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2022.07.25 - 2022.07.31

- [Headlines monday 25 july 2022](#)
- [2022.07.25 - Spotlight](#)
- [2022.07.25 - Opinion](#)
- [2022.07.25 - Around the world](#)
- [Headlines thursday 28 july 2022](#)
- [2022.07.28 - Spotlight](#)
- [2022.07.28 - Opinion](#)
- [2022.07.28 - Around the world](#)
- [Headlines friday 29 july 2022](#)
- [2022.07.29 - Spotlight](#)
- [2022.07.29 - Opinion](#)
- [2022.07.29 - Around the world](#)
- [Headlines tuesday 26 july 2022](#)
- [2022.07.26 - Spotlight](#)
- [2022.07.26 - Opinion](#)
- [2022.07.26 - Around the world](#)
- [Headlines saturday 30 july 2022](#)
- [2022.07.30 - Spotlight](#)
- [2022.07.30 - Opinion](#)
- [2022.07.30 - Around the world](#)

Headlines monday 25 july 2022

- [Live Starmer dismisses Tory leadership contest as 'Thatcherite cosplay'](#)
- [Boris Johnson James Cleverly 'comfortable' with current PM joining a Truss-led government](#)
- [Rishi Sunak Would-be PM to promise curbs on China as UK's 'biggest long-term threat'](#)
- [Keir Starmer 'Labour will fight next election on economic growth'](#)

[Skip to key events](#)

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

Tory leadership: Liz Truss and Rishi Sunak clash in heated BBC debate – as it happened

Latest updates: final two candidates exchange blows over plans for cost of living, levelling up and China

Updated 5d ago

[Martin Belam](#) (now) and [Andrew Sparrow](#) (earlier)

Mon 25 Jul 2022 18.17 EDTFirst published on Mon 25 Jul 2022 04.29 EDT

Key events

- [5d ago](#)
[Summary of the day ...](#)
- [5d ago](#)
[Truss and Sunak trade blows in acrimonious first TV debate – full report](#)
- [5d ago](#)
[Snap verdict](#)
- [5d ago](#)
[Section 9: Quick-fire round](#)
- [5d ago](#)
[Section 8: Trust in politics](#)
- [5d ago](#)
[Section 7: Boris Johnson](#)
- [5d ago](#)
[Section 6: The tone of the campaign](#)
- [5d ago](#)
[Section 5: Climate crisis](#)

- [5d ago](#)
[Section 4: Ukraine](#)
- [5d ago](#)
[Section 3: China](#)
- [5d ago](#)
[Section 2: Levelling up in the 'red wall'](#)
- [5d ago](#)
[Section 1: Cost of living crisis](#)
- [5d ago](#)
[First TV debate between Rishi Sunak and Liz Truss begins](#)
- [5d ago](#)
[Taoiseach Micheál Martin says Trimble was 'courageous' as tributes widely paid](#)
- [5d ago](#)
[Rishi Sunak and Liz Truss set for Conservative leadership TV debate](#)
- [5d ago](#)
[Summary of the day so far ...](#)
- [6d ago](#)
[David Trimble, former first minister of Northern Ireland and UUP leader dies aged 77](#)
- [6d ago](#)
[Sunak criticises railway unions for new strike dates](#)
- [6d ago](#)
[Johnson 'does not want to resign' – Lord Cruddas in Telegraph](#)
- [6d ago](#)
[Former Tory chair cautions Truss & Sunak not to 'trash brand' during leadership debate](#)
- [6d ago](#)

- [Renationalising services like energy and rail would be pragmatic, says Corbyn's former policy chief](#)
- [6d ago](#)
[Labour 'is committed to public ownership of rail', says shadow transport secretary](#)
- [6d ago](#)
[Starmer's economy speech shows he wants to 'adopt Tory policies wholesale', SNP claims](#)
- [6d ago](#)
[Starmer's opposition to nationalisation 'neoliberal dogma', says Momentum](#)
- [6d ago](#)
[No 10 claims delays at Dover not caused by Brexit](#)
- [6d ago](#)
[Sunak challenges Truss to agree to interview with Andrew Neil, as he has done](#)
- [6d ago](#)
[Starmer indicates he no longer favours bringing rail companies back into public ownership](#)
- [6d ago](#)
[Reeves suggests Labour would not renationalise rail, water or energy](#)
- [6d ago](#)
[Starmer says his proposed industrial strategy council could be as influential as OBR](#)
- [6d ago](#)
[Starmer promises 'no magic money tree economics' under Labour](#)
- [6d ago](#)
[Starmer sets out five principles he says will form basis of Labour's approach to promoting growth](#)
- [6d ago](#)
[Starmer claims Tory failure to secure stronger growth has left families £8,800 worse off on average](#)
- [6d ago](#)
[Keir Starmer's speech on Labour's plan for growth](#)
- [6d ago](#)

[Truss has been warning about threat posed by China for much longer than Sunak, says one of her key allies](#)

- [6d ago](#)

[Starmer dismisses Tory leadership contest as ‘Thatcherite cosplay’ as he says Labour will care about growth as much as redistribution](#)



Rishi Sunak and Liz Truss during the BBC Conservative leadership debate.
Photograph: Jeff Overs/BBC/PA

[Martin Belam \(now\) and Andrew Sparrow \(earlier\)](#)

Mon 25 Jul 2022 18.17 EDTFirst published on Mon 25 Jul 2022 04.29 EDT

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From 5d ago

[17.08](#)

Snap verdict

My tuppence? The debate was acrimonious, will make stitching back together the parliamentary Tory party in September more difficult, and almost certainly won't move the dial in the leadership race.

All polling suggests that Truss is well in front with the Conservative membership, so Sunak needs her to somehow sink her own campaign in these debates. And she did not. In fact, she said she wasn't the slickest media performer, and got one of the few rounds of applause for saying that.

Sunak has staked not raising taxes and not paying off Covid debt as moral questions about piling the burden on to future generations. Truss seemed woollier on the economics, but cites historical precedent on debt after the second world war as a reason to take it slower and expand the economy.

Nobody landed a killer blow. Sunak was as assured as ever, if a bit aggressive and more likely to interrupt his opponent, but Truss avoided disaster. They both said they could work together in the future, but I can't believe anybody, including them, believed it.

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Updated at 17.14 EDT

Key events

- [5d ago](#)
[Summary of the day ...](#)
- [5d ago](#)
[Truss and Sunak trade blows in acrimonious first TV debate – full report](#)
- [5d ago](#)
[Snap verdict](#)

- [5d ago](#)
[Section 9: Quick-fire round](#)
- [5d ago](#)
[Section 8: Trust in politics](#)
- [5d ago](#)
[Section 7: Boris Johnson](#)
- [5d ago](#)
[Section 6: The tone of the campaign](#)
- [5d ago](#)
[Section 5: Climate crisis](#)
- [5d ago](#)
[Section 4: Ukraine](#)
- [5d ago](#)
[Section 3: China](#)
- [5d ago](#)
[Section 2: Levelling up in the 'red wall'](#)
- [5d ago](#)

- [Section 1: Cost of living crisis](#)
- [5d ago](#)
[First TV debate between Rishi Sunak and Liz Truss begins](#)
- [5d ago](#)
[Taoiseach Micheál Martin says Trimble was 'courageous' as tributes widely paid](#)
- [5d ago](#)
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- [6d ago](#)
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- [6d ago](#)
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- [6d ago](#)
[Starmer's opposition to nationalisation 'neoliberal dogma', says Momentum](#)
- [6d ago](#)
[No 10 claims delays at Dover not caused by Brexit](#)
- [6d ago](#)

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- [6d ago](#)
[Starmer indicates he no longer favours bringing rail companies back into public ownership](#)
- [6d ago](#)
[Reeves suggests Labour would not renationalise rail, water or energy](#)
- [6d ago](#)
[Starmer says his proposed industrial strategy council could be as influential as OBR](#)
- [6d ago](#)
[Starmer promises 'no magic money tree economics' under Labour](#)
- [6d ago](#)
[Starmer sets out five principles he says will form basis of Labour's approach to promoting growth](#)
- [6d ago](#)
[Starmer claims Tory failure to secure stronger growth has left families £8,800 worse off on average](#)
- [6d ago](#)
[Keir Starmer's speech on Labour's plan for growth](#)
- [6d ago](#)
[Truss has been warning about threat posed by China for much longer than Sunak, says one of her key allies](#)
- [6d ago](#)
[Starmer dismisses Tory leadership contest as 'Thatcherite cosplay' as he says Labour will care about growth as much as redistribution](#)

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[5d ago](#)[18.01](#)

Summary of the day ...

- **The battle to become the UK's next prime minister descended into fierce clashes as Rishi Sunak launched repeated attacks on the economic policies of the favourite Liz Truss in their first head-to-head TV debate.** The two Conservative leadership hopefuls traded blows over tax cuts, China and inflation, with the former chancellor Sunak accusing the foreign secretary of seeking “a short-term sugar rush” by cutting national insurance. Truss accused her former colleague of raising taxes to their highest level for 70 years. The exchanges at the BBC debate followed a weekend of deeply personal attacks in the contest, including on-the-record criticisms singling out the former chancellor’s wealth and wardrobe, while Truss has faced claims of being economically illiterate and a former remaine. [\[More here\]](#)
- **David Trimble, Northern Ireland’s inaugural first minister and a crucial unionist architect of the Good Friday agreement, has died aged 77.** His death on Monday was announced by the Ulster Unionist party (UUP), the party he led into a historic power-sharing arrangement between nationalists and republicans in Northern Ireland. Lord Trimble was the first person to serve in the role of first minister, and won the Nobel peace prize, along with John Hume, leader of the nationalist SDLP party, for their part in negotiations for the Good Friday agreement. He was UUP leader between 1995 and 2005, accepting a life peerage in the House of Lords in 2006. [\[More here\]](#)
- **Downing Street has had to deny that the prime minister, Boris Johnson, intends to cling on to power** after the Telegraph published an “exclusive” in which Lord Cruddas said Johnson “does not want to resign” as prime minister and wishes he could “wipe away” his departure.

- Anger over the [Partygate scandal](#) has been reignited after Scotland Yard confirmed that it did not send questionnaires to Johnson before deciding against fining him for attending two Downing Street lockdown gatherings. Fines were issued to other attenders at the gatherings in 2020, including one at No 10 on 13 November, where the prime minister gave a leaving speech for his departing director of communications, Lee Cain, and another in the Cabinet Office on 17 December. [[More here](#)]
- Sunak has said he will stop unions “holding working people to ransom” if he becomes prime minister in response to the announcement that the Transport Salaried Staffs Association union (TSSA) will stage railway strikes on 18 and 20 August.
- Sunak has challenged Truss to agree to be interviewed by former GB News presenter Andrew Neil after it was confirmed that he will record an interview with Neil for broadcast on Friday.
- Downing Street said travel delays seen at Dover are not caused by Brexit. It said the problems were down to a combination of factors “including a shortage of French border control staff”. [Experts disagree](#).
- Keir Starmer has given a speech in which he said promoting growth is now as important for Labour as redistribution, but confusion over the party’s position on the renationalisation of railways and utilities has lingered with several different briefings during the day.

- **Jeremy Corbyn**, the former [Labour](#) leader, has implicitly criticised the speech. In a series of tweets, Corbyn restated his call for the renationalisation of rail, energy, water and mail, saying Labour needed to offer a “bold alternative”. The **Green party** has also criticised Labour for abandoning its commitment to renationalising utilities as set out in the 2019 manifesto.

That is it from me, Martin Belam, for the evening. Thank you for following our live coverage, and for all your comments this evening. The UK politics live blog will be back in the morning.

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Updated at 18.17 EDT

[5d ago](#) [17.55](#)

One of the more curious bits of tonight’s debate was when **Liz Truss** was directly questioned about saying that British workers are “among the worst idlers in the world” in a book, she for the first time appeared to claim that she hadn’t written that bit. She then said **Dominic Raab** wrote that chapter, and pointed out that he is supporting her rival for prime minister, **Rishi Sunak**.

This does not appear to have gone down brilliantly with Raab, who on BBC Newsnight this evening is criticising Truss for shifting her views on debt, as Lewis Goodall points out:

Dominic Raab: “We all took collective responsibility on the [Britannia Unchained] book...we all agreed...the chapter on debt, why it was so damaging for the economy, intergenerational unfairness...we were right then, it’s up to Liz to explain why she’s changed her view.” [#newsnight](#)

— Lewis Goodall (@lewis_goodall) [July 25, 2022](#)

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5d ago **17.49**

Truss and Sunak trade blows in acrimonious first TV debate – full report

Here is the full report of tonight's debate, from Rajeev Syal, Ben Quinn and Jessica Elgot:

The two **Conservative leadership** hopefuls traded blows over tax cuts, China and inflation, with the former chancellor Sunak accusing the foreign secretary of seeking “a short-term sugar rush” by cutting national insurance. Truss accused her former colleague of raising taxes to their highest level for 70 years.

The exchanges at the **BBC** debate followed a weekend of deeply personal attacks in the contest, including on-the-record criticisms singling out the former chancellor’s wealth and wardrobe, while Truss has faced claims of being economically illiterate and a former Remainer.

Sunak, widely seen as having to make up crucial ground to win over the Conservative membership, who will vote from 5 August, repeatedly described his opponent’s plans on the economy as “not conservative”, interrupting her at one point to say: “You promised almost £40bn of unfunded tax cuts, £40bn more borrowing.

“That is the country’s credit card. It’s our children and grandchildren ... everyone here ... who are going to have to pick up the tab for that.”

Truss hit back over Sunak’s calls for a tougher stance on China, pointing out that the Treasury just last month was calling for closer bilateral and economic ties. Sunak accused his opponent of making pronouncements about a “golden era” between China and the UK. “I think that was almost a decade ago,” the foreign secretary snapped back.

Amid reports that Boris Johnson has not yet ruled out a political comeback, despite pledging to step down next month, both candidates also ruled out a role for the current prime minister in any government they might lead.

“I am sure he will have a role. I am sure he will be vocal, but he will not be part of the government,” said the foreign secretary, despite emphasising that she had been an early supporter of Johnson’s. She contrasted her continuing loyalty to him to those of others, adding that “it would have been a dereliction of duty” not to remain in her post.

Read more of our lead story on the debate here: [Truss and Sunak trade blows in acrimonious first TV debate](#)

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[5d ago](#) [17.43](#)



Ben Quinn

My colleague Ben Quinn has this report tonight on another major political development that should not be overshadowed by the [Conservative leadership](#) TV debate – the death of David Trimble:

David Trimble, Northern Ireland’s inaugural first minister and a crucial unionist architect of the Good Friday agreement, has died aged 77.

His death on Monday was announced by the Ulster Unionist Party (UUP), the party he led into a historic power-sharing arrangement between nationalists and republicans in Northern Ireland.

Lord Trimble was the first person to serve in the role of first minister, and won the Nobel peace prize, along with John Hume, leader of the nationalist SDLP party, for their part in negotiations for the Good Friday agreement. He was UUP leader between 1995 and 2005, accepting a life peerage in the House of Lords in 2006.

Trimble had played a “crucial and courageous role” in the Good Friday agreement negotiations, said Ireland’s Taoiseach, Micheál Martin, who said all in politics at the time had “witnessed his crucial and courageous role.”

Tributes from across Northern Ireland’s political divide and beyond were paid to a politician whose own political journey from hardline unionism to a risk-taking partner with his sworn enemies helped end decades of strife.

Describing Trimble as “a man of courage and vision”, the UUP’s leader, Doug Beattie, said: “He chose to grasp the opportunity for peace when it presented itself and sought to end the decades of violence that blighted his beloved Northern Ireland.”

“He will forever be associated with the leadership he demonstrated in the negotiations that led up to the 1998 Belfast agreement.”

On the nationalist side, the Sinn Féin leader, Mary Lou McDonald, said on Twitter that she was “saddened” to hear of Trimble’s death, adding: “His contribution to building the peace process in Ireland will stand as a proud and living legacy of his political life.”



David Trimble (R) poses with Sinn Fein President Gerry Adams, Social Democratic Labour Party leader John Hume and US President Bill Clinton in the Roosevelt Room of the White House in Washington, in 2000. Photograph: Susan Walsh/AP

Read more of Ben Quinn's report: [David Trimble, key architect of Good Friday agreement, dies aged 77](#)

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[5d ago](#)[17.36](#)

Here are some verdicts from around social media. The Truss team have been accusing Sunak of interrupting her a lot – saying he did so 22 times in the first 12 minutes. Steven Swinford, political editor at the Times has tweeted to say that a spokesperson for Truss has claimed this shows “Rishi Sunak has tonight proven he is not fit for office. His aggressive mansplaining and shouty private school behaviour is desperate, unbecoming and is a gift to Labour”

A spokesman for Liz Truss claims that Rishi Sunak is not fit for office:

'Rishi Sunak has tonight proven he is not fit for office

'His aggressive mansplaining and shouty private school behaviour is desperate, unbecoming and is a gift to Labour'

— Steven Swinford (@Steven_Swinford) [July 25, 2022](#)

Sunder Katwala has questioned whether there is a right hand/left hand situation going on within the Truss camp.

It seems bizarre for a candidate to say on live television that they would want the rival candidate in their team & for the same candidate's campaign to declare within minutes that that candidate is "not fit for office". Is the candidate responsible for the campaign briefings?

— Sunder Katwala (@sundersays) [July 25, 2022](#)

The Labour MP for Walthamstow, Stella Creasy makes the point that Truss during the debate said she had stayed loyal to Boris Johnson. Creasy says “As [Liz Truss](#) thinks Rishi Sunak was a mansplaining boorish public schoolboy and that makes someone unfit for office, I imagine she refused to have anything to do with Number 10 under Boris Johnson.”

As Liz Truss thinks Rishi Sunak was a mansplaining boorish public schoolboy and that makes someone unfit for office, I imagine she refused to have anything to do with Number 10 under Boris Johnson.

oh.....□♀ <https://t.co/pPrKm4C1EU>

— stellacreasy (@stellacreasy) [July 25, 2022](#)

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5d ago 17.32

Pollster Opinium was measuring the reaction to tonight's debate among "1,000 regular voters" and according to Sky News they put the result at "Rishi Sunak is just ahead at 39%, with Liz Truss at 38%."

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5d ago 17.28

You can tell a little bit about what each campaign think they did well tonight judging by the clips they immediately put out. Sunak's social media team have gone big on his family backstory, going with "I'm standing here because of the sacrifice and love of my parents" and "They worked day and night, saved and sacrificed to provide a better future for their children."

"They worked day and night, saved and sacrificed to provide a better future for their children."

Rishi Sunak tells [#BBCOurNextPM](#) how his parents are and will always be an inspiration to him. [#Ready4Rishi](#)

Sign up at <https://t.co/3cXn1rFhca> pic.twitter.com/amzl7tWa77

— Rishi Sunak (@RishiSunak) [July 25, 2022](#)

The Truss team have gone for "I'm straightforward, straight-talking and honest. I do what I say I will do. I've done it in trade. I've done it in the Foreign Office. And I'll do it as prime minister."

I'm straightforward, straight-talking and honest.

I do what I say I will do.

I've done it in Trade.

I've done it in the Foreign Office.

And I'll do it as Prime Minister.[#LizForLeader#TrustedToDeliver](#)
pic.twitter.com/rOdSvqnnTI

— Liz for Leader (@trussliz) [July 25, 2022](#)

The clips chosen also talk to some of the massive contradictions in their campaigns. Truss boasts of her record of delivery, while also saying the country needs a complete change in approach from the government she has been part of, while Sunak, who would be one of the wealthiest prime ministers in history, wants to focus on his humble beginnings.

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Updated at 17.30 EDT

[5d ago](#)[17.08](#)

Snap verdict

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All polling suggests that Truss is well in front with the Conservative membership, so Sunak needs her to somehow sink her own campaign in these debates. And she did not. In fact, she said she wasn't the slickest media performer, and got one of the few rounds of applause for saying that.

Sunak has staked not raising taxes and not paying off Covid debt as moral questions about piling the burden on to future generations. Truss seemed woollier on the economics, but cites historical precedent on debt after the second world war as a reason to take it slower and expand the economy.

Nobody landed a killer blow. Sunak was as assured as ever, if a bit aggressive and more likely to interrupt his opponent, but Truss avoided

disaster. They both said they could work together in the future, but I can't believe anybody, including them, believed it.

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Updated at 17.14 EDT

[5d ago](#)**17.01**

They both finished with a promise that they could work together in the future in a rather awkward exchange, where Truss pointedly said she would welcome Sunak into her team (but not cabinet) and Sunak ... did not.

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Updated at 17.14 EDT

[5d ago](#)**17.00**

Section 9: Quick-fire round

The live blogger's nightmare.

Is Brexit to blame for delays at Dover: both no

Would you both ban railway strikes: yes

What score would you give Boris Johnson out of 10: Truss said seven, Sunak did a thing where he gave 10/10 for Brexit and the election.

I missed one. I can't read my own handwriting. I blame the Leeds comprehensive that Truss frequently cites.

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Updated at 17.15 EDT

[5d ago](#)[16.57](#)

Section 8: Trust in politics

One thing that is good about this debate format? Fewer “worst Kraftwerk tribute band ever” jokes because there are only two of them.

A bad thing? The audience are just not being invited to ask direct questions, which then makes it a bit odd for politicians to respond to them directly.

Truss is going in for the fact that in 2019 we promised not to put up taxes. She says: “I might not be the slickest presenter in the business” but she keeps her promises. There is applause.

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Updated at 17.15 EDT

[5d ago](#)[16.54](#)

Sunak, who was in government until three weeks ago as the most powerful financial minister, says he wants to be the change the country needs.

Truss says this debate is about who will beat [Keir Starmer](#) at the next election.

I had thought the temperature between the two of them had cooled a bit in the last 10 minutes, although Sunak just had another interrupting run at Truss.

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Updated at 17.16 EDT

[5d ago](#)[16.51](#)

Section 7: Boris Johnson

Truss says she doesn't think the mistakes that Johnson made – which include being fined for breaking his own Covid rules and appointing Chris Pincher to a senior role – meant he deserved to lose his job and she stayed loyal to the end.

Sunak says Johnson is one of the most amazing politicians he has worked with and he is proud of what they achieved in government.

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Updated at 17.17 EDT

[Newest](#)[Newest](#)

[Previous](#)

1
of
8

[Next](#)

[Oldest](#)[Oldest](#)

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Conservative leadership

James Cleverly ‘comfortable’ with Boris Johnson joining a Truss-led government

Education secretary says PM is ‘incredible’ politician but decision to put him in cabinet is not his to take

- [Politics live: latest updates](#)

James Cleverly would be 'comfortable' with Boris Johnson in government role – video

[Emine Sinmaz](#)

Mon 25 Jul 2022 05.27 EDT Last modified on Mon 25 Jul 2022 06.21 EDT

The UK education secretary, James Cleverly, has said he would be open to [Boris Johnson](#) joining a Liz Truss-led government if she was “comfortable” with it.

Cleverly, who is supporting the foreign secretary in the race for No 10, called Johnson an “incredible” politician but said it was not a decision for him to take.

“He’s an incredibly talented politician. Whether he would want to serve after the bruising that he’s got at moment that might be another matter, but it’s not for me to start dictating to Liz [Truss] who she puts into her cabinet,” Cleverly, one of Johnson’s staunchest defenders, told Sky News.

“I’ve worked with him for years, I’ve supported him and I continue to regard him as incredible, effective politician.”

Asked if he would welcome Johnson to a senior role in government, Cleverly added: “I would be comfortable if she [Truss] is.”

More than 9,000 Conservative party members are [reported to have signed a petition](#) calling for Johnson to be put on the leadership ballot.

Cleverly's comments come ahead of the first head-to-head TV debate between Truss and rival Rishi Sunak hosted by the BBC on Monday night. The two Tory leadership hopefuls have been engaged in bitter clashes over immigration, China and the economy ahead of Monday's clash.

Cleverly accused Sunak of being late to the threat posed by China after the former chancellor unveiled plans to close 30 Confucius Institutes, which promote the teaching of Chinese language and culture, in the UK.

Cleverly told Times Radio: "She's been talking about these for a long time. So I'm very glad that Rishi's now talking about the issues that Liz has been talking about for quite some time, and of course we do need to look at China's influence, not just on the world stage but here in the UK."

Cleverly, who said he would "love" to remain as education secretary in a Truss government, added: "I would say we have already been looking at the influence that China has in our education system. This is not new, it might be new to the people on Rishi's campaign team, but it's not new to anyone that's worked in the education or the Foreign Office."

But the health and social care committee chair, Jeremy Hunt, a former Tory leadership candidate who is backing Sunak, said the former chancellor was right to focus on China.

The former health secretary also suggested Sunak was ahead of Truss in understanding the pressures facing the NHS.

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Hunt told Sky News: "I do give him credit that of the two candidates he is the first that has actually spoken about the NHS and he has [used the word emergency](#), and I think that is very important because that is what it feels like on the frontline at the moment. That is what it feels like for some of the people who are waiting for their NHS care."

He also defended Sunak's plan to [house migrants in cruise ships](#) instead of hotels to save money, which has been criticised by Truss's campaign.

"The truth is we have to be radical, we have to do things differently and we have to be courageous and Rishi Sunak to me has shown that he is willing to be courageous, in particular being upfront to Conservative party members, of whom I am one, who all to a person want tax cuts and say that is not possible at the moment, we can't afford that right now," Hunt said.

"I think that is the kind of courage that has persuaded me that he is the right man to be prime minister but the same courage and decisiveness is necessary, yes, when it comes to asylum policy, refugee policy as well."

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

Conservative leadership

Sunak to promise curbs on China as UK's 'biggest long-term threat'

Leadership contender says he will close 30 Mandarin teaching programmes to restrain Beijing's soft power



Rishi Sunak is expected to take aim at China to try to focus the Tory leadership race on national security and international affairs. Photograph: Danny Lawson/PA

[Aubrey Allegretti](#) and [Vincent Ni](#)

Sun 24 Jul 2022 17.30 EDT Last modified on Mon 25 Jul 2022 06.15 EDT

China is the biggest long-term threat to Britain, Rishi Sunak will say on Monday as he unveils plans to curb the country's soft power by closing all of its 30 Confucius Institutes, which promote the teaching of Chinese language and culture, in the UK.

He will take on Liz Truss, his rival in the [Conservative leadership](#) race, by effectively accusing the foreign secretary and western leaders of having “turned a blind eye to China’s nefarious activity and ambitions” and call for a new Nato-alliance to be set up to counter it.

However, the latest front in the battle to replace Boris Johnson immediately saw recriminations from Truss supporters, with the former Tory party leader Iain Duncan Smith suggesting the announcement was tantamount to hypocrisy, as in the two years Sunak was chancellor the Treasury “pushed hard for an economic deal with China”. Duncan Smith has been on China’s sanction list since last year.

Sunak’s intervention threatens to further strain relations with Beijing, which have built substantially since the “golden era” only a decade ago. [In a report on 14 July](#), the Chinese nationalist Global Times newspaper said although Beijing did not expect a sea-change in the bilateral relationship under Britain’s new leader, it still hoped the two sides could improve ties. It said Sunak had a “pragmatic view of developing balanced ties with China”.

On Monday, China’s foreign ministry spokesperson, Zhao Lijian, declined to make specific remarks on Sunak’s speech, but he said: “I do want to inform some UK politicians that they can’t solve their own problems by frequently using China to make arguments and hyping the ‘China threat’ and other irresponsible statements.”

The current government has taken a harder stance against Xi Jinping’s administration over the crackdown on civil liberties in [Hong Kong](#), including a restrictive national security law and electoral reforms in the former British colony. Mutual sanctions have been in place over China’s treatment of Uyghurs in its far-western Xinjiang region.

In an attempt to move the focus in the Tory leadership race on to national security and international affairs, Sunak is expected to say on Monday that China “is the biggest-long-term threat to Britain and the world’s economic and national security”, citing the views of the director general of MI5 and head of the FBI.

“At home, they are stealing our technology and infiltrating our universities,” the former chancellor will say. “And abroad, they are propping up Putin’s fascist invasion of Ukraine by buying his oil and attempting to bully their neighbours, including Taiwan.”

Sunak will also criticise the Chinese government for “saddling developing countries with insurmountable debt and using this to seize their assets or hold a diplomatic gun to their heads”, as well as torturing, detaining and indoctrinating their own citizens in Xinjiang and Hong Kong.

In a slight against Truss, Sunak will add: “Enough is enough. For too long, politicians in Britain and across the west have rolled out the red carpet and turned a blind eye to China’s nefarious activity and ambitions.”

He said he will ban all 30 of China’s Confucius Institutes in the UK, claiming Beijing’s soft power is enhanced by taxpayer-funded Mandarin teaching in schools being channelled through the organisations.

The controversial bodies have been criticised before for influencing academic freedom in the UK, and [have been called “outdated”](#) by campaigners. They are effectively joint ventures between a host university, a partner university in China, and the Chinese International Education Foundation (CIEF), a Beijing-based organisation.

CIEF in Beijing has been contacted for comment.

Sunak’s remarks on Confucius Institute are likely to contrast with Truss, who oversaw the signing of a [memorandum of understanding](#) between University College London’s education faculty and Hanban – an agency under China’s education ministry that used to be a partner in the scheme – when she was an education minister in 2014.

Further moves Sunak said would curtail Chinese influence included ordering British universities to reveal any foreign funding partnerships worth more than £50,000 and reviewing all UK-Chinese research partnerships that might “unwittingly assist” the country’s attempt to dominate technologies of the future or that could have a military purpose.

