critical to the next phase in Libya. Stephanie Williams who had been the secretary general's representative, but not the security council envoy, was steeped in Libyan politics. Williams, an American, tried to shame the political classes in Tripoli and the east into staging elections, and backed a new, younger political class.

She nearly secured her goal by securing a nationwide ceasefire agreement in October 2020, the adoption of the political roadmap by the Libyan Political Dialogue Forum in November 2020, and progress between east and west on the constitutional framework for elections.

But less progress was made on meeting the planned deadline to remove foreign forces, or the level of conciliation required to hold national elections.

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Headlines friday 2 september 2022

- [Partygate Commons standards chief hits out over legal advice reports](#)
- [Pollution River testing in England has fallen sharply in a decade, data shows](#)
- [Live Sunak supporter says Truss victory not ‘cut and dried’ as voting set to close in Tory leadership race](#)
- [Explainer When does Tory party leadership race end and who will win?](#)
- [Rural affairs British countryside voters ‘ignored’ by Liz Truss and Rishi Sunak](#)

[Boris Johnson](#)

No 10 spending £130,000 of public money scrutinising Partygate inquiry

Boris Johnson accused of trying to ‘intimidate and bully’ inquiry into claims he misled MPs

- [Politics live – latest updates](#)



Chris Bryant: ‘This is an attempt to intimidate and bully the committee, in exactly the same way as happened over Owen Paterson less than a year ago.’
Photograph: Sophia Evans/The Observer

[Peter Walker](#), [Aubrey Allegretti](#) and [Jamie Grierson](#)

Fri 2 Sep 2022 14.30 EDTFirst published on Fri 2 Sep 2022 05.40 EDT

Boris Johnson has been accused of trying to “intimidate and bully” an inquiry into claims he misled MPs over Downing Street parties, after No 10

took the highly unusual step of commissioning a senior QC to scrutinise the legal basis for the process at a public cost of almost £130,000.

The crossbench peer David Pannick had [argued that](#) the Commons committee on privileges and standards was “proposing to adopt an unfair procedure” in examining allegations that Johnson falsely told the Commons he knew nothing about lockdown-breaking gatherings.

Pannick said Johnson should be permitted a lawyer and any sanction on him for inadvertently misleading MPs “would be likely to have a chilling effect on ministerial comments in the house”.

But the 22-page document prompted puzzlement from legal and constitutional experts, who said Pannick was assessing a parliamentary process as if it was a judicial one. Downing Street has declined to release the “instructions to counsel”, which set out the basis for a barrister’s opinion.

While ministers routinely seek legal advice, Johnson will face any consequences from the inquiry as a backbench MP. His successor as prime minister, expected to be Liz Truss, will take over on Tuesday, with voting in the Tory leadership campaign having ended on Friday afternoon.

However, Downing Street argues that the inquiry relates to his conduct as prime minister and thus has wider consequences for government.

Government sources confirmed the contract to Pannick, via a firm of solicitors, is one totalling £129,700 for four months of “legal services” beginning in August, [published on Friday](#).

In a highly choreographed process seemingly intended to discredit the inquiry before it begins in the coming weeks, Pannick’s findings were briefed to a handful of friendly newspapers on Thursday night, which ran stories describing the opinion as “devastating”.

Chris Bryant, the Labour MP who stepped back from leading the investigation over previous criticism of Johnson, said it appeared to be “an attempt to intimidate and bully the committee”.

Pannick, Bryant added, “does not acknowledge that the motion from the [House of Commons](#) setting up the inquiry does not refer to ‘knowingly misleading the house’ at all. It simply says, ‘misleading the house’. Second, he doesn’t seem to understand that lots of standards processes have changed over the last 20 years.

“We now have a process for ministers to formally correct the record when they have made an inadvertent error. Boris Johnson has not done that in relation to this. But ministers used this process 200 times this year.

“So the question of how culpable Boris Johnson is depends on several things, one of which might be whether he knowingly lied. One might be whether he was really careless about the truth. One might be whether he ever bothered to correct the record properly. All of those are in the mix.”

Pannick declined to comment.

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Mark Elliott, a professor of public law at the University of Cambridge, described Pannick’s opinion as “very odd”, adding: “Much of it is concerned with the fact that the committee’s process may not adhere to legal standards that are wholly inapplicable to a political, parliamentary process.”

Thangam Debbonaire, Labour’s shadow Commons leader, condemned what she called “yet another example of the Tories playing fast and loose with rules and standards in public life”.

She said: “This investigation does not undermine democracy; it does the exact opposite. It is vital that these well-respected committee members, a majority of whom are Tory MPs, are allowed to properly investigate whether the prime minister is in contempt of parliament.”

Christine Jardine, the Liberal Democrats’ Cabinet Office spokesperson, had called on Downing Street to reveal the cost of the advice, adding: “People are tired of these expensive attempts by this government to manufacture ways for Boris Johnson to wriggle out of any consequences of his actions.”

The committee, now chaired by Harriet Harman, is set to look into whether the prime minister misled the Commons when he claimed “all guidance was followed in No 10” and there was “no party” breaking lockdown rules.

Johnson, who in recent days has refused to rule out a political comeback, could be suspended or even kicked out of the Commons after a recall petition if he is found to be in contempt of parliament.

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2022/sep/02/ex-commons-standards-chief-chris-bryant-hits-out-over-partygate-legal-advice-reports>

[Rivers](#)

River pollution goes unchecked as testing in England falls to 10-year low

Experts warn drop from 100,000 samples in 2012 to 41,519 last year means huge risk to water quality



Reduced flow in the River Torridge, Devon. There are greater concentrations of pollutants at low flow. Photograph: John Insull/Alamy

[Sandra Laville](#)

Fri 2 Sep 2022 11.11 EDTFirst published on Fri 2 Sep 2022 05.35 EDT

Testing of rivers in [England](#) has fallen dramatically in the past 10 years, with experts warning it leaves a vacuum of knowledge about the effects of pollution.

Environment Agency data shows its river testing has fallen from nearly 100,000 samples a year in 2012 to 41,519 in 2021 – the lowest level of sampling in 20 years apart from the drop-off during Covid in 2020.

The dramatic fall in monitoring coincides with repeated cuts to the EA budget, in what its outgoing chair, Emma Howard Boyd, said had stopped the agency from [carrying out vital water quality work](#).

Dr Barnaby Dobson, an expert in water systems from Imperial College London, said: “If you ask what are the biggest risks to water quality, my view is that it is the lack of sampling and monitoring. We cannot work out where we are failing if we are not looking.

“We cannot know about the impact on rivers if we are not sampling any of them. How can we know what the biggest water quality threats that the country faces are if we are not looking in rivers?”

The risk of pollution increases when rivers are at low flow during drought conditions, as they have been this year.

Low flow means concentrations of pollutants such as phosphate and E coli are far higher in flowing water, raising concerns that discharges have a much greater negative impact. The last tests carried out under the EU water framework directive in 2019 [showed English rivers were in a shocking state](#), with no river passing quality tests for ecological and chemical status.

But since 2019 and Brexit, testing has continued to decrease, leaving a vacuum of knowledge about the possible further deterioration of rivers.

A damning report by MPs on the environmental audit committee [found rivers were suffering from a cocktail of pollutants](#) from agriculture, treated and untreated sewage, and plastic.

Dobson [said in a paper published this month](#) on testing of river catchments that informal testing schemes were increasingly supplanting routine regulatory surveys, such as those of the EA, for river sampling. He said funding for sampling needed to be restored to the EA.

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Nick Measham, chief executive of the charity Wild Fish, said testing was vital and independence was important for sampling. “Monitoring – done by the EA, not by self-interested parties like water companies – is key to any environmental protection regime,” he said. “No monitoring equals no evidence. Monitoring underpins the inspection and enforcement needed to cut pollution. The EA’s independent monitoring efforts have shrunk considerably over time. Without monitoring, problems disappear. And we now lack a coherent and comprehensive picture of the state of the freshwater environment in England.”

According to recent data, the main reasons for rivers failing to pass ecological and chemical quality tests are pollution from sewage discharges, treated and untreated, and agricultural runoff. Agriculture affects nearly two-thirds of rivers, the water sector affects more than half, and the urban and transport sector a quarter.

The report found the single activity with the most widespread impact on rivers was discharges of treated sewage effluent, which affected 43% of river water bodies in 2020. The effects of raw sewage spills via storm overflows contributed towards 12% of river water bodies failing standards.

An Environment Agency spokesperson said: “We continue to take tens of thousands of water quality samples every year as part of our work to keep rivers clean. In recent years technological advances and increased efficiency has enabled us to concentrate our resources, and target areas where the environment will benefit most.

“We are also investing more this year to further advance our approach to sampling, and we have placed a wide range of new requirements on water

companies to significantly increase their monitoring and reporting so that this data is available to all.”

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2022/sep/02/river-testing-england-fallen-sharply-decade-data>

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Politics live with Andrew Sparrow
Politics

Johnson accused of trying to intimidate MPs as government lawyer calls Partygate inquiry ‘flawed and unfair’ – as it happened

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Conservatives

Explainer

When does Tory party leadership race end and who will win?

Nation awaits as Conservative members decide whether Rishi Sunak or Liz Truss becomes PM



Conservative leadership candidates Rishi Sunak and Liz Truss during a hustings event. Photograph: Hannah McKay/Reuters

[Jamie Grierson](#)

[@JamieGrierson](#)

Fri 2 Sep 2022 14.36 EDTFirst published on Fri 2 Sep 2022 05.49 EDT

When does the Conservative party leadership contest end?

What felt like five years, was in fact just five weeks and the Tory leadership race concludes at 5pm on Friday evening to a collective sigh of relief across the UK.

Postal ballots were sent out between 1 August and 5 August. Any ballots received after 5pm on 2 September will not be counted. Online voting is possible until the close of the ballot.

Who votes for the new Tory leader and the country's next prime minister?

Only party members are allowed to choose the leader and by default the country's next prime minister.

Who they are and how many there are is shrouded in levels of secrecy not too dissimilar to the freemasons.

We know about 150,000 were registered and eligible to vote in the last leadership election, which took place way back in ... 2019. Estimates suggest there are now between 180,000 and 200,000 Conservative party members, which makes up about 0.3% of the population.

Research from the Mile End Institute at Queen Mary University of London suggests 44% per cent of the membership is over 65, 97% are white, and 54% live in the capital and the south of England.

Go democracy!

Who is running in the contest?

In the blue corner, we have the foreign secretary, Liz Truss, and in the blue corner we have the former chancellor [Rishi Sunak](#).

When will the winner be announced?

The candidate who receives the most votes will be revealed on Monday by Sir Graham Brady, the chair of the 1922 Committee, a gathering of Conservative backbench MPs. It was set up in 1923 for the large influx of inexperienced Tory MPs following the 1922 Conservative election landslide.

Who is expected to win?

The new leader and prime minister of the UK is widely expected to be Truss (a sentence many never expected to read).

What will happen when the new leader and PM is announced?

The formal handover will take place on Tuesday. The Queen is recovering from the outgoing prime minister's tenure in her Scottish pile Balmoral and will appoint the new PM there, which will be a challenge as it requires the winner to leave Westminster.

And what of Boris Johnson?

Johnson is expected to make a farewell address outside 10 Downing Street at about 9am on Tuesday. It is not known whether he has written two versions of the speech, one based on staying, one based on leaving.

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2022/sep/02/when-does-conservative-party-leadership-race-end-rishi-sunak-liz-truss>

[Rural affairs](#)

British rural voters ‘ignored’ by Liz Truss and Rishi Sunak

Tory leadership hopefuls ‘taking countryside voters for granted’ and neglecting pressing issues, says CLA business group



Telecoms engineer working in a Somerset village. In the UK access to broadband in rural areas lags behind the provision in towns. Photograph: Richard Wayman/Alamy

[Fiona Harvey](#) Environment correspondent

Fri 2 Sep 2022 03.00 EDT Last modified on Fri 2 Sep 2022 12.01 EDT

Neither of the candidates for leadership of the Conservative party has made a convincing pitch to rural voters, despite that demographic being one of the biggest sources of Tory power, the head of the UK’s biggest rural business organisation said.

Mark Tufnell, president of the Country Land and Business Association (CLA), which represents about 30,000 landowners and rural businesses, said [Liz Truss and Rishi Sunak](#) had done too little to show how they would boost the countryside economy and deal with pressing concerns such as planning, rural broadband, and farm support.

“I don’t think either candidate really understands what is happening in the countryside, and what the real issues are,” Tufnell said. “Both of them have said nice things about farms. But there is no understanding of what is actually happening in the countryside. They have not said much about it.”

He warned that the failure could cost the party at the next general election. “They assume that we [in the countryside] vote Conservative, and that they don’t really need to worry about us. But they should,” he said.

At the 2019 election 46% of voters in rural counties voted Conservative and only 29% voted for Labour. But polling conducted by the CLA before Boris Johnson’s resignation found a sizeable swing of about 7.5% from the Tories to Labour, putting the two main parties neck and neck in some rural areas.

The Liberal Democrats are also making inroads, with [strong local election showings](#) and [the capture of the formerly safe blue seat of Tiverton and Honiton](#) in the June by-election.

“[The Tories] have taken countryside voters for granted,” said Tufnell. “They’ve shown a lack of interest.”

While Truss and Sunak have sought to [reassure farmers during their campaigns](#), Tufnell pointed out that the bulk of countryside voters and businesses were not farmers.

Farming accounts for only about 4% of the rural economy, and 7% of rural jobs are farming related. About 85% of rural businesses are not related to farming or forestry, and while 12 million people of voting age live in rural areas of the UK there are only about 100,000 farmers.

For rural businesses outside farming key issues include connectivity, since [rural broadband and mobile phone access lags far behind](#) that available in

urban areas, and [planning regulations](#), as many businesses chafe against some planning rules. The CLA has also said that a lack of affordable rural housing is stifling growth.

Both Truss and Sunak have promised to retain or tighten planning laws. Sunak promised [no building on green belt land](#) and Truss vowed to [drop house-building targets](#). Each would restrict the [building of solar farms](#) and onshore wind farms.

Tufnell is also concerned that the new Tory leader could bow to pressure from some on the right wing of the party and dismantle [reforms to farm support payments, which are being gradually introduced](#).

Unlike the EU system of payment for the amount of land farmed, under environmental land management contracts (ELMs) farmers will be paid “public money for providing public goods”. In return for the subsidies they will be asked to [nurture soils](#), plant trees, improve water management, protect wildlife, and take other measures that help to clean the air and water, and safeguard nature.

The [National Farmers’ Union has spoken out against the reforms](#), arguing that at a time of rising food prices the focus should switch to supporting farmers to grow more food. Tufnell, whose 28,000 members own about half the land in England and Wales, urged Sunak and Truss to [stay with existing policy](#) and give farmers stability.

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Tufnell, who owns and manages a mostly arable farm in the Cotswolds, and is a Conservative party member, said: “It’s a false argument, that you need to stop ELMs to grow more food, you can do both. Without clean air and water and nurtured soils you can’t produce food anyway. And if you’re taking money from the public purse you should show a benefit to the public.

“ELMs are world beating, they are very forward thinking. They are the way the rest of the world will go eventually, but at a slower pace.”

Both candidates represented rural constituencies, Tufnell noted, Truss in east Anglia and Sunak in Yorkshire, but he said their policy ideas had focused on towns and cities. “The main focus still remains on the metropolitan and urban areas. There is a lack of focus on the countryside.”

Even the drought, which has scorched pasture and left crops dying in the fields to the despair of farmers across the Midlands, and south and east of England in particular, had failed to elicit much response, he added. “I’m not sure how much notice either of them has taken of the drought – they have just been running round the country.”

Tufnell called for the winner of the leadership election to install a “proper rural champion” in Downing Street who would advocate for policies reflecting the needs of rural Britain.

The CLA has estimated that investing in the countryside to bring the key infrastructure in rural areas – such as housing, transport, communications and technology – into line with that in towns and cities would improve the UK’s economic productivity by £43bn.

“There is a lack of infrastructure that is holding the countryside back,” said Tufnell. “There is enormous potential, but it needs political focus.”

2022.09.02 - Spotlight

- 'Curse of Heseltine' How the wheels came off Rishi Sunak's No 10 campaign
- Matty Healy of the 1975 'If you're still making art in your 30s you're either wadded or good – and I'm both'
- You be the judge Should my flatmate make coffee for both of us in the morning?
- 'Isn't it our duty to show horrible people?' Matt Smith, Ralph Fiennes and The Forgiven film-makers on faith, hope and depravity

Rishi Sunak

Analysis

‘Curse of Heseltine’: how the wheels came off Rishi Sunak’s No 10 campaign

[Aubrey Allegretti](#)

Ex-chancellor was leading frontrunner in the race to succeed Boris Johnson but his dreams soon unravelled

- [UK politics: live updates](#)



Rishi Sunak takes part in the final Conservative party hustings event at Wembley Arena, in London, on 31 August 2022. A Tory insider compared his No 10 bid to Michael Heseltine’s role in the resignation of Margaret Thatcher. Photograph: Susannah Ireland/AFP/Getty Images

Fri 2 Sep 2022 01.00 EDT Last modified on Fri 2 Sep 2022 04.27 EDT

One of the most familiar refrains of the [Conservative leadership](#) contest was candidates earnestly inviting comparisons to Margaret Thatcher.

But after his resignation as chancellor brought down Boris Johnson's wobbling house of cards, a Tory insider said Rishi Sunak found himself with "the curse of Heseltine hanging round his neck".

Despite long having been talked of as a likely future prime minister, Sunak struggled to shed the parallel with the man who helped bring down Thatcher but failed in his own tilt at the top job – before coining the famous political cliche: "He who wields the knife never wears the crown."

It was only a matter of hours after Johnson stood on the steps of Downing Street on 7 July and announced he was bowing out when the frantic jockeying to replace him began.

While Penny Mordaunt's campaign fumbled with a video that [had to be repeatedly re-edited](#) and Tom Tugendhat's logo was refreshed after suggestions it accidentally spelled "TIT", Sunak's close-knit group of advisers ensured Brand Rishi was launched swiftly and slickly.

Truss was the last candidate to hold her campaign launch – but calculated in her attacks on the man who would become her main rival. "I'm a loyal person," [she told the assembled audience](#). "I'm loyal to Boris Johnson. I supported our prime minister's aspirations and I want to deliver the promise of the 2019 manifesto."



Liz Truss at the launch of her Tory leadership campaign. She made a point of her loyalty to Boris Johnson and grew in confidence as the race wore on.
Photograph: Kirsty O'Connor/PA

Having secured endorsements from four former chief whips, Sunak began [streets ahead](#) in the race to hoover up votes.

“At the parliamentary stage, he totally owned it,” said one MP who helped drum up support among colleagues across the five rounds of voting. “But then everyone thought he was quids in. There probably was a little bit of arrogance back then.”

Though he collected an endorsement from the failed leadership contender Jeremy Hunt, a host of others who dropped out – Sajid Javid, Nadhim Zahawi and then, finally, Mordaunt – sensed which way the wind was blowing and got behind Truss. A series of MPs who [switched sides to support the foreign secretary](#) also dented morale.

Sunak supporters said that, in hindsight, he set too much store on winning over MPs and speaking over members’ heads to the general public; he had one eye on the real electorate he would face as prime minister instead of the roughly 160,000 people making up the party’s grassroots.

Though Sunak's personal ratings immediately shot up in the days after he resigned, Conservative members turned against him as the contest progressed. YouGov [polls](#) found a majority of them initially supported his decision to quit, but this subsided by the start of August. Of those party faithful who hold an unfavourable view of Sunak, a fifth (22%) hold a grudge and view him as a backstabber for causing Johnson to resign. His tax policies and performance in the Treasury was given as a reason by 8%, while 7% cited a lack of trust and 5% saw him as out of touch.

A video of Sunak admitting to [taking money from deprived urban areas](#) dented his reputation further. A supportive "red wall" MP said the comment – "made in some well-heeled garden" – created an "unhelpful narrative". "I had a flurry of people saying this is proof the Tories aren't helping constituencies like ours," they confessed.



Sajid Javid speaking at the launch of his campaign to be Conservative party leader. He later dropped out of the race but threw his weight behind Sunak's rival, Liz Truss. Photograph: Stefan Rousseau/PA

Meanwhile, the warnings about the brewing cost of living crisis worsened. While Truss perused tax cuts, Sunak held firm and insisted doing so would only [fuel inflation](#).