A Nato-style alliance would also be set up, Sunak pledged, along with moves to influence international standards on cybersecurity and help British businesses and universities counter Chinese industrial espionage with the help of MI5.

Truss's campaign said she had been clear Britain should not become dependent on China when building critical national infrastructure, including projects such as Sizewell C and that she would update the 10-year foreign affairs strategy "integrated review" to include a chapter on Chinese and Russian aggression.

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Ahead of the first head-to-head TV debate between the two candidates, Truss announced plans to focus on boosting freeports by scrapping Whitehall targets to let them choose their own favoured sectors and tailor incentives.

She also wants to introduce investment zones by creating new model towns similar to Bournville and Saltaire that will have fewer planning restrictions and lower tax burdens.

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Labour

Keir Starmer: Labour will fight next election on economic growth

Opposition leader to say ‘making the country and its people better off’ is main priority for party



Keir Starmer in Gateshead earlier this month. ‘There will be no magic-money-tree economics with us,’ he is expected to say in a speech on Monday. Photograph: Ian Forsyth/Getty Images

[Robert Booth](#) Social affairs correspondent

Sun 24 Jul 2022 17.30 EDT Last modified on Mon 25 Jul 2022 00.12 EDT

The Labour leader, [Keir Starmer](#), will attempt to frame the next general election as a battle for the economy, declaring on Monday that a Labour government’s priorities would be “growth, growth and growth”.

Echoing Tony Blair’s assertion in 1996 that his main priorities would be “education, education and education”, Starmer is expected to say in a major

speech in Liverpool that there is “no task more central to my ambitions for Britain than making the country and its people better off. This is why I am clear [Labour](#) will fight the next election on economic growth.”

He will outline plans for a new industrial strategy council, established on a statutory footing to become “a permanent part of the landscape, that sets out strategic national priorities that go beyond the political cycle; holds us to account for our decisions; and builds confidence for investors that will boost long-term growth and productivity”.

He will say the pandemic and the cost of living crisis have shown that the British economy in its current state is too “brittle”.

The speech comes amid forecasts that the UK’s economic growth will stagnate next year, with consumer price inflation running at 8.2% for the year to June, and a Conservative leadership contest that has seen bruising clashes over the economy, with Rishi Sunak describing Liz Truss’s plans to borrow billions to fund tax cuts as a “fairytales”.

However, Starmer is also facing a challenge from the left of his party, with Rebecca Long-Bailey, the shadow business secretary under Jeremy Corbyn, calling on Sunday for Labour to drop its cautious approach to the economy and fight on a radical manifesto including state ownership and a living standards contract between government and the public.

Starmer has been trying to pitch Labour as the party of fiscal prudence and will say: “With me and with Rachel Reeves [the shadow chancellor], you will always get sound finances; careful spending; strong, secure and fair growth. There will be no magic-money-tree economics with us.”

Long-Bailey represents thinking on the left of the party that is concerned Starmer may abandon interventionist policies such as state ownership of utilities that she argues would help with the cost of living crisis.

Starmer’s speech is not billed as providing detailed policies to deliver growth and he has faced questions over how much he would be able to achieve if a long-term global recession and high inflation set in.

However, he will say his economic plan will be founded on three principles – “strong, secure, fair”.

“Strong, because it will build a foundation where every business and every person plays a role,” he is expected to say.

“Secure, because it will produce good jobs that don’t leave people feeling insecure.

“Fair, because it will unlock the potential of every place – every community, every town and every city.”

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In an episode of The Rest is Politics podcast last week, the former Conservative cabinet minister Rory Stewart asked Starmer about his economic plans.

“We are about to head into a 10-year global recession and even if you become prime minister, you have got very limited control,” Stewart said. “What on Earth are you going to do with interest rates and inflation?”

The Labour leader said he wanted to provide “certainty and trust” to investors so the manufacture of items such as wind turbines that generate power in the north of England would not be outsourced to countries such as China.

Meanwhile, the Liberal Democrats are planning to roll out attack ads against Sunak over the tax rises he announced when he was chancellor.

Polling for the party suggests the increases are “as big a vote loser for the Conservative party as Boris Johnson in the south-east of England”, which the Lib Dems believe will be a key “blue wall” battleground at the next election.

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

2022.07.25 - Spotlight

- It's the ultimate Neighbours quiz! How well do you know Ramsay Street?
- Sorted The 10 best Neighbours characters ever
- Conservative leadership Who could be in the next cabinet under Rishi Sunak or Liz Truss?
- 'There's never been a time when you could just say anything' Frank Skinner on free speech, his bullying shame – and knob jokes

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[Neighbours](#)

How well do you know Ramsay Street? It's the ultimate Neighbours quiz!



The Melbourne legacy ... the iconic Neighbours lineup circa 1988.
Photograph: Fremantle Media/Shutterstock

After 37 years, the lights are finally going out on Ramsay Street. But how much do you remember about the soap's most brilliant and bizarre

moments?

[Scott Bryan](#)

Mon 25 Jul 2022 01.00 EDT Last modified on Mon 25 Jul 2022 01.01 EDT

1.Scott Robinson and Charlene Mitchell's wedding was watched by 20 million people in the United Kingdom. But what song did she walk down the aisle to?



Take My Breath Away – Berlin

Suddenly – Angry Anderson

Especially For You – Kylie Minogue and Jason Donovan

2.Who gave birth without removing her tights?

Izzy Hoyland

Daphne Clarke

Beverly Marshall

3.Who went on a cruise and never returned?

Marlene Kratz

Therese Willi

Libby Kennedy

4.Who was considered 'plain' but then was considered stunning simply by taking off her glasses?

Jane Harris
Julie Martin
Helen Daniels

5. Mrs Mangel was once painted in a portrait she described as “hideous,” in which she had an extremely long neck. Who painted it?

Helen Daniels
Madge Mitchell
Zoe Davis

6. In 2002, who slipped on some milk, banged their head, experienced amnesia and for several weeks thought they were a teenager again?

Susan Kennedy
Steph Sculley
Sheila Canning

7. What did Lou Carpenter say to help break Harold Bishop’s amnesia, after he was swept out to sea several years earlier?



"Jelly Belly"
"Tuba"
"Sausages"

8. Who accidentally drove their car off a cliff and (somehow) into the middle of the sea, with their partner in the passenger seat, mere moments after their

wedding?

Toadie Rebecchi

Lou Carpenter

Harold Bishop

9. Toadie's first wedding was a catastrophe. He then fell in love with Sonya Mitchell and another disaster took place at their wedding. What?

The wedding venue blew up

Sonya fell into a sinkhole

Toadie accidentally drove his car off a cliff again.

10. Which character called off their wedding as his bride was walking down the aisle because he had found God and wanted to become a priest?

Drew Kirk

Mark Gottlieb

Harold Bishop

11. Karl Kennedy has been known for having affairs, constantly breaking Susan's heart. But who did he not have an affair with?



Izzy Holland

Jane Harris

Sarah Beaumont

12. In 2007, which character had a brain tumour, and started having conversations with an imaginary teenager called Fox that only they could see?

Doug Willis

Lou Carpenter

Paul Robinson

13. Which character was recast mid-way through a disaster, so they disappeared underwater in a school rafting accident in one episode, then was fine, well and somebody else entirely in the next episode?

Libby Kennedy

Cheryl Stark

Declan Napier

14. In which year did Toadfish have his iconic mullet shaved off by Lou Carpenter in front of an excited crowd?



1999

2009

2019

15. Neighbours had a plane bomb crash, which resulted in the deaths of several members of Harold's family (David, Serena and Liljana). Who did Harold attempt to strangle because he thought he was responsible?

Karl Kennedy

Paul Robinson
Lou Carpenter

16. After the plane crash, which character was presumed dead but then turned up at their own memorial?

Boyd Hoyland
Sky Mangel
Dylan Timmins

17. After the will they, won't they relationship between Drew Kirk and Libby Kennedy, how did Drew unexpectedly die?

He fell off a horse
He got bitten by a spider
He got swallowed by a snake

18. In a special London episode, Karl and Susan Kennedy got married on a boat on the Thames, only to be interrupted by Izzy giving birth to Karl's baby. Neil Morrissey (yes, really) officiated the wedding, but which two celebrities witnessed it?

Sinitta and Jonathan Coleman
Sophie Ellis-Bextor and Amanda Holden
Lizo Mzimba and Hugh Laurie

19. Who pretended to be naturists to secure some business for a client? This led to a nude business meeting in their home, interrupted by Karl Kennedy trying to find a missing winning scratchcard, who then stripped off to keep up the lie.

Toadfish Rebecchi and Sonya Rebecchi
Aaron Brennan and David Tanaka
Madge Ramsay and Harold Bishop

20. Ask any Neighbours fan to name the most surreal moment of Neighbours, and they would probably say Bouncer's Dream, a 1991 episode where you could see inside the dog's mind. But what was Bouncer dreaming about?



Marrying the border collie Rosie next door

Scott and Charlene's wedding

The episode of Neighbours we were watching, implying that the entire show is actually a figment of the soap dog's imagination.

21.Which character was kidnapped by Ecuadorian rebels after their son was jailed in the country, then had an affair with one of her captors?

Cheryl Stark

Trixie Tucker

Kathy Carpenter

22.Who became the first LGBTQ+ couple to marry on Neighbours, just months after Australia legalised gay marriage?

Chris Pappas and Aidan Foster

Aaron Brennan and David Tanaka

Sky Mangel and Lana Crawford

23.In 2013, which character caused serious damage to their eyesight by staring at the sun during the total eclipse, after their dog ran away with the safety glasses?

Mark Branning

Kyle Canning

Oscar Manning

24. Dee Bliss came back from the dead after claiming to have amnesia (this is a trend in Neighbours.) But there was another unexpected twist. What was it?

Dee had no recollection of her own wedding to Toadie, and when asked, did not want to marry him

Dee faked her own death because she was a wanted fugitive, and had actually been living in a cave the entire time

Dee was “fake Dee,” a lookalike who was trying to con someone else out of their savings. Then the actual Dee came back and had a fight with Fake Dee

25. Which Neighbours character invented a fashion item called a “shrugalero,” which looks like a scarf you wear around your shoulders?

Michelle Kim

Donna Freedman

Susan Kennedy

26. In 2011, which footballer was quoted by Andrew Robinson as being “one of the greatest soccer players in the world”? This surprised some viewers because he very much wasn’t

Francis Jeffers

Milan Jovanović

David Seaman

27. Which character briefly became a nun after selling her relative’s baby? It was criticised by some fans as being rather unrealistic

Carmella Cammeniti

Michelle Scully

Susan Kennedy

28. Who notably died of a brain aneurysm, only to come back as a zombie in a Halloween web special in 2014?

Libby Kennedy

Izzy Hoyland

Stingray Timmins

29. In 2015, which character had sex with a Catholic priest in the middle of a hot air balloon disaster? (Karl Kennedy then drilled into the brain of one of the victims while drunk.)

Paige Smith

Piper Willis
Jacka Hills

30. Who is the only character who has been on the soap from the start?

Paul Robinson

Susan Kennedy

Toadfish Rebecchi

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

SortedNeighbours

Neighbours: the 10 best characters from Australia's beloved soap – sorted

After 37 extremely dramatic years, Neighbours has come to an end. Here are the best (and most ridiculous) characters who populated Erinsborough. RIP to most of them

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Lovebirds, hotties, and tumultuous marriages: Neighbour's best characters – from a revolving door of hundreds. Composite: Rex/Shutterstock

[Anna Spargo-Ryan](#)

Sun 24 Jul 2022 13.30 EDT Last modified on Mon 25 Jul 2022 01.02 EDT

Drama was rife in the wilds of Erinsborough. There was the time a tornado almost killed Lou Carpenter, and the time someone tried to kill Paul Robinson, and the other times someone tried to kill Paul Robinson, and the

epic love story of Anne and the guy from House. The suburb has been home to a backyard sheep, a dog in love, and a galah that was eventually eaten by Patti Newton's cat.

Narrowing down the best moments is simple: Toadie driving his car and new wife off a cliff, Drew wearing a kilt, and, of course, the time Harold Bishop went missing at sea.

But choosing the best characters from a list of hundreds? Not so easy. With the show ending after 37 years, let's look back on decades of extremely realistic, ordinary humans.

10. Scott and Charlene Robinson



That unforgettable wedding: 'Scott and Charlene are the beating heart of Neighbours.' Photograph: Fremantle Media/Shutterstock

I honestly felt a bit of peer pressure to include them here. Scott and Charlene are the beating heart of Neighbours! They are the reason Erinsborough exists! No woman had ever been a mechanic before Kylie Minogue arrived on the street. Here's my proposition: Scott and Charlene only work as a couple. They're your co-dependent Facebook friend with a name like

“BenAnd SarahJones”. Yes, adorable teenagers in love, but we have Baz Luhrmann for that. More drama, please.

9. Pepper Steiger

I am nothing if not pervy and superficial, and Pepper was just extremely hot. She had those 90s “I’ve probably aged out of this, and also I’m a teacher, but look how hot I am” pigtails. Sometimes she showed her bra on-screen. And she was half of Neighbours’ first on-camera queer kiss. It’s true that Janeane Garofalo in The Truth About Cats & Dogs was my true sexual awakening, but Pepper Steiger was very much up there.

8. Lyn Scully

As far as I can tell, Lyn was never a popular character among people on the street or in real life, but I related to her on a spiritual level. Everything was always too stressful for poor Lyn. Her daughters were intolerable, her career was dissatisfying, and she repeatedly fell in love with the wrong men, including notorious womaniser Paul Robinson. Never settled, Lyn came and went from the street no fewer than five times, long after her kids had married billionaire British property developers. She was, to borrow a phrase I recently heard on Twitter, the Wish version of Susan Kennedy.

7. Paul Robinson

The only original character still lurking east of West Waratah in 2022, Paul Robinson was a true soap villain. He had seven children (some murderers, some Scottish), six wives (one plumber, one who pushed him off a mezzanine) and a prosthetic leg with a reputation for changing sides. He committed insurance fraud, killed people, busted up marriages, was strangled by Harold Bishop and held hostage in a mineshaft. Paul Robinson could be a soapie all on his own.

6. Lance Wilkinson and Joel Samuels



'Perennial hottie' Daniel MacPherson at the 1999 Logies. Photograph: Patrick Riviere/Getty Images

There was a period during the early 2000s when Ramsay Street was full of bros in share houses. Just guys half-clad, always on their way to or from a neighbourhood pool. Perennial hottie Daniel MacPherson as Joel and his dorky sidekick Lance are my pick of the bunch. With Joel as his straight man, Lance evolved into a lovable oddball, meeting a girl at a sci-fi convention and subsequently creating his own sci-fi convention in the name of love and cosplay.

5. Karl Kennedy



The philanderer to gentle ditherer pipeline: muso-medico Karl Kennedy.
Photograph: Fremantle Media/Shutterstock

Although he's been through an image rehabilitation comparable to politicians in certain tabloid rags, Karl Kennedy will always be the man who betrayed Suze, and so I cannot, in good conscience, put him higher on the list. But as he matured from philanderer to gentle ditherer, he did grow on me. From his implausibly broad specialisation as a "physician" to his total disregard for doctor-patient confidentiality, this muso-medico will be remembered long after the tour buses stop coming.

4. Stingray Timmins

The whole Timmins family really belongs on this list, but Stingray is a character for the ages. He was, in some ways, a throwback to OG Neighbours – a bogan, a suburban bad boy who came good. And then he just bloody died in the only way a true Erinsborough local can – spontaneously at a street party after donating bone marrow to save his infant daughter from leukaemia, then donating his organs to a bit-part who was never seen again. Stingray gave us the gift of language that's still part of our vernacular today – not in the dictionary, sure, but in our spigging hearts.

3. Sonya Rebecchi

OK, she was a slow burn, but that's actually why she's so high on the list. In recovery from substance use, she became a guide dog trainer, the nicest job possible. After mysteriously falling in love with Toadie, she opened her own plant nursery, where she pottered about collecting cuttings and being friendly to customers. God, she was so lovely. Outraged by a threat to the community centre, where residents could learn self-defence and pole dancing, Sonya was eventually elected to her rightful role of mayor.

So beloved was she by audiences that Neighbours gave her a whole episode that culminated in a legitimately moving death scene, ultimately another victim of the curse of Toadie's wives.

2. The ghosts that definitely lived in Lassiter's Lake

There are two public spaces in Erinsborough: Lassiter's Complex, which contains every shop and restaurant in town, and Lassiter's Lake, which contains every engagement ring from every fraught Neighbours love story. I've been at Lassiter's Lake at night, and if you can drown out the sound of frogs and kids yelling at the nearby Timezone, you'll hear the mournful song of Kate Ramsay, brutally murdered in a rotunda. RIP.

1. Susan Kennedy



Jackie Woodburne as the inimitable Susan Kennedy – along with Margot Robbie's Donna Freedman (left). Photograph: FremantleMedia/Rex

It was one of the great privileges of my life to work with Jackie Woodburne, a fact I drop into conversation with friends, family and people at the dog park. Susan Kennedy was an icon. Whether she was seducing a priest, overcoming amnesia or carrying a pregnancy for her grieving daughter, she did so with grace and humility. An educator, a mentor, a leader. But being Ramsay Street's moral compass was only part of her complex character, and she was bold when it counted. Philandering husband? Slap him in the face! Then, job done, let a few more wayward teens move in.

Honourable mentions

Izzy Hoyland: One of Erinsborough's most memorable bad girls, Izzy, played by Natalie Bassingthwaite, had questionable taste in men (Karl, you rogue) but at least also the good sense to move as far away from them as possible.

Helen Daniels: Portrayed by Anne Haddy, Erinsborough's greatest ever guardian angel should be on this list, but I'm still recovering from her absolutely devastating death and might be forever.

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/culture/2022/jul/25/neighbours-the-10-best-characters-from-australias-beloved-soap-sorted>

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

Conservative leadership

Who could be in the next cabinet under Rishi Sunak or Liz Truss?

These are some of the figures tipped to be part of the two candidates' top teams



Liz Truss and Rishi Sunak will already have thought about who they would like around the cabinet table. Photograph: Getty Images

Aubrey Allegretti Political correspondent

Mon 25 Jul 2022 02.00 EDT

Though they wouldn't admit it, both Rishi Sunak and Liz Truss have already given serious thought to the cabinet ministers they will appoint when one of them wins the [Conservative leadership](#) contest in just over a month.

Both have to factor in requests for senior roles made by the MPs who endorsed them, ensuring factions from across the party are represented in a

bid to bring them together after a divisive contest, as well as considering who would fit best in each role.

With the winner inheriting a challenging situation for the [Conservatives](#) in the polls and for the country with spiralling inflation, who is sitting around the cabinet table will be of utmost importance for getting back on the road to recovery.

These are some of the figures tipped to be part of the two candidates' top teams.

Liz Truss's cabinet candidates



Kwasi Kwarteng.

Chancellor: Kwasi Kwarteng

Truss has the support of most members of the current cabinet, who remained loyal to Johnson to the end.

Among them is the business secretary, who authored the book *Britannia Unchained* with Truss in 2012 and is said to be in the running to become her chancellor.



Simon Clarke.

Business secretary: Simon Clarke

In a snub to his former boss, the financial secretary to the Treasury is vying with Kwarteng to lead the department.

He has called Sunak's criticism of Truss's tax cuts "project fear" and is supporting plans for these to happen more quickly.

If he loses out on the chancellor job, he could instead be made business secretary.



Thérèse Coffey.

Home secretary: Thérèse Coffey

The work and pensions secretary has a no-nonsense attitude and is often deployed on morning media rounds by the government when defending a tricky issue.

Given her performance in the role and that she was part of three-MP “guard of honour” for Truss when the foreign secretary made it to the final two, she is likely to stay in cabinet.

Experienced at running a large government department, she may be handed the role of home secretary.



James Cleverly.

Education secretary: James Cleverly

One of Johnson's staunchest defenders, Cleverly rose quickly through the ranks to become education secretary at the last reshuffle.

While his background is in the military and foreign affairs, the defence secretary, Ben Wallace, will probably stay on so he could remain in his current role.



Suella Braverman.

Work and pensions secretary: Suella Braverman

Already able to attend cabinet as attorney general, Truss is also likely to offer a full cabinet job to former leadership contender Suella Braverman to consolidate support from the right of the party.

One of the roles touted for her is work and pensions secretary.



Kemi Badenoch.

Levelling up secretary: Kemi Badenoch

If Truss keeps the title invented by Johnson, the candidate who came fourth in the leadership race would stand a good chance of a first foray into the cabinet.

Given how much untapped opportunity was part of Badenoch's pitch, the former levelling up minister is likely to be offered to lead that department.



Jacob Rees-Mogg.

Brexit opportunities minister: Jacob Rees-Mogg

Rees-Mogg is another minister who also already attends cabinet.

Truss may be keen to keep him in a beefed up Brexit opportunities role, given her pledge to expedite his existing plans to repeal all retained EU law.

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Rishi Sunak's cabinet candidates



Steve Barclay.

Chancellor: Steve Barclay

Having served in government under the current and previous two Conservative administrations, Barclay would be well placed to pick up a senior role from day one.

Though he stepped in as health secretary as Johnson tried desperately to fill cabinet vacancies, Barclay supported Sunak early in the race.

He has extensive experience in the Treasury and is talked of as a future chancellor.



Mel Stride.

Chief secretary to the Treasury: Mel Stride

As Sunak's campaign manager, Stride helped steer him through the parliamentary ballots and emerge as the frontrunner.

While having been on the backbenches for the last few years, given his experience running the Treasury select committee he would be a shoo-in for chief secretary to the Treasury.



Oliver Dowden.

Cabinet Office minister: Oliver Dowden

The former Conservative co-chair who quit after a disastrous double by-election loss that helped bring Johnson down has also been helping run Sunak's campaign.

Having been culture secretary and done stints in the Cabinet Office and Treasury, he is likely to make a return to the cabinet – possibly as chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster.



Robert Jenrick.

Justice secretary: Robert Jenrick

Sacked as a minister last year, Jenrick has been close with Sunak for some time.

The pair, along with Dowden, wrote a joint editorial in which they backed Johnson at the last leadership election and are a tight-knit trio.

Though given he was forced to abandon controversial planning reforms when communities secretary, Jenrick would probably be given another role. As a former City solicitor, justice secretary is one of those he has been talked about for.



Gavin Williamson.

Chief whip: Gavin Williamson

Another key figure who may be rewarded for their loyalty in helping run the whipping operation for Sunak is the former education secretary.

Williamson is known as a “master of the dark arts” – and, having been thrown out of government twice over a major security leak and the exam results chaos, he may be keen on a comeback in his role as chief whip.



Michael Gove.

Health secretary: Michael Gove

While he has yet to endorse a candidate, Gove was widely viewed as one of the most competent members of the cabinet and could be kept on.

Though sacked by Johnson for urging the outgoing prime minister to quit, Sunak could decide it is best to have an experienced pair of hands for a knotty policy brief such as health given the pressure public services are under and the increased scrutiny.



Penny Mordaunt.

International trade secretary: Penny Mordaunt

As a peace offering, the third-placed candidate in the Tory leadership race could be given a senior role.

She was previously defence secretary and already serves as a trade minister so could go on to lead the department.

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Interview

‘There’s never been a time when you could just say anything’: Frank Skinner on free speech, his bullying shame – and knob jokes

[Tim Jonze](#)



‘There is no excuse’ ... Frank Skinner on mocking footballer Jason Lee on Fantasy Football League. Photograph: Jill Mead/The Guardian

Poetry-loving, religious and with deep regrets about some of his comedy: either the standup comic has grown up, or he was never as laddish as his image suggested



[@timjonze](#)

Mon 25 Jul 2022 01.00 EDT Last modified on Mon 25 Jul 2022 11.07 EDT

It was while he was writing his latest Edinburgh show that [Frank Skinner](#) noticed a problem with his brain. He was hoping to perform a “cleaner, cleverer” kind of act, one that would let him look out at the crowd and – perhaps for the first time in his life – not see anybody squirming in their seat in discomfort.

“It was a struggle,” the 65-year-old says with a grin, “because I realised that I seem to think in knob jokes. And I have done since I was about 13. In the West Midlands, that was how people communicated!”

30 Years of Dirt is not, then, a compendium of Skinner’s best sex gags – of which there have been plenty over the years. Rather, it’s a comedic journey through his attempt to de-smutify his brain for the modern audience, a kind

of personal challenge: can he even be funny without talking about penises? It's only a loose, lighthearted theme, but it still feels refreshing in a world where many comics seem to think their sole purpose is to say the most offensive thing possible.

"I do wonder what all the fuss is about," he says, dismissing the idea that modern comedians have their free speech stifled. "I don't think there's ever been a time when you could just say *anything*." He recalls an early comedy show – this must have been in the late 80s – where the host apologised to the crowd after Skinner had performed some risqué sexual material. "He said I'd never play at the venue again – and then he launched into a load of racist material and brought the house down. Everyone's got their own standards and restraints. But I think it's been good for me to keep questioning what I say. It's made me think more."

Skinner meets me in a coffee shop near his north London home. On the way here he says he was spotted by a fan, who stopped to ask how he was doing. As the fan left, Skinner heard him say to his mate: "He used to be in Doctor Who."

"I'm guessing he means Capaldi?" Skinner ponders, looking at me for confirmation. Then his expression changes. "I hope it's not William Hartnell!" The actor who played the First Doctor, after all, would be 114 by now.

Skinner has been funny for as long as he can remember. As a teenager he used to bring props to the pub, or to the factory where he worked, to make people laugh: clingfilm dipped in beer might look like dangling snot after a fake sneeze; a Vicks inhaler up one nostril might work for a gag about ivory hunters. "That was my outlet then, doing a sort of improvised standup in the pub. I didn't know I was practising."

Growing up in Smethwick, an industrial town west of Birmingham, he had never thought of comedy as a viable career. Known to his friends and family as Christopher Collins (he stole his stage name from a member of his dad's dominoes team), he drank away most of his 20s, wondering what he was good at and where his life was heading. It was only as he turned 30 and

started telling jokes on stage that he realised all those wasted years were full of authentically grim material that was perfect for comedy.

His early shows were disastrous. But within a couple of years he had won Edinburgh's prestigious Perrier prize. Soon he was hosting his own long-running TV chatshow, and becoming a key figure in 90s "new lad" culture thanks to Fantasy Football League, the television show in which he and [comedy partner David Baddiel](#) sat around in a living-room set taking the piss out of footballers. How does Skinner look back on that era?



David Baddiel and Frank Skinner promoting their show Fantasy Football League in London in September 1997. Photograph: PA Images/Alamy

"I don't sit and watch my own things, but occasionally I've seen bits, and most of it, I can honestly say, I'd still do," he says. "But some stuff, no. On the chatshow, I did a weekly song as Bob Dylan and there were some complaints that [one of the songs] was homophobic. It went to Ofcom and they found it not to be homophobic. And I watched that back recently and I thought, no, no, that *was* homophobic – they got that wrong. But then other things we did get fined for I look at now and think it was unfair. So it's endlessly debatable."

He readily admits that he has made some terrible mistakes in more than 30 years as a comic. Take Skinner and Baddiel's treatment of Jason Lee, the black Nottingham Forest player whose lack of form on the pitch led to merciless mocking on Fantasy Football League and the popularising of a terrace chant about his haircut ("He's got a pineapple on his head"). One day, Baddiel even blacked up as Lee for a sketch, complete with a pineapple to represent his hair.



Skinner and his partner, Cath Mason, at the South Bank awards in London in 2016. Photograph: Danny Martindale/WireImage

"It was bad, yeah," says Skinner. "I spoke to Dave about it recently, from a how-the-fuck-did-that-ever-happen point of view. I still don't know how it happened. I know why we took the piss out of him, because I'd watched him on Match of the Day missing several goals, so a sketch about him being unable to put a piece of paper into a bin worked. But when Dave walked out from makeup [in blackface] that night, I still don't know why one or both of us or *someone* there didn't say what the fuck is happening?"

This racial aspect isn't the entire story, either, he admits. "I can't look back on it now without seeing it as bullying. There was a big response to it. People started to send in loads of pictures of pineapples, and so it ran and ran and ran. Looking back, it was a bullying campaign. And it's awful. And

yeah, I'm ashamed of it. And we've said that to each other without any Guardian journalist to impress. It wouldn't be too much to say we're both deeply ashamed."

In his 2001 autobiography, Skinner acknowledges the incident but glosses over it, even defends it from accusations of racism. Since then, he seems to have done some serious soul searching. This year, he told an audience at the Hay festival about growing up in Smethwick: "I used racist language, I was sexist, I was homophobic." That, he says today, was just how it was back in the 1970s.

"But when I talk about growing up in the West Midlands, there wasn't an alternative voice for me to either respond to or ignore." The Jason Lee incident, he accepts, was a different situation. "By then we'd come through the alternative comedy circuit, where 'non-racist, non-sexist' was the banner handle. So it's not like we didn't know. Because me and Dave *knew*."

I've never heard either of them talk like this in public. "We've never done the big public apology," says Skinner, who is still best mates with Baddiel. "Something doesn't sit well with me. They look a bit like union card apologies: 'I just need to keep working; I'll apologise for anything, just let me keep working.' I didn't want to be part of that."

He adds: "There is no excuse involved, though, because there is no excuse. Because I'm blaming us. But something I never hear mentioned in any of this is that we had a representative from the BBC in the audience every week. The BBC watched the show before it went out and OKed it. They were supposed to be a guiding hand, not letting us fuck up. But that's a side issue. It was a vendetta. An unintentional vendetta but still a vendetta."



Baddiel and Skinner kiss the tarmac at Rome's Ciampino airport ahead of England's 0-0 World Cup qualifying draw against Italy in 1997. Photograph: PA Images/Alamy

In reality, Skinner was never anything quite so simple as a new lad. Parts of his background – he has a masters in English literature; he is a practising Roman catholic – never fitted that description and so, he says, the press ignored it. These days, perhaps because of his age, he is allowed more space to talk about his cerebral passions. Poetry is one – he has written a short book on the subject (*How to Enjoy Poetry*) that deep-dives into Stevie Smith's nine-line work [Pad, Pad](#), and he also presents an engaging and accessible podcast on the subject, [Frank Skinner's Poetry Podcast](#). Was this part of a career plan to position himself as a more enlightened male?

He laughs at the idea. “I probably should have those big career thoughts, shouldn’t I? It actually came about by accident, but it’s ended up being the biggest labour of love job I’ve done.”

Skinner once had a chat with [Eddie Izzard](#) about what they could share about their lives on stage. The conclusion was that it was fine for Izzard to discuss wearing women’s clothes, but as for Skinner’s own religious beliefs? God, no. Yet recently even that position has shifted a little. Last year he published *A Comedian’s Prayer Book*, which features him talking to the

supreme being in his typically down-to-earth way (“I always liked that Jesus hung out with sinners. It made me feel potentially understood”). Does he feel more comfortable talking about God on stage now?

“*I think* it’s more acceptable,” he says, not entirely convincingly. “I do still feel a slight tension sometimes when I bring it up. I can feel it in the air.”

Still, he thinks it’s important that people get out there and talk about religion in the way they talk about other aspects of life. “One of the things religion has suffered from is being spoken of in grave terms constantly. I take it seriously, obviously, but I don’t take it seriously, if you know what I mean.”

I used to dream about [drinking] probably three nights a week. But funny enough, since I’ve had a kid, those dreams have faded away

Another thing that always fitted awkwardly with Skinner’s new lad tag: he’s been a teetotaler since the 90s. As a teenager, he had swiftly become a problem drinker, and during his 20s he would regularly wake up to a glass of sherry (or, later on, when things got really bad, a glass of Pernod). He says his life wasn’t miserable, it’s just that he had nothing in it for which to stay sober. His health was in a sorry state. Then his comedy career started and he knew he couldn’t risk messing it up. Still, the temptation to drink must have been everywhere, and Skinner has admitted that he has never found anything to recreate the buzz of getting drunk.



‘When I had a child, I was twice removed from my ego’ ... Skinner at the Amnesty International Secret Policeman’s Ball, London, 2008. Photograph: PA Images/Alamy

“I used to dream about it probably three nights a week,” he says today. “But funny enough, since I’ve had a kid, those dreams have faded away.”

Skinner spent his heyday sleeping around, often turning the encounters into gags in his act. But he has been with his current partner, Cath Mason, for about two decades now and they have a 10-year-old son, Buzz. I ask about the relationship, and he rather poetically describes falling in love as an out-of-body experience. “David Foster Wallace once said ... OK, he’s not the bloke you’d necessarily go to for happiness [the writer killed himself in 2008], but he talked about rising above a given situation, until you realise you’re not the main character there, but just an extra in a bigger scene. So with Cath, I met someone who I started to care about to the level where I felt them slightly foregrounded in my consciousness, and me slightly behind them. And if you’ve been through the celebrity process, it’s so unusual to not be the star of every scene in the film of your life. And of course then, when I had a child, I was twice removed from my ego.”

Skinner became a father at 55, by which point he had assumed the opportunity had passed. Not just because of age but because he and Cath

argued like mad. “I thought: we can’t bring a kid into *this*. Because apparently you’re not supposed to argue in front of them. Although my argument, speaking of arguments, is that it’s quite good for a kid to see you screaming at each other and then afterwards saying: ‘We’ve talked this through and we’re hugging again.’”

Skinner adored his own parents, who died a year apart from each other just before he had found proper fame. But his father was a drinker, a gambler and a fighter. It was rare that he became the target of his father’s rage, but it did happen occasionally.



‘It’s been good for me to keep questioning what I say’ ... Skinner.
Photograph: Jill Mead/The Guardian

“Hitting kids ... that’s another of those things that have changed,” he says. “The idea of hitting my own child is as ridiculous to me as the idea of me flying home from here unaided. But I didn’t think that when I was on the other end of it. It seemed normal. I don’t remember anyone ever airing the view that we shouldn’t hit our kids until ... I think the 1980s? It didn’t reach the West Midlands, that bit.”

“I love my dad,” he continues. “But there would be a moment around 10.40pm where there was a tension about what mood he would bring back

from the pub. I wouldn't want my kid to be remembering that."

Evolution is what Skinner is all about – people can change and they can grow. When he made his comments about racism and homophobia at Hay, he says, there was a slight backlash from some on the left. "Some people were apparently saying: 'Well, you never really grow out of that.' But to pretend that I am still the person I was then would be ludicrous."

And his jokes have evolved with him. The week before we speak, Skinner has been road-testing some of his new material. Debuting new stuff can be tricky, even more so when you've banned knob jokes. But a night or two ago he says he hit one of those magic moments where it all came together. "I couldn't get the material out quick enough," he says, before reaching for one last poetic metaphor. "When that happens, you can feel like an aeolian harp. It's as if the comedy universe is playing you."

Frank Skinner's 30 Years of Dirt is at the Assembly Roxy, Edinburgh, from 4 to 28 August. For more information and tickets go to frankskinnerlive.com

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2022.07.25 - Opinion

- [What the absurd class cosplay of Rishi Sunak and Liz Truss tells us about Britain](#)
- [Stewart Lee Tory death-priests have our lives in their hands](#)
- [For modern mothers, the toxic pull of the ‘momfluencer’ feels inescapable](#)
- [The Gaelic language is stunningly beautiful, but I just can’t get my tongue around it](#)

OpinionConservatives

What the absurd class cosplay of Rishi Sunak and Liz Truss tells us about Britain

[Nesrine Malik](#)

The UK's rampant class anxiety is enabling Tory leadership candidates who want to pretend we live in a meritocracy



Liz Truss and Rishi Sunak. Photograph: George Cracknell Wright/LNP/Andy Rain/EPA

Mon 25 Jul 2022 01.00 EDT Last modified on Mon 25 Jul 2022 07.00 EDT

One of the most bewildering things I've come across as an adult immigrant to the UK, after the price of train tickets and separate hot and cold water taps, is how people talk about class. British people from well-off backgrounds will drop, quite unprompted, into conversation that they went to private school but that it was a "cheap" one. Or that they went to a well-

known private school but were not as wealthy as the other students, because their parents couldn't afford skiing holidays. Or that they went to Oxbridge but did so from a comprehensive school and had parents with "normal" jobs. Once, someone gave me (unrequested) their class history, in which they described going from a charmed home life, to private school in London, to Oxbridge and then a job in the media, "but my parents gave me nothing". I have frequently and desperately wanted to ask, "Why are you telling me this?"

It took me a while living in this country to figure out what was going on. It wasn't class oversharing, but class discounting – a way for people to establish that their status, whatever it was, was earned and not bequeathed. Britain is a country of enormous wealth, much of it inherited. In fact, inherited family wealth is fast becoming, according to the [Institute for Fiscal Studies](#), the most important determinant of how well-off a person will be later in life. Britain is also a place where the alumni of a small number of expensive schools and exclusive universities hold a wildly disproportionate share of the nation's [power, wealth and top jobs](#).

The result is a privileged class anxiety. For the one in 10 UK adults born in the 1980s who will inherit from their parents more than half as much money as the average person earns in a lifetime, there is a constant need to pre-empt any impression that they are part of an entitled clique with the sort of money and connections that smooth their passage through life. Research [conducted by the LSE](#) last year looked into why almost half of people in middle-class professional jobs identified themselves as working class, even when a quarter of them had parents who had done similar jobs. The study identified a "[grandparent effect](#)", by which people from privileged backgrounds over-emphasised the working-class credentials of extended family members, even though they have little impact on an individual's life chances.

A particularly outrageous example of this is unfolding in the absurd class cosplay of Rishi Sunak and Liz Truss. Sunak, in an enormous reach, has to hark all the way back to his immigrant grandmother to ground himself in a rags to riches story. He likens the pharmacy [his mother owned](#) to the greengrocer's owned by Margaret Thatcher's father (the difference between groceries and pharmaceuticals is material in terms of class, but he has to

work with what he has). There was no way around his father's comfortable living as a GP, or his own eye-wateringly expensive education (at Winchester College, currently £45,936 a year for boarders), so Sunak, unfettered by the stubbornness of facts, offers this explanation; sure, his education was expensive, but his parents had to work hard and save for it. Only someone of truly out-of-this-world wealth can think that the difference between saving £45,000 and having it lying around is enough to confer upon you some sort of underdog status.

Truss is at it as well. Alumni of her old school, which Truss has claimed “let children down” through low expectations, have criticised her for misrepresenting the quality of schooling they received, and for her false claims that she grew up in a “red wall” seat. Truss’s fibs create her own class mobility mythology – one in which she made it to Oxford and into jobs at Shell and Cable & Wireless despite her childhood. “I was educated at a comprehensive school in the city and went to primary school in Scotland” she boasted to the Telegraph: “I got where I am today through working hard and focusing on results.” Her journey was only possible, she claims, “through aspiration, ambition and enterprise”. Nothing to do with the fact that she grew up in an expensive suburb of Leeds, in a comfortable family, with a father who was a professor of mathematics, and attended a school that at its worst was labelled “satisfactory” by Ofsted.

It’s a bit unedifying poring over the details of people’s family backgrounds and financial arrangements, but the nerve of the prospective Tory leaders’ claims, clearly checkable and in the public domain, forces you to do so. But then again, these statements are merely the kind of liberties an entire British social class takes when it is quite normal to say “I have bought a flat”, instead of “my parents have bought me a flat” (and no, it still doesn’t count if you are paying the mortgage).

This normalised dishonesty about how much of your success is down to the stability, networks and affluence of your family is not a harmless national quirk. It is a class disavowal that props up the entire corrosive myth of meritocracy – the belief in which enables and absolves cruel governance and mean citizenry. On a political level, rightwingers fetishise hard work and careful saving to bolster their belief that the state should not support those

who cannot work hard or save because, well, it's their own fault. On a personal level, we are less inclined to vote for politicians who want to share resources more equitably if we convince ourselves that our wealth is a result of good graft rather than good fortune. Note how Britons celebrate lower-class backgrounds – real or imagined – in the most individualistic way. British folktales about class mobility – of the types Sunak and Truss are peddling – become then not a call to marshal attention and capital towards mitigating the difficult conditions that made rising upwards such hard work for others, but a glorification of the individual who made it out, and then, a stick with which to beat those who didn't.

The most delusional part of this performance is the idea that class says something so definitive about a person's values or politics that it, alone, would make them suitable to lead. As the sociologist Stuart Hall wrote: "There's no permanent, fixed class consciousness. You can't work out immediately what people think and what politics they have simply by looking at their socio-economic position." Whatever Sunak and Truss's class, Sunak does not want to give immigrants the right to come to this country to have a shot at our great meritocracy, Truss believes that British workers are among the "worst idlers in the world", and both enthusiastically supported a lying prime minister. That is all the personal history that counts.

- Nesrine Malik is a Guardian columnist
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[The Observer](#)[Conservative leadership](#)

Tory death-priests have our lives in their hands

[Stewart Lee](#)

Surely last week's inferno must focus Conservative minds on the one real issue, the climate crisis – mustn't it?



Illustration by David Foldvari.

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“Dear Jim’ll. Please can you fix it for me to a) Go all upside down in a Typhoon plane like in *Top Gun*; b) Go in parliament drunk with my best friend Nadine and shout “boring” at the square politicians; c) Have a massive party with all food in a massive stately home for free; d) Give all my friends lordly old-sounding titles like in *Game of Thrones*; e) Get Winston Churchill’s autograph. I haven’t heard about any of the bad stuff relating to you by the way, so jog on! Yours Boris Piccaninny Watermelon Letterbox Wall-Spaff Deep-State Letterbox Johnson (58 years old).” Well

done. Now go. Go. Can you just... Just go. Go. Don't start playing the piano. There are your shoes. Have you got your water bottle? Go. Just go.

I believe it was I who wrote, [in this column on 19 August 2018](#), before the Brexiter foreign secretary Boris Johnson was even prime minister, “Those in positions of power – journalists, fellow Conservative party members wondering how things will pan out, people biding their time on the divided opposition benches, trembling television presenters in search of ‘balanced arguments’ in the face of blatant lies and transparent manipulation – know what this incubus is and what it is doing, and how it is prepared to put our futures at risk to achieve it. And yet they do not hold Boris Piccaninny Watermelon Letterbox Johnson to account. They will not shrink Boris Piccaninny Watermelon Letterbox Johnson to snuff box size and sink him into the black lake of legend where he belongs. They will have to live with their failure. And, sadly, so will we.” Though I take no pleasure in having so conclusively predicted the chaos Johnson would ultimately unleash, I am happy to be paid twice for the same 117 words.

Johnson leaves behind him a Conservative party stripped of talent, containing only psychopaths, compliant yes-people loyal to an egomaniac, and those too tarnished and damaged to seek gainful employment elsewhere. It is like the worst lineup of the Fall ever. And I speak as a fan. Now the party must dredge a solid from the chodbin to serve as a leader, like a plumber reaching down into a blocked toilet bowl hoping he can scoop out a clump of filth firm enough to sculpt into the shape of something presidential, a poodoo doll for the European Research Group’s proto-fascist plans.

Will we still be sending refugees to Rwanda if they arrive from a burned-out village inside the M25?

One of the few good things about the delayed climate change inferno finally sweeping fatally across the frazzled UK is that it may focus the minds of those involved in the idiotic moron burlesque of this year’s Tory party leadership hustings; a sick medieval ritual where bits of rotten meat on sticks, covered in black flies and alive with grey maggots, are waved in front of baffled peasants who have no say in which one will finally be garlanded

with flowers by a secret cabal of geriatric life-hating death-priests, or the Conservative party membership as you call them.

At the start of the week the British far right's anti-woke candidate of choice, the equal-opportunities offender Kemi Badenoch, [was unable to commit](#) to the 2050 net zero target, still hung up on the idea that it was uncompetitive to lead the world on this issue. We will need to be competitive when we are bartering our teeth for old bits of melted Tupperware full of boiled urine in a scorched wasteland of soggy asphalt and bent railway tracks. And when everything is on fire again next year, will we still be sending refugees to Rwanda if they arrive from a burned-out village inside the M25?

“Hello. This is reception. Just a quick call to let you know your bed is on fire.” As Britain finally got its belated climate crisis wake-up call, the stupidity of wasting any time debating penises, toilets, wokeness, the Rwanda dead cat, and redoing Brexit, whatever Brexit is supposed to mean this week, was exposed. There is only one real issue. The imminent death of all life on earth. Then there’s a massive drop off before you hit the next most important thing, the even more imminent cost of living crisis. Then everything else is irrelevant. Everything will die. Everything. Enjoy your anti-woke toilets. Twats.

And yet... The *Daily Mail* [ran a think piece](#) blaming the Met Office for “spreading alarm and scolding us with doom-laden lectures” by someone called Stephen Robinson, his role as a “speech writer and consultant” for “companies operating in the energy sector” glossed over; luxury communist Ash Sarkar winced patiently, as if at a foolish baby, on *Jeremy Vine* as TalkRadio’s Mike Parry trashed net zero and cited Romans seeing sunspots and growing vines in Scotland or something; and the *Daily Telegraph*’s Christopher Hope, whom no one addresses by his nickname of “Chopper”, appeared on Sky News blaming the wildfires on someone dropping a cigarette. Repeatedly? All over the country?

The pursuit of false balance in the climate change debate (there is no debate) finally drove even the BBC placeman Andrew Marr into the accommodating arms of LBC, where he now bleats truth to power like a heroic lamb: “[I for one have had enough](#) of being told by pallid, shadowy old businessmen and lazy, ignorant hacks and sleazy lobbyists – who aren’t real scientists, any of

them – that the science is wrong, and that what is happening, isn’t happening. Enough... And if you don’t believe me go outside, why don’t you, and have a brisk walk right now.” Andrew! Calm down!! Don’t have a brisk walk!!! And for God’s sake don’t try to work out your frustrations on the rowing machine!!!! We need you!!!!

Only 4% of the Conservative party members, who choose our next prime minister, say hitting net zero is one of their top three priorities. It’s too late isn’t it? We are already dead.

Edinburgh fringe shows, and dates for the 2022/3 show, *Basic Lee*, are [all on sale](#)

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

[Republic of Parenthood](#)[Social media](#)

For modern mothers, the toxic pull of the ‘momfluencer’ feels inescapable

[Rhiannon Lucy Cosslett](#)



From postpartum photographs to ‘golden hour’, it’s hard to remember that the perfect lives on Instagram are heavily curated



‘Social media has transformed the way my generation views parenthood.’
Photograph: mrs/Getty Images

Mon 25 Jul 2022 03.00 EDT Last modified on Mon 25 Jul 2022 03.14 EDT

I recently overheard a conversation between some older women about photographs taken early in motherhood. Several expressed regret that they didn’t have more pictures from that time, even though they weren’t, they said, looking “their best”. One woman lamented how she destroyed the photographs of her holding her new baby because she hated her appearance, and said she profoundly regrets this now. It made me sad, speaking as it did to the fact that women feel subject to the external, scrutinising gaze of others, even at such momentous events in our lives.

At least these photos were usually only shared with friends and family; now images like these have a potential audience of millions. I can’t imagine anything more exposing than putting such intimate photographs online, but the perfect postpartum photo has become as fetishised on social media as the perfect “golden hour” between mother and baby (meaning skin to skin contact immediately after the birth) is idealised.

Social media has transformed the way my generation views parenthood, just as women’s magazines and TV advertising did for older generations. “Momfluencer” Instagram accounts – most of them run by white, slim,

attractive women with immaculate houses and perfectly dressed children – are in your feed even if you don't follow them. In many ways they hark back to the 1950s, projecting an image of domestic contentment, where mothers and daughters dress the same (called “twinning”) and, having dispensed with work outside the home, embody a “trad wife” aesthetic (internet trend speak for “traditional wife”).

Other posts instruct you to breastfeed at all cost, promise you the secret to postpartum weight loss, or tell you they can solve your babies' sleep problems. (I set my age to 112, so for a long time the ads I got were for wills and hair dye, but the algorithm seems to have sussed it, either believing me to be a miracle of modern science, or an unusually engaged great-grandparent.)

Other mothers tell me that [Instagram](#) has been incredibly destructive to their mental health, and in some cases their physical health. Some hypnobirthing influencers scaremonger about medical intervention to the point where women are refusing the care they need (the same influencers were cited again and again as examples of irresponsible, unscientific, unmedicated birth lobbying). One woman tells me she became obsessed with “wake windows”, an unscientific, rigid approach to baby sleep that is popular on social media, and spent hundreds of pounds on sleep courses. Another tells me “milestones” became a preoccupation, and she would lie in bed at night comparing her child's motor skills with others'. Fitness is another area rife with toxicity, from babies being used as dumbbells during couples' workouts (“I feel guilty, ashamed of the fourth biscuit and ultimately flick Instagram off in a huff – resolved to be a spherical unfit mess for the foreseeable,” one mother, Jen Mitchell, tells me), to “bleak” captions about strengthening babies' abdominal muscles.

Another woman tells me she takes issue with the ubiquitous phrase #makingmemories, and how it “calls into question all the parents who are screaming into pillows or, like me, vaping in the locked toilet at 10am just for five minutes of alone time”. The hashtag seems to demand that mothers enjoy this precious time. The same woman tells me that a friend with postnatal depression once spent all night scrolling through motherhood-related posts, “wishing she had that life, the life where your house was clean

and your baby slept. I couldn't believe what she was saying, how could she believe that that was all real?"

As well as carrying the weight of a baby, any mother with a smartphone carries with her a portal into the #blessed lives of others, which serves to highlight – especially in a cost of living crisis where parents are struggling to feed their children – what we do not have. It can be so hard to remember that it's all fake, that we never see the photographs of the cupboard full of junk or the child reprimanded for sticky fingers. The bottle of formula and the antidepressants in the nightstand remain hidden; no one is recording the hours of hair and makeup, the lack of spontaneous joy in a life consisting of curated "moments".

My own mother boggles at the sheer amount of information available to us now, in contrast to her era, where you usually had a few secondhand books, at least one of which would end up thrown across the room. How are you supposed to learn to trust your own instincts, she wonders, when you are surrounded by so many opinions?

Of course, social media can provide crucial support, as in the case of groups for those who have experienced baby loss, or accounts that document parenting children with special educational needs. One woman tells me how Instagram helped her identify her postnatal anxiety, when midwives and health visitors spoke only of postnatal depression. Lots love @biglittlefeelings for toddler behaviour tips, the nurse and lactation consultant Lyndsey Hookway, the author Sydney Piercy, and the nutrition and weaning expert Charlotte Stirling-Reed. Many women tell me they've unfollowed some accounts, or deleted the app altogether. A useful question to ask is: "Does this make me feel better, or worse?" If the answer is worse, unfollow or uninstall.

Earlier this year, a New Yorker [article](#) looked at the phenomenon of the "hidden mother" in photographs, from women in the Victorian era covering their faces with fabric to appear inconspicuous in infant portraits, to the modern phenomenon of the mother always being the one behind the camera, absent from the visual narrative of family life, because nobody takes her photo, or she fears she will look ugly. You could argue that "momfluencers" are taking control of the way motherhood is represented, but that doesn't

take into account how backwards the iconography of so many of these images are. Weren't we supposed to resist becoming the angel in the house, rather than smugly show off the wings we've been #gifted?

And then, at the risk of sounding hand-wringing, what of the children whose entire lives are documented without consent? Whose parents spend hours posing, editing, uploading, monitoring responses? What will be the mental health impact of making a child a “public figure” from the moment they are born? The first “Mommie Dearest” memoir for the Instagram era cannot be far off.

What's working

The baby loves the sensory toy Captain Calamari, a multicoloured octopus designed by developmental experts, to the point that he'll instantly stop crying when it's placed in his field of vision. It's one of the best “new baby” presents we received, and it's really coming into its own now he's four months old.

What's not

I have officially had cabin fever. Leaving the house is still a struggle, as the baby now hates his bassinet and wants to look around, but is too small for a pushchair. I find myself praying for cloudy days, so at least we can have the shade down and he can look at the leaves on the trees.

- Rhiannon Lucy Cosslett is a Guardian columnist and author
- *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*

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

Why I quitLanguages

The Gaelic language is stunningly beautiful, but I just can't get my tongue around it

[Jenny Colgan](#)

After years of trying to master the language of my Scottish forefathers, the unpronounceable vocabulary may have finally defeated me



‘When I started my first attempt at learning the language in the 1980s, about 80% of the inhabitants of the Western Isles spoke it. Now, about 40% do.’ View over the Isle of Lewis, Scotland. Photograph: Murdo MacLeod/The Guardian

Mon 25 Jul 2022 05.00 EDT Last modified on Mon 25 Jul 2022 13.45 EDT

In common with my two terriers, I never give up anything, however much my harp teacher, publishers (40 books and counting) or husband (way out of my league) might think I ought to. Doctor Who readers once got a petition

up to stop me writing Doctor Who (I have not stopped writing Doctor Who). But everyone meets their Waterloo sooner or later, and this is mine.

Gaelic is the language of my forefathers, and my husband's: his grandfather was born on Mull in 1849. It is the original language of the country I live in and deeply love. Not only that, but it is in itself beautiful: musical to listen to, descriptive and exquisite. The very colour spectrum is different. *Liath* means blue or grey, because it is the word for the colour of the sky or the sea. Likewise *gorm* is blue, but also the colour of the grass. And *dearg* is reddish brown, like the earth, but *ruadh* is the red of your hair.

It also has an elegant, simple grammar. There are no words for “yes” or “no” and all verbs are infinitives. Things simply are or are not. *Tha* – it is the case that. *Chan eil* – it is not.

There is no difference between “I” and “me” or “she” and “her”. Nouns don't require “a” or “the” in front of them. There is no verb “to have” – something is either at you, or upon you. Which is actually rather lovely. Your job is on you – *orm* – rather than being you.

Its beauty aside, the learning of Gaelic is also incredibly important now. When I started my first abortive attempt at learning the language in the 1980s, about 80% of the inhabitants of the Western Isles spoke it. Now, about 40% do. The SNP has plastered *Ambaileans* and *Poileas* over every official vehicle, but this is papering over very severe cracks. All our own Peigis and Dohmnalls are leaving us in Scotland, and we need to work hard to replace them in the next generation.

Over 1.2 million people all over the world have, like me, downloaded the excellent Scots Gaelic Duolingo app. And I completed it! Can I now speak Gaelic? Can I *bollagan*. That wasn't even my first attempt. I also took a year at university, which I passed only by virtue of learning off by heart all the English-language poems in the textbook then pretending to “translate” them.

It is not the will. It is not the grammar. It is the absolute, insane, unpronounceable vocabulary that turns me into a total dunce. When I was at school, the first thing you learned in French was how to order in a cafe. I

feel it is unlikely that you summon a waiter by hollering “garçon!” these days (or get served if you do), but in Gaelic, that’s pretty much the last thing you’d get to, because the word for waiter is, wait for it, *neach-frithealaidh*. Or if you want the wine waiter, *neach-frithealaidh-fion*.

Other phrases that are generally handy to take with you when travelling are equally out of reach: *gabh mo leisgeul* (“excuse me”) is unlikely to trip off the tongue when you’re trying to squeeze past someone. *Meala-naidheachd!* is pretty hard to find when all you want to say is “congrats!”

Spider in French: *araignée*. In Italian: *ragno*. In German: *spinne*. In Gaelic: *damhan-allaidh*.

I have [BBC nan Gàidheal](#), the excellent Gaelic radio station, on in the car all the time (the phone-ins are not useful, but the afternoon show is traditional music, often new work from great musicians like Julie Fowlis or Kris Drever, and is just brilliant whatever language you speak).

When I lived in France and had to learn the language so my children didn’t have to take me to the doctor, I found the radio so useful because it repeats news and weather every 15 minutes. But *soleil* for sun and *vent* for wind felt relatively easy to glom on to. Yet in Gaelic, while I can handle the mellifluous *clachan-meallain* (hailstones), *ceothath*, *gaothach* and *reothadh* (fog, wind and ice) remain indistinguishable to me. (There is, in fact, a word for sunny – *a grianach* – if, for whatever reason, you find yourself speaking Gaelic abroad). As for the news, I cannot get past “... agus Nicola Sturgeon ann an Holyrood ...”

I wouldn’t mind, but my books are often set in (fictional) Scottish isles where people speak it casually, which means I am being made to feel even more of a fraud *by my own characters*.

There must be a way of simply becoming less stupid. I have an unopened book on my shelf that taunts me every time I look at it. Learn Gaelic in Six Weeks! it says. Six weeks! Come on. I can do it! Now all we need is another *glasadh-sluagh*.

- Jenny Colgan is a novelist, journalist and occasional radio pundit
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This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2022/jul/25/why-i-quit-gaelic-language-for-fathers-vocabulary>.

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

2022.07.25 - Around the world

- [California wildfires Oak fire remains uncontained as governor declares state of emergency](#)
- [Heatwave North-eastern US braces for record-breaking temperatures](#)
- [Diana Kennedy Influential guru of Mexican cuisine dies at 99](#)
- [France Government orders air-conditioned shops to save energy by shutting doors](#)

Wildfires

California fire crews make progress against ferocious Oak fire near Yosemite

Fire burning near famous national park exploded in size over weekend but crews achieved 10% containment Monday morning

California wildfire explodes near Yosemite and Sierra national parks – video

[Gabrielle Canon in Mariposa](#)

Mon 25 Jul 2022 16.29 EDTFirst published on Mon 25 Jul 2022 00.30 EDT

Firefighters made progress against a ferocious wildfire in the foothills of the Sierra Nevada that forced thousands of residents from their homes in the gateway to Yosemite national park.

The Oak fire started on Friday near the town of Midpines, [California](#), and exploded in size over the weekend.

Burning through dense and dry vegetation on the region's steep and rugged hillsides, the blaze was fanned by gusty winds and temperatures that hovered around 90F (32C). The extreme nature of the fire meant it turned tall trees into matchsticks and sent billowing black smoke curling over the quaint historic downtown of Mariposa.

[Map of active wildfires in Yosemite National Park.](#)

But weather conditions improved on Sunday night, and by Monday morning, a heavily resourced firefighting effort achieved 10% containment.

Since Friday, the blaze has consumed more than 16,700 acres. More than 3,000 people were under evacuation orders.

More than 2,000 first responders from state and federal agencies were battling the blaze, attacking it both from the ground and the air. At least 10

homes and other structures had been destroyed, with thousands remaining at risk in its path.

“The growth of this fire is pretty amazing given the fact of how quickly we had resources here,” said Chief Mike van Loben Sels of the Madera Merced Mariposa unit of California’s fire and forestry protection (CalFire). He noted that embers and spot fires were igniting more than a mile ahead of the blaze. “We really threw everything at this thing from the beginning,” he said.

The [fire is one of dozens burning](#) across the American west as the region braces for peak fire-risk months that still lie ahead. More than 5.5m acres have already burned in the US this year, roughly 70% more than the 10-year average.