Major jitters began to set in at Sunak's campaign headquarters when the first polls began to show Truss outstripping him – far outside the margin of error. “There was a genuine belief on Rishi’s side that those numbers were wrong,” said an insider.

In response, his campaign announced plans to cut the basic rate of income tax from 20p to 16p in the pound by the end of the next parliament and axe VAT from energy bills for the next year to help with the cost of living crisis.

“He lost credibility, then was desperately trying to get it back,” a Tory source not involved in either camp noted. “If he’d been playing a consistent message, it would have been clearly received.”

They also said Sunak would probably have been supported by those members driven to quit the party because of Johnson, but by doing so had lost their right to vote in the contest.

While Sunak’s allies hoped Truss would fail to match his charisma and come across as gaffe-prone in the TV debates, she became savvier and sharper. Right-leaning newspapers The Daily Telegraph and The Daily Mail swung behind her, and Sunak’s team feared a media narrative was setting in that meant their candidate was gradually being edged out of the picture.

By the time of the final hustings in London, Sunak supporters were ready for one more heave. Their man in the room was welcomed with rapturous applause as he strode on to the stage and declared: “Hello Wembley!” A source claimed that such was Sunak’s popularity, his supporters’ stand ran out of merchandise, and that a yelling match ensued when rival supporters for Truss tried to cover up his posters with their own.



Michael Gove (left), Rishi Sunak's wife Akshata Murthy (centre) and mother Usha Sunak (right) cheer him on during the final hustings event at Wembley Arena. Photograph: Stefan Rousseau/PA

On the penultimate day of the campaign, a member of Team Sunak sought to underline their confidence in his victory by placing a £5 bet on the outcome. But a supportive MP just grimaced: “I’m not sure I’d boast about such a low amount.”

The scars of the leadership contest will be long-lasting. A Sunak supporting MP called culture secretary Nadine Dorries “feral” and admitted: “Nerves are very raw because of the way some people have behaved.” Another said the timing of the contest would be punished by voters. “We plunged this country into the unknown for so long while facing crises on multiple fronts – we can’t do that again,” they said.

But Sunak’s team are pleased they ran what they think was a clean campaign. “We’ve channelled Michelle Obama – when they went low, we went high,” said one.

Rishi Sunak's campaign in numbers

Broadcast sit-down interviews: 9 (Today programme x 3, World At One, This Morning, Nick Robinson's Next PM Special, LBC, Andrew Neil, Radio 2)

Events: 130 (excluding 12 hustings)

Members met in last six weeks: 30,000

Campaign emails sent: 1 million

Number volunteering on the campaign team: 60

Number of supporter sign ups: 35,000

Endorsements from MPs, councillors, PCCs, MSPs and WS members: 750

Kcals burnt by one energetic campaign member at the final hustings: 4,500

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You be the judge: should my flatmate make coffee for both of us in the morning?



Illustration: Ilse Weisfelt/The Guardian

Steve always makes enough for two. Hamish only makes it for himself. There's trouble brewing here – you decide who's in the right

[Find out how to get a disagreement settled or become a You be the judge juror](#)



*Interviews by [Georgina Lawton](#)
[@georginalawton](#)*
Fri 2 Sep 2022 03.00 EDT

The prosecution: Steve

I always make a pot of coffee for the two of us in the morning, but Hamish only makes it for himself

My friend Hamish and I share a flat and we work from home several days a week. We both like coffee, but disagree about who should make it and when.

When we're both in the flat, Hamish will only ever make coffee for himself. I don't get it. He just makes enough for himself and won't check whether I want one. We work in different rooms and if Hamish is at home, I'll drop him a message asking if he wants coffee. I'll give it a couple of minutes and if I don't hear back, I'll still make loads. We have a cafetière: you put the

ground coffee in and add water before pushing the plunger down. If Hamish says no to coffee, I won't make too much, but I'll still add a bit more in case he changes his mind or I want another cup.

I alternate my work-from-home days. Hamish says he never knows if I'll be leaving for the office, so he doesn't bother making a bigger pot. But when I'm home, I always check if he's in. Why can't he do the same?

What's most annoying is when Hamish has made the coffee for himself first and left the granules in the cafetière

Then he says he doesn't like chatting first thing, as he's not fully awake. I'm more of an early riser and don't mind talking. But when you're making coffee, the physical effort required to add one extra spoon is minimal. So why not just do it in case someone else wants some? I don't see how it makes your morning any harder.

What's most annoying is Hamish making coffee just for himself and then leaving the granules in the cafetière. I have to wash it up before making my own. That's a slight: first seeing evidence of coffee you didn't get to drink, then having to clean it before starting the process again.

Sometimes Hamish says making extra coffee is wasteful. We don't have a microwave, so once the coffee goes cold, that's it. But even if it goes cold, that's only 20p's worth of coffee gone to waste, so I'd rather take the risk.

The whole thing has become a bit of a running joke. Sometimes Hamish says I'm a moral crusader, that I like to get on my high horse about little things for the sake of it. I guess that's true, but I genuinely think he is in the wrong here.

The defence: Hamish

I don't always know if Steve's in. If I make a pot and half of it goes cold, that's a waste

I'm not opposed to making coffee for other people in principle, but in our flat it just makes sense for me to make it for myself. When Steve and I lived in a shared house at university, we were with lots of other people, so I would often make a big pot for everyone, which would always get drunk. But now that it's just the two of us, making too much coffee at a time seems wasteful.

The main issue is that I don't always know whether Steve is staying in or not. We both work from home three days a week. But I always work from home on the same days, whereas Steve's routine changes. During the week, he works in the living room because he has the smaller room, and I work in my bedroom.

It might sound weird, but it's hard to tell if Steve's home. We stay quite separate during the day, and keep our doors closed. We're often listening on video calls, and even if Steve is home, he might be in a Zoom meeting for a couple of hours. I don't want to disturb him.

When Steve does make coffee for me, I am grateful – don't get me wrong. But I also never ask him to do it

I think: well, if I make coffee and the rest of it just sits there, it will get cold. We don't have a microwave, so we can't heat it up again. A cold brew probably doesn't taste as good. Besides, in the morning I just want to get on and do my own thing and not really have to speak to anyone. I'm definitely not a morning person – most people know that about me, including Steve. Pretty much anything will stress me out before I've had a coffee.

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I get that it can be annoying for Steve to get up to make a coffee and find I've already made one for myself. I suppose it also twists the knife in a little deeper when he then has to wash up the cafetière that I've made my coffee in before making his own.

When Steve makes me coffee I am grateful, don't get me wrong, but I also never ask him to do it. I would be more than happy to make the coffee for myself if I had to. In the mornings, I just like to stay in my zone, make the coffee, take it back to my room and drink it by myself. What's so wrong with that?

The jury of Guardian readers

Should Hamish make coffee for his flatmate Steve, not just himself?

Hamish mate, your pal is crying out for a little social interaction. He's not asking to be spooned in bed, just in the cafetiere. I get that you like your lone wolf life, but this small act will make Steve smile and, if you let it, give you a warm and fuzzy feeling too.

Ian, 30

It's part of the housemate code to offer a brew to others if you're making yourself one – it's all part of sharing a space. So Hamish is guilty. I would also not be happy having to clean the coffee maker first thing in the morning.

Amy, 28

Hamish has shown Steve who he is, yet Steve won't accept it. Hamish's reasoning is sound. My only suggestions are: clean the machine after you use it, and buy separate bags of coffee if cost is an issue.

Millie, 58

As someone who hates waste, I've got to side with Hamish. However, there isn't any excuse when it comes to not washing the cafetiere. It only takes a

minute, if not seconds.

Samuel, 30

It's reasonable for Hamish to recognise his needs and to want to do his own thing in the morning. That said, it would be nice if he extended some consideration to Steve once in a while – making an extra coffee is not a huge task but is always hugely appreciated.

Alannah, 32

You be the judge

So now you can be the judge. In our online poll below, tell us: should Hamish start making coffee for two?

The poll will close on Thursday 8 September at 9am BST

Last week's result

We asked if Min should do her daughter Amy's laundry, like she does for her son Ailun.

44% of you said no – Min is not guilty

56% of you said yes – Min is guilty

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‘Isn’t it our duty to show horrible people?’ Matt Smith, Ralph Fiennes and The Forgiven film-makers on faith, hope and depravity

[Catherine Shoard](#)



‘You cannot make a film about a racist character who behaves vulnerably’
... Ralph Fiennes (*second left*) and Matt Smith (*third left*) in *The Forgiven*.
Photograph: Nick Wall

Director John Michael McDonagh, author Lawrence Osborne and the stars of the film discuss personal salvation, simplistic critics and why ‘you can’t build a culture out of non-stop moral hysteria’



[@catherineshoard](#)

Fri 2 Sep 2022 03.00 EDT Last modified on Fri 2 Sep 2022 05.18 EDT

Everyone loved [John Michael McDonagh](#)’s first film, [The Guard](#), with Brendan Gleeson as a sloshed cop. They admired his second, [Calvary](#), in which Gleeson played a priest reconciled to his own murder. His third, a black comedy with Alexander Skarsgård and Michael Peña, was mostly loathed. McDonagh anticipated these reactions, he says in a pub in south London. He had assumed people would like his first two, “and War on Everyone was meant to be divisive”.

So he would be forgiven for having felt perky before the premiere last year of his fourth film. “I love watching the film!” he says. It’s an old-fashioned noir: tense, starry, good-looking. “So I was like: Everyone’s going to love it.” He puts down his pint and laughs.

The Forgiven stars [Ralph Fiennes](#) and Jessica Chastain as David and Jo Henninger, an embittered surgeon and a bored children's author, who have journeyed from Chelsea to Morocco for a friend's lavish party. It's late. They're driving through the desert, lost and bickering and worse for wear. A teenage boy suddenly steps into the road, holding out a fossil he hopes to sell them. David accidentally runs him over.

They put the body in the back and drive on to the party. The police aren't interested when they are called but the next day the boy's father turns up and asks David to return with him to his village for the burial. David is reluctant, but agrees; Jo, meanwhile, stays on to amuse herself at the do.

When the film screened at the Toronto film festival last September, critics were confounded. "A lot of the reviews got caught up in how unlikable Jo and David were," says Fiennes, over the phone. "Therefore: why should we waste our time with these people? That seems quite a simplistic reaction. I think John is making quite a moral film."

"He pushes all the offensive comments, yes. The disparaging, contemptuous attitude wasn't compromised on, which I liked. But he's not interested in celebrating; he's pointing the finger. Some of the responses didn't seem to be tuned in to the moral journey. Got a bit sidetracked by the louche behaviour."

With John there's such wit and beauty; his knife is very subtle, but he wields it

Matt Smith

Such snagging was not confined to the film, says Lawrence Osborne, who wrote the 2012 novel on which the film is based. Amazon reviews often made the same point. "They say: 'That was so boring. There's no one likable,'" he says over video call from Thailand. "You think: What the fuck are you talking about!?"

[Matt Smith](#) plays the host of the party: a languorous antiques dealer called Richard who has moved to a castle in the desert. There, he is waited on by

an army of servants, along with his vile stylist boyfriend, Dally (Caleb Landry Jones). Richard is a slippery fish, full of perverse choices, but also capable of astute cultural diplomacy.



'I think John is making quite a moral film' ... Ralph Fiennes and John Michael McDonagh. Photograph: Dave J Hogan/Getty Images

Smith loved the film's provocation, he says. It reminded him of seeing Sarah Kane plays in the 90s. "You were arrested by these ideas: 'Wow! Fuck! It's in my face.' That's what I like. With John there's such wit and beauty; his knife is very subtle, but he wields it. People say: 'It's about all these horrible people and aren't they awful?' But these people exist and isn't it our duty and our responsibility to show them?"

So why did critics disagree? McDonagh has his theories. "Has Marvel infantilised audiences?" he asks, rhetorically. He watches the films too, of course, "when I'm drunk on a plane on a small screen, to give them the level of attention they deserve".

Just as superheroes tend to remain psychologically consistent, perhaps mortal characters must now follow suit. "Once you've introduced a character who says obnoxious things, there can never be any fluctuation. It makes American film critics – maybe audiences – feel uncomfortable. They

want a smooth journey. Whereas in real life, we all know that we change our minds the next day.”



‘These people exist’ ... Caleb Landry Jones, Matt Smith and Jessica Chastain in *The Forgiven*. Photograph: Landmark Media/Alamy

That’s what “basically killed” the legacy of his brother Martin’s film, [Three Billboards Outside Ebbing Missouri](#), says McDonagh. Many balked at what they felt was an overly redemptive arc for Sam Rockwell’s dodgy cop. “You cannot make a film about a racist character who behaves vulnerably.”

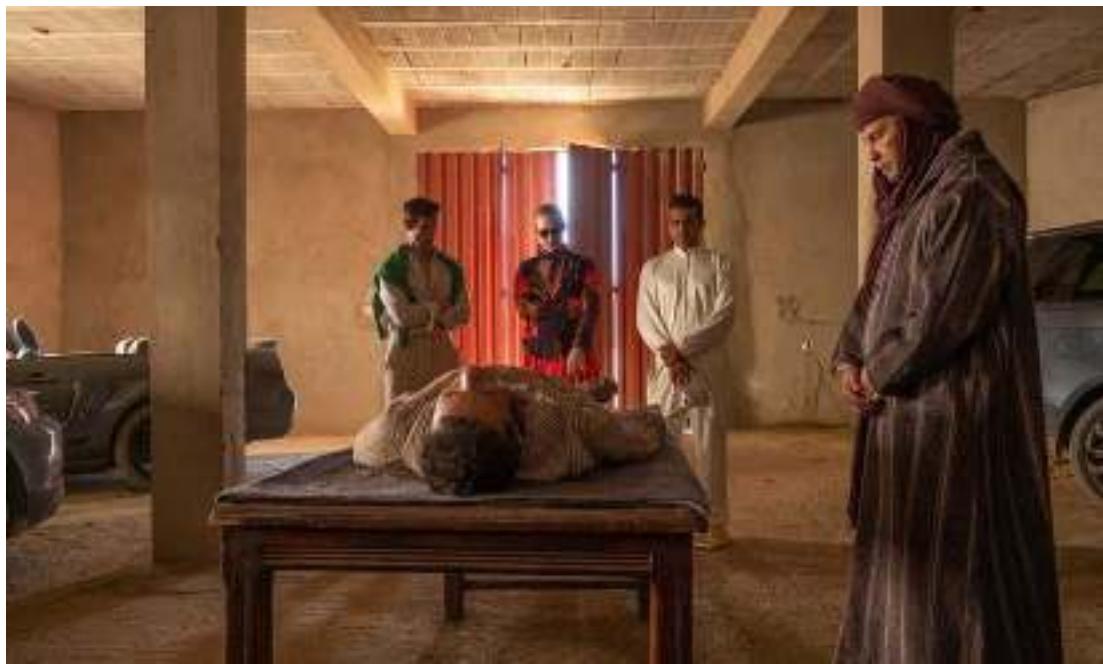
This stuff matters, he says: “It’s not really fine.” People who reject works of art in part because they find its characters repellent are “kind of in charge of the narrative at a certain point. Which we accept as film-makers, but let’s have some common sense,” says McDonagh.

Osborne, too, sees reaction to *The Forgiven* as an indication of something more troubling. “Our culture has become much more complex and wealthy, but less sophisticated in its idea of human beings. It’s become more sentimental and crude and therefore less realistic. I think this is very dangerous.”

The problem, he believes, is that “everybody now projects their own ideology into whatever they see”. So if a character is unpalatable, they must

simply be dismissed. To engage even with fictional monsters is increasingly iffy.

And it is possible, I think, to detect an element of performative puritanism in how people processed *The Forgiven*. That would explain why write-ups have tended to use broad brushstrokes to describe the Moroccans as saintly, missing – or ignoring – the fact that the fossil was a decoy: the boy had a gun and was planning a carjacking. When David suggests this in the film, he is dismissed as a bigot. Which he is, of course – but he is also, in this case, correct.



‘Everybody projects their ideology into what they see’ ... *The Forgiven*.
Photograph: Nick Wall

Plus, adds McDonagh, critics kept referring to the boy and his father as Arabs, not – as they are firmly described – Berber. “So they’re accusing you of insensitivity and then they don’t even know *that*. Hollywood has spent the last 50 years casting Moroccan actors as terrorists or victims of the US military. I assumed naively that if I made a film with fully rounded Moroccan characters who, from early on in the film, control the narrative, people would go: ‘That’s great.’ But no, no, no.”

“Scumbag racist twits are not the worst,” says Osborne. “It’s the white liberals for whom the Moroccans absolutely don’t exist.” Energetic virtue-signalling obscures people’s own failings, he thinks, and the subtleties of those they seek to champion.



John Michael McDonagh with Jessica Chastain and Ralph Fiennes on set.
Photograph: TCD/Prod.DB/Alamy

“I don’t think the British understand the extent to which they’ve been colonised by the US in this respect. It’s a sort of orgy of Protestant guilt. But you can’t build a culture out of non-stop moral hysteria. And I think its effects will be quite long-lasting.”

Osborne has been an expat for 40-odd years. He specialises in novels about naive westerners disrupting cultures they don’t understand. McDonagh tried to option another of his novels, 2017’s *Beautiful Animals*, about two moneyed young women holidaying in Greece who give shelter to a refugee. He didn’t win the rights, and now worries for those who did, in light of the reception to *The Forgiven*.

Both men are robust sceptics who have, at least partially, renounced the Christianity in which they were raised. Small wonder McDonagh, a former

altar boy, would be drawn to a story about how the devout view the ungodly, and vice versa.

“You think you can live without religion,” says Osborne. “You can’t. You just substitute something else.” The people he knows in [Morocco](#), in Thailand, all across the world, he says, “don’t take this woke stuff seriously. They just know that you discarded Christianity and this is your replacement.” Problem is: what to do when you want absolution but have no recourse to confession? “From whom will we seek forgiveness? There’s no God to dispense it.”



‘The racists are not the worst. It’s the white liberals for whom the Moroccans absolutely don’t exist’ ... Jessica Chastain in *The Forgiven*. Photograph: Sifeddine Elamine

This is certainly part of the undoing of David: a godless man in all senses. He’s introduced as a withering alcoholic with a blasted marriage and busted professional reputation (there’s talk of a lawsuit from a patient whose tumours he missed). Yet hints of something else are drip-fed: a lefty streak as a schoolboy; a history as an agitator who provoked entitled friends, then may have gradually bought into his own rhetoric.

Life bruises people who began with idealism. People fuck up and create a defence mechanism of rightwing posturing.

Ralph Fiennes

Monsters are usually made, thinks Fiennes – that means they can theoretically be dismantled. “If you can own your actions,” he says, “there’s a chance of evolving. I think when people implode, they build a carapace as a defence against the fact that they haven’t owned who they are, or the mistakes they’ve made. When you feel lost, the first thing to do is to push people away.

“Life bruises people who might have started out with idealism. People fuck up and create this defence mechanism, which can be a rightwing posturing. Who are we, really? All of us are presented with our own sort of interior odyssey.”

He sounds bashful. That sounds a bit much, he says. “It’s hard to become fully realised. One meets people about whom you feel: I want to be with this person because they have integrity, while this other person has clearly got issues.” He laughs. “Then you have to reflect: maybe I present something that puts people off.”



‘If you don’t believe in the devil, the devil cannot touch you’ ... Mourad Zaoui. Photograph: Rex/Shutterstock

David begins as nothing but off-putting. He changes, yet only one person seems to notice: Hamid, the chief flunky at Richard’s castle, forever smoothing relations between his coked-up employers and their revolted staff. Hamid glides about – the one person in possession of a backbone – dishing out canapés and increasingly ominous proverbs (“Piece by piece, the camel enters the couscous”).

The actor who plays him sees the film in a slightly different light to the others. Mourad Zaoui beams into his phone from a cafe in Los Angeles and tells me that David was an addict with a death wish. His flaw was not just his lack of religious faith but lack of “faith in one another, in humanity, in the journey. Nobody has faith in him: not his wife, not his friends.”

Any moral salvation is moot, he says. David, he thinks, failed to grasp an olive branch Hamid extends in a late scene involving a drink. “It was not enough,” says Zaoui. “Because Hamid was not white, Hamid was just the help. He focused on the beer more than he focused on the human being. He just drank that beer.” Goodness, I say. I thought the whole point was that David kept eye contact with Hamid? “Maybe with the eyes. But not with the heart.”