An air tanker drops retardant to try to stop the Oak fire reaching Lushmeadows. Photograph: Noah Berger/AP

California, a state that in recent years has faced intensifying threats from behemoth blazes, had seen a lighter-than-normal start to its highest-risk season. Spring rains offered a reprieve, delaying the onset of what officials still fear will be another devastating fire year. The Oak fire has showcased how quickly things can change.

On Sunday the California governor, Gavin Newsom, [declared a state of emergency](#) for the area, allowing for the deployment of thousands of emergency personnel.

The cause of the fire remains under investigation.

Firefighters working in steep terrain on the ground protected homes Sunday as air tankers dropped retardant on 50ft (15-meter) flames racing along ridgelines east of the tiny community of Jerseydale. Personnel faced tough conditions that included steep terrain, sweltering temperatures and low humidity, CalFire said.

Light winds blew embers ahead into tree branches “and because it’s so dry, it’s easy for the spot fires to get established and that’s what fuels the growth”, said a CalFire spokesperson, Natasha Fouts.

Smoke drifted about 200 miles (322km) north toward Lake Tahoe and the same distance west into the San Francisco Bay Area, pollution control officials said.

“Hazy skies may be visible and the smell of smoke is possible at high elevations,” the Bay Area Air District said on Twitter.

Thousands remained under evacuation, awaiting word for when they could return home. Miles away from the flames, fire crews and officers had prepared for the fire’s spread, marking mailboxes with descriptive pages that could aid in the firefight.

The forms include information on if there’s access for large fire trucks, if occupants had vacated the area, whether the property posed any extra risks with visible hazards like propane tanks or overhead power lines, and if a water source was available for use.

In the chaos, a local man named Ron, who declined to share his last name, left behind his medication and his dog Duke, an ageing labrador mix with a bad hip.



Ron and Duke after being rescued from their home during the Yosemite Oak fire. Photograph: Gabrielle Canon/The Guardian

“When he was left behind I couldn’t get anybody to help,” Ron said, adding that he had suffered a stroke and still gets disoriented. “But that’s my baby, man.”

CalFire officers Shayon Ascarie and David Janssen came to Ron’s aid, rushing the man back to his evacuated hillside home as the fire crept closer. Helicopters zigzagged overhead and planes dropped fire retardant on the slopes above as the firefighters helped Ron wrangle the terrified Duke into the back of their pickup and grab his pill boxes, before they ferried the duo back down the mountain to safety.

Janssen and Ascarie, who hail from different parts of California but were assigned as partners for the incident, spent the rest of the morning traversing through the towns to post the latest maps and answer questions for a public hungry for information. Along with supplying essential intel, big-incident firefights also often require rescues like Duke’s. “It is part of the job, you are just in the right place at the right time,” Janssen said, adding: “I have a feeling this isn’t going to be the last one.”

Throughout the town of Mariposa, people huddled around their A-frame information posts sharing stories and offering their thanks for the ongoing firefighting effort. Flags flapped overhead, turning what might have otherwise been a breezy reprieve on a hot summer's day into another foreboding sign that the fire loomed close.



Firefighters Shayon Ascarie and David Janssen at the Oak fire. Photograph: Gabrielle Canon/The Guardian

Further up the highway, a roadside diner called Steve's Sportsman's Café had become a de facto hub for locals, both those displaced by the fire and others watching and waiting. Outside, a motorcyclist shared videos of his harrowing close call with the fire. It spared his home but claimed his shed, where priceless keepsakes – his grandfather's fishing poles and guns – had been housed. "Still, it could have been a lot worse," he said, shaking his head as he walked into the restaurant.

From behind the cash register, Tracy Heidseck dished details on how power outages caused by the blaze did their own kind of damage. "We already lost all our food in our fridge and our freezers," she said, adding that her well had also run dry and there wasn't even water to flush toilets. This was one part of fire threats, which she said loom large year after year, that takes a toll. "I am just exhausted," she said. "I have no water and no power."

But the community – and the restaurant – have come together during this trying time. Steve Knauf, who owns the diner, ambled over to offer his support. “There’s been a lot of hugs and tears the last couple of days,” he said, adding: “But, it is like one big family in here.”

The Associated Press contributed to this report

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/jul/25/california-wildfires-oak-fire-remains-uncontained-as-governor-declares-state-of-emergency>.

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

US weather

North-eastern US endures record-breaking heat

One heat-related death reported in New York while authorities in Philadelphia extend health emergency declaration



Temperatures rise in Hoboken, New Jersey. Photograph: Anadolu Agency/Getty Images

Associated Press in New York

Sun 24 Jul 2022 16.50 EDTFirst published on Sun 24 Jul 2022 13.28 EDT

From the Pacific north-west to the southern Great Plains and on to the heavily populated Interstate 95 corridor, more than 85 million Americans were on Sunday under excessive heat warnings or heat advisories issued by the National Weather Service (NWS).

The agency warned of “extremely oppressive” conditions from Washington to [Boston](#).

Even in Promised Land State Park, 1,800ft up in Pennsylvania’s Pocono mountains, temperatures were forecast to soar above 90F (32C). But with shade from the forests, cool lake water and mountain breezes, it was more than tolerable, visitors said.

Rosa Chavez, 47, a high school teacher in Manhattan, applied sunscreen at a beach on Promised Land Lake. She and her friend Arlene Rodriguez had just experienced Europe’s own heatwave while vacationing last week in Italy.

“The heat is following us,” said Rodriguez, 47, a real estate agent and property manager.

Numerous record highs were expected to be tied or broken in the US north east, the NWS said.

Philadelphia was forecast to hit 100F (38C) on Sunday before even factoring in humidity. Newark, New Jersey saw its fifth consecutive day of 100F or higher, the longest such streak since records began in 1931. Boston also hit 100F, surpassing the previous daily record high of 98F set in 1933.

At least one heat-related death, in [New York](#), was reported. Around the region, athletic events were shortened or postponed.

Philadelphia officials extended a heat emergency through Sunday, sending workers to check on homeless people and other vulnerable residents. The city opened cooling centers and stationed air-conditioned buses at four intersections.

Forecasters urged people to wear light clothing, drink lots of water, limit time outside and check on elderly people and pets.

The mayor of Boston, Michelle Wu, declared a heat emergency through Monday and kept a dozen cooling centers open.

Organizers of the New York City Triathlon shortened the distances athletes had to run and bike. The Boston Triathlon was put off until 20-21 August.

On the west coast, forecasters warned of extreme heat until next weekend. Temperatures could break daily records in Seattle, Portland and northern California by Tuesday and be the highest since a heatwave last year killed hundreds.

Many homes in the often-rainy region lack air conditioning and authorities cautioned that indoor heat is likely to build, increasing the risk of heat-related illnesses.

Chavez, in Promised Land, said she has asthma and needs to keep her inhaler around, especially “when the heat is so thick I can’t breathe”. The breezes and clearer air in the mountains help, she said.

The heat was withering less than an hour away, at lower elevations. In Scranton, Pennsylvania, Sunday’s high was expected to be 97F (36C), and not below 70F (21C) at night.

“That also leads to the danger. People aren’t getting that relief overnight,” said NWS forecaster Lily Chapman. “That stress on the body is kind of cumulative over time.” The area also has been drier than usual, she said.

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2022/jul/24/north-eastern-us-record-breaking-heat-health-warnings>

Mexico

Diana Kennedy, influential guru of Mexican cuisine, dies at 99

Politicians and chefs pay tribute to the ‘Indiana Jones of food’, who helped preserve and popularise Mexican recipes in the English-speaking world



Diana Kennedy, pictured in her garden in Michoacán in 1990, has died.
Photograph: Paul Harris/Getty Images

[Sian Cain](#) and agencies

Mon 25 Jul 2022 01.36 EDT Last modified on Mon 25 Jul 2022 06.58 EDT

Diana Kennedy, the British-born food writer who dedicated her career to promoting the richness and diversity of Mexico’s culinary heritage and helped to popularise the national cuisine in the English-speaking world, has died aged 99.

The Mexican culture ministry confirmed Kennedy’s death at her home in Michoacán and paid tribute to her legacy, saying that she, “like few others”,

understood that conserving nature and its diversity was crucial to upholding the myriad culinary traditions of Mexico.

The cause of death was not shared.

During her lifetime, Kennedy was referred to as the “Julia Child of Mexican cuisine”, “the Mick Jagger of Mexican cuisine” and even the “Indiana Jones of food” – the latter from the renowned chef José Andrés, one of many figures in the culinary world who applauded her life efforts on Sunday.

“She loved Mexico, Mexicans and Mexican cooking like no one!” Andrés wrote. “Her books open a window into the soul of Mexico! She gave voice to the many Mexican cooks, specially women. She was my teacher and already miss her. Will cook together one day again!”

Kennedy was born Diana Southwood in Loughton, England in 1923 and emigrated to Canada in 1953. That same decade she moved to Mexico after marrying New York Times journalist Paul P Kennedy. Her husband died in 1967, and Kennedy spent years living in Michoacán, a rugged state in western Mexico.

Having fallen in love with the country and its cultures, she worked to preserve native ingredients and traditional recipes under threat from growing urbanisation, and spent decades documenting cuisines she found in villages, markets and homes across Mexico in books including *The Cuisines of Mexico* and *The Art of Mexican Cooking*.

She was renowned for her dedication and precision, sometimes driving hundreds of miles from Michoacán to check a single ingredient or measurement; her last book *Oaxaca al Gusto* took 14 years to research. Often, the home cooks she met on her trips would be fascinated by this passionate, slightly pushy Englishwoman who asked so many questions about their food, and would often invite her to stay and cook with them, sometimes for days. Whenever she published a recipe, she always acknowledged who had shared it with her.

In the foreword to *The Cuisines of Mexico*, the late food writer and friend Craig Claiborne wrote of Kennedy: “If her enthusiasm were not beautiful, it would border on mania.”

Kennedy once wrote that she was “surprised and very happy that the Mexicans themselves use my books, and are so generous in acknowledging, as they say … what I have done for their regional cuisines.”

Arturo Sarukhan, a former Mexican ambassador to the US, described the death of the “great” Kennedy as a “huge loss for Mexico, the UK and Mexican gastronomy”.

“She changed the narrative and perceptions of Mexican cuisine from a bland mish-mash of TexMex towards a sophisticated tapestry of regional cuisines” as rich as those celebrated in China, India, France or Italy, Sarukhan told Reuters.

Josefa Gonzalez Blanco, Mexico’s ambassador to Britain, called Kennedy a “remarkable woman” who had put her “heart and soul” into her work.

Kennedy won many prizes during her lifetime, including the Mexican Order of the Aztec Eagle, the country’s highest award for foreigners, which the Mexican government honoured her with in 1981.

In 2002, Prince Charles visited Kennedy at her home to appoint her an MBE, for “furthering cultural relations between the UK and Mexico”. She served him tequila aperitifs, tortillas, cream of squash blossom soup, pork loin baked in banana leaves and mango sorbet.

— Reuters contributed to this report

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/jul/25/diana-kennedy-influential-guru-of-mexican-cuisine-dies-at-99>

[**France**](#)

France orders air-conditioned shops to save energy by shutting doors

Minister says open doors lead to 20% more consumption as restrictions on illuminated signs also announced



Agnès Pannier-Runacher called the waste of energy due to open doors ‘absurd’. Photograph: Ludovic Marin/AFP/Getty Images

[Jon Henley](#) in Paris

Mon 25 Jul 2022 06.58 EDTFirst published on Mon 25 Jul 2022 03.06 EDT

Air-conditioned shops throughout [France](#) will have to keep their doors shut or risk a fine of €750 (£635), a French minister has announced, after the mayors of several major cities unveiled a similar rule during the country’s heatwave last week.

Agnès Pannier-Runacher, the minister for ecological transition, said leaving doors open with air conditioning on led to “20% more energy consumption

and ... is absurd". A decree confirming the decision will be issued in the coming days.

It follows recent announcements by the mayors of Paris, Lyon and other cities. Anne Hidalgo, the Socialist mayor of Paris, last week denounced "an aberration that must cease in the context of the climate emergency and energy crisis".

Municipal police in the capital have already begun issuing €150 fines after Dan Lert, a deputy mayor in charge of the green transition in Paris, and the rest of the council expressed outrage over a "vast, irresponsible waste of energy".

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French electricity is cheap because of the country's use of nuclear power, which produces about 70% of its needs, but the Russian gas crisis has prompted the president, Emmanuel Macron, to demand an energy "sobriety programme".

Retail outlets including major supermarkets have already agreed a plan under which they will switch off illuminated signs "as soon as the store closes" and "systematically reduce lighting intensity" by reducing shopfloor lighting levels.

Public premises will also be required to set thermostats higher in summer and lower in winter, while the public will be expected to turn off their wifi router and TV when they are away and switch off lights in rooms they are not using.

As part of the plan, aimed at reducing French power consumption by 10% within two years, Pannier-Runacher said on Sunday she would also issue a decree banning illuminated advertising between 1am and 6am everywhere except in railway stations and airports.

Yves Marignac, of the négaWatt thinktank, which recommends ways to reduce energy consumption, told France Info public radio the minister's announcements did not amount to "miracle measures" but were certainly more than symbolic.

"We are talking about measures likely to reduce consumption by a few per cent in a sector which itself represents a few per cent of French consumption," he said. "But it's important precisely because it's only by working all the levers that we will collectively achieve this objective."

Marignac added that what was also significant in Pannier-Runacher's remarks was the implicit reminder that "we have lived for decades in this promise of abundant energy, and have completely lost sight of the reality of our energy consumption".

Closing the doors of air-conditioned commercial premises was obviously "common sense", he said. "When a government has to remind us of this, it shows how far down the cheap, harmless energy route we have travelled."

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Headlines thursday 28 july 2022

- [Conservatives Nadine Dorries suggests Rishi Sunak was part of ‘coup’ to oust Boris Johnson](#)
- [Liz Truss Leadership candidate promises to build Northern Powerhouse Rail scaled back last year](#)
- [Live Business: British Gas owner Centrica’s profits soar as UK households face winter energy bill pain](#)
- [Shell Oil company posts almost £10bn quarterly profits as households struggle with bills](#)

Conservative leadership

Nadine Dorries suggests Rishi Sunak was part of ‘coup’ to oust Boris Johnson

Culture secretary and Liz Truss backer says Tory MPs made ‘huge mistake’ removing prime minister

- [Politics live: latest updates](#)

Nadine Dorries: Boris Johnson was removed via a 'coup', says cabinet minister – video

*Aubrey Allegretti
@breeallegretti*

Thu 28 Jul 2022 04.05 EDT Last modified on Thu 28 Jul 2022 05.31 EDT

Nadine Dorries has suggested Rishi Sunak was part of a “coup” that brought down Boris Johnson, and said Conservative MPs made a “huge mistake” removing the prime minister.

The culture secretary, who is one of Johnson’s most avid supporters, said he was a “great leader” and she was “very disappointed” he would be stepping down on 5 September.

But Dorries said they had to look to the future and hailed [Liz Truss](#) as “somebody who has both integrity and loyalty and is able to pick up the baton using those very important qualities to take the country forward”.

Despite having made pointed criticisms of Sunak that have intensified a blue-on-blue slanging match between the two Tory leadership camps, Dorries tried to avoid being drawn in to criticising the former chancellor.

“It’s not a secret that things happened that shouldn’t have happened and that [Boris Johnson](#) was removed via a coup,” she told Sky News when asked for her view on Sunak.

Despite being told about a YouGov survey that found Johnson had a net favourability rating of -90% among 2019 Tory voters who plan to switch to Labour at the next election, Dorries said “I don’t actually take an awful lot of notice” of polls.

She said “there’s only one that matters”, which was the last general election result where the [Conservatives](#) clinched an 80-seat majority. Dorries said the UK had lost a leader who helped secure that victory, led the UK through Covid and offered support to Ukraine after Russia’s invasion.

But speaking from Birmingham, where the Commonwealth Games will take place [from Thursday](#), the culture secretary declined to be drawn any further on her public criticism of Sunak.

She said the Commonwealth Games and England football team preparing for the [Euro 2022 final on Sunday](#) meant that “the next few days are not about leadership, they’re about showcasing what is great about this country”.

The Tory leadership race “will go on all through the summer”, Dorries said, adding: “It’s a really important day and I think we should be focusing on the positives.”

The interview was cut short after an altercation with a man off-screen who could be heard arguing with the camera operator filming the Sky News interview. “I’m afraid we’re going to have to go now,” she said.

A man could be heard shouting: “Touch me then? You can’t because they’ll have you arrested for assault.”

Dorries replied: “He’s not touching you,” before looking around and asking for security.

The man responded: “He can’t touch me, madam, what do you mean he ain’t touching me? He can’t, I’ll have him arrested in five seconds flat.”

Dorries doubled down on her attacks on Sunak in a later interview, saying the “ruthless coup” against Johnson was “led largely” by the former chancellor.

She stood by criticising him for [wearing a pair of Prada shoes](#) on a visit to Teesside earlier this month, saying it was “one of our most socially deprived areas”, and added: “If you’re going to be prime minister of this country, you have to understand people’s lives, you have to have walked in their shoes.”

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Dorries defended owning a pair of expensive shoes herself, saying: “I am not and never will be running to be prime minister.”

She suggested it was not impossible Johnson could return as prime minister in the future. “They used to say a week was a long time in politics but a few minutes is a long time in politics these days. Who is going to be foolish enough to predict the future?” Dorries said on BBC Radio 4’s Today programme.

Despite some Tory members pushing for him to feature on the leadership ballot paper, Dorries said she had been explicitly told by Johnson within the last few days: “Tell them to stop, it’s not right”

She also played down the suggestion Johnson would serve in cabinet after he stands down in five weeks, and described a report in the Daily Mirror that he was seeking a safer seat in parliament as “100% nuclear-grade tosh”.

Victoria Atkins, a former Home Office minister who quit as part of the wave of resignations that toppled Johnson, said the reason a leadership contest was being held was because of the conduct of the prime minister and those around him.

“I don’t think we can pretend otherwise, nor should we pretend otherwise,” she told Sky News.

Atkins, who is supporting Sunak, said she did not agree with Dorries’s comments about a coup, but said – with a smile – that her colleague had “a very exuberant range of language”.

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2022/jul/28/nadine-dorries-suggests-rishi-sunak-part-of-coup-oust-boris-johnson-liz-truss>

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

Conservative leadership

Liz Truss revives promise to build Northern Powerhouse Rail

Tory leadership frontrunner commits to building Liverpool-Hull line, nine months after government scaled back plans



Liz Truss visiting a broadband interchange company in Leeds. Photograph: Ian Forsyth/Getty Images

[Josh Halliday](#) North of England correspondent

Thu 28 Jul 2022 06.44 EDTFirst published on Thu 28 Jul 2022 05.30 EDT

Liz Truss has committed to building Northern Powerhouse Rail if she becomes prime minister, nine months after her government radically scaled back plans for a high-speed line across the north of England.

The Tory leadership frontrunner said the multibillion-pound coast-to-coast line, stretching from Liverpool to Hull, was “absolutely crucial for the future of the north of England”.

Speaking in Leeds, where she grew up, on Thursday, Truss said: “I know how poor the transport is and, frankly, it’s not got much better since I was a teenager getting the bus into Leeds city centre.

“What I want to see is really fantastic rail services, better roads so people are able to get into work.

“I also want to stop militant action by the trade unions, so that hard-working people who do the right thing can get into work, set up businesses and help grow our economy.”

Truss told the Northern Agenda newsletter before the first hustings debate for Tory members in Leeds: “I want to build an aspiration nation that unleashes opportunity for all, no matter where you live or where you grow up. We need to drive growth and business investment to bring new and better jobs to the north.

“We will build the Northern Powerhouse Rail to link up communities and unlock potential across the north. That’s how we will bring better jobs to the north and address productivity.”

Truss did not explain how her government would pay for the new rail network, which was previously expected to cost about £30bn and be completed between 2029 and 2040. When pressed by reporters, she promised to “fix the Treasury’s funding formula” so that the north received a fairer share of transport investment.

[Map](#)

The commitment came as Truss received the backing of Jake Berry, the former northern powerhouse minister who leads a caucus of Conservative MPs based in the north of England.

Berry, the Tory MP for Rossendale and Darwen in Lancashire, had been an ally of Boris Johnson but in November accused the prime minister of failing to keep his manifesto pledge to build Northern Powerhouse Rail, originally made under David Cameron’s government in 2014.

The government faced cross-party condemnation in November when it radically scaled back the original vision of Northern Powerhouse Rail, slashing its budget by £24.9bn and replacing plans for a new line with a promise to upgrade the existing network.

A high-speed line across the north of England is seen as critical to the government's mission of levelling up and any attempt to close the productivity gap between London and everywhere else. It can take longer to travel from Liverpool to Hull by train than from the north of England to Paris.

Truss's pledge to build Northern Powerhouse Rail was widely welcomed by northern leaders, although the Conservative mayor for Tees Valley, Ben Houchen, pointed out that both she and Rishi Sunak had made the same commitment weeks ago.

The chief executive of the Northern Powerhouse Partnership, Henri Murison, said: "The outgoing prime minister broke his promises to the north when he published the integrated rail plan.

"Liz Truss had promised Ben Houchen she backed Northern Powerhouse Rail, and although she served in the cabinet at the time is now promising to reverse the outgoing PM's cuts to what former Conservative leaders and chancellors had sought as part of the original northern powerhouse plan.

"This would bring back government support for this vision of a single travel-to-work area across the Pennines, driving up productivity to secure growth for UK plc."

Labour's metro mayors in the north, including Andy Burnham and Tracy Brabin, wrote a joint letter to Truss and Sunak calling for a meeting with the successful candidate to "agree a better way forward for the north".

They said the government's integrated rail plan, which scaled back the region's coast-to-coast line in November, caused "huge disappointment".

They wrote: "This is a critical decision that will affect the lives of generations of northerners to come."

In response to criticism of the government's rail plans, a Department for [Transport](#) spokesperson said: "The government's £96bn integrated rail plan is the largest single rail investment ever made by a UK government, and this report significantly underplays the benefits it will bring to millions of passengers for generations to come.

"The plan, which is backed by detailed economic analysis, is already benefiting our regions with 26,000 jobs created for the HS2 project alone, and will deliver transformational benefits to communities across the north and Midlands, far sooner than under previous plans."

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2022/jul/28/liz-truss-promises-to-build-northern-powerhouse-rail-scaled-back-last-year>

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

[Skip to key events](#)

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

Biden says US economic slowdown due to Fed inflation-fighting measures – as it happened

US president says growth affected by moves to tackle inflation as US enters technical recession

- [US GDP falls in second quarter as country enters technical recession](#)

Updated 3d ago

Graeme Wearden

Thu 28 Jul 2022 11.22 EDTFirst published on Thu 28 Jul 2022 02.28 EDT

Key events

- [3d ago](#)
[Closing post](#)
- [3d ago](#)
[Deutsche Bank: US recession "almost a slam dunk" over next 12 months](#)
- [3d ago](#)
[Biden: No surprise economy is slowing as Fed fights inflation](#)
- [3d ago](#)
[Full story: Dockers at UK's largest container port vote to strike in August](#)
- [3d ago](#)
[Rees-Mogg: very important to keep Felixstowe Port open](#)
- [3d ago](#)
[US falls into technical recession](#)

- [3d ago](#)
[Staff at Britain's biggest container port vote to strike in pay dispute](#)
- [3d ago](#)
[Two-hour queues at Dover ahead of 'extremely busy' weekend](#)
- [3d ago](#)
[TUC: Eye watering energy profits an insult](#)
- [3d ago](#)
[Eurozone economic sentiment signals a recession is near](#)
- [3d ago](#)
[Eurozone recession nears as confidence tumbles](#)
- [3d ago](#)
[Full story: Shell posts £10bn quarterly profits as households struggle with bills](#)
- [3d ago](#)
[AA: record fuel prices force motorists to cut back](#)
- [3d ago](#)
[FT: West London faces new homes ban as electricity grid hits capacity](#)
- [3d ago](#)
[British Gas sets aside more money for bad debts](#)
- [3d ago](#)
[Centrica profits soar in 'most challenging energy crisis in living memory'](#)
- [3d ago](#)
[Shell's refining profit margins triple](#)
- [3d ago](#)
[Introduction: Shell reports record profit of \\$11.5 billion](#)



A person on the floor of the New York Stock Exchange. Photograph: Timothy A Clary/AFP/Getty Images

[Graeme Wearden](#)

Thu 28 Jul 2022 11.22 EDTFirst published on Thu 28 Jul 2022 02.28 EDT

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[10.04](#)

Biden: No surprise economy is slowing as Fed fights inflation

President Joe Biden says it isn't a surprise that the US economy is slowing as the Federal Reserve acts to bring down inflation.

In a statement on today's GDP report ([showing the US economy has shrunk this year](#)), Biden points out that recent rises in US interest rates have slowed growth.

But he also argues that the US is on the 'right path', with a strong jobs market and growing consumer spending.

#BREAKING President Biden says US economy 'on the right path' despite GDP dip pic.twitter.com/U9lwrhg1cb

— AFP News Agency (@AFP) [July 28, 2022](#)

Biden says:

Coming off of last year's historic economic growth – and regaining all the private sector jobs lost during the pandemic crisis – it's no surprise that the economy is slowing down as the Federal Reserve acts to bring down inflation.

But even as we face historic global challenges, we are on the right path and we will come through this transition stronger and more secure. Our job market remains historically strong, with unemployment at 3.6% and more than 1 million jobs created in the second quarter alone. Consumer spending is continuing to grow.

Earlier this week, I met with the Chairman of SK Group from Korea, just one of the companies investing more than \$200 billion in American manufacturing since I took office, powering a historic recovery in American manufacturing.

The president ends by urging the House to [approve legislation to support the US semiconductor industry](#) quickly:

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- [3d ago](#)
[Closing post](#)
- [3d ago](#)
[Deutsche Bank: US recession "almost a slam dunk" over next 12 months](#)
- [3d ago](#)
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- [3d ago](#)
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- [3d ago](#)
[Rees-Mogg: very important to keep Felixstowe Port open](#)
- [3d ago](#)
[US falls into technical recession](#)
- [3d ago](#)
[Staff at Britain's biggest container port vote to strike in pay dispute](#)
- [3d ago](#)
[Two-hour queues at Dover ahead of 'extremely busy' weekend](#)
- [3d ago](#)
[TUC: Eye watering energy profits an insult](#)
- [3d ago](#)
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- [3d ago](#)
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- [3d ago](#)
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- [3d ago](#)
[AA: record fuel prices force motorists to cut back](#)
- [3d ago](#)
[FT: West London faces new homes ban as electricity grid hits capacity](#)
- [3d ago](#)
[British Gas sets aside more money for bad debts](#)
- [3d ago](#)
[Centrica profits soar in 'most challenging energy crisis in living memory'](#)
- [3d ago](#)
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[3d ago](#)[11.21](#)

Closing post

Our US Politics Live blog is tracking the latest developments, including the GDP report:

So here's a reminder of today's main stories, including the US economy shrinking for the second quarter in a row:

The threat of industrial action at the UK's biggest container port, adding to trade problems:

Anger over the surge in profits posted by energy giants [Shell](#) and Centrica, as UK households face soaring bills and potential shortages this winter:

Plus:

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[3d ago](#)[10.45](#)

The (technical) recession in the US might continue in 2022, fears Professor Costas Milas of the Management School at University of Liverpool.

He tells us that US growth might become very anaemic for the next two years or so, due to monetary policy tightening (which [president Biden pointed to earlier](#)).

Between April and July 2022, the Fed raised its main interest rate by 2 percentage points in total. [Recent academic research](#) finds that such a cumulative hike is expected to reduce GDP in the US by 1.4% within two years.

However, there are spill-over effects to the rest of the world. In fact, this very monetary tightening in the US is expected to reduce GDP in advanced economies (including the UK, of course) by 1% within three years.

Bank of England's MPC members should take these effects into consideration when they decide on UK interest rates in early August.

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[3d ago](#)[10.43](#)

The prospect of a strike at Felixstowe port next month will alarm UK companies, and would drive up shipping costs.

So warns **Simon Geale**, executive vice president for procurement at consultancy **Proxima**:

“News of a potential strike at Felixstowe will send some British businesses into a spin. The port is not just Britain’s largest, it is the largest by quite some margin, handling twice as many Twenty Foot Equivalent (TEU) containers as Southampton in second place.

Felixstowe was one of the hardest hit ports globally during the pandemic due to the lack of alternative capacity and its “deep water” capacity suitable for large vessels. Over the last two years we have seen ships diverted to Europe and goods returned by alternative means, such as smaller vessels, road or air, none of which are looking particularly attractive at the moment.

We’re principally looking at delays, which will mean sustained pricing impact.”

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[3d ago](#)[10.29](#)

Deutsche Bank: US recession "almost a slam dunk" over next 12 months

The US isn't **officially** in recession yet, but you have to go back to 1947 for a time when two successive quarters of negative growth haven't been classed as a recession by the National Bureau of Economic Research.

So points out **Jim Reid** of **Deutsche Bank**, who has deftly produced this chart:

DB's Jim Reid on today's second consecutive negative GDP print:

"However today's chart shows that since we have quarterly data from 1947, there have never been 2 successive negative quarterly prints without it being included in the official NBER recession definitions."
1/2 pic.twitter.com/GwXKykGBXu

— André Dragosch⚡ (@Andre_Dragosch) [July 28, 2022](#)

Reid's team have been warning that a US recession was imminent for a while, but they're not convinced we're in a 'proper' one yet:

Q1 was negative partly because of a surge in demand for imports. Final sales to private domestic purchasers (c.90% of the economy) was up a healthy 3% (q/q) in Q1 but was flat in Q2, although not quite as bad as the actual print. Of course, I'm a scratch golfer outside of my driving, approach play, short game and putting, but these are extraordinary times.

We still think a recession is almost a slam dunk over the next 12 months but want to see more evidence of employment rolling over before we would call the current US environment a recession.

However today's chart shows that since we have quarterly data from 1947, there have never been 2 successive negative quarterly prints

without it being included in the official NBER recession definitions. In fact it's been rare to have negative GDP quarters at all outside of a recession as you can see in the graph.

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3d ago [10.23](#)

The number of Americans filing new unemployment claims is running at its highest levels of the year, as rising interest rates hit the jobs market.

There were 256,000 ‘initial claims’ for jobless support last week, the Labor Department reports.

The previous week’s figures were revised up too, to 261,000 from 251,000 ([which was already an eight-month high](#)).

US Jobless Claims 256k (est 250k, last 261k from 251k)
US Continuing Claims 1.36m (est 1.39m, last 1.38m)

Jobless claim is up since mid March, so labor mkt is weakening.....
errrrrr! pic.twitter.com/B1d4O8KDul

— Mario Cavaggioni (@CavaggioniMario) [July 28, 2022](#)

[**#NEW**](#) Weekly jobless claims slip from 8-month high, still higher than expected. [@USDOL](#) reports 256k Americans filed initial unemployment claims last week, down 5k from previous week but higher than 249k expected

Continuing claims fell by 20k to 1.36 million in week ending July 16

— Greta Wall (@GretaLWall) [July 28, 2022](#)

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[3d ago](#)[10.04](#)

Biden: No surprise economy is slowing as Fed fights inflation

President Joe Biden says it isn't a surprise that the US economy is slowing as the Federal Reserve acts to bring down inflation.

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My economic plan is focused on bringing inflation down, without giving up all the economic gains we have made. Congress has an historic chance to do that by passing the CHIPS and Science Act and Inflation Reduction Act without delay.

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[3d ago](#)[09.47](#)



The New York Stock Exchange. Photograph: John Minchillo/AP

Wall Street has taken the US's fall into a technical recession in its stride.

The **Dow Jones industrial average**, which tracks 30 major companies, is just 0.04% higher in early trading, while the broader **S&P 500 index** is down a very modest 0.05%.

Traders may take the view that a weaker US economy means fewer hefty interest rate rises in the months ahead.

Hugh Gimber, global market strategist at **J.P. Morgan Asset Management**, says:

“When is a recession not a recession? The box has been ticked for two quarters of negative GDP growth, and yet the US economy added 2.7 million jobs over the same period. While we may have to wait several months for the judgement from the National Bureau of Economic Research, it has been clear for some time that the US economy is losing momentum.

“At yesterday’s FOMC meeting, Jerome Powell emphasised that the committee is not only willing, but rather hoping to see enough cooling in the economy in order to bring inflation back down. Today’s report will not deter the Fed from feeling that it has more work to do over the course of the autumn, and I expect the additional 100 bps of tightening indicated by the Fed’s dot plot to be delivered by year end.

“Yet looking further out, both growth and inflation dynamics are likely to be signalling that a less aggressive approach from the Fed is required as we move into 2023. For markets, earnings forecast downgrades in order to better reflect the weaker macro backdrop still pose a risk over the coming months, but investors will take some comfort from the fact that the most aggressive moves from the Fed may now be behind us.”

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[3d ago](#)[09.42](#)

Biggest drag in GDP is residential investment. In short, higher rates are crashing housing supply. That's gonna out continued upward pressure

on rent - causing 1) pain for the 50% of renters that already can't afford to pay the bills and 2) fuel more inflation.

— Mark Paul (@MarkVinPaul) [July 28, 2022](#)

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[3d ago](#)[09.41](#)

Full story: Dockers at UK's largest container port vote to strike in August



Robert Booth

Dockers at the UK's largest container port have voted overwhelmingly to strike after they were offered a below inflation pay rise in the latest industrial dispute sparked by the cost of living crisis to bring national transport infrastructure to a halt.

Workers at the port of Felixstowe in Suffolk balloted 92% in favour of a strike next month, rejecting a 5% pay-rise offer from the Felixstowe Dock and Railway Company which their union, Unite, said would be a real-terms pay cut with retail price inflation [standing at 11.8%](#).

[More here.](#)

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[3d ago](#)[09.30](#)

Rees-Mogg: very important to keep Felixstowe Port open

Back in the UK, Cabinet Office minister Jacob Rees-Mogg has warned that [a strike at the Port of Felixstowe](#) would be very damaging

Rees-Mogg also argued that the “1970s’ approach to labour activity” being taken by unions isn’t the answer to inflation, following today’s vote for industrial action at Britain’s largest container port.

He told the BBC Radio’s The World At One programme:

“This is part of the problem with inflation, and inflation is a major problem for the economy, and it feeds through to increase wage demands and to tensions in the labour market.

Rees-Mogg added that it is very important to keep Felixstowe Port open.

“The strike would be extremely damaging to the whole UK economy and the supplies to this economy, and it would have a direct effect on people’s lives. I am concerned about the 1970s’ approach to labour activity that’s coming from the unions, with a certain degree of support from the Labour Party at the moment.

“I don’t think this will prove the answer to inflation, as it wasn’t in the 1970s.”

But back in May, a leading economist at the International Monetary Fund has insisted that wages do not have to be suppressed to avoid a wage-price spiral.

Gita Gopinath, told the World Economic Forum in Davos that it’s possible to have a situation where wages rise and prices do not, as company profits, she said, could reduce instead.

Inflation, after all, is a measure of price rises, not wage rises....

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3d ago[09.23](#)

Rob Clarry, Investment Strategist at wealth manager Evelyn Partners, argues that the US is not yet in recession, although [two quarters of negative growth is the ‘technical’ definition.](#)

After the White House took the unusual step of releasing a blog on its website last week that outlined the definition of a recession, speculation that we would see US GDP fall for a second quarter in a row, resulting in a ‘technical recession’, started to increase.

Today’s release proved this speculation to be well founded, as the US economy contracted by 0.9% on a quarter-on-quarter (annualised) basis. This was driven by weak readings for investment, government spending, and inventories.

However, importantly, consumer spending held up. This is arguably the most important indicator of underlying growth, so this can be taken as a positive from a disappointing set of data. In addition, labour markets remain robust providing further support to the economy.

Despite this negative reading, we don't think the US economy has entered a recession yet. The NBER is tasked with deciding this and the indicators it tracks include real personal income minus government transfers, employment, various forms of real consumer spending, and industrial production. None of these indicators are pointing towards a recession at this moment in time.

Larry Adam of Raymond James makes a similar point:

Back-to-back negative quarterly GDP results with today's -0.9% 2Q results. Recession? We do not think so (nor do we believe the NBER will classify it as one), as healthy job creation and positive industrial production continue to support the economy.
pic.twitter.com/Q4mQzKTftN

— Larry Adam (@LarryAdamRJ) [July 28, 2022](#)

We'll have to wait for the **National Bureau of Economic Research's** official verdict, sometime in the future....

US real [#GDP](#) fell by 0.9% in Q2, the 2nd straight quarterly decline. Is the economy in a [#recession](#)? That is determined by the NBER and the data is subject to revision. There is precedent for the economy shrinking 2 straight quarters without a recession, but last time was 1947. pic.twitter.com/zi3FU5qU91

— Cetera Investment Management (@ceteraIM) [July 28, 2022](#)

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[3d ago](#)[09.19](#)

The big picture, Allianz's Mohamed El-Erian points out, is that the US is falling deeper into stagflation.

Message is clear from the negative US GDP print (-0.9%) and unfavorable miss on jobless claims:

The US [#economy](#) is slowing at a significant rate.

Add to that the 8.7% price change in today's data and the bottom line is clear:

Deepening stagflation and flashing red [#recession](#) risk

— Mohamed A. El-Erian (@elerianm) [July 28, 2022](#)

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1
of
5

[Next](#)

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Shell

Shell and Centrica post profits totalling £11bn as households struggle with bills

British Gas owner reinstates dividends after operating profits of £1.3bn, while Shell reports £10bn profit between April and June



Climate activists disrupted Shell's general meeting at Methodist central hall in London in May this year. Photograph: Vuk Valcic/Alamy

Jasper Jolly

@jjpjolly

Thu 28 Jul 2022 09.51 EDTFirst published on Thu 28 Jul 2022 03.19 EDT

Shell made record profits of nearly £10bn between April and June and promised to give shareholders payouts worth £6.5bn as the oil supermajor benefited from the surge in energy prices prompted by Russia's invasion of [Ukraine](#).

The FTSE 100 company made adjusted profits of \$11.5bn (£9.5bn) during the second quarter of the year, beating its previous high – set between January and March – by 26%. The profits were more than double the same period in 2021, and higher than expected by analysts.

It has been a period of roaring trade for Shell and other major oil and gas companies, in contrast to struggling households and much of the rest of the economy. Higher energy prices have [caused inflation to soar to 40-year highs](#) in the UK and elsewhere, and which threaten to tip economies into recessions across much of the world.

[Shell's quarterly profits chart](#)

British Gas owner [Centrica](#), also a member of the FTSE 100, on Thursday reinstated its dividend as it reported bumper operating profits of £1.3bn during the first half of 2022 thanks to higher prices for the oil and gas it drills.

[Centrica's half-year profits chart](#)

Chris O’Shea, Centrica’s chief executive, said it was “the most challenging energy crisis in living memory” even as his company reported its highest adjusted operating profits since 2013.

The scale of the oil companies’ profits prompted the UK government to eventually give in to [demands for a windfall tax](#) to redistribute some of the profits, although some senior Conservative ministers are thought to favour removing the tax, amid a leadership campaign that will lead to a new prime minister and cabinet in September.

The windfall tax – known as the energy profits levy – did not come into force until 14 July, meaning the companies’ second-quarter profits and payouts to shareholders were not affected.

The sector has remained a bonanza for oil companies and their shareholders. [Shell](#) investors received \$7.4bn in the first quarter of 2022 and will receive another \$6bn in a share buyback and \$1.8bn in dividends announced on Tuesday.

Shell said it had experienced “higher realised prices, higher refining margins and higher gas and power trading”.

Vladimir Putin’s invasion means Shell may have to [abandon its stake in the Sakhalin-2 gas project](#) with Russia’s Gazprom as well as petrol stations in the country. Yet the recognised costs of abandoning Russia are \$4.3bn – just over a third of the profits Shell has made in three months after Kremlin troops entered Ukraine. The company had already booked costs worth \$4.2bn related to its withdrawal from Russia, but it increased this estimate by only \$111m in the second quarter of the year.

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Shell said it expected the tight energy market was here to stay. It added \$4.3bn to its income attributable to shareholders to account for higher than expected prices in the mid- and long-term “reflecting the current energy market demand and supply fundamentals”.

Ben van Beurden, Shell’s chief executive, recognised the “huge challenges for consumers, governments and companies alike” caused by the “volatile energy markets”, but argued that the company was “using our financial strength to invest in secure energy supplies which the world needs today, taking real, bold steps to cut carbon emissions and transforming our company for a low-carbon energy future.”

Centrica’s dividend payment will be worth about £59m to shareholders. It made £900m during the quarter from its oil and gas drilling arm, which it is in the process of selling off part of.

Centrica’s retail business, under the British Gas brand, has also had to deal with extra costs because of an [influx of customers from smaller energy suppliers](#) who failed to prepare for higher prices.

It gained 158,000 new accounts when it took over the responsibility to sell gas and electricity to Together Energy’s customers.

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/business/2022/jul/28/shell-posts-10bn-quarterly-profits-as-households-struggle-with-bills>

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

2022.07.28 - Spotlight

- [GoT vs LOTR Who will win the epic battle of the spin-offs?](#)
- ['Standup was a weapon to him' Ian Cognito, the comedian who died on stage – literally](#)
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Game of Thrones v Lord of the Rings: who will win the epic battle of the spin-offs?



One show to rule them all? Morfydd Clark as Galadriel in Lord of the Rings: The Rings of Power. Photograph: Amazon Prime Studio

Hundreds of millions of dollars have been flung into making prequels of the fantasy franchises. But which will triumph? Or, with no familiar characters, could both end in disaster?

[Steve Rose](#)
[@steverose7](#)

Thu 28 Jul 2022 01.00 EDT Last modified on Thu 28 Jul 2022 11.03 EDT

‘We thought the war, at last, was ended,’ says Morfydd Clark’s elf queen Galadriel in the trailer for Amazon’s new [Lord of the Rings](#) series, but she really ought to know better. High fantasy thrives on tales of epic battle, but this autumn a different kind of showdown is taking shape. Rather than good v evil or elves v orcs, a clash of eye-wateringly expensive streaming series is on the cards, the likes of which we have never seen before.

At one end of the field is Lord of the Rings: The Rings of Power, Amazon’s lavish, long-awaited prequel to JRR Tolkien’s hugely successful fantasy saga. At the other is House of the Dragon, HBO’s lavish, long-awaited prequel to George RR Martin’s hugely successful fantasy saga. In what appears to be a deliberate head-to-head, the 10-part House of the Dragon will debut on 21 August, two weeks before the eight-part The Rings of Power launches, which means the two series will reach their respective climaxes the same week. Who will be the victor? Do we have room for both? Or, in fact, either? And who has the most to lose?

At this stage, the final question is the easiest to answer. The most talked-about aspect of The Rings of Power so far has been its budget. It is by all accounts the most expensive show ever made. Amazon has spent more than \$1bn (£820m) on it, including an estimated \$462m for the first season alone. That works out at nearly \$60m an episode. House of the Dragon looks frugal by comparison: an estimated \$20m an episode. This is still at the upper end, though: the final seasons of [Game of Thrones](#) came in at about \$15m an episode, Disney’s Marvel and Star Wars miniseries have cost between \$15m and \$25m an episode, and Peter Jackson’s original Lord of the Rings trilogy cost less than \$100m a movie.

For most networks, Rings of Power would be betting the farm, but whereas rivals such as HBO, Disney and Netflix live and die by the success of their content, [Amazon](#) is primarily a retail business, with almost bottomless reserves of cash.

Money is no object for Amazon, but prestige and intellectual property are, says Julia Alexander, the director of strategy at Parrot Analytics. “What Amazon is trying to do is what many of these companies are trying to do – which is develop the next big franchise that they can then spin off into films and merchandising and games and really create a flywheel effect. So to that extent, The Rings of Power is a very, very important move. It’s Amazon coming into the fold and saying: ‘We can compete with the Marvel and Star Wars, and the Harry Potters. We’re willing to spend that money.’”

It was Amazon’s deep pockets and desire for its own franchise properties (along with Jeff Bezos’s personal love of Tolkien, reportedly) that saw it outbid rivals (including HBO and Netflix) [to secure the rights to Tolkien’s Middle-earth mythology for \\$250m in 2017](#). However, these rights only cover the “second age” of Middle-earth lore – a period centuries before the “third age” in which the Hobbit and Lord of the Rings stories take place. As a result, Rings of Power cannot incorporate familiar characters such as Gandalf or Bilbo Baggins. There are a few exceptions – Clark plays a younger version of the elf queen Galadriel, who was played by Cate Blanchett in Jackson’s trilogy – but the second age was only vaguely sketched out by Tolkien in a 150-page postscript to The Lord of the Rings, known as the Appendices, so Amazon is in effect starting from scratch. The challenge, as co-showrunner Patrick McKay put it, was: “Can we come up with the novel Tolkien never wrote and do it as the mega-event series that could only happen now?”

Coincidentally, House of the Dragon faces a similar predicament. Like Rings of Power, it is a prequel. It is adapted from Martin’s 2018 book Fire and Blood, which is set 200 years before the events of Game of Thrones. So again, it will not include any familiar characters or storylines. Instead, House of the Dragon focuses on the Shakespearean succession battles of the house

Targaryen, led by Matt Smith, Paddy Considine, Olivia Cooke and newcomer Emma D'Arcy.

Despite the rivalry, crossover between these two franchises runs deep. Martin admits his fiction was heavily influenced by Tolkien. "I yield to no one in my admiration for The Lord of the Rings," [he told the Edinburgh international book festival](#) in 2014. "I reread it every few years. It's one of the great books of the 20th century." Martin's fantasy arguably embraces more moral and political complexity than Tolkien's (and, of course, more sex and violence), but is set in a similar quasi-medieval realm of swords, sorcery, fantastical beasts and strange names.

It was the success of Jackson's Lord of the Rings movies that convinced HBO there was a market for a grownup fantasy series. So their ears pricked up when, in 2006, screenwriters David Benioff and DB Weiss pitched their adaptation of Martin's books as "Sopranos in Middle-earth". The pendulum has now swung the other way: the stellar success of Game of Thrones has had rival streamers seeking more of the same. In 2017, the Amazon Studios chief, Roy Price, [told Variety his orders from Jeff Bezos](#) were effectively, "Bring me a Game of Thrones." Amazon has already had one stab at a high-fantasy franchise: last year's Wheel of Time, adapted from Robert Jordan's novels (for a mere \$10m an episode), and led by Rosamund Pike. It is being renewed for a second series, but so far has not quite crossed over into the mainstream.

Amazon is starting from scratch production-wise as well as story-wise, which partly explains the show's colossal budget. Unlike House of the Dragon, which can refer to a decade of world-building experience from Game of Thrones, Rings of Power has had a whole new fantasy world to establish: costumes, props, characters, sets, locations, the look and feel of the show, teaching actors to speak Elvish, and so forth – knowing that superfans will pore over every detail looking for errors.

Rings of Power is expected to run for at least five seasons, so many of these are one-off costs, but the series has been beset by other issues. Filming began in New Zealand in February 2020 but shortly after, the Covid pandemic shut down production for several months. New Zealand's strict

quarantining rules stranded [800 cast and crew members there](#), and prevented outside visitors coming in. They muddled through, but a year ago, Amazon announced it was relocating the entire operation to the UK. Season two is already in production at Bray Studios in Berkshire. “What that tells me is ‘car crash’,” says one industry insider, who estimates the cost of such a move alone as \$30m. “You don’t move like that unless it’s not going well.” As well as the dismantling and reconstruction of sets and the like, such moves often entail expensive reshoots and money wasted on unusable footage, they suggest.



Eve Best and Steve Toussaint in House of the Dragon. Photograph: Landmark Media/Alamy

There are also question marks over Rings of Power’s relatively inexperienced showrunners: McKay and JD Payne, whose only credit to date is co-writing 2016’s Star Trek Beyond (Star Trek producer JJ Abrams apparently recommended them to Amazon). “The pressure to succeed for Amazon is enormous,” the insider continues, “but with projects of this scale, there can end up being too many voices in the room, drowning out the creatives. Things start to eat themselves at that stage.”

HBO has a reputation for being more experienced, more in tune with its creatives, and less profligate, but it has also had its challenges. For one

thing, Game of Thrones didn't exactly go out on a high. Many fans complained the grand finale was disappointingly rushed and clumsily written, to the extent that 1 million of them signed a petition demanding the final season be remade. To make matters worse, Benioff and Weiss parted ways with [HBO](#), signing a \$200m deal with Netflix in 2019.

Like its rivals, the network has been desperately seeking “the next Game of Thrones”. In 2018, HBO put five different Game of Thrones spin-offs into development, with five different showrunners, almost like a tournament. The winner was a script known as Bloodmoon, run by Jane Goldman, the writer of the Kick-Ass and Kingsman franchises. The network spent an estimated \$30m shooting a pilot, led by Naomi Watts, but according to reports HBO was “not thrilled by the results”, and abruptly pulled the plug on the show. They then switched horses to House of the Dragon with showrunners Ryan Condal and Miguel Sapochnik, the latter of whom directed several Game of Thrones episodes.

Such headaches are par for the course with this scale of production, and are by no means indicative of the final result. In fact, HBO abandoned its first attempt at Game of Thrones. Again, they were “not thrilled” by the pilot, so went back to the drawing board and spent nine months redeveloping the show to make it more realistic. The strategy paid off.

But above this mega-budget fantasy fray hangs a broader question: why should we watch either of these shows? Given today's diverse, progressive, global audience, might these high-fantasy sagas seem a little archaic? Both are essentially reimaginings of feudal, patriarchal, medieval Europe, created by white, middle-aged men in the 20th century.

As if to acknowledge this fact, both shows are making concerted efforts to modernise their material. In both Tolkein's fiction and Jackson's adaptations, Middle-earth was an almost entirely white realm. Different mythical races existed, such as elves, dwarves and hobbits, but not humans of colour. Rings of Power attempts to mix it up racially. For the first time, we see elves, dwarves and “harfoots” – ancient ancestors of hobbits – being played by actors of colour, including Lenny Henry. Inevitably, there has been a backlash from some corners of Tolkien fanbase.

Game of Thrones attracted similar criticism for its lack of actors of colour in leading roles (not to mention Emilia Clarke's Daenerys Targaryen, who was presented as a pale, white-haired "white saviour" amid the darker-skinned Dothraki people). House of the Dragon makes some amends by casting Steve Toussaint as Lord Corlys Velaryon, a central character who was white in Martin's source novel.

In terms of female representation, too, both franchises have made changes. Lord of the Rings and The Hobbit were overwhelmingly male-dominated affairs, but Rings of Power promises a more equitable mix. And while Game of Thrones featured multiple female protagonists, many found its casual approach to sexual violence objectionable. It is rumoured that House of the Dragon will slightly tone down the sexual content and focus on the brutal treatment of women, including the violent nature of childbirth.



Lord of the Rings: The Rings of Power. Photograph: Amazon Prime Studio

But perhaps it is a mistake to see the two shows as direct competitors at all. Unlike when rival movies or network television programmes have gone up against each other in the past, streaming is less of a zero-sum game. Fans do not necessarily have to pick a side. Simply measuring which programme had the most viewers is "an antiquated way of looking at it", says Alexander. "Because the bigger questions are: how many subscribers did it bring? How

many subscribers did it stop from leaving? How many of those customers are engaging with the platform elsewhere? Of course, viewership is still a huge part of it, but it is so beyond just the one-to-one relationship.” From Alexander’s research there is no clear frontrunner. “There is an insane amount of anticipation and demand for these two shows.”

It may be more enlightened not to view this as “one franchise to rule them all” competition, but the fantasy genre is not exactly renowned for its love of peaceful, diplomatic resolution. It thrives on conflict. Martin, for one, has welcomed the head-to-head, even as he bemoaned the perceived rivalry. “I hope both shows succeed,” [he said in a recent interview](#), before adding: “I hope we succeed more. If they win six Emmys – and I hope they do – I hope we win seven.”

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‘Standup was a weapon to him’: Ian Cognito, the comedian who died on stage – literally



‘No one knew what the hell he was going to do or say’ ... Ian Cognito.
Photograph: Richard Wood

Three years ago, the caustic comic had a fatal aortic dissection mid-show. Now a new documentary about the self-proclaimed ‘most banned act in Britain’ reveals a saga of booze and outrage

Ryan Gilbey

Thu 28 Jul 2022 01.00 EDT Last modified on Thu 28 Jul 2022 09.14 EDT

When Ian Cognito walked on stage in Bicester, Oxfordshire, on 11 April 2019, he couldn’t have known he was about to follow in the footsteps of Tommy Cooper. Every comedian has stories of “dying” in front of an audience but few do it literally. The manner of [Cognito’s death at the age of 60](#) seems entirely in keeping with this caustic performer, who boasted about being the most banned act in Britain, accused other comics of hypocrisy, head-butted his own manager, and took everything he did to extremes.

A new documentary, [Ian Cognito: A Life and a Death on Stage](#), tells the story of the man born Paul Barbieri but known as “Cogs” to friends and admirers. Singing his praises in the film are the likes of James Acaster, Shaparak Khorsandi and Stewart Lee. Some are a little more equivocal. Jo Brand calls him “a loose cannon”. Bob Mills says: “Standup comedy was a weapon to Cogs. It wasn’t a nice thing.”

Those familiar with Cognito will recall that he began many of his gigs by banging a nail into the wall and then hanging his hat on it, before turning to the audience. “Now you know two things about me,” he would bark. “First, I don’t give a shit. And second, I’ve got a hammer.” He also threw a television set out of a Birmingham hotel window. His explanation? “Room service was late.” Alcoholism and mental health issues drove this sort of behaviour. Cognito rarely performed without several pints inside him and another one in his hand, and he was honest about the corrosive effects of his stage persona. “He’s in danger of killing me, my Mr Hyde,” he said.

Danny Ward and Joe Bor, the standups who directed the documentary, have fond memories of him. “Cogs and I did a festival together where he nicked a bottle of rum from the bar and then ate a chicken out of a bin,” Ward tells me. Bor chips in: “We took turns hosting one weekend at the Glee club in

Cardiff Cogs said: ‘The audience really likes you. They don’t like me.’ But then again, he had just called them all cunts, so ...”

He was playing a character who had no filter. And sometimes the things he said were quite shocking

Cognito could craft an exemplary one-liner. He railed against people with disabilities “using our spaces in the car park. If you let them get away with it, they’ll be in our toilets next.” But the bracing, heady flavour of a Cognito set was never about individual gags. “No one knew what the hell he was going to do or say,” says his son, Will Barbieri. “The adrenaline was incredible. When he was on form, it was as much a theme park ride as it was a gig.”

The comic Becky Fury agrees. “Being in the room with him was electrifying,” she says. Her first encounter with Cognito was about 15 years ago, when she was 19. “My boyfriend did some comedy promoting at a theatre. Paul came on stage and started hammering a nail in the wall. I’m sure there are a lot of people who would be like: ‘Don’t go anywhere near that guy.’ But I found it very attractive. He was this powerful, charismatic, sexy presence. We had a fling, so that was the end of him ever performing at that venue again!” It wasn’t the last time he helped Fury end an ailing relationship by going to bed with her. As she wrote after his death: “He had an uncanny knack of appearing when he was needed, like a swaggering cockney genie that lives in a bottle of Jameson’s.”



‘He had something otherworldly about him’ ... Cognito. Photograph: Journeyman Films

Though Cognito’s relationship with the audience was uniformly combative, it could sometimes seem as though women bore the brunt of his opprobrium. “I don’t think we’re gonna be seeing you in the next episode of Baywatch, are we?” he asked a woman in the front row at one gig. Fury says that audiences back then were better equipped for this abrasive approach. “They could deal with banter,” she says. “Whereas today, you’ve got a generation who didn’t play out enough as kids. They’re not exposed to that sort of thing so it seems more outrageous.”

For all that its makers admire Cognito, the documentary is no hagiography. “Cogs did alienate people,” says Ward. “He was flawed, like all of us.” The ultimate target of his comedy, though, was usually himself, as that joke about parking spaces makes clear. Lee puts it nicely in the film: Cognito, he explains, was “the person of low status” in any routine. Ward also draws a distinction between man and persona. “Paul Barbieri was playing a character called Ian Cognito who had no filter. And sometimes the things he said were quite shocking.”

Rarely more so than in his lacerating set at the Glastonbury festival in 1999. In a brazen instance of audience-baiting, he immediately insulted the Manic

Street Preachers, who had played a headline set the previous evening, then silenced a heckler by explaining what happened to the last person who interrupted him: “I followed her home, waited up all night and shot her on her fucking doorstep, so bear it in mind.” No wonder the crowd gasped – [the murder of Jill Dando](#) less than two months earlier was still fresh in the memory.



‘The last of a dying breed’ ... on stage in 2014.

Ward flinches when I mention that moment, which isn’t in the documentary. “You told me to cut that one out, Joe,” he reminds his co-director. “We didn’t want to whitewash Cogs, which is why there’s a whole section about his flaws, but that kind of clip could easily have capsized the film.”

A standup who thrived on the crackle of danger unique to live comedy was never going to be a snug fit for TV. Cognito was scathing about those who were. Will believes his father’s distaste for the medium was authentic. “He hated the idea of selling out. His anarchist, nonconformist streak wouldn’t have let him do it.”



Danny Ward and Joe Bor, directors of Ian Cognito: A Life and a Death on Stage

According to Bor, this made him “even more popular among his peers. He was a God of the circuit.” Some comics, such as [Daniel Kitson](#), have made the anti-TV angle work. “The Daniel Kitson model means having tens of thousands of fans on your mailing list,” says Ward. “If they all give you, say, £10 a year, then you’re in business. Cogs didn’t have that. He lived on a houseboat on the River Avon with his last £20 note. It wasn’t a business plan.”

I ask Will whether his father had ambitions for the future and he lets out an almighty laugh. “No, he was fucked!” he says. “He wasn’t getting a lot of gigs. We talked about him living at the end of my mum’s garden.” Tastes had changed. “He never did a Ricky Gervais, claiming he wasn’t ‘allowed’ to say certain things. But he did struggle with the sensitivity of audiences.” His material also played differently once he reached his 50s. “As you get older, you’re less able to style things out,” says Will. “You go from swashbuckling anarchist to bitter old man. I’d sometimes say: ‘Why don’t you try a more cerebral, introspective gig?’ It didn’t come naturally but he gave it a go every now and then. I’d love to have seen more of that.”

Though Cognito was often proudly out of step, Ward thinks the landscape had changed irrevocably. “Cogs was the last of a breed. He represented the wild west days. Now you’ve got people writing about comedy gigs on social media like they’re rating kettles on the Argos website.” For Fury, who is keeping the Cognito spirit alive [by touring a show called C*nt!](#), TV is partly to blame. “Paul was all about being a road comic and not restricting his material just because there might be an exec in the audience. He had something otherworldly about him. The guy died on stage at a comedy night called Lone Wolf – how poetic is that?”