Abbott, Chastain and Smith in *The Forgiven*. Photograph: Landmark Media/Alamy

Zaoui smiles benignly and says he is “happy to play a brown character that was not a terrorist, very positive, smart and wise”. No, he says, being a Moroccan actor in LA does not require the kind of careful navigation his character faced in the film: “If you don’t believe in the devil, the devil cannot touch you.”

And no, he says, drinking his juice cheerfully, he’s not troubled by any of the reaction to the film. If some people can’t stomach it, don’t force them. “Vanilla doesn’t make you think, make you feel uncomfortable or make you sweat. But if you are used to eating McDonald’s every day, I’m not going to make you eat Indian food.”

The *Forgiven* is in UK cinemas from 2 September

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/film/2022/sep/02/matt-smith-ralph-fiennes-and-the-forgiven-film-makers-on-engaging-with-the-enemy>.

2022.09.02 - Opinion

- The UK is at a perilous tipping point. But what is Truss planning to do about it?
- Britain's traumatised education system needs a break – and a decent minister
- Arts funding in England is a thin gruel that organisations are forced to beg for
- Children thrive in a loving family, no matter how unconventional

OpinionUK cost of living crisis

The UK is at a perilous tipping point. But what is Truss planning to do about it?

[Polly Toynbee](#)



Each day brings more news about a spiralling catastrophe – the economy is crying out for major government intervention



‘Is anybody confident that Liz Truss and Kwasi Kwarteng will have a rescue plan on anything like the scale required?’ Photograph: Leon Neal/Getty Images

Fri 2 Sep 2022 03.00 EDT Last modified on Fri 2 Sep 2022 10.17 EDT

The gigantic scale of the oncoming economic shock becomes clearer by the hour. Click – and there’s Goldman Sachs predicting a [22% inflation rise next year](#). Click again and Bloomberg [reports](#) UK energy companies will make £170bn in excess profits over the next two years. If interest rates do [hit 4%](#), banks too will roll in unearned mortgage money, plus shedloads from money loaned to the government. Fine profits will be made from national misery.

Each day dawning reveals how everything, everywhere, is at a perilous tipping point. Martin Lewis warns that [lives will be lost](#) from cold and hunger, amplified by Sir Michael Marmot’s warning [yesterday](#) of children in grave peril. Lewis is not “catastrophising”, he says: “This is a catastrophe, plain and simple unaffordable.” If only he were to be the new chancellor ... carry on with your own Jack Monroe-and-Marcus Rashford dream team.

But next week we face the appointment of a leader with nothing to say that acknowledges the enormity of the calamity ahead, whose defining policy of tax cuts is the perverse opposite of what’s required. In the great crunch of

2008, Gordon Brown and Alistair Darling staved off imminent calamity with policies that had been unimaginable to them only a day earlier: nationalising banks, bailouts and a quantitative easing bonanza. Is anyone confident that [Liz Truss](#) and Kwasi Kwarteng will plan on anything like the scale required?

Rishi Sunak pitching to Tory party members in leafy Hertfordshire this week faced not one question – not a single one – concerning the cost of living crisis. From this twilight zone of unreality emerges a leader unfit to grapple with the worst crisis of our lifetime, with a typical 10% fall in disposable income predicted by 2024, according to the [Resolution Foundation](#), which would be worse than during the 1970s oil shock, the worst in a century.

New perils come daily. Corner shops and pubs will close. Libraries and museums can't be warm hubs for cold people as they shut to save fuel bills. Schools, hospitals, nurseries and colleges can't pay. Credit card borrowing will soar, and food banks are already running out of food.

Of course people will strike wherever they have unions to organise them: already their demands fall well behind the latest predicted inflation figures. Their immediate employers can't pay from government-restricted budgets: only government can pay out. “[Restraint](#)” is demanded by the Bank of England governor with nothing said about the [39% rise](#) for FTSE 100 CEOs this year, as reported by the High Pay Centre. The wonder is not that unions are “militant” (they're not) but that they have been so acquiescent over the last austerity decade of falling real wages. Why? It takes exceptional outrage for union members to vote to strike, suffering lost pay with an uncertain outcome. This time the pay cuts are too shocking to tolerate.

Facing this unthinkable catastrophe, the only solutions are things once deemed politically unthinkable. The idea that a £30bn tax cut is the answer defies reason, especially when biased to benefit the best off. Why would cutting corporation tax lead to “growth” when company investment was absent even in better times? When six companies alone made [£16bn excess profit](#) during the pandemic, what's needed is walloping windfalls on profiteers, as Labour urges.

This is a wartime emergency, with the west resolute against Putin's invasions. In a war paid for by Ukrainians with their lives, we are obliged to

pay with our money. But whose? Everyone's, but the most ought to come from those with the broadest shoulders. In wartime, money is conscripted in the form of war bonds, in a solidarity tax and in property taxes, since that's where most wealth resides. Public services must survive, public servants can't pay the price and nor can collapsing small businesses. Massive, Covid-era-style support is a necessity for social survival. The very minimum immediate action requires universal free school meals to stop any child starving, and an instant, inflation-matching rise in already puny universal credit. But far more than that for many more households is essential if we are to prevent Marmot's worst predictions.

Rowan Williams is among more than 500 clerics [proposing](#) a 1% wealth tax on those with £2m or more. Prof Arun Advani of Warwick University says a one-off 1% raid, to be paid over five years, would [raise £80bn](#). Invest that in renewables and insulation to head for energy near-self-sufficiency, so that the country can protect against future energy shocks.

Liz Truss, writing an ineffable stream of balderdash in the Sun yesterday, pledged as "a freedom-loving, tax-cutting Conservative" to "lead the British people through the economic storm with my clear and truly Conservative plan" with "bold action such as tax cuts, decisive reforms and slashing senseless red tape". How far she strays from voters is hinted at in the Sun's own oddly zig-zag leader, which warned her: "Tax cuts and growth are vital as a direction of travel for her Tories – but they won't stop the poorest freezing in December." And it tells her not to "protect Shell and BP's billions out of misguided ideology".

But in her final hustings this week, she pledged no windfalls, no new taxes, no energy rationing (and maybe [no speed limits either](#)). No one alive has witnessed an economic cataclysm such as this – and that's her unthinkable response.

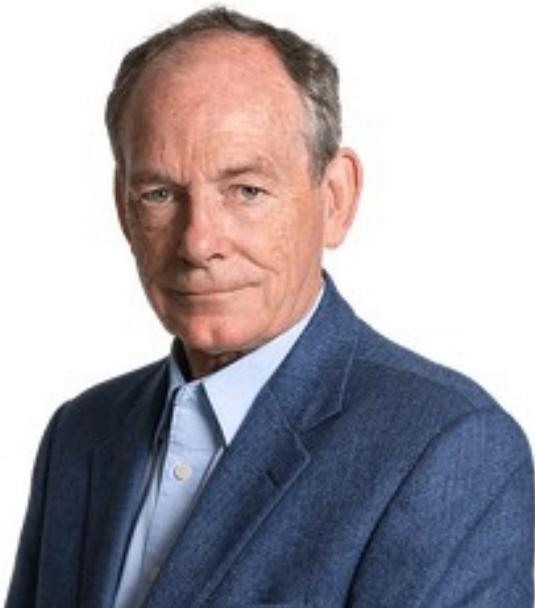
- Polly Toynbee is a Guardian columnist

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[OpinionEducation](#)

Britain's traumatised education system needs a break – and a decent minister

[Simon Jenkins](#)



After two-plus years of Covid and seven secretaries of state in the past six years, teachers and students deserve more support



Students receive GCSE results at a school in London, 25 August 2022.
Photograph: Andy Rain/EPA

Fri 2 Sep 2022 05.12 EDT Last modified on Sat 3 Sep 2022 15.50 EDT

To be Her Majesty's secretary of state for education has become a bad joke. There have been seven in the past six years, three in the past two months. Like Keeper of the Wardrobe or Lord Warden of the Cinque Ports, the job means nothing besides acting as a visible reminder of the decay of serious government under Boris Johnson.

After two years of trauma, Britain's education system desperately needs a break. Schools and universities have been closed and exams suspended. Learning has stayed at home, gone online or been delegated to private tuition. Higher education has become increasingly virtual, with ever-diminishing contact hours. And at the height of the pandemic, while Britons showered the NHS with money and praise, they hung their [teachers out to dry](#). Offered a 3% pay rise, teachers in England are [threatened to strike](#), and [university staff](#) across the UK will vote next week.

The sector is in disarray.

To any government, a pandemic is like a war: a moment of disruption and upheaval. It is also an opportunity. The education policies embedded by the Blair and Cameron governments are badly outdated. They led to a craze for centralised assessment, the humanities being suppressed in favour of maths, and a fixation on universities to the exclusion of their Cinderella sister, vocational further education. All these policies are now challenged – and fiercely defended by their lobbies.

Nothing better illustrates this than the revival, in [England, Wales and Northern Ireland](#), of GCSE exams after two years of lockdown, with the usual August hysteria of school league table rankings. These exams, at age 16, achieved their nadir [under Michael Gove](#) with his supposed toughening of their Victorian rigour. In England, this meant an end to coursework and teacher assessment, and a return to written papers scored numerically. Exams and league tables came to dominate the school year. The [one-third of pupils](#) in England, Wales and Northern Ireland who failed their English and Maths GCSEs were ejected from the system.

Since then, pleas for the ending of GCSEs have come from every quarter. Head teachers have pronounced them useless and a treadmill. Sir John Major and eight former education secretaries told this year's [education commission](#), sponsored by the Times, that they should go. The Rethinking Assessment campaign wants the same, along with [the Blair Institute](#). The Commons education committee chairman, Robert Halfon, calls them "[pointless](#)".

Whitehall's addiction to quantification reflects its craving for control. During lockdown, a transient education secretary, Gavin Williamson, was reduced to gaming exam results with an algorithm. A multimillion-pound marking industry has flourished, with its leading member, Pearson, now facing [fines of £1.3m](#) for "incorrect" behaviour. Small wonder, then, that the [OECD reports](#) pupils in the UK as being among the most anxious in the world, more so than in exam-mad China and Japan. The organisation's director of education, Andreas Schleicher, puts the UK "at one end of the spectrum: everything is standardised, and assessment is high-stakes". Everyone teaches to the test. It is significant that Finland, with no centralised testing, tops every OECD league table that matters.

Lockdown offered a golden opportunity to put a stop to this – and to the rash of testing now inflicted on primary schools. This year’s results show one consequence: a steady defection of A-level pupils from subjects such as English, history and the arts towards more measurable maths and science. There has been a drastic curbing of time available for extracurricular sport and the arts. Teaching of music and drama at GCSE has fallen by as much as a fifth in the past decade. Foreign languages have all but vanished.

During the two years of suspended exams, schools could have been liberated to explore new areas of instruction now commonplace to school systems abroad. They could have delved into physical and mental health, the handling of the law, of money, and skills of personal presentation so critical in the workplace. Educationists could have challenged the narrowness of A-level syllabuses. They could have advanced the still-hesitant cause of vocational learning and of broad-based bachelors.

As it is, such opportunities have slithered away in a frantic and misguided rush to make up for lost time in the league tables. Liz Truss, in her Conservative leadership election campaign, proffered a cliche-fest of stale ideas: more grammar schools, more state academies and much more maths. When she was an education minister in 2014 she lauded China’s dirigiste Confucius Institutes and was mesmerised by the rote chanting of Shanghai maths classes. As icing on the cake, she wants a supercharged access to Oxbridge for all pupils with three A*. She is addicted to micromanagement.

Education remains a conservative profession. Subjects taught reflect little of relevance to life in the world outside. Online is ignored. The internet hardly exists. Lessons are still hour-long. Terms are still fixed by church calendars. Summer holidays are interminable. Three- and four-year university courses waste vast quantities of time and human resources, their techniques and value for money unchallenged.

The hope was that Covid might deliver a shock to this system. Another hope may be that Westminster’s political turmoil will do likewise. But that will depend on the next prime minister finding a wise, radical education secretary who can stay the course. What hope is that?

- Simon Jenkins is a Guardian columnist
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Arts funding in England is a thin gruel that organisations are forced to beg for

[Charlotte Higgins](#)



There's no new money in the government's levelling up of the arts wheeze: just a shifting of neglect from one place to another



‘Since 1994, Junction Arts has worked with local people to create the annual Bolsover Lantern Parade.’ Photograph: Junction Arts

Fri 2 Sep 2022 01.00 EDT Last modified on Sat 3 Sep 2022 04.01 EDT

Perched high over the Vale of Scarsdale, dominated by a magnificent 17th-century castle, the Derbyshire town of Bolsover is proudly kept; so too are the former mining villages that surround it. But the neatness and prettiness on a bright late-August day occlude the fact that the area has suffered since the pits closed. Opportunities are few, unemployment high. Buses are infrequent and expensive. A worrying amount of [violent and sexual crime](#) is reported to the local police. Much of what once gave these places their identity has drifted away. In the nearby village of Pinxton, a mural has just been unveiled on the gable end of the village hall. “It is,” says Paul Steele, who worked with the parish council to commission it, “about everything Pinxton has lost” – its railway station, its mine, its porcelain factory. This is classic “red wall” territory: Dennis Skinner lost his seat here to the Conservatives at the 2019 general election.

Steele is the managing director of [Junction Arts](#), the local community arts organisation. “Bolsover has essentially no cultural infrastructure,” he tells me. No theatre, no music venue, no further education. Which isn’t to say that there isn’t creativity. Of course there is. Since 1994, Junction Arts has worked with local people to create the annual [Bolsover Lantern Parade](#).

Wonderfully inventive lanterns – in the shape of jellyfish, dinosaurs, guinea pigs, yellow submarines, you name it – are handmade by Bolsover families for a huge procession. It's a joyful spectacle that thousands come to see.

This year could be a bonanza for Junction Arts. At the moment it receives just over £100,000 a year from Arts Council England (ACE). But this year, Bolsover was identified as a “[priority place](#)” – one of 54 areas that have suffered from underinvestment to be given precedence by ACE in its next three-year funding round. (One [recent analysis](#) suggested that in the east Midlands, annual arts subsidy was £5.01 a head, as opposed to £24 a head in London.) So Steele has applied for a big uplift. If he gets it, Junction Arts plans to create a summer children's festival for nearby Chesterfield, where its office is based – lots of free creative activities for young people. You'd have to be particularly hard of heart not to hope they get it. “We felt it was now or never,” he says.

But there's a catch. Steele tells me he's never applied for an uplift before: “We feel we're all part of one big arts sector, and we don't want to take from others”. He knows that politically it is Junction Arts' moment, and it would be absurd not to grasp the opportunity when money's being shovelled into places like Bolsover, Sandwell and Stoke-on-Trent in the name of levelling up. But arts funding, under the current government, is a zero-sum game. There's no new money, beyond a tiny, 2% rise in the ACE budget. If Junction Arts gets more funding, someone else will get less. If the Tories really wanted to “level up” funding for the arts they would increase provision in Bolsover without knocking someone else back. What's actually going on here is not levelling up. It is punching down.



A new mural in Pinxton, Derbyshire, is ‘about everything the village has lost’. Photograph: Junction Arts

By 2025-26, on the instructions of the [current culture secretary, Nadine Dorries](#), £24m a year is to be taken out of the Arts Council budget in London to be redistributed to other parts of England. It’s a prospect that might make you shrug with indifference, or even quietly cheer, until you consider how exactly that might be done. Let’s be charitable and call it £16m, since part of the plan is that £8m-worth of London organisations will have moved out of the capital by 2025 as part of a “transfer scheme”. (Dorries wanted forcible removals of institutions; she was argued down to this voluntary compromise.)

Redistribution sounds great, in theory. Why not wrest cash from the grasping metropolis? The problem is, redistribution doesn’t really work as an idea in the English arts system, where everyone is struggling, and the sums of money involved are risibly small. The current ACE grant-in-aid budget is [£341m a year](#), which is in real terms somewhere between 30% and 50% of its value in 2010. It is this £341m that keeps the heart of the arts beating in England – [everything](#) from the Royal Shakespeare Company to the Manchester international festival to the Royal Northern Sinfonia .

Put it this way. To get to your £16m target, you could defund the National Theatre, which currently receives £17m grant-in-aid from ACE. Or the Southbank Centre, which gets £18.4m – no more Meltdown festival, farewell Hayward Gallery, up yours the aspirations of the Festival of Britain. Or you could get rid of English National Opera (£12.4m) plus a couple of symphony orchestras (£2m each), since London's almost certainly got enough opera and orchestral music, and it wouldn't really matter about hundreds of brilliant musicians and singers and technicians losing their livelihoods. Right?

Or let's look at it another way. Since most of London's arts funding goes to a handful of high-profile national organisations – the sort of places Oliver Dowden called "[the crown jewels](#)" when he was culture secretary – you could leave those largely alone and concentrate on some smaller organisations. You could reach £16m, for example, by defunding all of the following: the London Philharmonic, the London Symphony Orchestra, the Philharmonia Orchestra, the ICA, Camden Arts Centre, Battersea Arts Centre, the Donmar Warehouse, the Chisenhale Gallery, Poems on the Underground, the Lyric Hammersmith, Wigmore Hall, the Young Vic, the Roundhouse, the Almeida, the Serpentine and the Soho theatre.

It's worth bearing in mind that the proportionately small amounts some of these places get does not mean that they could survive without a backbone of public funding. That spine of certainty is what allows them to leverage donations and sponsorship and funding from charitable trusts; it is what allows them to take creative risks. Given the energy crisis, the [failure of railway franchises](#), and the various huge state interventions made necessary by the pandemic, it seems otiose to point out that you can't just abandon huge chunks of life to the raw winds of the market, though it is amazing how often this needs to be argued in relation to the arts.

Do you remember “eat out to help out” – Rishi Sunak’s wheeze (let’s not dignify it with the word policy) that subsidised restaurant meals during the pandemic? It cost [£849m for one month](#) – that’s one single month of populist, back-of-the-envelope, unscrutinised public spending. What a grotesque contrast to the painful, toiled-over, self-justifying applications that arts organisations have to turn in before they get their bowl of thin gruel, in

the form of ebbing funds that they've taught themselves never to complain about in case it makes them look like whingeing luvvies.

The contrast – £341m a year for an entire country's arts infrastructure compared with £849m for a month of pub lunches that may, or may not, have had an impact on the health of the hospitality sector, but certainly affected rising Covid cases and pressure on the NHS – might make you laugh. But only if you sometimes find yourself laughing out of fury and disbelief.

The hideous funding decisions forced on ACE are going to be taken in the coming weeks. The traumas of the pandemic mean more organisations than ever have applied for money – 1,730, requesting £2bn. When the decisions are announced, probably in October, it won't just be ignorable metropolitan lefties who'll be furious, it will be Tory donors and patrons of organisations in the capital. It's going to get ugly, and fast.

- Charlotte Higgins is the Guardian's chief culture writer
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OpinionFamily

Children thrive in a loving family, no matter how unconventional

Gaby Hinsliff



A pro-family government would need to embrace a sometimes messy, blurry but realistic concept of what it seeks to support



Illustration by Eleanor Shakespeare

Thu 1 Sep 2022 10.11 EDT Last modified on Thu 1 Sep 2022 16.45 EDT

It was love, rather than duty, that took a good friend of mine to a funeral last week. But it was the kind of love that can be hard to explain.

She hadn't lost a blood relative, or a friend. Instead, the funeral was for the first wife of my friend's much-married father, a woman for whom – unlike a cousin or a sibling or even a step-parent – there isn't an official word. But still, she was family, the beloved mother of my friend's equally beloved older half-sisters, a fixture in all of their long-interwoven lives, even though they had never all lived together under one roof. As always in grief, it isn't only love for the deceased that brings us together, but love for the living and bereaved.

Families are complicated beasts, not always easily packaged into tidy boxes or one-word explanations, but it is those sprawling complications that make us what we are. What matters in the end, as a [thoughtful and nuanced report](#) from the children's commissioner Rachel de Souza made clear this week, isn't whether your family fits some narrow, approved template but whether they make you feel loved and supported, confident that someone would catch you if you fell. In policymaking, [she argues](#), "too little attention has

been paid to the things which families say matter: relationships, trust in one another, love, and time together”, yet these should be taken as seriously as household composition or income.

What makes this such an interesting argument is that its author can’t be dismissed by an incoming Conservative administration as a bleeding-heart liberal. De Souza is a steelworker’s daughter from Scunthorpe, the Boris Johnson-appointed former headteacher turned academy trust leader, whose schools were famed for relentlessly driving up standards in deprived neighbourhoods, and she sees happy families not as something fluffy and nice to have, but an important, overlooked driver of social mobility and life prospects.