He had joked about his health that night in Bicester, telling the crowd: “Imagine if I died in front of you lot here.” Later, he sat down on stage and fell silent. Cognito had suffered an aortic dissection, a tear to the body’s main artery. As he exhaled for the last time in front of an audience convinced they were watching part of his act, I had wondered if the mythologising of Cognito’s death might have felt disrespectful to his family. (“Died with his boots on,” tweeted Jimmy Carr.) But Will is all for it. “Dad had quit drinking and he was on antidepressants,” he says. “The last time him and my mum saw one another, they went dog-walking and he told her: ‘You know what? I’m really happy.’ His arc did feel complete in a way. He had the rise, the fall, the hardships and then he’d reached this equilibrium. To go out like that, I think, was fitting.”

Ian Cognito: A Life and a Death on Stage is screened at the [Edinburgh fringe](#) from 4 to 14 and 25 to 28 August. [Becky Fury: C*nt!](#) is at the Free Fringe, Edinburgh, from 6 to 28 August.

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Bicycle graveyards: why do so many bikes end up underwater?

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[Television](#)

Reader, I married one – and moved there. How Neighbours gave me a deep Australian kink

To a teenager in Lincolnshire, Erinsborough seemed like a wonderful, bright and sexy place – and it opened up the world to me



A frou-frou masterpiece ... Charlene's wedding dress. Photograph: Channel 5

[Rae Earl](#)

Thu 28 Jul 2022 05.00 EDT

And there I was ... sobbing at a wedding dress in a museum in Hobart, Tasmania. I hate weddings. By all means, plan your big day, create your mood board and do the princess thing. I was married in a five-minute ceremony, wearing a Stetson, before heading to the pub. Fancy nuptials

leave me cold. This wasn't just any wedding outfit, though. This was the meringue that I believe sealed my destiny.

It was Charlene's wedding dress from [Neighbours](#). Backlit and plumped up in a corner while the classic Kylie Minogue and Jason Donovan episode played in the background. The object of my pilgrimage, resplendent in all its glory, was available to view for one month only. High neck. *Huge* sleeves. Lace. Roses. Ruffles. A frou-frou masterpiece that can whisk middle-aged Britons back to November 1988. School. Lincolnshire. Where the wonderful Mrs Russell let us watch the ceremony at lunchtime on the telly in the sixth form centre. She understood the gravitas of the situation; this wasn't just family getting married. This was our royalty. The wedding of the century.

For much of Britain, what even *was* Australia before Neighbours? A galaxy far, far away that people disappeared to, like the two ginger-haired boys from Doughty Street in my home town in the 70s. The revelation "We are moving to Perth" was greeted with sharp intakes of breath and a hesitant, loaded: "All the very best with *that!*" It was a place that featured with terrifying frequency on the reunion segment of Surprise Surprise – the big finale where Cilla Black would tell some bewildered pensioner that her sister from Brisbane, who she hadn't seen for 37 years, was about to come on stage. Australia was further away than the moon.



Annie Jones as Jane Harris and Guy Pearce as Mike Young in Neighbours.
Photograph: Fremantle Media/Shutterstock

Of course, we'd had their soaps before – the theme tune from Sons and Daughters was practically our soundtrack to skiving off school – but we'd never seen *this* Australia before. Neighbours reset it all. It was so bright. It had cafes, hangouts and HSCs (higher school certificates). They seemed so much sexier than GCSEs. And, if you failed them, you could just start your own chauffeuring business. Whenever I'm in Melbourne and I see a green car, I wonder if Helen Daniels' "Home James" service is still operating.

Moreover, Neighbours had teenagers who argued with their parents and then went out and had fun. No moping around Albert Square meeting up with the secret father of your baby, Michelle Fowler style. Young Australians went to the *beach*. It was an odd place, without a pier, donkeys or fruit machines, but it looked amazing. Zero sharks and lots of splashing about with hot boys.

And here was the real attraction: Australian men. Scott/Jason. They were interchangeable to me. Not the gauche Foster-swigging Paul Hogan stereotype of Australian men. Scott/Jason was supportive of Charlene/Kylie's effortlessly feminist mechanic ambitions. Then there was sensitive grafter Mike/Guy Pearce, who ended up dating Plain Jane "Super Brain" Harris. What is this wonderful world? It's a country where geeks can

score a hot guy and working-class people can have detached houses with big yards. It's a country where [even labradors can dare to dream](#).

But, like Bouncer's nocturnal hallucinations, it was all fantasy. Back then, I had no desire to live abroad. With my teenage panic attacks, Peterborough was as far as I could get. But, somewhere within me, a seed must have been sown. The media in the 90s was littered with Australians. They were everywhere. I was friends with lots of them; I married one. After a decade of living in the UK, he said: "Why don't we live *there* for a bit?" It was terrifying. But Skype had arrived: you could now actually see people that were far away. And the echoes of Erinsborough were in my brain.

Neighbours became, in my mind, the pseudo-documentary on which I based one of the key decisions of my life. It would all be OK. Madge. Jim. Clive. Helen. I just had to avoid cliffs. "Harrrrrrrollllldddddd!"



The look of the Donovans ... Rae Earl's partner in the 1980s.

As we prepared for the move, I sorted through some of my partner's old Polaroids from the 80s. He looked, I realised, like an extra from Lassiter's coffee shop. When I recently shared the photo on Facebook, I embellished the post with what I thought was an obvious lie: "He had been in the soap for seven episodes as waiter Jason Byrne in Mr Udagawa's hotel complex."

Despite the ludicrousness of the claim, some of my friends believed it. He did have the look of the Donovans about him. Neighbours, it seems, gave me a deep Australian kink. And I didn't even know it.

Life tumbles on. Living here for “a bit” has turned into more than a decade. Rarely do you see your life as a complete series – more like chapters and episodes. However, in that one wedding dress, I saw my trajectory from teen to 50. From that mad, fat adolescent who couldn’t go anywhere to a functioning adult … on a bloody island near Antarctica.

At the time of writing, Charlene’s dress is about to be packed away safely in a box at the Tasmanian Museum and Art Gallery. I have no idea what it will mean to future generations, but I suspect Minogue’s endless and joyful reincarnations will ensure its relevance. For me, it will always be more than a dress. So much more than a symbol of romance. By the time you get to a half-century, you know the limitations of that. And yes, I am still married to my brilliant Aussie.

Neighbours opened up the world for me. Scott and Charlene have sat in my soul for years. Their wedding – along with all the 80s frills Minogue wore – is a reminder of when I needed to believe there was something else. A bigger, better future that, at that time and in that mental state, I couldn’t quite conceive of. I still have days like that, wherever I am in the world. Don’t we all? That’s when a good dose of frothy soap can make all the difference. Onya Neighbours.

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2022.07.28 - Opinion

- What has happened to the Labour party that it can't stand up for labour?
- The ‘sadmin’ after my mother’s death was hard enough – then I encountered Vodafone
- The difference between the Tory candidates’ tax plans? One is bad, the other is really bad
- Athletic feats at Commonwealth Games cannot distract from Britain’s colonial sins

OpinionLabour

What has happened to the Labour party that it can't stand up for labour?

[John McDonnell](#)

With the cost of living crisis hitting millions, Keir Starmer will pay an electoral price for his failure to support striking workers

- John McDonnell is a former shadow chancellor



A picket line outside Glasgow Central station during a nationwide strike called by the RMT union, 27 July 2022. Photograph: Jeff J Mitchell/Getty Images

Thu 28 Jul 2022 05.37 EDT Last modified on Thu 28 Jul 2022 09.09 EDT

It was 1977. I was in my mid-20s and had just moved down from the north to west London. A group of Asian women working at a film-developing factory in Brent had started a strike for better pay and working conditions.

Trade union branches across London and my local constituency Labour party in Hayes were sending delegations to join the women in their saris on the picket lines. This was [the historic Grunwick strike](#), led by the now famous, heroic Jayaben Desai.

I went with our CLP delegation regularly. It was a tough and, at times, violent dispute as the police escorted a bus full of scabs brought in by the company to break the strike and teach the women a lesson.

The Labour and trade union movement came together as one to campaign against the exploitation of these women. Joining the picket lines to show solidarity were some of the most prominent members of the movement, and among those who joined the women's picket line were Labour cabinet ministers. Not shadow ministers but cabinet ministers actually serving in government at the time, including, famously, [Shirley Williams](#).

Labour MPs joining picket lines was not exceptional; it was expected of them. The trade union movement had founded the [Labour](#) party to serve as the voice of labour in parliament. To be a Labour party member in those days, you had to demonstrate that you were a trade union member and what trade union members do is support one another. There was no exemption from the basic duty to show solidarity just because party members and trade unionists had selected you to be an MP and serve the movement as a minister or shadow minister.

So how is it that we have arrived at a situation where a Labour leader is [instructing shadow ministers](#) not to attend picket lines and has [sacked a shadow minister](#), Sam Tarry, seemingly for doing so?

The recent [Forde report](#) into the operation of the Labour party spends considerable time exploring what it described as the culture of the party. The report exposes just how far the party has travelled from its original ethos. The Labour family survived, and at times thrived, by accepting it was a broad church of political views, upholding a mutual respect for those differing views and, above all else embracing, at its heart, solidarity.

But the clique of advisers that now surrounds [Keir Starmer](#) and appears to control the party seems drunk on its own power and to have lost all appreciation of the party's traditions of mutual respect and solidarity.

It's not hard to imagine the line of thought of those advising Starmer on the strikes: it's political painting by numbers. The focus groups don't like strikes. They will blame the unions and anyone who supports them for the disruption caused, egged on by a rising tide of abuse in the rightwing media. So the advice to the leader will be keep away from any association with the unions at all costs.

Crass decisions are then made not to back our unions in disputes, no matter how just their cause, then to order shadow ministers not to join picket lines no matter what their membership or association with the union in dispute. This isn't just a complete misreading of the mood within the Labour and trade union movement but also among the general public.

The anger at Starmer's actions among trade unions is palpable. This may not matter to the leader's team when the Tories are so helpfully self-immolating, but when times get tougher and the trade union cavalry is needed to save the leader, they may remember who was and who wasn't on [this summer's picket lines](#).

In terms of the general public, the reason that there is an unprecedented level of sympathy for these strikes is not just down to the impressive [straight-talking eloquence](#) of the RMT's Mick Lynch. It's because millions are being hit by the same cost of living crisis, which has become the key mobilising factor in the massive wave of industrial disputes that is currently building.

The risk is that when the millions involved go to the polls next, they will be asking the question of the Labour leader, where were you when we needed you? Whatever diktats from the Labour leader's office, there is a weightier responsibility on the shoulders of Labour members, whatever position they hold. It is to stand up for one another in the Labour and trade union movement in this summer of solidarity.

- John McDonnell is the Labour MP for Hayes and Harlington. He was shadow chancellor from 2015 to 2020

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

OpinionVodafone

The ‘sadmin’ after my mother’s death was hard enough – then I encountered Vodafone

George Monbiot



After months of calls, hostility, and a referral to a debt collectors, the phone company cancelled my late mother’s contract. I will not watch this happen to others



Illustration by Ben Jennings

Thu 28 Jul 2022 03.00 EDT Last modified on Thu 28 Jul 2022 12.24 EDT

It's sometimes called "sadmin": tying up the affairs of someone who has passed away. There's a lot to do, though some aspects have become easier – you can notify most branches of government through an online form called [Tell Us Once](#). But some private interests are less helpful.

My mother died in early March. My father is confused and very frail, so my sister and my dad's carer and I handled the sadmin. Most of it went smoothly: in many cases cancelling my mother's accounts was quick and straightforward. That was until we ran into [Vodafone](#).

A long time ago my father set up two Vodafone contracts, one for himself and one for my mother. He stopped using his phone a few years ago, and we cancelled his contract. But my mum used hers almost until the end of her life. After she died, we followed the only available route, and rang the company. Or tried, dozens of times, before giving up after 40 or 50 minutes waiting for someone to answer.

A remarkable number of people reported that call handlers insisted on speaking to the deceased account holder

When my dad's carer managed at last to speak to a human being, the person who answered was astonishingly rude and unhelpful. He passed us around the system, but no one seemed willing to cancel the contract. We assumed we had caught someone on a bad day, but every encounter, on the rare occasions when someone picked up the phone, followed the same pattern: breathtaking aggression and hostility, followed by stonewalling.

They kept demanding to speak to my father, and refused to hear answers from anyone else, even after we pointed out that my sister and I have [lasting power of attorney](#). The only way we could meet this demand was to dictate the answers to him, which he repeated to the call handler. This caused him great stress and anxiety. Among other questions, they asked him the exact date on which the account commenced. They might as well have asked how many grains of sand there are in the Sahara. When he was unable to answer (none of us knew), they refused to cancel the account.

This went on until May. Vodafone continued to charge my dad for a contract that should have ended the day my mum died. Eventually my sister told a call handler she intended to stop the direct debit. He replied: "Do what you like, but you'll be in breach of contract." She stopped it anyway, and posted a letter to Vodafone HQ (there was no other means of contacting the company) informing it. Without warning, Vodafone passed the matter to a debt collection agency, which started pursuing my dad for the £33 bill it deemed my mum to have incurred since she died. The agents rang my dad's landline repeatedly, every time insisting on speaking to him. His carer refused. Had my dad not been shielded, these calls would have inflicted immense distress.

My mum suffered a long and debilitating illness, and we were as prepared for her death as anyone can be. We are blessed with the support of my dad's brilliant carer. Even so, Vodafone made everything much worse. I can scarcely imagine how this might have affected a family unexpectedly bereaved, under great stress and with fewer resources.

A fortnight ago, more than four months after my mother's death, I belatedly snapped, and described our experience in a [Twitter thread](#). My intention was to shame Vodafone into action. I got more than I bargained for.

Immediately, the responses started pouring in: first dozens, then hundreds of people sharing similar and sometimes even worse experiences when trying to cancel accounts with Vodafone, especially the accounts of people who had died or whose capacity had diminished. They reported, while in the depths of grief, the same nastiness and lack of sympathy. They reported an insistence on questioning vulnerable and confused elderly people. They described months, in some cases years, of failure to cancel such contracts. One woman who contacted me said she was still paying £78 a month to Vodafone for the phone of her daughter, who was murdered more than a year ago, despite sending them the death certificate and newspaper clippings.

Many told me they had also been referred to debt collectors when they stopped their direct debits. Some then discovered, often much later and at crucial moments (such as when trying to buy a house), that their credit rating had been damaged, and they could not proceed until it had been resolved.

A remarkable number of people reported that call handlers insisted on speaking to the deceased account holder “because only the account holder can cancel the account”. Some of the responses were grimly funny: people asked the company whether it could supply a medium or suggested exhumation. Other people related similar treatment by a range of phone, finance and utility companies.

When our story went public, Vodafone couldn’t move fast enough. After it had checked the details, it cancelled the contract in the course of a two-minute phone call, later the same day. It shows it can be done. It failed to call off the debt collectors, however, who continued to ring my dad until we [publicly complained again](#).

Vodafone did not deny what happened to us. But nor did it respond as I’d hoped. Without consulting me, it issued a [public apology](#) to my family for its “errors” and sent me links to information available on its website about cancelling contracts after a bereavement. I found it hard to see this pattern of behaviour, suffered by so many, as “errors”, not least because this isn’t the first time such practices have been [brought to the company’s attention](#). Nor did I want an apology only for my own family, but for all the people who had been treated this way. Above all, I wanted action.

Please accept our apology [@GeorgeMonbiot](#) and we promise to address the errors made. pic.twitter.com/g695sS7UvA

— Vodafone UK (@VodafoneUK) [July 12, 2022](#)

I asked for a call with the chief executive, and was offered a face-to-face meeting, which will happen in September. I have sent the company a list of [21 demands](#), ranging from joining a one-stop service to compensation for people who have been unfairly charged and wrongly pursued by debt collectors. I won't stop till they have all been met.

When I asked Vodafone whether it had a strategy of exploiting bereaved families, it replied: "We do not have a policy of making it difficult for bereaved families to get in touch with us to cancel contracts." It also told me: "We are conducting a full-scale review and have refreshed the training we provide to our customer care colleagues."

I don't bear grudges. I would be happy to help Vodafone turn its performance around. But, if the company fails to make the necessary changes, I will not stand by and watch.

- George Monbiot is a Guardian columnist
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[Opinion](#)[Tax and spending](#)

The difference between the Tory candidates' tax plans? One is bad, the other is really bad

[Larry Elliott](#)



Neither has the first idea of what they're doing. Truss's proposal does little for those who need it, and Sunak's is a desperate U-turn



‘Clearly, there is no way in which their proposed tax cuts – whether now or later – are a solution to a worsening cost of living crisis.’ Photograph: Jacob King/AFP/Getty Images

Thu 28 Jul 2022 05.00 EDT Last modified on Thu 28 Jul 2022 10.36 EDT

Rishi Sunak is losing the battle to be Britain’s next prime minister and he knows it. The former chancellor’s announcement that he would [scrap VAT](#) on energy bills for a year is exactly what it looks like: a U-turn born of desperation.

Having set himself up as the candidate of sober rectitude, Sunak has bowed to the inevitable as opinion polls show Liz Truss’s plan for immediate tax cuts are proving more attractive to Conservative party members than his wait-and-see approach.

Let’s be clear. Judging by their campaigns so far, neither Sunak nor Truss have the first idea of what to do about the UK’s deep-seated economic problems. But Truss – more by luck than judgment perhaps – is on to something when she says Sunak’s previous tax decisions are making a bad situation worse.

Some economists think Britain is already in recession, others that the country is still teetering on the brink. One thing is certain: the decision by Gazprom to restrict supplies of gas to Europe through the Nord Stream 1 pipeline has amplified that threat. The International Monetary Fund (IMF) said this week that a sudden stop to Russian energy was one of the things that could turn a marked slowdown in the global economy into something a lot more serious. That recession risk seems to be materialising, and although Britain is not dependent on Russian gas it will still be affected by surging global gas prices.

It now looks as though the energy price cap will increase from just under £2,000 a year to at least £3,300 a year – and perhaps even higher – in October, pushing the annual inflation rate well into double figures. The IMF already expects the UK economy to have stalled by the end of this year and to be the slowest growing of the G7 group of major industrial nations in 2023.

Higher inflation is bound to trigger a response from the Bank of England. Interest rates have been raised at the last five meetings of the Bank's monetary policy committee (MPC) and official borrowing costs will go up again next week. Up until now the MPC has preferred cautious 0.25 percentage point increases but there is every chance of a 0.5-point jump this time. The chances of overkill are high because the Bank will continue tightening policy until it is sure higher prices are not feeding through into higher pay deals and inflation is heading back towards its 2% target.

Meanwhile, the Treasury's obsession with balancing the books means it too is bearing down on growth. National insurance contributions (NIC) went up in April, income tax thresholds are being frozen for three years and corporation tax will be raised from 19% to 25% next year. As a share of the economy, taxes this year will be at their highest since 1950-1.

The risk here is obvious. If the Bank of England is sucking spending power out of the economy through higher interest rates at the same time as the Treasury is doing the same through higher taxes, then the chances of recession increase, especially when the economy is already weakening.

Sunak has put forward two reasons to justify his tax increases. The first is that the high levels of debt and borrowing mean the UK has maxed out on its credit card. This, though, suggests that there is no difference between the finances of a household and the finances of the state, when that is not the case. States that can print their own currency do not go bust. There is no such thing as the nation's credit card and it makes sense for the government to spend more when the rest of the economy is weak.

The second argument is that Truss's proposed tax cuts – the reversal of the NIC increase and the scrapping of the proposed corporation tax rise – would lead to even greater inflationary pressure and hence significantly higher interest rates from the Bank of England.

This doesn't really stand up to serious scrutiny either. Truss's [£30bn package](#) is relatively small beer in the context of a £2tn-plus economy, and more than half the cost would come from not going ahead with the corporation tax increase. The boost to consumer spending potential would be modest and even under Prime Minister Truss taxes would still be at a 70-year high. Interest rates may be a bit higher than they would otherwise be.

A better critique of the Truss tax plan is that it does very little for the people who are being hit hardest by spiralling energy costs. As the Resolution Foundation has pointed out, only [15% of the benefits](#) of reversing the NICs increase would go to the poorer half of the population against 28% going to the richest 20%. The average boost to incomes in London would be more than double that in the north-east of England or Wales.

Clearly, there is no way in which their proposed tax cuts – whether now or later – are a solution to a worsening cost of living crisis and more help is going to be needed to help households through the winter. It would make more sense to target support at those who need it most through the benefits system rather than provide tax cuts that favour the better off.

That, though, is not the choice being presented to those handed the task of picking Boris Johnson's successor. They are being given the choice between Truss's bad plan and Sunak's really bad plan. As things stand, they look like opting for the former.

- Larry Elliott is the Guardian's economics editor
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| [Section menu](#) | [Main menu](#) |

Commonwealth Games 2022

Athletic feats at Commonwealth Games cannot distract from Britain's colonial sins

[Tumaini Carayol](#)



The lasting damage that slavery and colonialism have inflicted on Commonwealth countries has never been fully addressed



Australia and New Zealand volleyball players practice at the Smithfield court. Photograph: Tom Jenkins/The Guardian

Thu 28 Jul 2022 03.00 EDT Last modified on Fri 29 Jul 2022 00.31 EDT

At 8.30 on Friday morning, with the sun up over Birmingham, the [Commonwealth Games](#) action will begin. Even in a competition contested by a limited pool of countries with notable athlete absences, there will be great performances and heartwarming moments. Supreme exhibitions of athleticism will be complemented by breakthroughs from those with few opportunities to shine on such big stages. It may just be enjoyable enough for some to forget about the organisation the Games represent.

These were once known as the British Empire Games, the British Empire and Commonwealth Games, and then the British Commonwealth Games. What initially stood as an event for Britain and its colonies is now a helpful tool for Britain to divert attention from its ills of the past, presenting itself as a more compassionate nation compared with other former imperial powers, the country that dismantled its empire to become friends with former subjects.

The royal family, with Queen Elizabeth II still head of the Commonwealth, is often positioned as graciously bringing together nations under one roof. A

transformation pulled off without ever fully addressing the lasting impacts of slavery and colonialism on many of the countries within it.

The wealth, of course, is not common. The vast majority of the Commonwealth countries are former colonies and 14 excluding Britain are still officially headed by the British royal family. The relationships between the nations are hierarchical, with major power imbalances within. Canada, Australia and New Zealand are of far more interest to Britain than any African or Caribbean country.

Even since the last Commonwealth Games just four years ago, the world has shifted enough that this is a particularly notable time for the Games to return to Britain. So many of the Commonwealth realms are reckoning with and seeking to redefine their relationship with the country on their terms. [Barbados's decision to become a republic](#) last year set off a chain reaction of change, with Jamaica, St Kitts and Nevis, and Antigua and Barbuda all openly discussing the possibility of following suit.



Celebrations in Bridgetown as Barbados becomes a republic in November 2021. Photograph: Reuters

The ill-fated Platinum Jubilee royal tours only strengthened those sentiments. As the Duke and Duchess of Cambridge toured Belize, Jamaica

and the Bahamas in March, their presence inadvertently gave centre stage to protesters and other citizens endeavouring to expose the lasting damage that colonialism has inflicted on their countries. Others stressed that the wealth and luxury that allows the royal family to saunter around their countries was built off the backs of their ancestors.

Then came the tours of Antigua and Barbuda, St Vincent and the Grenadines, and St Lucia by Prince Edward and Sophie, Countess of Wessex, with protests demanding acknowledgment, apologies and reparations from Britain until they were gone. When Gaston Browne, the prime minister of Antigua and Barbuda, calmly explained to Prince Edward [why they are seeking reparational support](#) to address the long-term effects of colonialism, Edward responded with a pitiful quip and laughter.

The betrayal of the Windrush generation remains at the forefront of minds. As the flags of Commonwealth countries fly at the Alexander Stadium, it will be hard not to think about the treatment of former citizens of those countries and their descendants, who were beckoned to these shores for their talents and skills. They settled down and lived full lives, yet Britain spent much of the 2010s endeavouring to deport them. Only public shame led the government to alter aspects of its cruel immigration policy, by which time many lives had been permanently altered and it was far too late.

There are other issues at play as well, such as more than half of the countries at the Games criminalising homosexuality, which will be the source of protests on Thursday in Birmingham. Those laws and attitudes were initially implemented by Britain itself, [homophobia imported through colonisation](#), another branch of the colonial legacy.



LGBT+ protesters at Aston Hall as the Queen's Baton Relay arrives on the day of the Commonwealth Games opening ceremony. Photograph: Peter Byrne/PA

On the pitches, swimming pools and track, the Commonwealth Games will thrive. Whether played in front of crowds or not, contested by a small, selective group of countries or the entire world, there is always tension and jeopardy in sport. There are also other positive, distinguishing features, from the integration of athletes with disabilities to the [gender balance in the medal events](#) and even just the spirit of congeniality among athletes.

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But this is a time when the relevance of the Games have long been in doubt for various reasons, particularly due to the costs of holding such an event. The consequences of this year's edition included [moving homeless families housed in Birmingham hotels](#) at short notice.

Its relevance should also be scrutinised because of the weight of history. It is particularly notable in Birmingham, a city home to many African, Caribbean and Asian immigrant communities that originally arrived here from Commonwealth countries and over the decades have experienced ample reminders of the fragility of their Britishness in the eyes of the government.

It is not possible to separate the Commonwealth, and its Games, from the memory of the British Empire out of which it has grown.

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

2022.07.28 - Around the world

- [Iraq Hundreds of protesters storm parliament in support of cleric Moqtada al-Sadr](#)
- [Yang Huiyan Asia's richest woman loses half her \\$24bn fortune in China property crisis](#)
- [Trump 2020 Murdoch told Kushner on election night that Arizona result was 'not even close'](#)
- [US Capitol attack Justice department gets warrant to search Trump lawyer's phone](#)

Iraq

Hundreds of protesters storm Iraq parliament in support of cleric Moqtada al-Sadr

Police fired teargas in a bid to stop crowds who entered parliament waving flags, taking photographs, chanting and cheering



A supporter of Iraqi cleric Moqtada al-Sadr lies on the desk of the speaker of the Iraqi parliament. Photograph: Ahmad Al-Rubaye/AFP/Getty Images

Agence France-Presse

Wed 27 Jul 2022 21.47 EDT

Hundreds of supporters of powerful Iraqi cleric Moqtada al-Sadr danced and sang in parliament after storming Baghdad's high-security Green Zone in protest at a rival bloc's nomination for prime minister.

Police fired barrages of teargas in a bid to stop the protesters from breaching the gates of the heavily fortified Green Zone, but the crowds surged forward and entered parliament.

"I am against the corrupt officials who are in power," said protester Mohamed Ali, a 41-year-old day labourer, one of the hundreds who entered the zone that is home to both government buildings and diplomatic missions, before later leaving peacefully.



Demonstrators gathered inside the Iraqi parliament building after they stormed the so-called 'Green Zone'. Photograph: Ahmed Jalil/EPA

The protests are the latest challenge for oil-rich Iraq, which remains mired in a political and a socioeconomic crisis despite soaring global energy prices.

Sadr's bloc emerged from [elections in October](#) as the biggest parliamentary faction, but was still far short of a majority and, nine months on, deadlock persists over the establishment of a new government.

Crowds wandered around the parliament building waving national flags, taking photographs, chanting and cheering.

The prime minister, Mustafa al-Kadhimi, called on the protesters to “immediately withdraw”, warning that the security forces would ensure “the protection of state institutions and foreign missions, and prevent any harm to security and order”.

But it took orders issued by the [Shia leader Sadr](#) before the crowds of protesters started to leave nearly two hours later.

“Revolution of reform, and rejection of injustice and corruption,” Sadr wrote on Twitter, in support of the protesters.

“Your message has been heard … you have terrorised the corrupt”, he added, calling on the demonstrators to say a prayer “before returning home safe and sound”.

“We obey the Sayyed,” the crowds chanted as they calmly left parliament, a term honouring Sadr by acknowledging him as a descendant of the Prophet Mohammed.



Supporters of Iraqi Shia cleric Moqtada al-Sadr seen inside the parliament building in Baghdad. Photograph: Ahmed Saad/Reuters

Sadr’s bloc won 73 seats in last year’s election, making it the largest faction in the 329-seat parliament. But since the vote, talks to form a new

government have stalled.

The protesters oppose the candidacy of Mohammed al-Sudani, a former minister and ex-provincial governor, who is the pro-Iran Coordination Framework's pick for premier.

The Coordination Framework draws lawmakers from former premier Nuri al-Maliki's party and the pro-Iran Fatah Alliance, the political arm of the Shia-led former paramilitary group Hashed al-Shaabi.

"I am against Sudani's candidacy, because he is corrupt," added protester Mohamed Ali.

"We reject the whole political process", said Bashar, a protester in parliament, giving only his first name. "We want an independent person who serves the people."

Iraq was plunged deeper into political crisis last month when Sadr's 73 lawmakers quit en masse.

Sadr had initially supported the idea of a "majority government" which would have sent his Shia adversaries from the Coordination Framework into opposition.

The former militia leader then surprised many by compelling his lawmakers to resign, a move seen as seeking to pressure his rivals to fast-track the establishment of a government.

Sixty-four new lawmakers were sworn in later in June, making the pro-Iran bloc the largest in parliament.



Iraqi security forces stand guard as protesters attempt to storm Green Zone.
Photograph: Ahmed Jalil/EPA

Earlier this month, hundreds of thousands of Muslim worshippers loyal to Sadr attended a Friday prayer service in Baghdad, in a display of political might.

The huge turnout came despite scorching heat and the Shia cleric not being there in person – an indication of his status as a political heavyweight, as well as a key religious authority.

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/jul/28/hundreds-of-protesters-storm-iraq-parliament-in-support-of-cleric-moqtada-al-sadr>

[**China**](#)

Asia's richest woman loses half her \$24bn fortune in China property crisis

Yang Huiyan, a majority shareholder in Chinese property giant Country Garden, saw net worth plunge to \$11.3bn in a year



Yang Huiyan inherited her vast wealth from her father, Country Garden founder Yang Guoqiang. Photograph: Imaginechina Limited/Alamy

Agence France-Presse

Thu 28 Jul 2022 01.06 EDTFirst published on Thu 28 Jul 2022 00.47 EDT

Asia's wealthiest woman has lost more than half her fortune over the past year as [the crisis engulfing China's real estate sector](#) continues to worsen, a billionaire index showed on Thursday.

Yang Huiyan, a majority shareholder in China's biggest property developer [Country Garden](#), saw her net worth plunge by more than 52% to \$11.3bn from \$23.7bn a year ago, according to the Bloomberg Billionaires Index.

In a sign that the crisis is spreading to developers previously thought to be rock solid, Yang's fortune took a major hit on Wednesday when the Guangdong-based Country Garden's Hong Kong-listed shares fell 15% after the company announced it would sell new shares to raise cash.

Yang inherited her wealth when her father – Country Garden founder Yang Guoqiang – transferred his shares to her in 2005, according to state media.

She became Asia's richest woman two years later after the developer's initial public offering in Hong Kong.

But she is now barely holding on to that title, with chemical fibres tycoon Fan Hongwei a close runner-up with a net worth of \$11.2bn on Thursday.

Chinese authorities cracked down on excessive debt in the property sector in 2020, leaving major players such as Evergrande and Sunac struggling to make payments and forcing them to renegotiate with creditors as they teetered on the edge of bankruptcy.

Buyers across the country, furious at lagging construction and delayed deliveries of their properties, have begun withholding mortgage payments for homes sold before completion.

While Country Garden has remained relatively unscathed by industry turmoil, it spooked investors with an announcement on Wednesday that it planned to raise more than \$343m through a share sale, partly to pay debts.

Proceeds from the sale would be used for “refinancing existing offshore indebtedness, general working capital and future development purposes”, Country Garden said in a filing to the Hong Kong stock exchange.

China's banking regulator has urged lenders to support the property sector and meet the “reasonable financing needs” of firms as analysts and policymakers fear financial contagion.

The property sector is estimated to account for 18-30% of the country's GDP and is a key driver of growth in the world's second-largest economy.

Analysts have warned that the industry is mired in a “vicious cycle” that would further dampen consumer confidence, following the release of dismal Q2 growth figures that were the worst since the start of the Covid-19 pandemic.

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

Books

Murdoch told Kushner on election night that Arizona result was ‘not even close’

Donald Trump’s son-in-law and adviser’s new book recounts turmoil caused by Fox News decision to call state for Biden in 2020



Jared Kushner and Rupert Murdoch, pictured in 2014. Photograph: Patrick McMullan/Getty Images

[Martin Pengelly](#) in New York

Thu 28 Jul 2022 01.00 EDT Last modified on Thu 28 Jul 2022 08.18 EDT

When Fox News called Arizona for Joe Biden on election night 2020, infuriating Donald Trump and fueling Republican election subversion attempts which continue to this day, [Rupert Murdoch](#) told Jared Kushner “the numbers are ironclad – it’s not even close”.

Details of the [Fox News](#) owner's conversation with Trump's son-in-law and chief adviser about the call which most observers say confirmed Trump's defeat are contained in Kushner's memoir, *Breaking History*, which is due out next month.

They also come as Murdoch-owned papers and even Fox News itself [seem to turn against Trump](#) in light of the January 6 hearings on the US Capitol attack and his attempt to overturn his election defeat.

A first extract from the book, in which Kushner described being secretly treated for thyroid cancer, was [reported](#) by Maggie Haberman of the New York Times.

On Wednesday another Times reporter, Kenneth Vogel, [tweeted pictures of pages](#) from Kushner's book, each emblazoned with the word "confidential".

Kushner's description of the shock of the Fox News [Arizona](#) call mirrors those in numerous reports and books on Trump's 2020 defeat, his refusal to accept it and the attack on US democracy which followed.

"The shocking projection brought our momentum to a screeching halt," [Kushner writes](#). "It instantly changed the mood among our campaign's leaders, who were scrambling to understand the network's methodology."

Kushner describes the Trump campaign's focus on Arizona and writes that losing there "would drastically narrow our path to victory".

In *Landslide*, a book released last year, the author Michael Wolff [reported](#) that Murdoch gave his son Lachlan Murdoch approval for Fox News to call Arizona for Biden with "a signature grunt" and a barb for Trump: "Fuck him."

Fox News denied Wolff's story.

Kushner writes: "I dialed Rupert Murdoch and asked why Fox News had made the Arizona call before hundreds of thousands of votes were tallied. Rupert said he would look into the issue, and minutes later he called back.

“Sorry Jared, there is nothing I can do,” he said. “The Fox News data authority says the numbers are ironclad – he says it won’t be close.””

Biden [won Arizona](#) by about 10,000 votes, a margin which [increased](#) after a partisan audit encouraged by Trump allies and commissioned by state Republicans.

Key members of the Fox News decision desk left after the election. Chris Stirewalt, the politics editor, was [fired](#). He has [appeared before the January 6 committee](#).

“We knew [Arizona] would be a consequential call because it was one of five states that really mattered,” Stirewalt [testified](#).

Stirewalt also said that by the time of the Arizona call, Trump’s chances of beating Biden were “very small” and “getting smaller”. After Arizona, he said, those chances dwindled to “none”.



Election results are displayed in Times Square, New York. The Arizona projected result was a key turning point in the 2020 election. Photograph: Bloomberg/Getty Images

In his book, Kushner shades close to his father-in-law’s lie about electoral fraud in Biden’s victory, writing: “2020 was full of anomalies.”

The election was [called for Biden](#) on 7 November, when Pennsylvania fell into his column. He won the electoral college [by 306-232](#), the same margin Trump called a landslide when it landed in his favour against Hillary Clinton in 2016. Biden won the [popular vote](#) by more than 7m.

In his passage on the speech Trump gave in the early hours of 4 November, the day after election day, claiming “[Frankly, we did win this election](#)”, Kushner says he was called by Karl Rove, the strategist who helped George W Bush win “the closest presidential election in US history”, against Al Gore in 2000.

Trump claimed to have been the victim of fraud. Rove, Kushner writes, said: “The president’s rhetoric is all wrong. He’s going to win. Statistically, there’s no way the Democrats can catch up with you now.”

Kushner says he responded: “Call the president and tell him that.”

Trump later [turned on Rove](#), who he said called him at 10.30pm on election night “to congratulate me on ‘a great win’”. Fox News called Arizona just before midnight.

On Wednesday, Vogel also tweeted pages in which Kushner describes his work on presidential pardons.

Kushner says he did not oppose a pardon for Steve Bannon, the former Trump strategist who was accused of fraud but who was a prominent White House leaker, because of the work Bannon did on Trump’s winning campaign in 2016.

He also writes that when Trump [pardoned Alice Johnson](#), a Black [grandmother](#) sentenced on a minor drugs-related charge of the sort Kushner targeted in his work [on sentencing reform](#), Trump said: “Let’s hope Alice doesn’t go out and kill anyone!”

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

US Capitol attack

Justice department gets warrant to search Trump lawyer's phone

John Eastman spoke at a rally before the Capitol attack and claimed Mike Pence could halt certification of Biden's election win



John Eastman, left, speaks at the rally on 6 January 2021. Photograph: Jim Bourg/Reuters

Reuters

Wed 27 Jul 2022 19.57 EDT Last modified on Thu 28 Jul 2022 09.01 EDT

The US justice department said on Wednesday it had obtained a warrant to search the phone of Donald Trump's election attorney, John Eastman, who spoke at a rally before the January 6 assault on the US Capitol.

Federal agents seized Eastman's phone in June based on a warrant authorizing them to take the device. They needed a second warrant to search the phone's contents.

In a filing with US district court in New Mexico, the assistant US attorney Thomas Windom said the US district court for the District of Columbia issued a search warrant on 12 July authorizing review of the phone's contents and manual screen capture.

He said federal agents in northern Virginia had the phone and screenshots of some of its contents.

Eastman has been under intense scrutiny in the investigations into the attack on the Capitol by Trump supporters after the former president falsely claimed that he had won the 2020 election. Eastman spoke at the rally where Trump gave a fiery speech alleging election fraud and urging supporters to march on the Capitol.

Eastman also wrote a memo outlining how, in his view, Mike Pence could thwart formal congressional certification of Trump's re-election loss. The then vice-president declined to follow Eastman's advice.

Wednesday's filing was made in New Mexico because Eastman had previously filed a suit there asking a judge to order the justice department to return the phone, destroy records and block investigators from accessing the phone.

The judge denied that request but ordered the government to update the court by Wednesday on the location of the phone and status of a second search warrant.

A representative for Eastman was not immediately available for comment.

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Headlines friday 29 july 2022

- [Energy bills Charities concerned as details of £400 support for Britain revealed](#)
- [Labour Sacked shadow minister accuses Keir Starmer of ‘complete car crash’](#)
- [Live Wallace says he is backing Truss because she understands ‘threats’ faced by UK](#)
- [Conservative leadership Ben Wallace attacks Rishi Sunak’s cabinet resignation after backing Truss](#)

Energy bills

Charities concerned as details of £400 energy bill support for Britain revealed

Money for households to be issued in instalments over six months, but there are fears the most vulnerable could miss out

- [Energy bills support scheme: who is eligible and when will it be paid?](#)



About 29 million households in England, Scotland and Wales will receive the support. Photograph: Simon Dack News/Alamy

Rupert Neate

@RupertNeate

Fri 29 Jul 2022 03.35 EDTFirst published on Fri 29 Jul 2022 01.51 EDT

Charities have warned that some of the most vulnerable households could miss out on the £400 to help with soaring energy bills this autumn, after

details were revealed of how all homes in Great Britain would receive the support.

The money, part of [the already announced](#) energy bills support scheme, will be paid in six monthly instalments of £66 or £67 to about 29 million households.

Charities and campaigners raised immediate concerns that more than 2 million prepayment meter customers could have difficulties accessing the support.

Those who pay by direct debit will receive an automatic deduction off their bills, while those with “smart” prepayment meters will see an automatic monthly top-up added to their account.

However, customers with older “non-smart” prepayment meters will not receive the support automatically, instead receiving an energy bill discount voucher each month via text, email or in the post. Customers will then have to redeem these in person at their usual top-up point, such as newsagents or post offices.

Those using prepayment meters include some of the country’s poorest and most vulnerable households who are finding the soaring cost of energy and other bills most difficult.

[Graph showing projected rise of energy cap](#)

Maureen Fildes of the fuel poverty charity National Energy Action said she was fearful that some people using prepayment meters may struggle to get the vouchers.

“There is a lot of fear about how people are going to survive the winter,” she said on BBC Radio 4’s Today programme. “I don’t think that is going to be sufficient to help people cope with the cost of living this winter.

“A lot of people on prepayment meters don’t have a lot of interaction with the energy supplier; they just top up as and when they need to. If it’s a paper

voucher, we'd like to ensure that people don't ignore post from their supplier. It's not going to be another bill; it is going to be some level of support."

She urged people to ensure that their contact details with their supplier were up to date and not to ignore any post from their supplier.

More than 4m households use prepayment meters in Britain, according to the energy regulator, Ofgem. Less than half of those meters – 1.9m – are smart devices that will allow this payment to be made quickly and easily.

Kwasi Kwarteng, the business and energy secretary, said: "People across the country are understandably worried about the global rise in energy costs, and the pressure this is placing on everyday bills.

"While no government can control global gas prices, we have a responsibility to step in where we can, and this significant £400 discount on energy bills we're providing will go some way to help millions of families over the colder months."

It comes days after households were warned average annual energy bills [could hit £3,850 from January](#), triple the level at the beginning of this year.

The chancellor, Nadhim Zahawi, said the discount was "part of our £37bn of help for households, including 8m of the most vulnerable households receiving £1,200 of direct support to help with the cost of living".

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The announcement comes after the consumer champion Martin Lewis said the prime minister and the Tory leadership contenders, Liz Truss and Rishi Sunak, needed to agree on a package to help consumers.

He said Boris Johnson's "zombie government" was failing to address the crisis caused by rising energy bills and warned that decisions on support could not be delayed until Johnson's successor was in office.

Lewis, the founder of MoneySavingExpert.com, said households would start receiving notice of increased bills before the Tory leadership contest concluded, with the energy price cap rising to £3,500 or more in October.

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/money/2022/jul/29/400-in-energy-bill-discounts-to-go-to-all-households-in-england-scotland-and-wales>

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

Labour

Sacked shadow minister accuses Keir Starmer of ‘complete car crash’

Sam Tarry again joins picket line after being removed from Labour frontbench earlier in week

- [Sam Tarry: why I’m proud to be on the picket line with rail workers](#)

‘Complete car crash of a week’: sacked shadow transport minister attacks Starmer on strikes – video

Ben Quinn
[@BenQuinn75](#)

Fri 29 Jul 2022 08.40 EDTFirst published on Fri 29 Jul 2022 04.59 EDT

Keir Starmer’s ban on Labour MPs going on picket lines was a “fundamental mistake” that caused a “complete car crash” in a week when the party should have been talking about increasing workers’ wages, Sam Tarry has said after he was sacked from his role as a shadow minister following media appearances at an RMT picket line.

In a defiant riposte to the Labour leadership as he once again joined a picket line, the MP rejected Starmer’s statement that he had been sacked for making up policy “on the hoof” as he stood alongside striking workers during rail action. [Trade unions](#) were the ones “showing true leadership at the moment”, he added.

“At the end of the day I thought it was time we were really clear about whose side we were on, and I am on the side of ordinary British workers,” said Tarry, giving fresh interviews after joining striking workers from the Communication Workers Union (CWU) on Friday morning in central London.

“I didn’t make up policy. All I said is that surely it should be right that we make an offer to workers in this country that matches inflation, because otherwise all they are getting offered is a real-terms pay cut,” he told Sky News.

Writing for the Guardian, Tarry said Labour MPs were “duty bound” to join striking workers on the picket line. “The rail workers need Labour in this dispute now, and MPs at Westminster, who will not shirk from standing with them on picket lines and fighting back against every Tory attack on these Covid heroes.”

He likened plans by the Conservative leadership frontrunner Liz Truss to prohibit industrial action as being like something from the dictatorships of Augusto Pinochet and Vladimir Putin, adding it would be a “dereliction of duty” for Labour not to support those on picket lines.

His comments came as thousands of BT and Openreach workers were striking across the UK on Friday in a dispute over pay. The CWU said it would be the first national telecoms strike since 1987 and the biggest ever among call centre workers.

Another strike will be held on Monday after union members voted in favour of industrial action in protest at a £1,500 pay rise.

Starmer, who removed Tarry from the party’s frontbench earlier this week as shadow minister for buses and local transport, has previously warned shadow ministers not to join picket lines, although several did so during the last rail strikes in June and did not lose their jobs.

The Guardian understands Tarry was told he was sacked for saying it was “not acceptable to offer below-inflation pay rises” because it would be a real-terms pay cut for workers.

Tarry was told Labour’s position was that it was for ministers and unions to negotiate terms. That dispute is likely to cause significant alarm from trade unions about Labour’s position, including those affiliated to the party.

Tarry said on Friday: “This isn’t about me or Keir Starmer. This is about the Labour party demonstrating it’s on the side of ordinary British workers in this country.

“I think it’s a fundamental mistake to ban Labour MPs from being on picket lines. It shouldn’t happen, never happen. It has caused a complete car crash in a week when we should have been talking about what we are going to do to raise wages for the British people.”

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Asked if a general strike was a prospect, Tarry said he did not believe it was on the cards but that trade unions needed to work together to fight back against the government.

“They are the people showing true leadership at the moment. They are the people standing up for British workers,” he said.

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Rishi Sunak grilled by Andrew Neil but Liz Truss declines invitation – as it happened

Former chancellor, who is trailing Liz Truss, gives broadcast interview

- [Sacked shadow minister accuses Starmer of ‘complete car crash’](#)

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Nadeem Badshah (now); *Nicola Slawson* and *Geneva Abdul* (earlier)

Fri 29 Jul 2022 16.10 EDTFirst published on Fri 29 Jul 2022 04.33 EDT

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- [2d ago](#)
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[Ben Wallace says he's backing Liz Truss because she understands 'threats' facing UK](#)

Rishi Sunak says he was 'silly' to say he had no working class friends – video

[Nadeem Badshah](#) (now); [Nicola Slawson](#) and [Geneva Abdul](#) (earlier)

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1d ago**16.10**

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1d ago**15.40**

A couple of highlights from the interview.

"Is there not something unsavoury about the son of successful middle-class migrants prepared to turn away asylum seekers with a valid claim?"

"No."

Rishi Sunak responds to [@afneil](#) asking about his migration policies.[#C4RaceToBePM](#) pic.twitter.com/qgjJLBaw3W

— Channel 4 (@Channel4) [July 29, 2022](#)

“She addressed the situation and made a statement about it.”

Rishi Sunak responds to [@afneil](#) question on whether it was “bad judgement” to be chancellor and to have his wife “remain a non-dom for tax purposes”.[#C4RaceToBePM](#) pic.twitter.com/Jyqr4x3Ilp

— Channel 4 (@Channel4) [July 29, 2022](#)

-
-

1d ago**15.33**

Former MP Lynn Featherstone's take on the Channel 4 interview

If Liz Truss was watching the Andrew Neil [@afneil](#) interview with Sunak - she'll run a mile. But she should do it. It's not right to run and hide just because you're in the lead.

— Lynne Featherstone (@lfeatherstone) [July 29, 2022](#)

•
•

[1d ago](#)[15.29](#)

From the i's Jane Merrick

My snap analysis of that is that Rishi Sunak did ok against a 27-minute battering ram from Andrew Neil - he didn't crumble, but there was no game-changing moment. He remains the underdog.

— Jane Merrick (@janemerrick23) [July 29, 2022](#)

•
•

[1d ago](#)[15.18](#)

Some Twitter reaction to [Liz Truss](#) declining to be interviewed by Neil.

Liz Truss bottled it. Didn't stop Johnson becoming PM when he refused to be grilled by Andrew Neil. [#andrewneilshow](#)

— Sangita Myska (@SangitaMyska) [July 29, 2022](#)

No major wins or losses from that interview with Andrew Neil in my view. But I think Rishi Sunak deserves credit for showing up to it,

which can't be said for all the contenders...

— Noa Hoffman (@hoffman_noa) [July 29, 2022](#)

-
-

[1d ago](#)[15.16](#)

Political journalist Rachel Wearmouth gives her reaction to Sunak's handling of questions about his wife's tax arrangements.

Andrew Neil points out Sunak's wife had to apply for non dom status. Sunak looks very uncomfortable, & keeps repeating "I'm the one running to be Prime Minister, not my wife"

— Rachel Wearmouth (@REWearmouth) [July 29, 2022](#)

-
-

[1d ago](#)[15.14](#)

Neil says [Liz Truss](#) declined an invitation to be interviewed but the invitation remains open. And that concludes the programme.

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[1d ago](#)[15.13](#)

Sunak concludes by saying “people have seen me lead this country’s economy through an incredibly challenging time throughout the past two years” and he plans to use this experience if elected as PM.

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1d ago**15.11**

On his wife's non dom tax status he replies "I am the one running for office, not my wife.

"My wife is from abroad. Several months ago we addressed this situation and I support her decision."

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1d ago**15.09**

On his now infamous comment when he was a student that he had no working class friends, Sunak admits "we all say silly things when we're students."

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1d ago**15.08**

On his background as the son of successful migrants potentially at odds with his asylum proposals, Sunak says "there is nothing wrong about that. My family and millions like them were welcomed legally."

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1d ago**15.07**

On his asylum cap proposal, Sunak says he believes it does not breach international law.

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[1d ago](#)[15.06](#)

Sunak is now defending his support for the policy of sending illegal migrants to Rwanda, none of whom have been deported so far.

Neil points out that Rwanda officials have admitted they only have capacity for 200 migrants and questions whether the programme is value for money at £120 million. Sunak says the “strong deterrent effect” of the programme will prevent thousands of migrants from crossing the Channel and £5 million is being spent on hotels to house them.

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[1d ago](#)[15.03](#)

On NHS waiting lists increasing and breaking a manifesto pledge on not raising taxes to raise cash for the health service,

Sunak talks about other pledges of having debt lower in Parliament and “we got hit by a pandemic, a once in a century event”. He adds his plan to lower waiting lists includes a taskforce which is scoffed at by Neil and creating over 100 surgical hubs.

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[1d ago](#)[14.57](#)

On his previous opposition to a windfall tax before implementing one, Sunak replies “the situation changed”.

He added he did not know how high and how long the oil prices would stay at those levels for.

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[1d ago](#) [14.56](#)

Sunak says the option of suspending VAT will be the only option available, albeit “far from perfect”. if he becomes prime minister in September with energy bills forecast to increase again in October.

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[Newest](#) [Newest](#)

[Previous](#)

1
of
5

[Next](#)

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[Conservative leadership](#)

Ben Wallace attacks Rishi Sunak's cabinet resignation after backing Truss

Defence secretary says public would never have forgiven Tories if financial markets had crashed

Ben Wallace attacks Rishi Sunak's decision to quit Johnson's cabinet – video

[Ben Quinn](#)

[@BenQuinn75](#)

Fri 29 Jul 2022 03.54 EDT Last modified on Fri 29 Jul 2022 06.24 EDT

The British public would never have forgiven the [Conservatives](#) if the financial markets had crashed after Rishi Sunak quit as chancellor, Ben Wallace has said as he stepped up attacks on the Tory leadership candidate after endorsing his rival Liz Truss.

Wallace, the defence secretary, also suggested he was throwing his weight behind Truss because she recognised that the “threats we face every day” needed to be “funded properly”.

Speaking after [coming out for Truss overnight](#) in an article for the Times, Wallace continued to go on the offensive against her opponent, telling Sky News that Sunak’s decision to cut entrepreneurs’ relief when he was chancellor was not a way to create “either wealth or indeed growth”.

Sunak was the second senior cabinet minister to resign from Boris Johnson’s government this month, after Sajid Javid, triggering Johnson’s downfall a few days later. Allies of Johnson blame Sunak more than anyone else for his departure.

Wallace contrasted his own decision and that of the home secretary, Priti Patel, to stay in their posts with Sunak and others’ resignations.

“What if the markets had crashed? What if the home secretary had done that and there had been a terrorist attack? The public would never forgive us,” Wallace told Sky News.

He appeared to echo criticism of Sunak’s record on defence spending. As chancellor, [Sunak reportedly resisted pressure](#) for a big increase in UK defence spending in the wake of Russia’s invasion of Ukraine

Wallace said: “I am the secretary of state for defence, I want to find a candidate that’s going to do right by the department and recognise that the threats we face every day are very real and are growing and that they need to be funded properly.”

In a thinly veiled swipe at Sunak, Wallace wrote in the Times that Truss was “a winner not because she’s a slick salesperson but because she is authentic”.

The two candidates faced a grilling from voters in Leeds on Thursday [in the first official hustings with Tory members](#), where tax continued to be a significant dividing line between them.

Sunak implicitly criticised Truss by saying he would not “embark on a spree, borrowing tens and tens of billions of pounds of unfunded promises and put them on the country’s credit card”.

Truss criticised windfall taxes, which Sunak imposed on energy companies as a one-off as chancellor. She said: “I don’t believe in windfall taxes, because they put off future investment. What we should be doing is encouraging Shell and other companies to invest in the United Kingdom, because we need to get our productivity up, we need capital investment.”

Rishi Sunak and Liz Truss questioned by Tory party members in first hustings – video highlights

Sunak said he would back the creation of new grammar schools if he becomes prime minister. He used his opening speech at the debate in Leeds to say he would create “a Britain where the birthright of every child is a world-class education”.

Asked by the presenter Nick Ferrari to give a yes/no answer to the question of whether he would bring back grammar schools, Sunak – who attended one of the UK's most expensive public schools – said: “Yes.”

He added: “I believe in educational excellence, I believe education is the most powerful way that we can transform people’s lives. But I also think there’s lots we can do with the school system as we have it.”

Some Conservative MPs have long hankered after the return of grammar schools, despite evidence that they tend to disproportionately benefit the children of wealthier families.

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

2022.07.29 - Spotlight

- [The myth of Marilyn Monroe How her ‘sex bomb’ image buries the truth](#)
- [Analysis Tribunal rulings for gender-critical women have key implications](#)
- [Experience I look after the world’s oldest pot plant](#)
- [‘So refreshing and joyful’ Readers on Euro 2022 and women’s football](#)

[Movies](#)

The myth of Marilyn Monroe: how her ‘sex bomb’ image buries the truth

Six decades on, the spectacle of Marilyn Monroe’s tumultuous life and death still holds us in its grip. With a major new biopic on the way, her biographer sorts fact from fiction



Arthur Miller and Monroe in 1957. Photograph: Sam Shaw/Rex Features

Anthony Summers

Fri 29 Jul 2022 03.00 EDT Last modified on Fri 29 Jul 2022 09.55 EDT

In May, a portrait of a woman [sold at auction](#) in New York for \$195m (£157m): a record for an artwork by an American artist and by any artist in the 20th century. That month, also in New York, there was a furore when a dress the woman had once worn was paraded at the Metropolitan Museum of Art gala by a reality TV star. The gown is said to be “the most expensive dress in the world”; its owner paid nearly \$5m for it. To ensure its safety, it is normally kept in special conditions in a darkened vault.

The woman in the portrait, the woman who once wore the dress – to sing Happy Birthday to President [John F Kennedy](#) at Madison Square Garden – was, of course, Marilyn Monroe. The vividly coloured screen-print of her, the work of Andy Warhol, is the most famous of his works of pop art. Kim Kardashian, whose stunt it was to wear the Monroe dress at the Met, responded to criticism for having worn a deceased woman's clothing by insisting, bizarrely, that she had “so much respect” for her.

In life, Monroe made herself noticed far beyond Hollywood and in ways very different from the corny “sex bomb” image that is the leitmotif of her modern iconography. Twenty years before physical exercise became a fad, she went running. She read serious literature voraciously, Dostoevsky in particular. As early as 1950, studio executives had thought it necessary to warn her not to be seen reading politically radical books. Before the decade was out, Monroe would marry Arthur Miller, at the very time the playwright was being investigated for his dalliance with communism. She supported the burgeoning civil rights movement. She was a founder member of the Hollywood branch of Sane, the Committee for a Sane Nuclear Policy.



Warhol's Shot Sage Blue Marilyn, which sold for \$195m in April.
Photograph: Angela Weiss/AFP/Getty Images

Yet 60 years after she died, Monroe's vivid presence in the world's culture – only Diana, Princess of Wales rivals her hold over the public imagination – does not allow for nuance. Massive sexpot street art of the star can be seen from Istanbul to Penang, Cannes to Vancouver. A silk Monroe hair scrunchie celebrating “[her] authenticity, self-acceptance and self-confidence” retails for £42. A “lifesize hyper-realistic silicone figurine statue” is [a snip](#) at £13,000.

Monroe is still a lucrative – and helpfully mutable – asset. The Montblanc Marilyn Monroe Special Edition Pearl ballpoint pen is yours for [£660](#). A lamp featuring Monroe with the wind blowing her skirt up is just [£148](#). Across the planet, Monroe's features decorate everything from cookery books to coffee mugs, handbags to ties. Innumerable Facebook groups, Pinterest boards, Instagram accounts and fansites – Marilyn Remembered, Our Marilyn, Immortal Marilyn, the Irish Marilyn Monroe fanclub – are devoted to her.

I wrote a biography of the star in 1985, seeking to penetrate the jungle of factoids about her and emerge with something approximate to the truth about her life and controversial death. Since its publication, the appetite for all things Monroe – in particular the seamier side of her legacy – has only grown more voracious. In recent months, millions have watched [a Netflix documentary](#) based on the interviews I taped for that book. In September, Netflix will premiere [Blonde](#), a highly anticipated fictional film starring Ana de Armas.

It is billed as a “biopic” – and, by the director, Andrew Dominik, as “an emotional nightmare fairytale”. It is adapted from the novel of the same name by the American author [Joyce Carol Oates](#), which was published in 2000. The novel, Oates wrote in a preface, was a “radically distilled ‘life’ of Marilyn Monroe”. By radically distilled, she explained, she meant that she had been highly selective, used real-life facts and characters – she credited my biography as being one of her main sources – but freely imagined much else.

In Oates' 700-page novel, the lead character is usually named as Norma Jeane, the name Monroe was born with and known by until her movie career

took off. Later, she is “Marilyn Monroe”. During the second world war, the novel’s Norma Jeane works at Radio Plane, a company doing war work – and the future star did work at such a company. Later, when she finds fame, she marries first “the Ex-Athlete” and then “the Playwright” – transparent references to Monroe’s husbands Joe DiMaggio and Arthur Miller.