Children who get on well with either of their parents aged 13, she writes, have higher earnings at 25 than those who don’t. Close family relationships are directly correlated with GCSE grades, and for adults, believing you can rely on family in a crisis is associated with higher wellbeing across income groups. Being able to go out into the world confident that someone has your back matters, even if that person doesn’t fit a traditional definition of family. Yet still much of the rightwing press coverage was gloomily hand-wringing, lamenting the shocking breakdown of the nuclear family.

True, the report confirms that almost one in four families is headed by a lone parent – although that figure can’t be enormously shocking, given it’s barely changed in 20 years – and 44% of children will not see out their childhood living with both parents, due to separation or bereavement or in some cases being taken into care. Families are also shrinking: the same percentage of parents have one child as have two, although some of those households may expand with time. The cosy old unit of two adults and 2.4 children – the kind plenty of us are reminded we don’t have whenever we buy a four-pack of something from the supermarket, get a “family” ticket for some day out that doesn’t cover our actual families, or duck another nosy question about why we don’t want kids at all – is no longer necessarily the norm.

But as the report points out, it’s hard to disentangle the effects on children of their parents splitting up from the effects of whatever misery drove them to split (or indeed from what follows, which can be poverty). What should

interest policymakers is why some families seem to survive conflict, change and crisis better than others. For while “blended” second families aren’t always easy, an initially spiky jumble of steps and halves can and miraculously often does eventually reassemble itself into an emotionally rich and happy new life.

When de Souza’s team interviewed scores of children and adults to see how they defined the f-word, surprisingly often it wasn’t by DNA; some had friends so close they felt like family, but blood relatives they barely knew, while others spoke movingly about all sorts of formative figures in their lives. The most common word used when asked what family means, meanwhile, was “everything”.

Unconventional families aren’t necessarily easy to capture in government statistics, as de Souza points out, or describe to outsiders. When Labour’s deputy leader, Angela Rayner, took bereavement leave last year, she didn’t initially say whom she had lost because she didn’t quite know how to explain the relationship with the woman she calls “[her adoptive mum](#)”. The truth was that the woman who took a somewhat lost 20-year-old Rayner under her wing was the unconditionally loving maternal substitute Rayner had leaned on for guidance throughout her adult life, following a difficult childhood as a carer to her own biological mother.

“That’s the thing in bereavement, people’s relationships are so complex,” Rayner told me some months later. “Who is your close family? To a lot of people that’s your mum, your dad, your son, your daughter – well it’s not like that for a lot of people.” The pro-family government approach de Souza recommends needs to embrace a sometimes messy, blurry but realistic concept of what it seeks to support.

Some will balk at the words “pro-family”, evoking as they do finger-wagging lectures about getting married or rightwing populists offering bribes to breed (even though family life for many means supporting elderly parents, not children). But David Cameron’s initially twee-sounding “[family test](#)” – the idea that all domestic policy be scrutinised for its effect on family life, which de Souza wants to review and revive – looks in retrospect like a major missed opportunity for progressive change.

When public health experts warn that children will die this winter in cold damp homes, refusing to help the poor with their fuel bills would surely be an instant fail. So would Jacob Rees-Mogg's obsession with forcing everyone back to the office, a housing crisis that leaves too many thirtysomethings contemplating bringing up kids in tiny rented flats, the exploitation of children's homes for profit, frighteningly long waits for adolescent mental health services, and a social care system that doesn't let those exhausted by looking after elderly parents catch a break.

If love, time together, trust and a thriving emotional life are the goal, then everyone ought to be able to get behind a pro-family policy. The traditional family is dying? Then long live the happy one, whatever shape it takes.

- Gaby Hinsliff is a Guardian columnist
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2022.09.02 - Around the world

- [Pakistan Aid continues to arrive as deaths from floods pass 1,200](#)
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[Pakistan](#)

Aid continues to arrive in Pakistan as deaths from floods pass 1,200

Planes bring food, medicine and tents to disaster zone, with officials blaming floods on climate crisis



Flood victims take refuge in makeshift tents in Dera Allah Yar, Jafferabad district. Photograph: Reuters

Associated Press

Fri 2 Sep 2022 03.06 EDT Last modified on Sat 3 Sep 2022 00.11 EDT

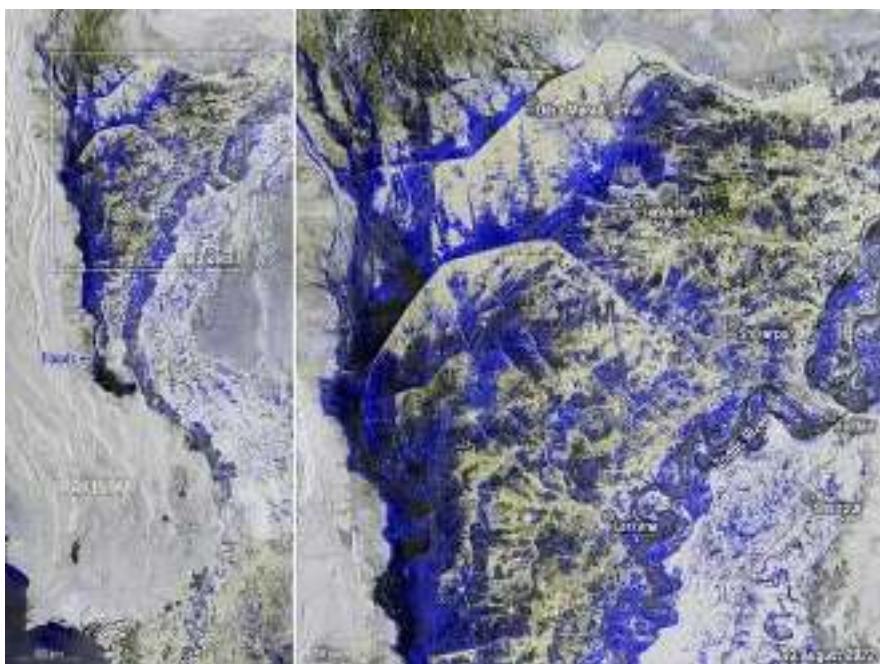
Planes carrying fresh supplies are forming a humanitarian air bridge to flood-ravaged [Pakistan](#) as the death toll passed 1,200, officials have said, with families and children especially at risk of disease and homelessness.

The ninth flight from the United Arab Emirates and the first from Uzbekistan were the latest to land in Islamabad overnight as a military-

backed rescue operation elsewhere in the country reached more of the 3 million people affected by the disaster.

Officials blamed the unusual monsoon and flooding on climate change, including the UN secretary general, António Guterres, who earlier this week called on the world to stop “sleepwalking” through the deadly crisis.

Pakistan’s foreign ministry said in a statement on Friday that the planes brought food items, medicine and tents. Pakistan’s prime minister, Shehbaz Sharif, had planned to travel to UAE on Saturday but postponed the trip to visit flood-hit areas at home.



A satellite image released by the European Space Agency shows the extent of flooding in Pakistan with a wide view of the affected area (left) and a zoom into the area between Dera Murad Jamali and Larkana, the blue to black colours showing where the land is submerged. Photograph: European Space Agency/AFP/Getty Images

So far Pakistan has received aid from China, Saudi Arabia, Qatar, Turkey, Uzbekistan, UAE and other countries. This week, the US announced it would provide \$30m (£26m) of aid for flood victims.

Pakistan also blames the climate crisis for the heavy monsoon rains that triggered the floods. Asim Iftikhar, a spokesperson at the foreign ministry, said at a news briefing the previous day that the crisis had lent credibility to climate change warnings from scientists. “This is not a conspiracy, this is a reality and we need to be mindful,” he said.

According to initial government estimates, the devastation has caused \$10bn in damages.

Since 1959, Pakistan has emitted about 0.4% of heat-trapping carbon dioxide, compared with 21.5% by the US and 16.4% by China, according to scientists and experts. Pakistani officials and experts say there has been a 400% increase in average rainfall in areas of Pakistan such as Balochistan and Sindh, which led to the extreme flooding.

Earlier this week, the UN and Pakistan [issued a joint appeal for \\$160m in emergency funding](#) to help the 3.3 million people affected by the floods, which have damaged more than 1m homes.

On Friday, authorities were warning people in the district of Dadu in the southern Sindh province to move to safer places ahead of the arrival of flood water from the swollen Indus River, which is expected to hit the region this week.

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In May, some parts of Sindh were the hottest place in Pakistan. Now people are facing floods there that have caused an outbreak of waterborne diseases.

Although flood waters continued to recede in most of the country, many districts in Sindh remained underwater.

Farah Naureen, the director for Pakistan at the international aid agency Mercy Corps, told the Associated Press that about 73,000 women would be giving birth within the next month, and they needed skilled birth attendants, privacy, and birth facilities. Otherwise, she said, the survival of the mothers and newborns would be at risk.

According to the military, rescuers, backed by troops, resumed rescue and relief operations early on Friday. Rescuers are mostly using boats, but helicopters are also flying to evacuate stranded people from remote flood-hit towns, villages and districts across Pakistan areas and deliver food to them.

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Donald Trump

US judge hints she may grant Trump request for Mar-a-Lago ‘special master’

Aileen Cannon does not make formal ruling at hearing but appears inclined to appoint official to decide which materials can be used



Donald Trump in New York for a deposition in August. Trump has claimed he has executive privilege over the documents discovered in the search.
Photograph: David Dee Delgado/Reuters

[Hugo Lowell](#) in West Palm Beach and [Ed Pilkington](#) in New York

Thu 1 Sep 2022 17.17 EDTFirst published on Thu 1 Sep 2022 13.16 EDT

A federal judge on Thursday appeared inclined to grant [Donald Trump](#) his request to have a so-called special master set aside documents seized by the FBI from his Mar-a-Lago resort that could potentially be subject to privilege protections in the investigation surrounding his unauthorized retention of government secrets.

The Trump-appointed judge, Aileen Cannon, did not formally rule from the bench on the former president's request, saying at an hours-long hearing in West Palm Beach, Florida, that she would review the matter further before making a final decision.

But the judge gave serious indications that she would appoint a special master to determine what materials the US justice department can use in its investigation, while potentially allowing for the intelligence community to continue its assessment about whether Trump's retention of the documents risked national security.

"What's the harm?" Cannon asked the government towards the end of the hearing, referring to the prospect of appointing a special master.

The judge also raised repeated concerns over two instances of "inadvertent exposure" of potentially privileged documents to the team conducting the investigation and "some missteps in the execution of the warrant" that suggested the need for an independent arbiter to go through the materials.

According to a justice department lawyer on the filter team that conducted its own review of the seized documents, federal investigators saw a potentially privileged document that was topped with a name of a organization unrelated to the investigation, as well as a second unidentified, potentially privileged document.

The judge also questioned the extent of the potentially privileged documents collected by the [FBI](#) that totaled 64 sets of documents amounting to roughly 520 pages, and corrected the justice department that in Nixon vs GSA, the supreme court did not rule that former presidents cannot assert executive privilege.

The justice department opposed Trump's motion, arguing that such a move would delay its criminal investigation examining potential obstruction and potential violations of the Espionage Act. The government also raised alarm at the fact that appointing a special master could give Trump access once more to classified documents.

Jay Bratt, the justice department's counter-intelligence section chief, who argued principally for the government, also argued that Trump's motion should not be granted because Trump had no possessory interest in the presidential documents since he was no longer president.

More details about what the FBI seized from [Mar-a-Lago](#) are expected to be revealed after judge Cannon unsealed a more detailed inventory of what was collected by the justice department, as well as a status report from the team conducting the investigation after Trump's lawyers agreed to make it public.

But the judge agreed to keep sealed the status report from the justice department's investigative team after Trump's lawyers objected, and also deferred ruling on a request from the filter team attorney to make available to Trump's legal team only a summary of the 64 sets of potentially privileged documents.

The arguments for Trump were mainly made by Jim Trusty, a former chief of the organized crime section at the justice department. Trusty repeatedly emphasized the consequential nature of the case and that appointing a special master – and temporarily delaying the investigation – would not pose a particularly heavy burden.

Trusty made the case that having a special master to assess whether certain documents were privileged, and adjudicate between personal or presidential or attorney-client privileged documents, could also be a way to resolve disagreements with the justice department about potential privilege.

The Trump legal team, which featured opening remarks from its newest addition, former Florida solicitor general Chris Kise, said that the justice department was twisting the nature of the Presidential Records Act – mandating the National Archives as the custodian of presidential records – that lacks an enforcement mechanism.

“They’re trying to criminalize … the unenforceable Presidential Records Act,” Trusty said of the government.

Prosecutors remain skeptical that the push for a special master is designed to obfuscate and delay the criminal investigation into whether Trump illegally

removed highly sensitive material from the White House when his presidency ended in January 2021. The tactics have been frequently deployed by him in other contexts, including his real estate dealings.

The Department of Justice had set out its opposition to a special master in two separate filings this week. In the first, [on Monday](#), it said it had completed its review of the documents to filter out any that Trump was entitled to be returned and found “a limited set of materials that potentially contain attorney-client privileged information”.

A more detailed filing [on Tuesday](#) gave extensive detail about why Trump’s wish for outside review of the DoJ’s actions should be resisted. It bluntly stated that Trump has no claim to executive privilege over the documents because “those records do not belong to him”.

The agency is pursuing a criminal investigation of how documents were taken out of the White House by Trump on his departure and relocated to Mar-a-Lago in violation of the PRA. It says that some of the papers are restricted to the highest level of classification, and could put US undercover agents in danger.

At least 320 classified documents have been recovered from Mar-a-Lago since January. Of those, more than 100 were seized in the August search.

As an attachment to its latest filing, the DoJ released a photograph of several document folders marked “Secret” and “Top secret” scattered over a carpet in Mar-a-Lago. Some of the documents were stamped “NOFORN”, indicating they should not be seen by any non-US citizen without permission.

The director of national intelligence is in the process of reviewing the documents retrieved from Mar-a-Lago to see what possible damage they could do to national security were any to have fallen into the wrong hands.

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[Iran](#)

Iran nuclear deal: US dismisses latest move from Tehran as ‘not constructive’

US state department rejects what Iran characterised as a bid to ‘finalise the negotiations’ in latest efforts to agree a deal



Milad Tower, Tehran. One of the most difficult issues has been how to handle Iran’s advanced centrifuges and surplus stock of uranium, which it enriched in breach of the original nuclear agreement. Photograph: Amin Mohammad Jamali/Getty Images

[Julian Borger](#) in Washington and [Patrick Wintour](#)

Thu 1 Sep 2022 23.16 EDTFirst published on Thu 1 Sep 2022 20.16 EDT

Hopes of a rapid conclusion to negotiations on a revived nuclear deal with [Iran](#) have receded after the US quickly rejected the latest Iranian proposal as “not constructive”.

Washington's rapid reaction to the Iranian text, which had been delivered shortly before 3am on Friday Tehran time, directly contradicted Tehran's claims that its proposals presented "a constructive approach" aimed at "finalising the negotiations".

Only minutes after the Iran proposals were received by the EU and passed on to Washington, the Biden administration gave it a provisional, but abrupt, thumbs down.

"We can confirm that we have received Iran's response through the EU," a state department spokesman said. "We are studying it and will respond through the EU, but unfortunately it is not constructive."

An unnamed US official was [quoted in Politico](#) as saying: "Based on their answer we appear to be moving backwards."

It is not clear what was in the Iranian text that was the latest round in a to-and-fro exchange with Washington aimed at tweaking a draft agreement presented by the EU on 8 August. Iran gave its first response to the draft on 15 August, which was followed by a response from the US. The latest Iranian document was, in turn, a reply to the US text.

Officials on both sides had been cautiously optimistic about the possibility of converge on a final agreement that will revive a 2015 nuclear deal in which Iran accepted strict limits on its nuclear activities in exchange for sanctions relief. That agreement has been severely eroded since Donald Trump withdrew US participation in 2018 and reintroduced sanctions.

Last week, John Kirby, the US national security spokesman, had hailed what he called Iranian concessions and on Wednesday this week said the White House remained "hopeful" there would be a deal.

Early on Friday in Tehran, Iran's foreign ministry spokesman, Nasser Kanaani, had said Iran's latest text presented "a constructive approach with the aim of finalising the negotiations".

The French president, Emmanuel Macron, had also struck an optimistic note on Wednesday in an address to French diplomats in Paris, saying he hoped a new deal could be agreed on “in the next few days”.

But Ali Alizadeh, a member of the Iranian parliament security commission had dampened that optimism, by warning that the US position was not aligned with the EU draft text, saying it had dashed his earlier hopes that agreement was days away.

The Iranian foreign minister, Hossein Amir-Abdollahian, said Iran still needed stronger guarantees that the lifting of US sanctions would have a practical impact, and could not readily be reimposed by future US administrations.

“On guarantees, we need a stronger text,” the minister said in Moscow at a press conference with his Russian counterpart Sergey Lavrov.

Joe Biden has said he can guarantee US compliance with the agreement under his presidency but not by future administrations – in effect giving Iran only a two-year guarantee of sanctions relief.

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The US has tried to give Tehran comfort by vowing that any trade or investment deals signed before a future US administration left the agreement would be legally immune from US sanctions for as long as five years.

Iran is also seeking guarantees that by the time the agreement comes fully into force, the west will entirely drop its three-year inquiry into unexplained

nuclear particles found at nuclear sites before 2003. The EU has suggested the inquiry might be dropped so long as credible explanations are provided.

Iran fears the probe's continued existence might be used as a pretext to maintain or reimpose sanctions.

The Russian envoy to the nuclear talks in Vienna, Mikhail Ulyanov, urged the west to relent saying: "No current illegal activities are taking place there."

One of the most difficult issues has been how to handle Iran's advanced centrifuges and surplus stock of uranium enriched by the Iranians in breach of the original agreement.

The west wanted the destruction of these centrifuges or their removal from Iran, but Iran only wants to dismantle and store these devices within Iran.

Iran argues that the warehousing of the centrifuges in an IAEA supervised building will act as a sword of Damocles, and serve as a guarantee that the US will abide by the agreement. US Republicans also want guarantees that enriched surplus uranium will not be sent to Russia, without UN oversight.

Israeli officials say the deal opens a pathway to an Iranian nuclear weapon since it will be allowed to begin operating advanced centrifuges by 2026 and then enrich more uranium at higher levels by 2031. But advocates of the deal say the alternative, no deal at all – is worse, and these expiry dates can be extended in negotiations.

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Markets rally after US jobs report; G7 ministers back Russian oil price cap; pound under pressure – as it happened

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Global development

‘Powder kegs waiting for a spark’: rising costs threaten global unrest, say risk analysts

More than half the world’s countries at heightened risk of conflict and instability because of soaring food and energy prices



Sri Lankan university students taking part in a protest in May calling for President Gotabaya Rajapaksa to step down. Photograph: Anadolu Agency/Getty Images

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[Sarah Johnson](#)

Fri 2 Sep 2022 02.00 EDT Last modified on Fri 2 Sep 2022 02.36 EDT

Rising costs of food and energy and the impact of the climate crisis on resources are predicted to increase civil unrest in more than half the world's countries over the coming months, according to new analysis.

This year has already witnessed large-scale protests as inflation levels soar in Argentina, [Ecuador](#) and [Sri Lanka](#), but the worst is yet to come, said risk intelligence company Verisk Maplecroft.

With more than 80% of countries around the world seeing inflation above 6%, socioeconomic risks are reaching critical levels, it said.

“We’re talking about numerous powder kegs around the world simply waiting for that spark to be ignited. We don’t know where that spark will come first,” said Jimena Blanco, the company’s chief analyst.

Analysis published by the company on Friday said 101 out of 198 countries, including the UK and across Europe, now had a heightened risk of conflict and instability.

Only a significant reduction in global food and energy prices can stop the trend of growing civil unrest, it said.

“We’ve seen a lot of big protests around the world this year and we’re seeing inflation accelerating,” said Torbjorn Soltvedt, Verisk’s principal Middle East and north Africa analyst, who led the research. “In parallel, we’ve seen a trend of a weakening of democratic countries and of free speech. That’s why we expect a lot more civil unrest this year and going into next year.”

Counties across Europe face some of the biggest risks of unrest, fuelled by Russia’s invasion of Ukraine.



Protestors gather in Buenos Aires on 10 August demanding better wages, more jobs and a meeting with Argentina's new economy minister Sergio Massa. Photograph: Luis Robayo/AFP/Getty Images

“The situation is so bad in places like Haiti, Myanmar and Sudan that it is hard for them to become much worse. Therefore, countries in Europe that have to date enjoyed much more stable environments are likely to see bigger increases in risk,” said Blanco.

The risk of civil unrest has increased in Ukraine because it is harder to voice discontent under martial law, said Verisk. Since the beginning of the Russian invasion, anyone protesting can be arrested. Even after the conflict ends,

“the challenges to rebuild the economy, infrastructure, and bring back civil life to prewar standards, will provide fertile ground for protests,” said Blanco.

Countries such as Egypt, the Philippines and Zimbabwe that were able to offer support to people during the Covid-19 pandemic are now struggling to maintain levels of social spending, which could cause discontent, said Verisk.

Blanco said political events in Latin America “may feed into drivers of unrest”.

Chile is preparing to vote on a new constitution, she said, and Brazil is heading into a polarised general election. “In Argentina the government is effectively collapsing amid ongoing unrest,” she added. “The question is whether the unrest will escalate into something more profound.”

For governments unable to spend their way out of crises, repression is likely to be the main response to anti-government protests. People in Iran – alongside other countries in the Middle East – are already subject to violence from security services, the research found.

Weather is likely to be a determining factor in whether unrest increases. A cold autumn and winter in Europe could worsen an already serious energy and cost of living crisis. An increase in droughts and water stress globally may worsen already high food prices and spark protests in affected areas.

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Headlines saturday 3 september 2022

- [Live Russia-Ukraine war: Ukrainian forces ‘exploiting poor Russian leadership’; EU outcry at gas pipeline closure](#)
- [Nord Stream 1 Russia shuts down gas pipeline indefinitely](#)
- [Analysis Russia’s hybrid war on Ukraine extends to new terrain](#)
- [Russian oil G7 countries agree plan to impose price cap](#)

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[Gazprom](#)

Nord Stream 1: Gazprom announces indefinite shutdown of pipeline

Russian energy company had been due to resume gas delivery to Germany on Saturday morning



The Nord Stream 1 gas pipeline in Lubmin, Germany. Photograph: Hannibal Hanschke/Reuters

[Alex Lawson](#) and agencies

Fri 2 Sep 2022 13.40 EDT Last modified on Sat 3 Sep 2022 00.15 EDT

The Russian energy major Gazprom extended the shutdown of gas flows through its key Nord Stream 1 pipeline to [Germany](#) on Friday evening, providing no timeframe for a reopening.

The move came hours after [G7 countries agreed to impose a price cap on Russian oil](#) in an attempt to stem the flow of funds to Vladimir Putin's regime.

Gazprom, the state-owned oil and gas firm, said supplies would remain halted indefinitely after a leak was detected. It said the pipeline would not restart until repairs were fully implemented.

Nord Stream 1 is the single biggest pipeline for gas from Russia to [Europe](#) and has the capacity to deliver 55bn cubic metres (bcm) of gas a year. Continued supplies through the pipeline are seen as crucial to prevent a deepening of the energy crisis.

In a statement on Telegram, Gazprom said: “Gas transportation to the Nord Stream gas pipeline has been completely halted until the complaints on the operation of the equipment have been eliminated.”

It said in the social media post it had identified “malfunctions” on a key turbine along the pipeline, which carries natural gas from western [Russia](#) to Germany, and that the pipeline would not work unless these were eliminated.

[supply routes](#)

Early on Wednesday, Gazprom completely halted the flow of gas through Nord Stream 1, in line with an earlier announcement, adding that the stoppage would last for three days. Flows were due to resume just after midnight on Saturday morning.

The company said work was necessary on the only remaining functioning turbine at the Portovaya compressor station at the Russian end of the pipeline, but German officials cast doubt on that explanation.

The timing of the move will raise questions over whether Putin was responding to the impending imposition of a cap on Russian oil. Finance ministers from the UK, US, France, Germany, Italy, Japan and Canada on Friday agreed a plan to put a ceiling on Russian oil prices.

The proposal would mean importers seeking shipping services and insurance cover from companies based in [G7](#) and EU countries would need to adhere to a price cap to transport Russian oil. It is likely to be introduced from December.

Since the invasion of Ukraine, Putin's regime has been accused of weaponising gas by reducing supplies into Europe, pushing prices higher and threatening blackouts.

Gazprom officials have already indicated they would blame sanctions for disrupting gas deliveries to Europe. In remarks earlier this week, Gazprom's chief executive, Alexei Miller, indicated that the manufacturer Siemens could not perform repairs on the turbines used in Nord Stream 1 because of sanctions against the Russian state energy company.

The shutoff will add to concerns that Europe, and Germany in particular, will be forced to significantly curtail power usage for households and businesses this year.

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European countries have rushed to fill up their gas storage facilities in case Russia shuts off gas supplies completely this winter. Germany's storage facilities are now more than 84% full.

The head of Germany's network regulatory agency, Klaus Mueller, tweeted that the Russian decision to keep Nord Stream 1 switched off for now increases the significance of new liquefied natural gas terminals that Germany plans to start running this winter, gas storage and “significant needs to save” gas.

The European Commission chief spokesman, Eric Mamer, said: “Gazprom’s announcement this afternoon that it is once again shutting down Nord

Stream 1 under fallacious pretences is another confirmation of its unreliability as a supplier.”

Jacob Mandel, a senior associate for commodities at the energy consultancy Aurora, said the halt of flows through Nord Stream 1 “does not significantly alter the outlook for European imports of Russian gas from the last few weeks”.

Mandel said Nord Stream 1 was delivering about 30m cubic metres a day, or 20% of its capacity of 55bcm, before the latest shut down. He said this was equivalent to only about 3.7bcm over the rest of this year or more than 18bcm if it were to run at full capacity. That represents just 4% of Germany’s annual demand and less than 1% of Europe’s annual demand, he said.

Mandel added: “That said, supply is hard to come by, and it becomes harder and harder to replace every bit of gas that doesn’t come from Russia.

“Europe’s storages are well on track to hitting or even surpassing their targets for this summer, and there’s plenty of scope to replace that gas with liquified natural gas imports for now, but when weather turns cold and demand starts to pick up in the winter in Europe and Asia, there’s only so much LNG out there that Europe can import to replace Russian gas.”

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Gazprom

Analysis

Russia's hybrid war on Ukraine extends to new terrain as Gazprom cuts supply to Europe

[Patrick Wintour](#)

Energy war with west has exploded after weeks of tension



Gazprom announced an oil leak had been found on the Nord Stream 1 gas pipeline and it would take an indefinite amount of time to fix. Photograph: Dmitry Lovetsky/AP

Fri 2 Sep 2022 16.08 EDT Last modified on Sat 3 Sep 2022 03.01 EDT

The energy war between Russia and the west has suddenly exploded, threatening an all-out power struggle in which the west seeks to cap the price of Russian oil and the Kremlin cuts off the supply of gas to [Europe](#).

The unpredictable dispute, in which both sides deploy unconventional weapons of economic warfare, shows the extent to which Russia's hybrid war in Ukraine has been extended into new terrain. President [Vladimir Putin](#) is testing Europe's real willingness to see the lights go out in defence of Ukraine's sovereignty.

Gazprom, the Russian state-owned gas monopoly supplier, [on Friday afternoon announced](#) that during a routine maintenance check an oil leak had been discovered in the main gas turbines at compressors on the Nord Stream 1 gas pipeline, which takes gas from Siberia into northern Germany via the Baltic Sea. Gazprom said the leak would take an indefinite amount of time to fix, after innumerable other unusually prolonged breaks for maintenance.

The Russian announcement – seen in the west as a piece of transparent blackmail – came hours after the G7 finance ministers pressed ahead with an elaborate plan, first outlined by the US at the G7 leaders summit in June, to [put a cap on Russian oil prices](#). The aim is to introduce the cap as early as December, depriving Putin of the resources he needs to fund the war past the winter. Until now, Gazprom had hit a sweet spot of dwindling European demand for Russian energy not leading to a fall in revenue, due to the rise in global energy prices.

The news in the G7 finance ministers announcement was that the US had managed to get a previously sceptical [Germany](#) to examine the proposal in earnest.

As soon as the G7 leaders meeting ended in June, senior US officials came to London to talk to the Treasury about how the idea would work. London, the centre of the shipping insurance industry, is indispensable to the plan. In essence, it requires shipping underwriters not to provide insurance to any tanker that is planning to sell the oil above a price cap set by the G7.

An audacious piece of market intervention, the plan retains many inherent flaws. Underwriters claim they do not know the price of the oil that the ship they have insured will sell.

For the scheme to work, it may require neutral oil importing countries, such as India to participate, or else [Russia](#) will simply find new markets for its oil. The Greek shipping industry in particular would be hit.

Despite the work since the G7, no target price has been agreed and the noises out of the London insurance industry are not enthusiastic. But the plan does now have the enthusiastic endorsement of the UK chancellor, Nadhim Zahawi, and more importantly the US Treasury secretary, Janet Yellen. But it remains a long-term plan on a drawing board.

By contrast, Putin already has powerful destructive levers at his disposal. He has cut supplies to just 20% of normal level on Nord Stream 1, contributing to the vast rise in gas prices. The question is whether he plans to continue toying with Europe by occasionally threatening to reduce supplies, or to instead go for the jugular by turning off gas supplies altogether.

There is a risk that could backfire, not least if the powerful Russian gas industrialists think he is jeopardising their industry. There is an argument that if he intends to damage Germany industry seriously, he needs to strike now.

Germany claims to be ahead of plan in its efforts to fill reserves to 80% of capacity. But German industrialists and politicians have warned cutoffs could lead to blackouts and possible mass redundancies.

Inside the EU there is little doubt that Putin has been manipulating gas supplies for months, just as so many countries warned Germany that Putin would probably do if Berlin became too dependent on cheap Russian gas.

Eric Mamer, the European Commission's chief spokesperson, said: "Gazprom's announcement this afternoon once again shutting down Nord Stream 1 under fallacious pretences is another confrontation of its unreliability as a supplier."

He added: "It is also proof of Russia's cynicism".

But Russia, accused of innumerable battlefield war crimes and its economic relations with Germany in tatters, will hardly be shedding tears at such

accusations.

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Oil

G7 countries agree plan to impose price cap on Russian oil

Aim is to cut revenues for Moscow's war in Ukraine but keep crude flowing to avoid price rises

- [Russia-Ukraine war – latest updates](#)



Despite Russia's falling oil export volumes, its oil export revenue in June increased by \$700m from May because of higher prices. Photograph: Bloomberg/Getty Images

[Alex Lawson](#) Energy correspondent

Fri 2 Sep 2022 11.01 EDTFirst published on Fri 2 Sep 2022 08.30 EDT

The G7 countries have agreed to impose a price cap on Russian oil in an attempt to stem the flow of funds into the Kremlin's war coffers.

Finance ministers from the UK, US, France, Germany, Italy, Japan and Canada have agreed a plan to put a ceiling on Russian oil prices. The proposal would mean importers seeking shipping services and insurance cover from companies based in [G7](#) and EU countries would need to adhere to a price cap to transport Russian oil.

The cap is expected to be introduced at the same time as planned EU embargoes on Russian oil kick in – on 5 December for crude and 5 February for refined products, such as diesel. The level of the cap is still being discussed.

The UK chancellor, [Nadhim Zahawi](#), said the decision followed a meeting earlier this week in Washington with the US Treasury secretary, Janet Yellen.

He said: “We will curtail Putin’s capacity to fund his war from oil exports by banning services, such as insurance and the provision of finance, to vessels carrying Russian oil above an agreed price cap.

“We are united against this barbaric aggression and will do all we can to support [Ukraine](#) as they fight for sovereignty, democracy and freedom.”

Yellen said the measure would be implemented “in the weeks to come” and represented a “major blow for Russian finances and will hinder Russia’s ability to fight its unprovoked war in Ukraine”.

She said the move would help fight inflation and protect businesses and consumers from “future price spikes caused by global disruptions”.

The import of Russian oil makes up 44% of Russian exports and 17% of federal government revenue through taxation.

The Kremlin said on Friday Russia would stop selling oil to countries that impose price caps on Russia’s energy resources – caps that Moscow said would lead to significant destabilisation of the global oil market.

“Companies that impose a price cap will not be among the recipients of Russian oil,” the Kremlin spokesperson Dmitry Peskov said.

Russian oil companies have increased exports to markets outside [Europe](#) after countries shunned its exports since the outbreak of war.

Craig Howie, an analyst at Shore Capital, said: “Oil supplies are not exactly plentiful at the moment so this appears to a sensible way of punishing Russia while acknowledging that oil needs to keep flowing.

“The effectiveness of this will come down to enforcement not just in the G7 but other markets. In theory, more countries may come onboard if they can access cheap oil.”

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In March, shortly after Russia invaded Ukraine, the UK government pledged to ban the import of Russian oil by the end of the year.

Europe has been upended by tumult in Russian energy markets so far this year. Russian state-backed gas major Gazprom has reduced supplies into Europe, causing a rush to fill storage facilities.

Russia said on Friday gas deliveries via one of the main supply routes to Europe, the [Nord Stream 1 pipeline](#) under the Baltic Sea, remained at risk because just one turbine was operational.

Nord Stream 1 was running at 20% capacity even before flows were halted for three days this week for maintenance. Deliveries were due to resume in

the early hours of Saturday morning.

Fears over shortages this winter have pushed the price of gas higher, increasing profits for energy firms including BP and Shell.

On Friday, it emerged that Shell's long-serving chief executive, [Ben van Beurden, is preparing to step down](#) next year after almost a decade in the role.

The energy boss, who was [paid €7.4m \(£6.1m\) in 2021](#), warned earlier this week that gas shortages in Europe would [probably last several years](#), raising the prospect of continued energy rationing. The Canadian head of Shell's integrated gas and renewables division, Wael Sawan, who is said to be the frontrunner in Shell's search for a successor.

Shell declined to comment on van Beurden's pending departure or his potential successors.

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‘We had such trust, we feel such fools’: how shocking hospital mistakes led to our daughter’s death

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Ian McEwan on ageing, legacy and the attack on his friend Salman Rushdie: ‘It’s beyond the edge of human cruelty’

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Ian McEwan: ‘I’d like to continue to be read, but that’s entirely out of one’s control.’ Photograph: Lydia Goldblatt/The Guardian

The author’s new novel explores how global events shape individual lives – but nothing prepared him for this ‘dark moment’

[Got a question for Ian McEwan?](#)

Sat 3 Sep 2022 05.00 EDT Last modified on Sat 3 Sep 2022 13.25 EDT

Ian McEwan was on holiday on the remote coast of north-west Scotland when he heard the news that his great friend [Salman Rushdie had been attacked](#) in New York. His wife, the writer Annalena McAfee, let out a cry from the next door room in the small hotel where they were staying. The numbness of his first response was quickly followed by a feeling of horrible inevitability: “How could I have been so blind?” Like Rushdie, McEwan had hoped the threat of the fatwa was over. “The tragedy of this is Salman always wanted to get back to having an ‘ordinary’ writing life, and that seemed to have happened,” McEwan says on a video call a week after the incident. The 74-year-old novelist is back in his Cotswolds home, surrounded by books and looking slightly beaten up after his first bout of Covid.

The grim effects of coronavirus added to his “sense of visceral disgust” at the violence of the stabbing. “It all seemed one with my own perception of it,” he says. “A colossal weariness and also disgust at the thought that it takes a lot of hatred, a lot of zeal, to push a knife deep into someone’s eye. It is beyond the edge of human cruelty. And only an intact ideology, not available to disprove in any way, could bring you to the point.”

We had met earlier in the summer to discuss McEwan’s epic new novel, *Lessons*, in which the fatwa issued against Rushdie for *The Satanic Verses* in 1989 appears as part of the novel’s far-reaching look at postwar British history. “It was a watershed moment for those of us around Salman,” [he says now](#). For writers, intellectuals and artists in the 70s or 80s, religion wasn’t an issue: “We didn’t even deny religion, it just didn’t come up.” So when the fatwa was decreed, “it was explosive. It cut across the sort of multicultural

assumptions we had at the time. People whom we naturally most wanted to defend from racism were burning books in Bradford.”

Although not originally part of the notorious gang of writers – Martin Amis, Julian Barnes and the late Christopher Hitchens – who made their names in the 70s and dominated the literary scene for much longer (too long, according to their critics), Rushdie arrived a few years later with the publication in 1981 of [Midnight's Children](#), which transformed both British and Indian writing, and won the Booker prize that year. “It was amazing, it expanded horizons,” McEwan says. “Salman is a great conversationalist, with a great taste for fun and mischief,” he adds. “So we all got on straight away.”

Audio extract: Lessons

Listen to an excerpt from the audiobook of Ian McEwan's forthcoming novel

00:00:00

00:02:36

McEwan’s ambition with *Lessons*, his 18th novel, was to show the ways in which “global events penetrate individual lives”, of which the fatwa was a perfect example. “It was a world-historical moment that had immediate personal effects, because we had to learn to think again, to learn the language of free speech,” he says. “It was a very steep learning curve.” It seems strange to remember that 1989 was also the year the Berlin Wall came down, a central event in the new novel. “The fatwa just preceded a rather wonderful time when democracies were sprouting out across Europe, free speech was on the rise, free thought was on the rise,” he says. “Everything has changed from 33 years ago. We now live in a time of heavily constricted, shrinking freedom of expression around the world: Russia, Saudi Arabia, Turkey, China, you name it. Plus the self-inflicted free speech matter of the rich west.”

It is exactly this trajectory from youthful optimism to disillusionment and despair that the novel charts, following the life of his central character, Roland Baines, from the Suez and Cuban crises right up to Brexit and the

pandemic. McEwan finished writing Lessons before the Russian invasion of Ukraine, or else he would have included it as a further example as part of the “trashing” of his hopes, which he compares to the thwarted dreams of Orwell’s generation at the end of the 30s. If he was still writing, the attack on Rushdie would be in there, too. “It is horribly consonant with the times,” he says. “We live in an age of casual death threats, of the kind that washes towards JK Rowling, for example. For some lone, insufficient individuals, it’s a short step to carry out some terrible act. This is a very dark moment.”

Things look much brighter when I meet McEwan in his immaculately white Bloomsbury mews back in July. He is tanned and healthy from a recent walking holiday (he is a committed hiker) in the Lake District with McAfee.

He shows me a photograph of Lingcove Bridge, which they visited, the site of a late scene in Lessons, when Roland, on the eve of his 70th birthday, has a tussle with a Tory peer and is pushed into the river. “That was me feeling I was defeated by Brexit,” McEwan admits. He describes Lessons as “a sort of post-Brexit novel”. Our world has got smaller, he says. “The ceiling in our rooms has lowered by two feet.” It’s the day before Boris Johnson is forced to resign, and he tells a jolly story about “a delightful hour” he spent discussing Shakespeare with the former prime minister (who is writing a biography of the playwright), after a dinner, long before Brexit. “He needs to get back to that book,” McEwan says drily.

We had our time, my generation. We can’t complain. We got prizes, some money, and now it’s this tsunami of other voices

Few interviews fail to note the disconnect between the genial man in linen shirt and jumper, who might just as easily be an eminent scientist, and his enduring reputation as contemporary fiction’s “prince of darkness”. Over his 50-year writing life, which has included winning the Booker in 1998, becoming a fixture on school reading lists and blockbuster films, not least Atonement, McEwan has been accorded the position of “national novelist”; “national psychologist” even, a tag he winces at now. Lessons is teasingly alert to the perils of being “white, hetero and old” as a writer today.

If there is no longer a commotion when his novels don't make it on to the Booker longlist (*Lessons* hasn't), he's not complaining. "We had our time," he says sanguinely. "My generation, when we were first publishing in the 70s, it was very boyish. It was a tight world. We're all in our 70s now. We can't complain. And I especially can't complain. And for very good reason. We got the prizes and some money, and we had the writing life. And now it's this tsunami of other voices. Everything has opened up wonderfully."

He started writing *Lessons* in 2019, after a long publicity tour for [Machines Like Me](#). All he wanted to do was stay at home and write throughout 2020. "One should be careful what one wishes for," he deadpans. "All novelists are locked down. Lockdown is what we do. But I never thought I'd have such opportunities for total immersion, seven days a week, often 12 hours a day, broken only by walking the dog. I really wanted to write a long novel, to relax into it, to live in it."



With Salman Rushdie and Melvyn Bragg at a book launch in 2012.
Photograph: Mike Marsland/WireImage

Coming in just shy of 500 pages, it is far longer than McEwan's characteristically "short, smart and saturnine" novels, as John Updike summed up his work in a 2002 [review of Atonement](#). So much for his assertion in previous interviews that he was going to spend his 70s writing

novellas. “I think you have written your *last* novel,” a writer friend wrote after reading the end result. “Even though I hope you will write more.” As McEwan concedes, you know what he means. “It is a novel of the backwards look.”

Billed as “the story of a lifetime”, it is in many ways the story of McEwan’s life. “I’ve always felt rather envious of writers like Dickens, Saul Bellow, John Updike and many others, who just plunder their own lives for their novels,” he explains. “I thought, now I’m going to plunder my own life, I’m going to be shameless.” Before readers assume that he was abused as a boy, or went through any of the misfortunes that befall Roland, parts of McEwan’s past are fictionalised and “interwoven” with the narrative. “It is certainly my most autobiographical novel, but at the same time, Roland is not me. He didn’t lead my life,” McEwan explains. “But in a way he lives the life I might have led. All of us have these moments, when we think about them later, where we could have gone down some other path. I could so easily not have become a writer.”

While McEwan’s previous historical novels have zoomed in on specific periods – unforgettably the second world war (*Atonement*), the cold war (*Sweet Tooth*, *Black Dogs*, *The Innocent*), the 80s (*Machines Like Me*) and post-9/11 (*Saturday*) – *Lessons* marches through the political landscape of postwar Britain, taking in Thatcherism, New Labour (Tony Blair with “his copious hair, good teeth, an energetic stride”) to the new populism (Trump and Johnson are pointedly unnamed). He wasn’t aiming to write the British equivalent of the Great American Novel: “We don’t have that phantom bearing a whip that American writers have.” Instead he wanted to show how the actions of those “all too human gods”, our political leaders, can wreak havoc on mere mortals: “a piece of dust as it were from their heels flies in your eyes”.

People talk about Salman’s ‘life-changing injuries’. This is very hard at 75. Being that age is life-changing enough

The opening section, a minutely played out “affair” between the young Roland and his 25-year-old piano teacher at boarding school (very like the one the author attended), which Roland only later realises was abuse, is

vintage McEwan: psychologically gripping, erotically intense and morally troubling. On the brink of the Cuban missile crisis, the only question among Roland's classmates after lights out in the dormitory was what if the world ended "before you had it? *It.*" Roland isn't about to take any chances: chasing up overtures made by the seductive Miriam, he fetches up at her front door. The pair embark on a summer of "throbbing" duets and Lawrentian allusions. "This was what the far-off belligerent gods, Khrushchev and Kennedy, had arranged for him," Roland reflects helplessly.

This story was not, McEwan makes clear, drawn from his own life, but from an abandoned earlier novel, part of which became *On Chesil Beach*, also set in 1962. Having taken on the biggest contemporary issues – the climate emergency as comedy in [Solar](#) (2010), artificial intelligence in [Machines Like Me](#) (2019) – it was only a matter of time before McEwan turned his dark-seeking antenna to the subject of historical child abuse. He admires Zoë Heller's 2003 novel [Notes on a Scandal](#), about a relationship between a teacher and one of her pupils. But the decision to have a female abuser was not simply McEwan-esque contrarianism. "I wanted to write it from the point of view of the victim, to show the consequences for the rest of the life," he says. "But I didn't want to appropriate a woman's experiences."

McEwan hadn't intended to write about his family history, but his [discovery in 2002](#) of a brother, David Sharp, a bricklayer, was so powerful an illustration of the novel's central idea that he found he "couldn't step away". His parents came from "very poor, hard-working families": both left school at 14, his father, David (Robert in *Lessons*), to become a butcher boy, before joining the army, where he worked his way up to major; his mother, Rose, went into service as a chambermaid. They met when his father was training in Aldershot and his mother was already married. After her first husband was killed fighting they married, but never reclaimed the baby who had been born as a result of their wartime romance. "*Wanted, Home for baby boy, age 1 month; complete surrender*", reads the heartbreakingly heartbreaking advertisement his mother put in the paper offering her illegitimate child for adoption.



‘It’s a novel of the backwards look’: at home in London. Photograph: Lydia Goldblatt/The Guardian

McEwan’s father, with his Brylcreem and “spit-and-polish” ways, as well as the frustrations “of a highly intelligent man deprived of formal education”, which led to drinking and often violent anger, and his mother’s anxiety and unexplained sadness, “all that just fell on to the page”. By the time the secret was finally revealed, his father was dead and his mother was in the late stages of dementia. “My mother was worried, frightened and sad as a person,” he says now. “There would be moments when she’d relax and laugh, but I think this matter hung over her all her life.” When the story became news in 2007, it was widely described as “like something out of an [Ian McEwan](#) novel”. Now it is.

As a boy in Libya, growing up “in an obscure crevice of history”, as he puts it in the novel, the Suez crisis gave the young McEwan his first taste of freedom and adventure, when he spent a “rapturous two weeks” at a military camp, an experience he gives to Roland. “It was just bliss,” he says now. “The long shadow or the light it cast over the rest of my life meant I never wanted a full-time job.” This became clear to him after a visit to the careers office at the University of Sussex, when he was presented with a chart of civil service salary scales from 22 to retirement: “Just looking at that, I knew I could never do anything like that. Ever.”

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Roland's peripatetic adult life unfolds alongside his childhood. It is 1986 and Roland is in his mid-30s. There's a hosepipe ban and ominous news of a radiation cloud from [Chernobyl](#). Roland's wife, Alissa, has suddenly deserted him and their seven-month-old son to return to her native Germany to fulfil her ambition to become "the greatest novelist of her generation".

There's no messing around, there's no third cup of coffee. Do an hour, then empty the dishwasher

"I've read so many literary biographies of men behaving badly and destroying their marriages in pursuit of their high art. I wanted to write a novel that was in part the story of a woman who is completely focused on what she wants to achieve, and has the same ruthlessness but is judged by different standards," he explains. "If you read Doris Lessing's cuttings they will unfailingly tell you that she left a child in Rhodesia."

While McEwan was never left to bring up a baby single-handed, both his sons lived with him from their early teens after a messy custody battle with his first wife. Unlike Alissa, he never felt "it was either/or" in terms of his writing. His office door was always open – "If children come in and out, they rapidly find it's very boring" – and he would work in the school hours. "There's no messing around, there's no third cup of coffee," he says. Today he keeps the door of his study, a converted barn, open for his sheepdog, who also likes to wander in. He works on two desks – an old kitchen table and a

headmaster's desk he picked up in a junk shop in London in the 70s – one reserved for the screen and one for longhand. He maintains the old disciplines: "Do an hour, then empty the dishwasher," he advises firmly.

Decline and death inevitably creep into the final section of the novel. "I've had so many friends die of cancer," he says, "the complicated last three years, the intrusiveness of the treatment." He wanted to pay tribute to their "amazing bravery" and "incredible sense of purpose". He has also lost many people to less talked about smoking-related illnesses, he adds ruefully: his father; Malcolm Bradbury, his creative writing teacher at UEA; Ian Hamilton, his editor at the New Review; and he was at Hitchens's bedside shortly before he died.



With his wife, the writer Annalena McAfee. Photograph: Nick Harvey/WireImage

He compares ageing to driving a car: "The car is your body and one day you notice the wing mirror has come off. And someone's taken the front bumper away in the night, and the passenger side door no longer opens. Then there's systemic change of course." Rushdie's age makes the attack particularly cruel, he says when we speak later. "People use the 'phrase life-changing injuries'. This is very hard at 75. Being 75 is life-changing enough. It is

going to take a good while for him to get to the other side of this and face the new kind of life.”

Does he worry about his own legacy? “I don’t know, maybe.” Honestly? “Yes. I’d like to continue to be read, of course. But again, that’s entirely out of one’s control. I used to think that most writers when they die, they sink into a 10-year obscurity and then they bounce back. But I’ve had enough friends die more than 10 years ago, and they haven’t reappeared. I feel like sending them an email back to their past to say, ‘Start worrying about your legacy because it’s not looking good from here.’”

He was greatly saddened by what he describes as “the assault on Updike’s reputation”; for him, the Rabbit tetralogy is the great American novel. Saul Bellow, another hero, has suffered a similar fate for the same reasons, he says. “Those problematic men who wrote about sex – Roth, Updike, Bellow and many others.”

Surely the reputations of his generation, many of them the self-styled British disciples of those problematic American men, none of whom have been shy about writing about sex, now seem similarly precarious? “We’ve become so tortured about writing about desire. It’s got all so complex,” he says. “But we can’t pretend it doesn’t exist. Desire is one of the colossal awkward subjects of literature, whether it’s Flaubert you’re reading or even Jane Austen. People will be compelled, they’ll just have to write about it.” He recalls listening to a young writer on the radio who said how difficult it is to write about male desire. “I thought, oh, poor kid.”

McEwan, like Alissa in the novel, was criticised for comments about gender at the end of a speech on identity at the Royal Institution in 2016. “I said: ‘Call me old-fashioned, but I tend to think of most people with penises as men,’ he recalls now. “I did say most men, I didn’t say all.” He was accused of inciting violence against transgender people. “Violence!” he exclaims now.

It is important to resist the temptation to think “because you’re coming to an end, therefore the world is”, he cautions. “But it’s very, very tempting.” He finds it “chastening” that many young people also feel fearful about the

future, “and timid in the face of history. There’s no big project, as it were, for a new kind of society.” He worries about the return of Trump, or someone “even worse”, he says. “We could be looking at a very authoritarian state, that could probably swing it so the Democrats are never in power again.”

He recently set himself the challenge of writing a short story in which he had to be optimistic about the future up to 2060 (there are “a couple of strategic nuclear explosions” – cheery). “I thought, am I just writing a delicious fantasy? That old saying that most things aren’t as bad as you fear?” But he is reluctant to make any real predictions. “The world is so connected now it’s like a giant mind,” he reflects. “And just as with our own minds, or with our own fates, we can never predict what we’re going to do next collectively.”

If there is a lesson to be learned from the new novel, it is that true comfort and happiness are to be found at home, and *Lessons* is touching on the quiet consolations of domesticity. One of the few compensations for getting old, he says, is becoming a grandparent. Like Roland, McEwan is a doting grandfather (he has eight grandchildren). “Just when you think that you’re never going to meet anyone new, you have this love affair,” he says. “There is another explosion of love in later life.” Even having “plundered” his life for *Lessons*, he doesn’t rule out writing a straightforward memoir: “I keep saying I will and then I don’t.”

He is a firm believer in what, borrowing VS Pritchett’s phrase, he likes to call “determined stupor” between novels: “I just read and soak things up.” His greatest pleasure when he is not writing is walking. Over the years he has hiked all over the world, especially across America. But he never feels totally free in the US. One of the things he most loves about England is the footpaths, “historically laid down over the centuries. Every village more or less is connected; in every town, if you walk to the edge of it there is a footpath.” He often hikes with a close friend with a bottle of good red wine in his rucksack. “To be high on a ridge with a glass of wine in your hand absolutely transforms the landscape,” he says looking wistfully into the distance. “Suddenly it’s your vast drawing room. It’s your space.”

Lessons by Ian McEwan is published by Vintage on 13 September at £20. To support The Guardian and Observer, order your copy at guardianbookshop.com. He'll be discussing it at the [Southbank Centre](#) in London on 14 September; tickets from £15.

This article was amended on 3 September 2022. Ian McEwan has eight grandchildren, not four as an earlier version said, and the bridge in the photograph that features in Lessons is Lingcove Bridge, not Lincoln Bridge. The author told us the VS Pritchett phrase he quoted as “productive indolence” should have been “determined stupor”; this has been corrected.

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[Ian McEwan](#)

Send us your questions for Ian McEwan

Got something to ask the author? Send it our way and we'll put it to him



Portrait of Ian McEwan for Guardian Weekend at his home in London.
Photograph: Lydia Goldblatt/The Guardian

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Sat 3 Sep 2022 05.00 EDT Last modified on Sat 3 Sep 2022 05.02 EDT

Booker prize winner [Ian McEwan](#) has been writing novels for more than 40 years. Much-loved copies of *Amsterdam*, *Atonement* and *On Chesil Beach* sit on bookshelves across the world, and fans of the writer will soon be able to add another title to their collection: *Lessons*, a novel described by McEwan's publisher as the author's "most epic book to date".

The new novel follows protagonist Roland Baines from his childhood at boarding school to his adult life, when his wife disappears and he is left to care for their young son alone.

Following [Lisa Allardice's interview with the author](#), McEwan will be answering questions from Guardian readers, to be published next week. Whether you're a lifelong McEwan reader or new to his work, now's your chance to ask him something you've always wanted to know. What's it like to be one of the UK's most popular novelists? Where does he get his ideas? And did he really have a "false memory" of a novella that he never actually wrote?

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Julian Lennon: ‘A very famous tennis player once said to me: “You’ll never amount to anything”’

[Rosanna Greenstreet](#)



Julian Lennon: 'Who would I most like to be? Harry Styles.' Photograph: Robert Ascroft

The musician and author on his parents, ghosting and his longing for a life partner

Sat 3 Sep 2022 04.30 EDT Last modified on Sat 3 Sep 2022 08.00 EDT

Born in Liverpool, Julian Lennon, 59, was the inspiration for the Beatles song Hey Jude, which was written after his parents, John and Cynthia Lennon, separated. In 1984 Lennon made his own debut as a singer-songwriter with the album Valotte, and in 1985 he was nominated for the best new artist Grammy award. He releases his seventh album, Jude, on 9 September. His children's books include the Touch the Earth trilogy, and last year he received a World Literacy award. He lives in Monaco.

Which living person do you most admire, and why?

Anyone who promotes peace.

What is the trait you most deplore in yourself?

Fear, anxiety and panic attacks.

What is the trait you most deplore in others?

Ghosting, where you are mid-conversation with someone and they disappear off the face of the planet.

Aside from a property, what's the most expensive thing you've bought?

I bought a sports car over 20 years ago and still have it. She's a black Z8 BMW. I love her: she's my pride and joy.

What is your most treasured possession?

A bracelet my mother wore.

Describe yourself in three words

Kind, empathetic and cheeky.

What would your superpower be?

Healing – spiritual and physical.

What do you most dislike about your appearance?

I have a very annoying birthmark on my head that makes my hair frizzy and grey where the rest of it is very fine and flat. At school, kids would tease me – “Have you slept on the wrong side of the bed again?” – because my hair would be like an afro on one side.

If you could bring something extinct back to life, what would you choose?

Dad.

What is your most unappealing habit?

Overthinking.

What scares you about getting older?

Not falling in love again.

Who is your celebrity crush?

Kate Beckinsale.

What did you want to be when you were growing up?

A steam train driver.

What is the worst thing anyone's said to you?

“You’ll never amount to anything.” It was actually a very famous tennis player. Name them? No, I wouldn’t give them the time of day.

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What or who is the greatest love of your life?

Mum.

What is the worst job you've done?

I was a waiter with my old friend Justin Clayton; we would sneak in too many drinks and were fired after spilling soup too many times on customers.

If not yourself, who would you most like to be?

Harry Styles.

When was the last time you changed your mind about something significant?

Ten days ago, I decided to move. I've been living in this house for 25 years.

What single thing would improve the quality of your life?

A partner – finding her and enjoying the rest of our lives together. Hopefully it will happen one day.

What keeps you awake at night?

A bee in my bonnet – whether that's a song in my head or a person I'm thinking about.

How would you like to be remembered?

For being one of the good guys.

What happens when we die?

I believe there's some level of consciousness that continues.

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2022.09.03 - Opinion

- Serena Williams showed the world that black women excel. That has changed us all
- Cycling is so dangerous now, my children have had to stop
- No influencers, no filters – BeReal shows the beauty of the lives we actually lead
- It would have been better for everyone if the festival of Brexit had stayed in its box

[**Opinion**](#)[**Serena Williams**](#)

Serena Williams showed the world that black women excel. That has changed us all

[Afua Hirsch](#)



Born in the same year as the tennis champion, I watched her face countless obstacles – and become the greatest of all time



Serena Williams after defeating Montenegro's Danka Kovinić at the US Open in New York, 29 August 2022. Photograph: Timothy A Clary/AFP/Getty Images

Sat 3 Sep 2022 04.10 EDT Last modified on Sat 3 Sep 2022 05.17 EDT

We don't deserve [Serena Williams](#). Nothing about this world makes it likely that a little black girl from Compton – now [“evolving” away](#) from professional competition after her [final match](#) at the US Open – would become an indisputable Goat.

Witnessing Williams's ascension to Greatest of All Time status has been an extraordinary, once-in-a-lifetime experience. The sheer longevity of her career sunk in for me when I discovered that [Emma Raducanu](#), who Williams [has played](#) this season, had not even been born during one of Williams's most memorable seasons: 2002, when she [won three grand slam titles](#) in a row.

But more than her impressive record, it is how Williams got here that I most celebrate – refusing to assimilate into the rarefied, exclusionary culture of tennis, and redefining it on her own terms.

One of my favourite interviews with the star, which surfaced only recently, shows an 11-year-old Williams standing shyly giggling beside older sister Venus. When asked: “If you were a tennis player, who would you want to be like?” she almost hesitates to reveal her self-belief. But [her answer](#), when it comes, is unequivocal: “I’d like other people to be like me.”

Serena Williams retirement: a look back at the tennis great's career – video

Born the same year as Williams, I was 11 then, too. I didn’t have the language of being unapologetic, or taking up space, of authenticity or representation. I had nowhere near her confidence, and a Goat, as far as I was aware, was a hollow-horned mammal. Like Williams, I was a little black girl, whose own black consciousness blossomed in the unlikely terrain of the very same grassy, [Wimbledon](#) soil as Williams’ global sporting prowess.

Through her and Venus’ [appearance there in 1998](#), in beaded braids, I watched young black women excel in even the most hostile spaces on their own terms. Bumping into the entire Williams family in our neighbourhood over the years, as they rented houses near our own during the tennis, my sister and I were the recipients of various acts of kindness – we learned first-hand that these sisters had a sense of solidarity with other black girls they encountered along the way.

And tennis was a hostile climate. Growing up in Wimbledon, I glimpsed only the tip of the iceberg when it came to the mountain of structural barriers stacked up against the Williams sisters. Theirs is a story about winning the game before they ever set foot on the tennis court – overcoming poverty, racism, colourism, class.

These factors are so often downplayed in the telling of Williams’ story, in favour of the personal characteristics that make her unique – of which, there are plenty: a seemingly more talented older sister, Venus, whose early success initially saw Serena’s own chances underestimated; her faith as a Jehovah’s Witness; remarkable parents; a level of self-criticism, the depths of which are still being revealed even now.

In her valedictory [Vogue piece](#) earlier this month, Williams reflected on her four Olympic gold medals, 14 grand slam doubles titles and 23 grand slam titles – almost every tennis record imaginable. And yet she still references the success of Margaret Court, who played before the advent of the Open era and won 24. “I didn’t show up the way I should have or could have. But I showed up 23 times,” was Williams’s consolatory verdict, “and that’s fine.”

There is no questioning Williams’s unique talent and drive, but the full truth is a more uncomfortable narrative. We don’t deserve Williams, because she should not exist. The idea that the Williams sisters succeeded because of their unique work ethic, raw talent and visionary father – a story of the American Dream generously extended to embrace a low-income black family – conceals a darker notion. By implication, people of colour who remain in [disadvantaged circumstances](#) are there due to their own fault.



Serena Williams in the US Open, 1999.

Williams offers us clear insight into the unfairness of this. However much she is held up as an example of the American Dream, she has done her bit to problematise it. [Writing about](#) the especially emotive impact of being jeered at during a tournament that had a special meaning for her, she hinted at the intergenerational trauma that informs the African American experience. “It haunted Venus and our family as well. But most of all, it angered and

saddened my father ... sparking cold memories of his experiences growing up in the south.”

And when asked about the murder of George Floyd, Williams disclosed that she had not watched the video of his death at the hands of police, or any other video of a black person suffering the same fate. “I can’t,” she said. “It’s my life.”

This, and the many other instances of abuse she has weathered, have made many black women feel especially protective of Williams. From surviving childbirth in America as a black woman – a [shocking percentage](#) of whom do not, something she has publicly decried – to the overtly racist tropes too numerous to mention she has been tarred with.

It was this sense of protectiveness – and not a stake in the depressingly unwinnable competition of masculinities between Will Smith and Chris Rock – that angered me at this year’s Oscars. Serena and Venus [executive-produced a film](#) that offered a view of the world through their lens. When it was hijacked by a debate about which of two men – both of whom have form for failing to centre black women – was more wrong, I felt cheated on Williams’ behalf. She maintained a dignified silence.

Williams is selective about how she speaks about her emotional inner world. Which is why her letter [announcing her retirement](#) from tennis landed with such grace and honesty. “I hate it,” she said. “I don’t want it to be over, but at the same time I’m ready for what’s next.”

What’s next is already under way. Like Beyoncé, Edward Enninful and so many other prominent black cultural figures, Williams grew up with a mother who doubled as a seamstress, bestowing on her a confidence in designing her own aesthetic. She has form in collaborating with other black creatives. After the [Black Panther-inspired catsuit](#) that she wore to the 2018 French Open – one of her most memorable on-court outfits – was subsequently banned by tennis officials, citing “respect” for the game, Williams collaborated with the late, great Virgil Abloh. Her [2019 look](#) was no less bold – a striking black and white two-piece, with matching cape bearing the words “*mère, championne, reine, déesse*” (mother, champion,

queen, goddess). In [Abloh's words](#), Williams is a “thought leader, not just a tennis player”.

The more Williams was bullied about her physique by various detractors over the years, the more she seemed to draw attention to her figure with bold designs – another tendency for which I appreciate her deeply. Her first forays into fashion design, which only her most ardent fans will remember, stretch back to the early noughties, with the launch of her clothing line Aneres (Serena spelled backwards) in 2003, which has over the years evolved into her current body-inclusive brand S by Serena, founded in 2019.

And she has been quietly, but successfully, [angel investing](#) for more than a decade, injecting capital into companies with diverse points of view in an act of multi-hyphenation that – speaking for myself at least – makes her more, not less, relevant to generations of side-hustling, entrepreneurial women.

“Over the years, I hope that people come to think of me as symbolising something bigger than tennis,” Williams wished as she bade farewell to tennis. That, she maybe does not fully realise yet, is already done. My hope now is that Serena Williams’ story will come to symbolise something even bigger than herself – the reality facing every young black person with a dream.

- Afua Hirsch is a writer, broadcaster and former barrister
 - *Do you have an opinion on the issues raised in this article? If you would like to submit a letter of up to 300 words to be considered for publication, email it to us at guardian.letters@theguardian.com*
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[OpinionCycling](#)

Cycling is so dangerous now, my children have had to stop

[Karen Murphy](#)

In the pandemic it seemed community cycling was going up another gear, now we get closed lanes and tacks on the road



A boy negotiating traffic in Willenhall town centre, West Midlands.
Photograph: Robert Brook/Alamy

Sat 3 Sep 2022 04.00 EDT Last modified on Sat 3 Sep 2022 08.23 EDT

During those long pandemic days, when we had nowhere to go and nowhere to be, my kids and I used to hit the road on our bikes. We would head out on a [brand new cycle lane](#) that popped up on a high-traffic road in Shoreham-by-Sea, where we live, as part of government measures to help more people walk and cycle during the pandemic. We would nip to the shops, down to the river or to the local library, and weekend activities were interspersed with

quick rides. At the height of the Covid restrictions, taking off spontaneously as a family offered us a sense of freedom that felt liberating.

I had never considered allowing my two children, now aged 12 and nine, to ride on the roads before this cycle lane popped up in September 2020, neatly sheltering cyclists from the fast-moving flow of traffic that is a constant on our surrounding roads. To state the obvious, it was the cars that put me off before. If your child is weaving in and out of traffic, one momentary lapse in judgment could be fatal. But the pandemic sparked a shift for us, towards a more sustainable lifestyle. It felt safe to set off on your bike, and the cycle lane became a living, breathing thread of community that stitched nearby towns together.

So when West Sussex county council [ripped it out just two months later](#), citing [opposition to the cycleway](#) and complaints about increased traffic congestion, it felt deeply personal. From one day to the next, my children stopped using their bikes, and their budding freedom vanished too. Another mother, who had started sending her daughter to school along the cycle lane, was back in her car again. However responsible a cyclist she felt she was, she could no longer trust that her daughter would be safe.

Cycling in this community seems to have become a scapegoat for a wider cultural resistance to change. When the cycle lane was first installed, we found tacks on the road, designed to puncture our tyres. The aggression families like mine have faced from motorists for quite simply wanting to share space has been, frankly, scary.

Since it's been removed, a lot of us feel even more unsafe than before. You feel the resentment from certain drivers as they accelerate past you, and you're constantly questioning whether they have seen you. The irony is that the cycle lane allowed us to coexist peacefully.

I have always cycled to get around places I've lived – in London, Japan and now Shoreham-by-Sea. And despite the dangers, I continue to use my bike to ride the 10 minutes to work in a local SEN (special educational needs) school. I often joke that by doing so I take my life into my own hands, but in reality I think about giving up cycling all the time.

When I get on my bike in the morning, I know I have to be in a certain mindset to be safe – psyched up and confident. If I’m having a hard day, or lacking emotional energy, I leave the bike at home. I’m fortunate to have this choice, but many others have no other way to get to school. Local transport options are woeful, and the price of petrol makes it prohibitively expensive to run a car.

It’s no coincidence that the cycling boom that seemed to promise so much during the pandemic, has now died back. Cycle lanes across the country funded by central government have suffered [a similar fate](#) to ours, and the proportion of adults in England who say they cycle at least once a month has [fallen to 13.1%](#), the lowest figure since records began in 2015-16.

Getting a taste of what a less car-centric future could look like has left me wondering who our roads are really for. We spend so much time telling our children to [get out into nature](#), but there’s nothing to support them to do that. My kids are too scared to cycle now. Isn’t that sad?

Karen Murphy is a teaching assistant in a special educational needs primary school from Shoreham-by-Sea, West Sussex. As told to Lucy Pasha-Robinson

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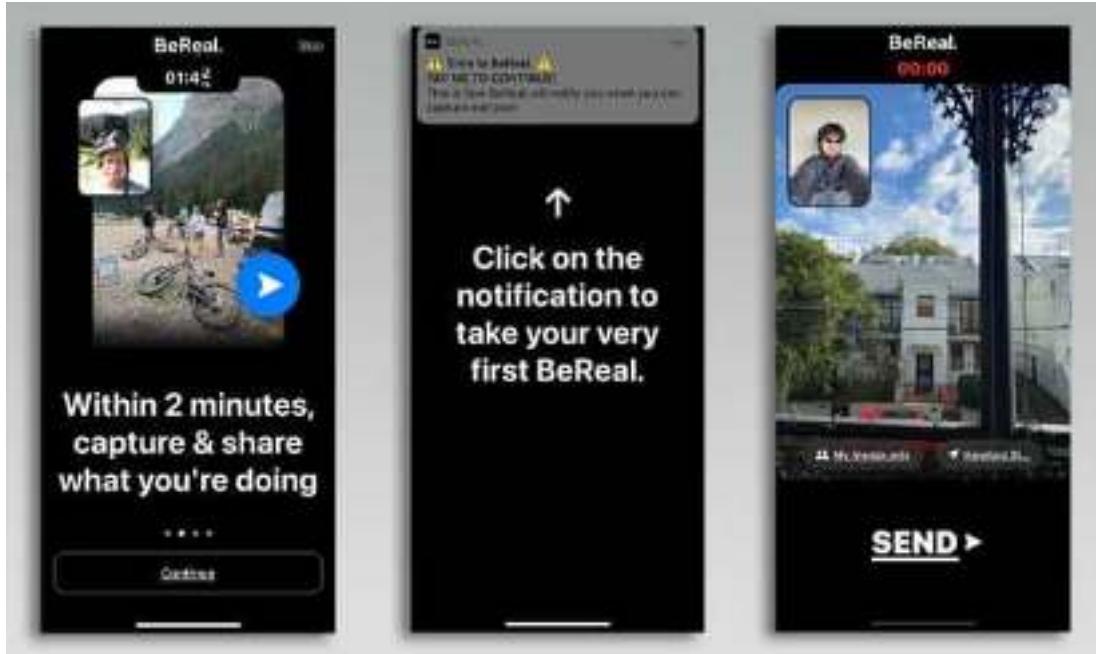
[Opinion](#)[Social media](#)

No influencers, no filters – BeReal shows the beauty of the lives we actually lead

[Jess Cartner-Morley](#)



Frazzled hair, sleepy eyes, warts and all: at last, an app that lets us share the glory of daily life in all its compelling mundanity



‘You don’t get to wait for the fun bit of your day, or find a flattering photo on your camera roll.’ Photograph: Michael Sun

Sat 3 Sep 2022 04.00 EDT Last modified on Sat 3 Sep 2022 12.40 EDT

I have been on BeReal since March – this year’s grooviest, see-and-be-seen social platform. Six months on, I’ve learned that my life is way more dull than I had realised.

BeReal is a [photo sharing app](#) in which once a day, at a random time, every user is sent a notification to post a photo of their surroundings within a two-minute time frame. You don’t get to wait for the fun bit of your day, or find a flattering photo on your camera roll. My BeReals are almost invariably of my computer screen, my dog or my fridge. Even being on holiday doesn’t always help: sod’s law demands that the app’s distinctive ping will come while you are buying suncream or at the car hire office, not on the beach.

I am struck each day by not only how pointlessly mortified I am by my own mundanity – when the ping came while I was on the bus home from a chic restaurant, I found myself bristling at the unfairness of the timing, which is patently ridiculous – but how compelling mundanity turns out to be.

On BeReal, you only get to see everyone else's photos once you've posted yours. So if you want to scroll through your friends' photos – the view out of the window of the 6.04 from Charing Cross, the un-tablescaped kind of family dinner, with kitchen roll for napkins and phones on the table – you need to share yours first. There is a cheering camaraderie to the process: I trust you with my life, warts and all, and you show me yours.

Every BeReal post is in fact two photos, not one, because the reverse camera takes a photo of you as you snap your surroundings. Even if you look presentable, most of the time, that aforementioned sod's law dictates that you will be captured in your dressing gown, or sweaty-faced in gym gear. Oh, and there are no filters.

But that's not the worst of it. The angle necessary to take a coherent shot of what is in front of you results in horrendously unflattering selfies. If you adjust the angle of your phone to take a nice selfie, everyone can tell, because the other photo will be of the ceiling. So even after six months' practice, I count any fewer than three chins as a good day.

But it turns out that that's OK. Because what BeReal reminds me, as I scroll through the selfies of my friends, sleepy-eyed in the morning or frazzle-haired on the way home from work, of their kids strapped into car seats and their clumsily made beds and heatwave-wilted window boxes, is that beauty is not the same as perfection. [Instagram](#) has trained us to aspire to a glossy, idealised fantasy of life; BeReal, by contrast, shows us that beauty exists everywhere: in the joy of the everyday, in the bones of the people we love – whether or not they have mascara on.

BeReal has no influencers. Instead, the app scans your contacts, inviting you to "friend" people whose details are in your phone already – that is, people you know in real life. Unlike an Instagram follow, a BeReal friending is a two-way exchange, harking back to the old days of the internet, when it was connective tissue for friends and family, before social media was cannibalised by the algorithms of marketing. That BeReal has taken off only this year – a full two years after it launched – appears to correlate with changes in the Instagram algorithm. My Instagram feed was once my family, friends and colleagues; now it is mostly made up of witless mini-videos in which anonymous influencers show me how to do mindbendingly obvious

things. The algorithms don't lie, so clearly there is a voracious market for short reels of manically smiley people pointing at words on the screen while demonstrating how to make a sandwich or brush your hair, but it's not working for me.

As with [Wordle](#), part of the appeal of BeReal is that it is a short daily ritual rather than a voracious black hole swallowing hours of free time. Wordle would never have been so addictive if you had been able to do more than one puzzle a day. Similarly, by allowing just one photo to be shared, BeReal never outstays its welcome. It creates a daily ritual, a gentle heartbeat in the background of real life. The sound of its alert, promising a scattering of esoteric updates from friends and family around the world, is the modern equivalent of what the thump of morning post on the mat used to sound like, in the days when post came every morning and brought letters and postcards rather than just bills.

Authenticity feels like a tarnished word these days, cheapened by strategists and marketeers. But it still matters. The success of BeReal – the [most-downloaded free app](#) in the UK, the US and Australia in August – is testament to a yearning for life online that is about connection rather than confection. That the demographic of BeReal skews young – I was introduced to it by my teenage kids, and have watched younger colleagues and friends, twentysomethings and now thirtysomethings, swell the ranks – suggests the way the wind is blowing. As do reports that Meta is testing a feature called Candid Challenges for Instagram Stories: a notification to capture and share a photo within a daily two-minute time frame. Six months on, BeReal has shown me that life is, for the most part, decidedly unglamorous. And that I wouldn't have it any other way.

- Jess Cartner-Morley is associate editor (fashion) at the Guardian

OpinionBrexit

It would have been better for everyone if the festival of Brexit had stayed in its box

[Marina Hyde](#)



Who could have predicted that Unboxed would be such a surreal disaster?
Literally everyone



‘Unfortunately, a hugely successful national moment did not ensue.’ Paisley Abbey illuminated for Unboxed. Photograph: Andy Buchanan/AFP/Getty Images

Fri 2 Sep 2022 08.49 EDT Last modified on Fri 2 Sep 2022 12.27 EDT

There is simply no subtlety to the UK’s adventures in self-parody these days. Take the so-called Festival of [Brexit](#) and the criticism levelled at this £120m deceased elephant by everyone from appalled auditors on the culture select committee to visitors who somehow didn’t enjoy being forced to sit through what they were being shown. Total fiasco, you say? Appalling waste of public money, you say? Completely different to what was promised, you say? Despite having been years in the planning, no one knew what it was actually supposed to look like, you say? The people who came up with it are blaming its failure on anyone but themselves, you say? I mean ... I mourn the time when a metaphor stole imperceptibly into the British consciousness instead of grabbing it by the lapels, shaking it like a rag doll and head-butting it in the nose while screaming, “I AM A STONECOLD METAPHOR, OK PAL?”

If you were one of the 67 million-odd UK citizens who missed this event over the summer, the Festival of Brexit was [formally rebranded as Unboxed](#), given the ominously woolly aim of celebrating “creativity in the UK”, and has been running all round the country since late spring with a series of

events that were this week laid bare with hilarious dryness in a quite majestic article in [the House magazine](#). Any connection with what was once feared to be a jingoistic-sounding idea was actively shunned by the various organisers, and in many cases heroically undermined. Unfortunately, a hugely successful national moment did not ensue.

The many creative happenings seem largely to have run the gamut from the deranged and poorly executed to the deranged and poorly attended. Lowlights are too numerous to cover in full here, but special mention must be made of the unwatchable (and indeed unwatched) video content culled from some misconceived lamplight/drone event on the Norfolk Broads whose wildly expensive funding would arguably have been better handed to the disadvantaged women and victims of abuse who somehow found themselves participating in it.

Other standouts? At one leg of a strand called Tour de Moon, the reporter watched a deeply moving speech by a man in a wheelchair explaining how his life-changing fall had left him excluded from his passion for clubbing. This was immediately followed by a DJ shouting: “Come on, everyone needs to stand up from their chairs for this next tune!” Any number of quotes from people featured in the article could have found their way on to a sarcastic poster advertising the discreet charms of Unboxed. Nadine Dorries “absolutely loved it”. “There were a lot of learning curves,” euphemised the creator of the world’s first inflatable playground, which in practice proved physically unstable.

Unboxed was tilting at what its impresario called a “stretch target” of 66 million visitors. It got 238,000. The entire thing clocked in at £120m of taxpayers’ money, which – strangely – has yet to prompt a government minister to fume about how many nurses it could have paid for instead. (But of course, despite bringing pleasure to millions and occasionally billions, only footballers are judged by how many nurses or teachers they could have paid for.)

To put it in alternative terms, each visitor to one of Unboxed’s many events could have been given £500 cash instead of being, for example, smashed over the head by kids toting inflatable moons, as happened at one malarial-

sounding thing entitled Moon Games. Looked at in another way, Unboxed cost more than four times the money spent on the Platinum Jubilee. (Surely there could have been economies of scale with the latter event? At the very least, both could have featured hardline national treasure Joan Collins.)

The disowning by Brexiteers was under way before it had even begun. South Thanet MP Craig Mackinlay complained that not calling it the Festival of Brexit was “[a great opportunity missed](#)”. Like communism, which has simply yet to be done right. Or – because all metaphors now have to be so sledgehammer as to result in head trauma – like Brexit itself.

Looking back, were there any clues that Unboxed/the Festival-of-Brexit-as-was would be a complete turkey? Well, yes. Not least that from the get-go it was described as “an excellent idea” by [Jacob Rees-Mogg](#). In Hollywood, you’d lose your job if you greenlit a flop this big; I note Rees-Mogg is widely tipped to become business secretary under Liz Truss, the Conservative right’s latest ridiculous and obviously terrible idea.

As for the idea’s genesis, it was unveiled in Theresa May’s 2018 speech to the Conservative party conference. If you’re a fan of how the best-laid schemes of mice and men gang aft to shit, do consider that this precise May speech was entitled Campaign 2022. This was a reference to the 2022 general election date she was apparently strategising brilliantly towards.

Anyway ... here we all are, in 2022. As you may recall, what with having been forced to live through it, we have suffered two prime ministerial defenestrations since 2018, and are now staring down the barrel of Trussonomics. Or the unlit uplands, as some are now calling them.

Even back when May debuted the plan, which she apparently envisaged as a celebration of national renewal, the Festival of Brexit proved a straight-to-meme idea, as did most of the other things said at that [particular conference](#). To pluck some at random, Jeremy Hunt took the opportunity to compare the EU to Stalin’s Soviet Union for “stop[ping] people leaving”. Amazingly, he would end up being the “sensible” candidate in the next leadership contest.

Rees-Mogg himself was back then touting a “supercalifragilisticexpialidocious Canada” Brexit model to the party faithful, explaining: “That is a word developed by a nanny, and nannies are jolly good things.” “Brexit will be a success,” he added, “because it is a Conservative thing to be doing.” So yes: any idea that came out of the 2018 Conservative party conference should have had a concrete dome built over it, with all those operationally responsible gifted with a show trial and a restorative trip to the labour camps.

Instead, many of the architects are eyeing up seats around yet another cabinet table, while £120m is probably the smallest single sum wasted on their epochal vanity project thus far. As for Britain’s “renewal”, that is once again predicted to be just around the next corner.

And yet, is it? Despite the fact that a bizarre amount of journalism has now made itself about predicting events as opposed to reporting on them, I do aim to avoid any serious forecasts in my columns. But an internet search reveals that back in the day, I suggested that by the time the Festival of Brexit came around we would be “pooling our corned beef and lightbulbs”. A reminder that pretty much the only thing recent administrations have delivered on is making grimly facetious jokes come true.

- Marina Hyde is a Guardian columnist
- What Just Happened?! by Marina Hyde (Guardian Faber, £18.99). To support the Guardian and Observer, order your copy at the [Guardian Bookshop](#)
- Marina Hyde will be in conversation with Richard Osman at a Guardian Live event in London on 11 October. Join them in person or via the livestream – book tickets via the [Guardian Live website](#)

2022.09.03 - Around the world

- ['It's too hot' Los Angeles melts under its worst heatwave of the year](#)
- [Europe EU to invite next UK PM to summit on security alliance](#)
- [US A girl wanted to keep the goat she raised for a county fair. They chose to kill it](#)
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'It's too hot': Los Angeles melts under its worst heatwave of the year



Extreme heat is beating down on southern California with no relief in sight and raising concerns on heat-related deaths. Photograph: Caroline Brehman/EPA

Temperatures are breaking records in southern California with advocates concerned for the unhoused and outdoor workers



[Lois Beckett](#) in Los Angeles

[@loisbeckett](#)

Sat 3 Sep 2022 01.00 EDT Last modified on Sat 3 Sep 2022 14.16 EDT

As Los Angeles struggled under a brutal heatwave, many streets were quiet as residents followed the official warnings to shelter inside their air conditioned homes. Public libraries transformed into cooling centers, and mutual aid groups prepared frozen water bottles to offer relief to unhoused residents. Food vendors were still on the streets, despite describing [heat that can reach 115F](#) (46C) inside a sweltering truck.

Heading into a holiday weekend, southern California is grappling with its hottest weather of the year, with no relief in sight. Even in a city known for its heat, the triple digit temperatures in some towns around [Los Angeles](#) are breaking records, and advocates worry that the extremes will prove deadly for workers and others forced to be outside during the hottest hours of the day.

Israel Contreras, 45, pushed an ice-cream cart along a mostly-empty sidewalk in Filipinotown, pausing in the shade of a tree. “It’s too hot,” he said. Sweat soaked through his shirt, but despite the lack of people outside, business wasn’t too bad, he said. There were children waiting inside their houses, and when they heard him, they would come out for the cold relief.



A Los Angeles vendor prepares a frozen ice treat during a heatwave in California. Photograph: Caroline Brehman/EPA

California’s extreme heat has raised concerns on a number of fronts: as firefighters battling blazes succumbed to heatstroke, as officials worried that the state’s electric grid could be overwhelmed, and as advocates warned that those without shelter or means would be the hardest hit.

Even with emergency measures put in place by Governor Gavin Newsom, including [additional generators](#) to produce more energy, the heatwave was expected to strain California’s electrical grid to the breaking point. In an attempt to stave off power outages, officials asked residents to try to reduce their energy use and avoid using major appliances during peak hours in the early evening when people usually return home and switch on their air conditioners.

Soaring temperatures have alarmed parents and school officials who spoke out about public schools without enough greenery or shade for children to safely play outside. Playground [asphalt can reach 145F](#) in extreme heatwaves, the Los Angeles Times reported. In San Diego, public high school students described the difficulty of concentrating in classrooms without functioning air conditioners, the Union-Tribune [reported](#).



A woman cools off with water from a hydrant in the Skid Row area. The city's large unhoused population is especially at risk. Photograph: Jae C Hong/AP

Workers who have to be outside in the heat, and the tens of thousands of people in Los Angeles who have no homes, are at particular risk of heat-related illness and death, advocates warned.

“Many unhoused people are going to pass away, being out here, and not having appropriate cold water, not having the appropriate shade,” said Theo Henderson, who hosts a podcast called [We the Unhoused](#). Henderson urged residents who have housing to freeze water bottles and distribute them to their unhoused neighbors throughout the weekend.

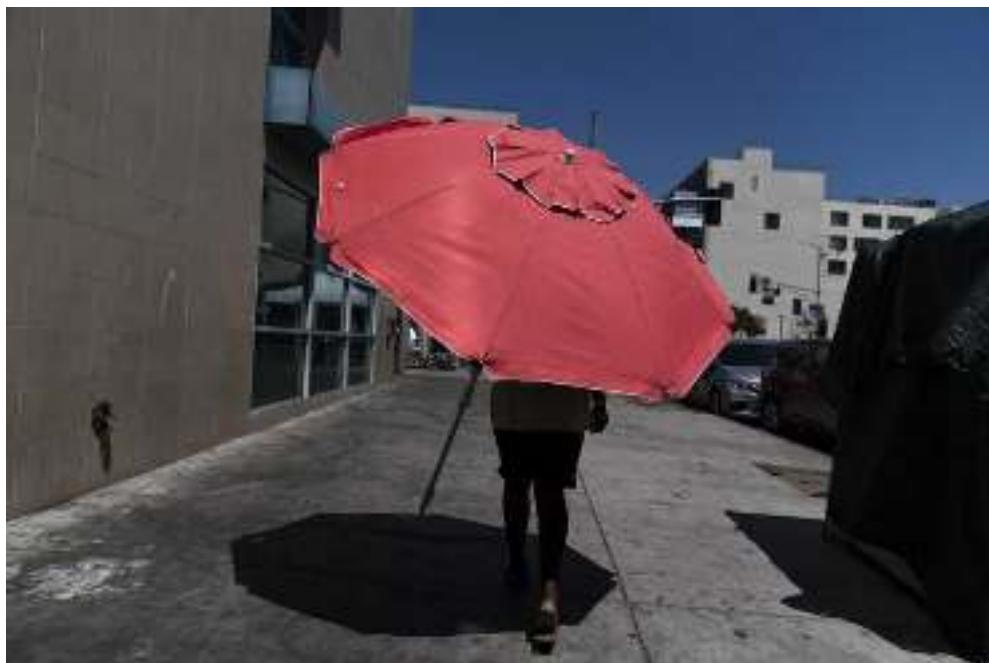
Although Los Angeles has opened up more than 150 public cooling centers in response to the heat emergency, Henderson said, the number of centers is

simply “not sufficient” for a region where more than 60,000 are estimated to be unhoused.

As many as [3,900 deaths across California](#) in the previous decade were probably caused by excessive heat, a 2021 analysis by the Los Angeles Times found, with the state’s official statistics for heat deaths dramatically undercounting the toll, which disproportionately affects people who are poor, sick, elderly or very young. Black California residents were more likely than any other racial group to die of the heat, the analysis found.

In historic Filipinotown on Friday, mutual aid groups had advertised that they would be handing out hundreds of gallons of cold water to anyone who wanted to distribute it to their unhoused neighbors. Phillip Kim helped other young activists load bottles of water into the back of a car, where they would take them to people living in the street in Little Tokyo, he said.

“We’re not going to means test,” Albert Corado, another local activist, quipped. Anyone who wanted water could take it, no questions asked.



A woman walks with a beach umbrella in Los Angeles. Residents have been told to stay hydrated and seek shade. Photograph: Jae C Hong/AP

On Tuesday, garment workers and some of California’s Democratic members of Congress held a news conference demanding [more federal](#)

[protections](#) against extreme heat for workers, such as delivery drivers and farm workers.

The Los Angeles county library system said it would open two dozen emergency cooling center locations across the city on Sunday and Monday, which “will be staffed by library workers who have agreed to work over the holiday weekend”, library spokesperson Jessica Lee said on Friday. But advocates like Henderson worry even those efforts won’t be enough, and urged the city to do more to let its most vulnerable residents know where they can find refuge.

California has taken a more proactive approach than most to address the climate crisis but many say the extreme heatwave highlights how much more aggressive action is needed.

Jane Fonda, the Hollywood actor who has been [arrested multiple times](#) at climate protests in Washington, noted that California legislators rejected a bill on Wednesday that would have set a more ambitious goal of a [55% reduction](#) in greenhouse gas emissions by 2030, compared to the current target of a 40% reduction.

On Thursday morning, Fonda held a news conference in the scorching, nearly-deserted streets outside Los Angeles’ city hall to highlight her new climate change-focused political action committee, which is supporting a slate of climate-focused candidates at the city level in Los Angeles.

“We need to talk about mitigation and long term solutions at the same time,” Fonda said. “We are living through the effects of climate change.”



Temperatures in some areas are predicted to either match or break previous records. Photograph: Caroline Brehman/EPA

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[Europe](#)

EU to invite next UK PM to summit on new pan-European security body

European leaders will head to Prague on 6 October to forge European Political Community



Charles Michel says he has no doubt the UK will be invited to Prague despite ‘difficulties’ over the Northern Ireland protocol. Photograph: Georgi Licovski/EPA

[Jennifer Rankin](#)

Sat 3 Sep 2022 00.00 EDT Last modified on Sat 3 Sep 2022 00.13 EDT

The EU will offer an olive branch to the new British prime minister with an invitation to a summit to discuss a new organisation uniting the democracies of the European continent.

Britain’s next prime minister, widely expected to be Liz Truss, will be invited to join fellow leaders across Europe at a summit in Prague on 6

October to forge a European Political Community, a body dedicated to advancing security across the continent.

Charles Michel, the president of the European Council, said he had no doubt the UK would be invited to the Czech capital despite “difficulties” over the Northern Ireland protocol.

Speaking in an interview with the *Guardian* and other European media, he said it was obvious the UK needed to be there. Michel said: “Even if we have discussions and difficulties on that [NI protocol] topic; in the broader perspective, there is no doubt that we are friends and that we need to continue to act together.”

Michel is a close political ally of the French president, Emmanuel Macron, who sketched out in May the idea of a European Political Community which would include all the democracies of the continent, including Ukraine and other aspirants to EU membership in the western Balkans.

If Truss is put into No 10 by Conservative party members, as widely predicted by opinion polls, her response to the invite will be an early sign of her stance towards Europe.

As foreign secretary, Truss made a speech on Britain’s allies that avoided mentioning the European Union. During the Tory leadership race, she caused astonishment and dismay among British diplomats when she said “the jury is still out” on whether Macron was a friend or foe of the UK.

Michel, a former Belgian prime minister, struck a similar tone to the French president, who has said he would not hesitate for a second to describe Britain as a friend. “The United Kingdom is a friend, a partner, a like-minded partner,” Michel said.

The invite to a gathering of European leaders on 6 October – immediately after the Tory party conference – contrasts with an earlier decision not to ask Boris Johnson to an EU summit that Joe Biden attended earlier this year.

While EU diplomats agree on Britain’s invitation to the gathering, the question of Turkey’s inclusion is more controversial. Greece and Cyprus,

embroiled in long-running disputes with Ankara, oppose inviting Turkey, which remains an official candidate to join the EU although talks have been stalled for years. Michel said the EU should invite Turkey, but that he wanted to “make sure there is support from all colleagues”.

The rest of the guest-list is straightforward: there will be invites for Norway and Switzerland, non-EU countries deeply integrated into the single market, as well as nine countries hoping to join the EU, including [Ukraine](#), [Moldova](#), [Georgia](#) and six western Balkan states, plus non-candidates Armenia and Azerbaijan.

While there have been concerns the European Political Community could simply replicate existing pan-European bodies, such as the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE), Michel suggested leaders wanted an informal and “very flexible” body, resembling the G7 or the G20.

He said: “We don’t want a complicated structure.”

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The war in Ukraine has put security at the top of the agenda for the fledgling organisation, but Macron has also suggested the body could promote free movement for young people, as well as joint work on transport and energy.

The invite to the Prague summit does not signal any change from the EU to the contested Northern Ireland protocol. EU officials [are pessimistic](#) about an upturn in relations from either candidate vying to be prime minister, especially Truss, the architect of a bill to unilaterally override the protocol.

Michel, who is not involved in talks on the Northern Ireland protocol, said he expected the UK to uphold the agreement signed in 2019.

“I think there are so many difficult challenges in the world. We don’t need additional difficulties. Our position is very clear: we have got an agreement with the United Kingdom and we are confident that a great democracy will respect the international rule of law.”

Repeating the Latin formula beloved by EU officials, which is a fundamental principle of international law, he added: *pacta sunt servanda*, agreements must be kept.

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[California](#)

A girl wanted to keep the goat she raised for a county fair. They chose to kill it

A California lawsuit brought by the girl's parents accuses law enforcement of traveling hundreds of miles to confiscate a beloved pet



A California girl became attached to Cedar, a goat she was raising to sell at the county fair livestock auction. Photograph: Advancing Law for Animals

[Dani Anguiano in Los Angeles](#)

[@dani_anguiano](#)

Fri 2 Sep 2022 19.41 EDT Last modified on Fri 2 Sep 2022 20.39 EDT

When a young [California](#) girl purchased a baby goat last spring, the intention was to eventually sell it at a county fair livestock auction. But after feeding and caring for the animal for months, she bonded with the goat, named Cedar, and wanted to keep it.

Instead, law enforcement officers allegedly travelled hundreds of miles to confiscate the pet, who was eventually slaughtered.

The story is laid out in a lawsuit, first reported by the [Sacramento Bee](#), filed by the child's parent this week, in a case that has sparked outrage and criticism that the police and the county fair went too far to reclaim the goat and send a child's beloved pet to slaughter.

Jessica Long sued the Shasta county sheriff's department seeking damages and accusing the agency of violating her daughter's constitutional rights and wasting police resources by getting involved in a dispute between her family and a local fair association.

In July, "two sheriff's deputies left their jurisdiction in Shasta county, drove over 500 miles at taxpayer expense, and crossed approximately six separate county lines, all to confiscate a young girl's beloved pet goat", the lawsuit states. "As a result, the young girl who raised Cedar lost him, and Cedar lost his life."

According to the lawsuit, Long and her daughter purchased the baby goat while the child was enrolled in 4-H, a youth agriculture program popular in rural California. The intention of the program was that the goat would be raised by the family and eventually sold. But the girl, who is not even 10 years old, grew attached to Cedar. In June, when it was time to sell Cedar at a local fair livestock auction, she was "sobbing in his pen beside him", the lawsuit states.

"[The girl] and Cedar bonded, just as [she] would have bonded with a puppy. She loved him as a family pet," according to the lawsuit.



Jessica Long's daughter bonded with Cedar and was distraught at the thought of selling him. Photograph: Advancing Law for Animals

The family told the Shasta Fair Association that the girl, as was within her rights, did not want to continue with the sale of the goat. In another strange twist, the goat's meat was due to be sold to the California state senator Brian Dahle, a Republican who is also running for governor.

Long offered to "pay back" the fair for the loss of Cedar's income, but the fair association ordered her to return the goat and said she would face charges of grand theft if she failed to do so, according to the complaint. She contacted Dahle's office to explain the situation and representatives for the lawmaker said they would "resist her efforts to save Cedar from slaughter". She also appealed to the fair association.

"Our daughter lost three grandparents within the last year and our family has had so much heartbreak and sadness that I couldn't bear the thought of the following weeks of sadness after the slaughter," Long said in a letter to the fair association.

But the association was "unmoved", according to the lawsuit, rejecting her offer and continuing to "threaten" Long with criminal charges. Instead, they opted to "avoid the courts and instead resort to the strong-arm tactics of

involving law enforcement”, the lawsuit states. Despite having no warrant, according to the lawsuit, law enforcement seized Cedar from the Sonoma county farm and brought him to the Shasta district fairgrounds. He was eventually killed.

“Cedar was her property and she had every legal right to save his life,” the lawsuit states. “Yet, the Shasta Fair Association disputed her contractual rights to do so. In response, two sheriff’s deputies unreasonably searched for and unreasonably seized Cedar, without a warrant.”

The Shasta county sheriff’s office has told media outlets it will not comment on pending litigation. The fair association did not immediately respond to a request for comment.

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[Argentina](#)

Argentinians march for Cristina Kirchner after vice-president survives assassination bid



Argentinians march to support the vice-president on Friday. The suspect was arrested and named as Fernando Andrés Sabag Montiel. Photograph: Mariana Nedelcu/Reuters

Tens of thousands take to the streets to condemn political violence and show support for vice-president a day after shock attack

[Uki Goñi](#) and Amy Booth in Buenos Aires

Fri 2 Sep 2022 18.36 EDT Last modified on Sat 3 Sep 2022 14.24 EDT

Tens of thousands have taken to the streets across [Argentina](#) to protest against political violence and show support for vice-president Cristina Fernández de Kirchner, the day after she survived what appeared to be a failed assassination attempt.

Political leaders around the world and Pope Francis condemned the attack, as marchers flooded cities across the country in solidarity with a political leader who, like Juan and Evita Perón, dominates Argentina's political landscape.

The attack late on Thursday was broadcast live, as television cameras caught a man pushing through a crowd of supporters and raising a gun to Fernández de Kirchner's face.

The assailant was quickly arrested and named as Fernando Andrés Sabag Montiel, a 35-year-old Brazilian citizen who has lived in Argentina since 1998.

Police have not speculated on a motive for the attack, which comes against a backdrop of political tensions and economic crisis, but President Alberto Fernández described it as Argentina's gravest incident since the country returned to democracy in 1983.

Governments across the hemisphere decried the attempted assassination, while Buenos Aires-born Francis said: "I pray that social harmony and respect for democratic values will prevail in beloved Argentina, against all kinds of violence and aggression."

On Friday, the central Avenida de Mayo in Buenos Aires was bursting with protesters waving light blue and white Argentine flags and huge banners representing the country's powerful social movements.

Some clutched framed portraits of Fernández de Kirchner wearing the presidential sash. In the background, a huge banner of her face hung next to the image of Eva Perón on the Ministry of Social Development building.



Supporters of the vice-president in the Plaza de Mayo in Buenos Aires.
Photograph: Emiliano Lasalvia/AFP/Getty Images

The sounds of brass bands and drums filled the air as protesters chanted: “If they touch Cristina, what mayhem we’re going to cause!”

Juan Pablo Fort Flanagan, a 51-year-old primary school teacher, described the assassination attempt as a “fascist attack”.

“What happened yesterday was a shame on our democratic institutions,” he said. “You can think like her or you can not think like her, but you must respect democracy.”

Peronist leaders said that the assailant may have been encouraged by the growing level of violent discourse against Fernández de Kirchner, a polarizing figure who is facing potential corruption charges.

“It must be made clear that this is in no way an isolated incident by a mentally unbalanced person,” said Buenos Aires governor Axel Kicillof. “It

happened in a context [of increasing political confrontation] and that is where we have to act.”

In central Buenos Aires, Graciela Jacob, 81, said she was marching on behalf of a generation decimated by the country’s military dictatorship.

“First, I was stunned [when I heard about the attack]. Then, angry, and afraid that this was possible,” said Jacob. Like many others, she blamed the attack on a fervid political atmosphere stoked by opposition politicians and press.

Tango singer Eduardo Torres, 49, said: “We knew that something like this could happen. There’s a pretty tense social climate.”

Torres listed the coronavirus pandemic, runaway inflation, and the cost of living crisis exacerbated by the war in Ukraine as factors in growing political polarization in the country.

“It’s all generated a kind of social violence, and the split [between left and right] has got a lot bigger,” he said.

Torres added that he views Cristina as the most important Argentinian politician in the past 30 years. “I think she’s the only one who embodies the hope of the people.”

But while Fernández de Kirchner has many such supporters, she has also become the focus for vitriolic hatred from those on the political right.

In March, a group of protesters attacked the vice-president’s senatorial office, causing extensive damage, while opposition activists often chant “Death to Cristina” during marches.

Last week, opposition legislator Francisco Sánchez – an admirer of Brazilian president Jair Bolsonaro – prompted outrage when he called for Fernández de Kirchner’s execution after she was charged with corruption.

“These kind of crimes should be considered treason. They deserve the death sentence,” he tweeted on 22 August.

“It’s a message of hate,” said TV newscaster Daniel Navarro who compiled

a number of such death references for a segment in his Amanecer program Friday morning.

“Many of these statements and tweets talk of of death, killing, that she must die, it’s a superlative level of hate.”

The attack has also sent shockwaves through neighbouring Brazil, which is just a month away from a presidential election in which Bolsonaro will face his bitter rival, the leftist former president Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva.

In 2018, Bolsonaro notoriously called for supporters to “machine-gun” their leftist opponents, and [tensions have risen severely in recent weeks](#).

Bolsonaro supporters have twice attacked Lula, throwing faeces, urine and a crude explosive device at the former president’s supporters, and [shooting dead a prominent Workers’ party official](#).

On Friday, Lula warned that politicians across the world should be prepared to face a climate of violence stoked by populist figures.

“I think all of us who are politicians have to be aware of the violence provoked by those who do not know how to live democratically,” he said.

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US-Mexico border

Nine killed and dozens rescued from river at hazardous US-Mexico border crossing

Days of heavy rain caused dangerous currents in the Rio Grande in an area where people frequently cross into Texas



People cross the Rio Grande into Texas on 30 June. At least eight people were found dead in the river Friday. Photograph: Chandan Khanna/AFP/Getty Images

Valere Gonzalez and agencies

Sat 3 Sep 2022 09.06 EDTFirst published on Fri 2 Sep 2022 22.18 EDT

At least nine people were found dead in the Rio Grande while attempting a hazardous crossing in [Texas](#), officials said on Saturday.

The discovery was made by US Customs and Border Protection (CBP) and Mexican officials on Thursday while responding to a large number of people attempting to migrate across the river near the city of Eagle Pass.

US officials recovered six bodies, while Mexican teams recovered three others, according to a CBP statement updated on Saturday.

The agency said US crews rescued 37 people from the river and detained 16 others, while Mexican officials took 39 people into custody. Officials on both sides of the border continue searching for any possible victims, the CBP said.

Days of heavy rain in the Big Bend region had resulted in swift currents in the Rio Grande.

The border patrol's Del Rio sector, which includes Eagle Pass, has been especially dangerous because river currents can be deceptively fast and change quickly. The area draws people from dozens of countries, many of them families with young children. Crossing the river can be challenging even for strong swimmers.

In a news release last month, CBP said it had discovered more than 200 bodies in the Del Rio sector from October through July. The Del Rio sector extends 245 miles (395 km) along the Rio Grande.

Surveys by the UN International Organization for [Migration](#) and others point to rising fatalities as the number of crossing attempts have soared. In the last three decades, thousands have died attempting to enter the United States from Mexico, often from dehydration or drowning.

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