Sexual experiences, mostly miserable ones, dominate Blonde – with an emphasis on the tyranny and treachery of many of her men. Early in the book, Norma Jeane is raped by a Hollywood studio mogul who is allotted the name “Mr Z”. The rape scene is graphically written, sparing no detail. “Mr Z” has been interpreted as a thinly veiled reference to the founder of Twentieth Century Fox, Darryl Zanuck. The real-life Monroe recalled “casting couch” sex encounters, but nothing suggests any of them were with Zanuck. In interviews with almost 700 people, I encountered nothing to suggest that any Hollywood producer raped Monroe.



Monroe with President John F Kennedy (right) and his brother Robert, after JFK's birthday party in 1962. Photograph: Cecil Stoughton/EPA

In Oates’ novel, though, the most blatant historical libel targets Monroe’s 1962 involvement with “the President”. “The President”, from a hugely wealthy Irish-American family, is a clear reference to Kennedy. In the novel,

the President asks peremptorily to see Monroe, has sex with her repeatedly, then becomes inaccessible until “the summons” comes again.

Monroe is flown to the White House. There is more sex, chitchat about communist Cuba and Fidel Castro, and still more sex. Back in Los Angeles, she dreams that the president has made her pregnant. Then comes another summons, another flight east. She sings “Happy Birthday, Mr President” at Madison Square Garden. Then, on her return to Los Angeles, desolation and death.

In the novel, death comes “hurtling toward her” in the form of a man “without passion and without pity”, an assassin. The man does not know whether his mission is “to protect the President from the President’s blond whore” or whether the real purpose is “to damage the President for being associated with the blond whore”. Using a key he has been given by a person identified as “RF”, the assassin gets into Monroe’s house at night when she is asleep. Then, equipped with a syringe loaded with a fatal dose of a sleeping medication, he “[sinks] the six-inch needle to the hilt into her heart”.

Oates’ novel makes it clear that references to “the President” in the book are to Kennedy. Moreover, no one would interpret her reference to “RF” as code for anyone other than “RFK” – the president’s brother, Attorney General Robert F Kennedy.

Why do I call Oates’ “fictionalised” tale of dalliance with the Kennedys “historical libel”? Credible information does suggest that Kennedy dallied with Monroe. His brother Robert, research indicates, also had some sort of covert connection to her. There is zero evidence, however, that they or anyone else murdered her. Is it defensible to write and publish this scenario in a novel – not least when the individuals involved are still fresh in the memory? A scenario that could suggest the president’s brother aided and abetted – ordered? – murder?



Monroe reads Michael Chekhov's book *To the Actor: On the Technique of Acting*, in 1955. Photograph: Michael Ochs Archives/Getty Images

When Oates' novel came out, her defence was that, in a work of fiction, she "had no particular obligation" to the facts. In my view, that is not so. The people she named in her novel were real people with real reputations – and historical legacies – and such fictional fabrication is unjustifiably cruel. The fact that the individuals concerned are dead is no defence.

Will the upcoming movie spin the same tale? Dominik has said the film will be "critical of American sacred cows", including Kennedy, and that "there's something in it to offend everyone". It is evident that the film will push the limits. Netflix reportedly insisted on hiring an editor to "curb the excesses" of the production. Even so, it has an NC-17 rating, which – in theory – bars viewing by anyone 17 or under in the US.

Dominik does not mince his words. He says the movie is what you would want from "the NC-17 version of the Marilyn Monroe story". He continues: "If the audience doesn't like it, that's the audience's fucking problem." More soberly, he claims the movie would not have been made without the #MeToo movement; that it tells what it is like "to be an unloved girl, to go through the Hollywood meat-grinder ... how a childhood trauma shapes an adult who's split between a public and private self".

After seeing a rough cut, Oates deemed the film “brilliant, very disturbing, perhaps most surprisingly an utterly ‘feminist’ interpretation”. Dominik has since [ventured](#) that “*Blonde* will be one of the 10 best movies ever made.”

“The scale of the Monroe myth is impossible to measure,” Prof Sarah Churchwell has written. More books have been written about the star than about any other entertainer. More than 20 films already offer a fictional version of her life story. Will the coming film be an indulgent wallow in her sex life and in conspiratorial fantasising about her death, or deliver something worthwhile?



Monroe with Clark Gable in *The Misfits*. Photograph: United Archives GmbH/Alamy

John Huston, who directed Monroe’s first substantial movie (*The Asphalt Jungle*, 1950), as well as the last one she completed (1961’s *The Misfits*), said: “People say Hollywood broke her heart, but that is rubbish – she was observant and tough-minded … In certain ways, she was very shrewd.” He added: “She went right down into her personal experience for everything, reached down and pulled something out of herself that was unique … She found things about womankind in herself.”

“How do you go about writing a life story?” Monroe herself wondered during an interview just before she died. “Because the true things rarely get into circulation. It’s usually the false things ... It’s hard to know where to start, you know, if you don’t start with the truth.”

Anthony Summers is the author of [Goddess: The Secret Lives of Marilyn Monroe](#). An updated edition has just been published by Weidenfeld & Nicolson

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

Transgender

Tribunal rulings for gender-critical women have key implications

Analysis: recent cases strengthen protections for debate, but questions remain around workplace conflicts



Barrister Allison Bailey, pictured with the author JK Rowling, won her discrimination case against her chambers but lost against the charity Stonewall. Photograph: Allison Bailey

[Haroon Siddique](#) Legal affairs correspondent

Fri 29 Jul 2022 03.00 EDT Last modified on Fri 29 Jul 2022 07.18 EDT

The decision, on Wednesday, that LGB Alliance founder and barrister [Allison Bailey had suffered direct discrimination and victimisation](#) was the second highly anticipated ruling in less than a month – after [the Maya Forstater case](#) – concerning gender-critical women in the workplace.

With both women being allies of [JK Rowling](#), and both of their cases turning on their tweets criticising beliefs of supporters of transgender rights, they attracted an unusual amount of attention for employment tribunals and experts say they have important implications.

The most significant ruling came in the Forstater case when, [in June last year](#) a panel led by the president of the employment appeal tribunal (EAT) held that gender-critical views were a protected philosophical belief under [the Equality Act](#).

The decision paved the way not just for Forstater winning her case, which was then sent back to an employment tribunal to be heard in full, but also Bailey's victory against her chambers, Garden Court.

Lucy Lewis, employment partner at Lewis Silkin, said: “If you want to engage in public debate, if you are clear you are doing that in your personal capacity, then I think that there is now much stronger protection as a result of these two cases in your ability to do that.”

Bosses at Garden Court Chambers (GCC) argued that Bailey's tweets, one of which spoke of “intimidation, fear & coercion that are driving the @stonewalluk trans self-id agenda” went beyond her beliefs, which the Forstater case had established were protected, but this was rejected by the tribunal.

Lewis said as a result of the Forstater case “the bar is high” as views have to be “objectively offensive” but what the cases – both unusually involving high-profile individuals on social media, each with more than 50,000 Twitter followers – had left unanswered was how to deal with such a conflict of views in the actual workplace, for example directed towards a colleague.

She said the only case to address this to date was when a doctor, David Mackereth, who insisted on misgendering trans people while assessing benefit claimants lost a claim against the government that he was discriminated against on the basis of his religious beliefs, in another decision [published earlier this month](#).

That was in line with the EAT's decision in the Forstater case which it said "does not mean that those with gender-critical beliefs can 'misgender' trans persons with impunity".

Bailey sued both GCC, whose decision to join Stonewall's Diversity Champions scheme provoked her tweets, and the LGBTQ+ charity itself. Her crowdfunding page, which raised more than £500,000 for legal costs, pointing the finger at the latter with the title: "I am suing Stonewall."

She won the case against GCC – which has said it is considering an appeal – but lost against Stonewall, having failed to show that the charity, which was among those to complain about her tweets, had induced or instructed discrimination by her chambers.

Nevertheless it was Stonewall Bailey reserved her harshest words for following the decision, accusing it of "creating the environment in which discrimination against gender-critical women and lesbians has been allowed to flourish".

For its part, Stonewall said it was committed to creating a workplace "where everyone can thrive" and placed responsibility for organisations' culture in the hands of their leaders. "Stonewall's resources, support and guidance is just one set of inputs they use to help them as they consider how best to meet the needs of their own organisation," the charity said.

Lewis said the fact that some people within an organisation did not agree with Stonewall did not mean that businesses should not engage with the charity but it would require careful management.

"There are lots of businesses that continue to engage with Stonewall even though employees within their organisations say they are uncomfortable about that because they have made their own assessment and they are comfortable with that," she said.

"I think if you bring in any kind of external advice you need to take a measured approach to what you are looking to achieve and how that external organisation is going to help you achieve that."

Her words were echoed by Georgina Calvert-Lee, employment law and equality expert at Bellevue Law, “There is no harm in employers engaging with third party interest groups – it often helps keep them aligned with current sensibilities which may affect their staff – but they should still ensure their workplace is tolerant of differences,” she said.

Calvert-Lee added that another lesson of the case was that where employers have mission statements or the like “they should stand back and consider objectively how proposed policies or statements may impact different members of staff, depending on their beliefs and other protected characteristics, and then try to plot a neutral path that avoids this different impact and treats everyone with respect”.

The tribunal heard that GCC, with a motto of “Do right, fear no one”, prided itself on supporting trans rights since 1988 but Bailey’s views on the matter were very different.

Echoing Calvert-Lee, Lewis said employers should “avoid taking a knee-jerk reaction because somebody is expressing a view which is different from the organisation’s stated objective or stated position on a certain matter”.

But given there was still a debate at the time of Bailey’s tweets over whether or not gender-critical views were protected, she said it was a mistake organisations were less likely to make in the wake of the tribunal’s decisions.

This article was amended on 29 July 2022. An earlier version referred to solicitor Lucy Lewis as “partner and head of the employment team” at Lewis Silken. This has been changed to “employment partner”. To clarify: she heads the employment team at the firm’s Cardiff office.

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ExperienceLife and style

Experience: I look after the world's oldest pot plant

He was brought to the UK in 1775. He's a gentle giant who just gets on with life



Brie Langley with the giant cycad at Kew Gardens in London. Photograph: Mark Chilvers/The Guardian

Brie Langley

Fri 29 Jul 2022 05.00 EDT Last modified on Fri 29 Jul 2022 05.54 EDT

I came to horticulture after university. I had finished a postgrad in sustainable agriculture and was working in a cafe while living with my parents in Stirling. It was the middle of the last recession and I was finding it hard to get a job. My parents were trying to sell their house and, as I had a bit of time on my hands, they asked me to sort out the garden.

It was a jungle. I cleared all the weeds, and began to plant it – things like lobelia ‘Queen Victoria’ and hollyhock. Then I began a vegetable plot – mangetout, swede, beetroot, purple potatoes – and even revived their tiny greenhouse. I became obsessed. Horticulture combined all sorts of things I found interesting – both ecology and science, but it also had an artistic side; it’s not something that’s talked about in schools.

I couldn’t afford to go back to university, but fortunately, most of the training opportunities for horticulture are paid. I managed to get an apprenticeship at an RHS garden in north Devon and it all started from there.

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I’ve worked at Kew for four and a half years. At first I worked in the Temperate House, which has a Mediterranean climate. But then I was given the opportunity to move to the Palm House, where the tropical plants live, and I jumped at the chance. It is home to a plant that is, as far as we know, the oldest pot plant in the world. It is a giant cycad or *Encephalartos altensteinii*, native to the Eastern Cape province of South Africa and brought to the UK in 1775 by the botanist Francis Masson. In 1848, the Palm House was completed at Kew [Gardens](#) and this giant cycad was moved there.

He is toxic all the way through: very spiky, very stoic. We see him as a gentle giant, really – he just gets on with life. When you get to know a person very well, you can tell instantly if they look a little off colour. Caring for plants is the same. As I walk through the Palm House, I’m looking out for how the different plants seem, their colour, texture, the angles of their leaves, and I’m also paying attention to the quality of the air – is it too dry, or too hot?



The giant cycad, or *Encephalartos altensteinii* Photograph: Andrew McRobb, Kew Gardens/Kew Gardens

Some plants are very dramatic, and will droop significantly or start to yellow as soon as something is wrong, but the giant cycad isn't one of those. He's more like a grumpy grandfather, who sits by the fire and doesn't say much except, "Leave me be; I'll be fine." He just keeps on growing, slowly, approximately 2.5cm a year. Today, he's about 4 metres long, and held up by a series of metal supports so his trunk doesn't break.

Over the winter we probably water him once a week, and in the summer months he'll get a little bit more. We'll water him all the way through his pot, give him a good soak, which is a useful tip for most pot plants – give them a good soak through the pot rather than sprinkling a bit of water on top. Apart from that, he gets sprayed with water every morning like all the other plants, and is fed every week with fertiliser. It is sometimes seaweed-based but we like to change it up so the plants get all their minerals. Though generally we just leave him to do his thing.

It's unavoidable in this line of work to personify plants and begin to feel for them. I think that's something that humans always do. You might remember that one plant flowered fantastically one year, but then the next year it

doesn't do so well, and you think, "Oh god, what's wrong?" So there is some anxiety. But equally in horticulture there's a requirement to be detached – because something will always go wrong. Plants will decide whether or not they want to grow. And there's nothing we can do about it. We just have to get over it.

The giant cycad is so chill that he's not usually the source of this anxiety – the only danger he faces is when he needs moving or repotting. He's been moved before, but when it's on your head, that's really nerve-racking. You think, this is something that has been part of people's lives for hundreds of years. If the worst happened and the end of the trunk did come off, it would probably still survive. But, obviously, you don't want that to happen. I'm sure it'll be fine.

As told to Felix Bazalgette

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Women's Euro 2022

‘So refreshing and joyful’: readers on Euro 2022 and women’s football

Girls, boys and older longtime followers of the sport have lapped up a tournament that looks like a breakthrough



Alessia Russo of England celebrates the third goal in the semi-final against Sweden. Photograph: Naomi Baker/Getty Images

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[Alfie Packham](#) and [Clea Skopeliti](#)

Fri 29 Jul 2022 03.00 EDT Last modified on Fri 29 Jul 2022 13.37 EDT

Interest in women's football has surged during the Euro 2022 tournament, with [consistently high viewing figures](#). England's semi-final against Sweden was among the most watched television broadcasts of the year, drawing a peak audience of 9.3 million viewers on BBC One.

Five fans speak about what has drawn them to the tournament this year, and their favourite moments from the matches so far.

'I looked at my daughter's face and she was so excited'



Rob and his daughter Mia. Photograph: Guardian Community

I travelled to Brighton last week for the quarter-final between England and Spain with a friend and our 12-year-old daughters. We arrived around 15 minutes prior to kick off and the atmosphere was incredible. This continued throughout the match, even after Spain went ahead.

My highlight was when Georgia Stanway scored the winning goal and the crowd rose as one in appreciation. I remember looking at my daughter's face and she was so excited. It was like that ball was destined for the back of the net and the crowd just erupted. It was wonderful.

My daughter is a keen player so we spend a lot of time together at her games on weekends. The match we attended has given her increased enthusiasm for the game. Coming out of the ground, we talked about going to WSL [Women's Super League] games together next season.

I'm a lifelong Leicester City supporter and love watching football, but it's not something I've wanted to take my own family to very often because of the nature of the crowds at the men's games. So this increased awareness of the women's game is fantastic for me and my family.

Rob Crowther, 55, school principal, Surrey

My favourite moment was when the players came to the corner after the goal. They were so close to us and it was like we were celebrating with them. It was great to see players this good and it makes me want to try to be as good as them.

Rob's daughter Mia

'I was football mad as a teenager, but wasn't allowed to play'



Kathryn Streatfield. Photograph: Kathryn Streatfield

I was very impressed by the standard of women's football. Super skills, fitness, tactics and passing. I have thoroughly enjoyed watching football without the hype and the aggression of the Premier League. It's so refreshing and joyful, a pleasure to watch.

As a teenager, I was a football mad – it was my obsession. But I was at secondary school in the late 1960s and early 1970s, and you just couldn't do it. I can remember in Year 8 trying to get a girls' football team together to play at lunchtime. There were a few people who were interested and we got summoned to the deputy head who said there was no way girls were playing football in that school, so forget it.

It was all quite interesting when women's football started to take off, and now it's really got momentum and I really hope it goes on. I think it will inspire enthusiasm and also give people a role model. I hope many more girls get on the pitch and enjoy themselves.

Kathryn Streatfield, 67, North Yorkshire, retired

'My boys were cheering every goal'



Sonya's sons and their friend watching the football. Photograph: Sonya Dunn

The joy of these Euros has been watching the games with my three sons – my twins are eight and my eldest is 12 – and their friends. They have loved every single England game, and the 8-0 Norway game in particular. My three boys were just cheering with every goal, going absolutely nuts for it and saying: we don't care if it's men or women playing football, we just care that it's football, it's England, and we just want to win.

This is the generation where gay marriage is normal, women playing football is normal – it's really emotional for me to be watching these things, and they don't understand that. And that's OK – they can just enjoy it, that's the point of getting here. When I was at school, a teacher laughed at me because I wanted to play football with the boys.

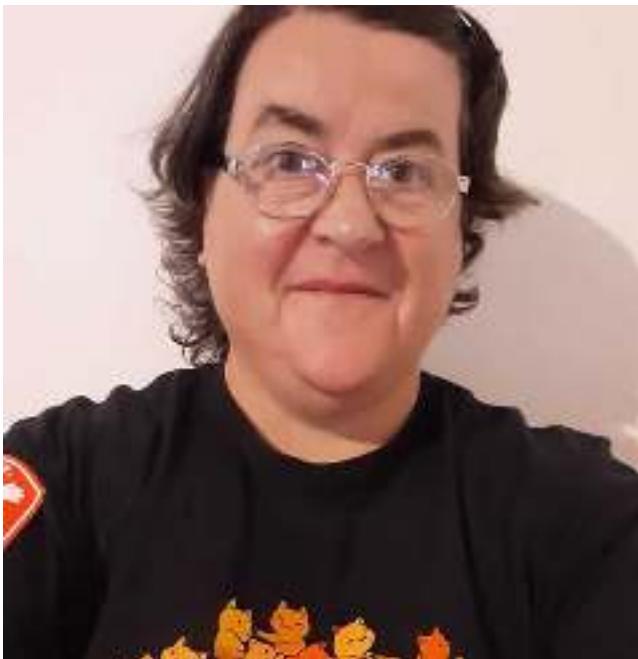


Sonya's son Myles. Photograph: Sonya Dunn

As a mother of sons, I almost feel that it's more important to watch the Euros with them than I would if I had a daughter. It's just as important that men engage with women's football as women do.

Sonya Dunn, West Sussex, 42, stay-at-home parent

'It's given me a lot of pride in England'



Mary Collins. Photograph: Guardian Community

I have felt very inspired by the Euros and, interestingly, it's given me a lot of pride in England – the team and the country. Although I was born in Birmingham, my family is from Ireland and I never identify as English. I have nothing to relate to that I like, besides Wallace and Gromit. But seeing the grace and success of the Lionesses has changed something.

Before this year, I'd never seen an international game in person. I've been to Sheffield to see Netherlands v Sweden and Leigh for Netherlands v Portugal, Sweden v Portugal. I don't know what it's like at bigger matches, but they were so well organised. There were so many stewards around and you just felt that you were in a really supportive environment.

Another thing I have noticed this year is the commentary. It's more equal to the men's commentary now. It seems to be more serious and focused.



Mary's poster and flag. Photograph: Guardian Community

The best moment so far has probably been watching Beth Mead score her hat-trick against Norway. It's incredible, the way England has played. It was magic how gracefully they scored these goals. And to get that 8-0 result. I was watching in a pub in Sheffield and just laughing. I couldn't believe it.

Unfortunately, I've had a chest infection this last week, but if I'm well enough, I'd like to see the final in the fan zone in Manchester city centre, or one of the pubs. If not, I'm quite happy at home. I've got a poster in the front window and a little Euro flag. So it might be me and the cat, Frank. It's going to be amazing.

Mary Collins, 54, Manchester

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2022.07.29 - Opinion

- Travel chaos and understaffed airports are a wake-up call: Britain is unravelling
- The rouble is soaring and Putin is stronger than ever - our sanctions have backfired
- Now Whitby, too, is finding out what happens when tourism takes over
- Tory hustings: a fresh circle of hell where we don't even get to enjoy Rish! and Radon Liz fighting

[Opinion](#)[Air transport](#)

Travel chaos and understaffed airports are a wake-up call: Britain is unravelling

[Gaby Hinsliff](#)



From passport delays to Brexit gridlock, the UK's failures are becoming impossible to hide – even from those in denial



Illustration: Joe Magee

Fri 29 Jul 2022 01.00 EDT Last modified on Fri 29 Jul 2022 05.46 EDT

We made it home from holiday, eventually, on the third day of trying. Not bad, really, by the standards of this hellish summer. Better than being [stuck for 21 hours](#) in traffic outside Dover with a screaming toddler in the back and no loo for miles. Or sitting on the asphalt for [six hours in a heatwave](#) without food or drink, as the inmates of one American Airlines flight to New York reportedly were this week. At least I wasn't missing a wedding or a funeral, or even (like one despairing passenger on what was meant to be our flight home) trying and failing to get back for a sister's graduation.

All we had to contend with was a flurry of last-minute changes to our tickets, followed by someone else's plane breaking down on a runway in New Jersey and triggering a now woefully familiar chain reaction: delayed takeoffs, jumbo jets queueing on the tarmac unable to offload increasingly stressed passengers at the gates, a missed connection, a day and a night unexpectedly stuck at Newark airport. There's only so much time you can kill boggling at the Donald Trump "I'll be back!" T-shirts and Kamala Harris commemorative socks on sale in the airport gift shop.

Still, we managed to get on to another flight the next evening, which was airborne for one hopeful hour before starting to leak hydraulic fluid somewhere over Canada, prompting a scramble back to Newark and a runway lined with emergency vehicles. The rest, to be honest, is a blur. After more than 48 hours in transit everything takes on a faintly dreamlike quality, fogged by living on a diet of airline snacks and never being sure what time it is in real life.

Travel chaos is the ultimate in first-world problems, of course, confined to those lucky enough to afford a holiday. But if it's a luxury complaint it's also an illuminating one, a lens through which something may finally snap into focus. Going away in summer is the sort of thing most people take for granted. When even hopping on a Channel ferry becomes a heroic expedition against the odds, the sense of things falling apart at the seams is palpable.

The Home Office has been failing in plain sight for years now. But when more than [half a million people](#) are waiting to renew their passports, these failures become impossible to hide even from those who wouldn't ordinarily notice. Nothing brings home the reality of Brexit, meanwhile, like gridlocked motorways in Kent. Now a [summer of airmageddon](#) threatens to expose some painful truths about post-pandemic working life, too.

The never knowingly understated Ryanair boss Michael O'Leary has blamed cancelled flights on a government that "[couldn't run a sweet shop](#)", together with airports failing to prepare for a predictable summer rush, which feels at least partly true. Ryanair was readier than some for the lifting of travel bans; the company retained its staff through lockdown (albeit while imposing an unpopular [pay cut](#)), and has been visibly [exasperated with airports](#) cancelling slots at the last minute, making it kick enraged passengers off otherwise viable flights. But this isn't a universal story. We were told to arrive at Heathrow four hours before our flight, where we found the longest queues not at security but at woefully undermanned airline check-ins. Too many carriers who dumped their staff like hot potatoes during Covid seem surprised they haven't come running back now it's over. Why be loyal to bosses who showed no such care for you?

Worldwide, an estimated [400,000 aviation staff](#) were fired, furloughed or warned they faced redundancy in the spring and summer of 2020. Many now show understandably little inclination to come back and bail out companies that made them feel disposable. Pilots who were leaving the RAF a few years ago for a seemingly cushier life flying civilian planes are now heading back in the opposite direction. Thanks to an unusually tight labour market, cabin crew are discovering they have options other than an industry notorious for cost-cutting (Lisa Nandy, the shadow levelling-up secretary, whose constituency includes workers at Manchester airport, says she has [heard from crew](#) taking Pot Noodles with them on stopovers because their company meal allowances no longer cover the cost of dinner when they land). Among those who did stay on board, resentment seems to be mounting. While we glumly watched the departure boards at Newark lighting up with cancellations, Lufthansa was [scrapping hundreds of flights](#) through Frankfurt and Munich after staff walked out. British Airways pilots are [threatening to strike](#) next, over pay and conditions.

Long before Covid-19 hit, the aviation industry had become a skin-of-the-teeth operation, operating on punishingly tight margins. At first airlines squared the circle of fierce consumer demand for cheap fares by charging for things that used to be free. Want to sit next to your own children, or take an actual suitcase with you? That'll be extra. But lately things have taken a darker turn. The American Airlines' pilots union recently [accused companies](#) of "trying to fly more airplanes than they can actually fly and building these schedules to an inhumane level", prompting calls in the US for an investigation into the wider industry. If you can't feel sorry for stranded holidaymakers, then spare a thought for short-staffed crews bearing the brunt of their anger, all while watching colleagues drop like flies in a new wave of Omicron. The captain of our aborted Newark flight was brought in off standby after the original pilot fell sick at the last minute, and when we finally took off again five hours late, it was only because the crew volunteered to extend their working day; board quickly, we were warned, or there won't be a crew at all (there are legal limits on how long they can work without a break). Watching the exhausted-looking stewards rush through takeoff routines was the first time I've ever felt a twinge of nerves, rational or not, about flying.

Memories fade almost as fast as holiday tans, so perhaps by next summer we'll have simply forgotten what this one was like. But not everything can be shaken out as easily as sand from a beach bag, and one lasting legacy of the last few years may be a new sense of fragility: the insecurity born of feeling that loyalty isn't rewarded, jobs are not for life, things once taken for granted can no longer be guaranteed, and something somewhere may have been hollowed out beyond repair. Fasten your seatbelts: that means turbulence ahead.

- Gaby Hinsliff is a Guardian columnist

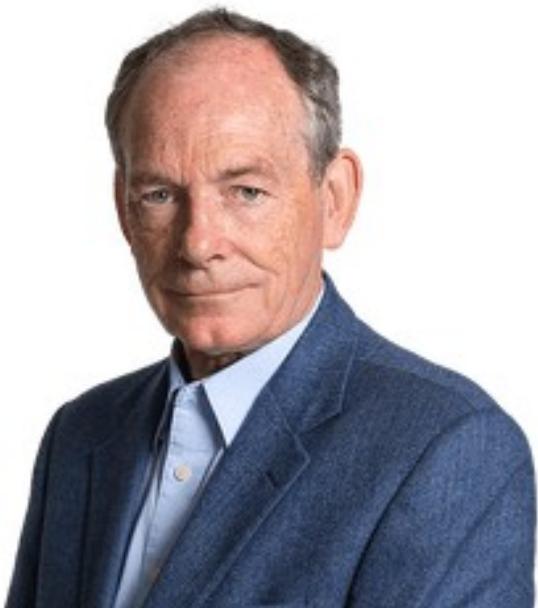
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| [Section menu](#) | [Main menu](#) |

OpinionRussia

The rouble is soaring and Putin is stronger than ever - our sanctions have backfired

[Simon Jenkins](#)



Energy prices are rocketing, inflation is soaring and millions are being starved of grain. Surely Johnson knew this would happen?



Vladimir Putin and the Russian energy minister, Nikolai Shulginov, in Moscow, 21 July 2022. Photograph: Mikhail Klimentyev/AP

Fri 29 Jul 2022 02.00 EDT Last modified on Fri 29 Jul 2022 04.35 EDT

Western sanctions against Russia are the most ill-conceived and counterproductive policy in recent international history. Military aid to Ukraine is justified, but the [economic war](#) is ineffective against the regime in Moscow, and devastating for its unintended targets. World energy prices are rocketing, inflation is soaring, supply chains are chaotic and millions are being starved of gas, grain and fertiliser. Yet Vladimir Putin's barbarity only escalates – as does his hold over his own people.

To criticise [western sanctions](#) is close to anathema. Defence analysts are dumb on the subject. Strategy thinktanks are silent. Britain's putative leaders, Liz Truss and Rishi Sunak, compete in belligerent rhetoric, promising ever tougher sanctions without a word of purpose. Yet, hint at scepticism on the subject and you will be excoriated as “pro-Putin” and anti-Ukraine. Sanctions are the war cry of the west’s crusade.

The reality of sanctions on Russia is that they invite retaliation. Putin is free to freeze Europe this winter. He has [slashed supply](#) from major pipelines such as Nord Stream 1 by up to 80%. World oil prices have surged and

eastern Europe's flow of wheat and other foodstuffs to Africa and Asia has been all but suspended.

Britain's domestic gas bills face tripling inside a year. The chief beneficiary is none other than Russia, whose energy exports to Asia have soared, driving its balance of payments into unprecedented surplus. The rouble is one of the world's strongest currencies this year, having strengthened since January by nearly 50%. Moscow's overseas assets have been frozen and its oligarchs have relocated their yachts, but there is no sign that Putin cares. He has no electorate to worry him.

The interdependence of the world's economies, so long seen as an instrument of peace, has been made a weapon of war. Politicians around the Nato table have been wisely cautious about escalating military aid to Ukraine. They understand military deterrence. Yet they appear total ingenues on economics. Here they all parrot Dr Strangelove. They want to bomb Russia's economy "back to the stone age".

I would be intrigued to know if any paper was ever submitted to Boris Johnson's cabinet forecasting the likely outcome for Britain of Russian sanctions. The assumption seems to be that if trade embargos hurt they are working. As they do not directly kill people, they are somehow an acceptable form of aggression. They are based on a neo-imperial assumption that western countries are entitled to order the world as they wish. They are enforced, if not through gunboats, then through capitalist muscle in a globalised economy. Since they are mostly imposed on small, weak states soon out of the headlines, their purpose has largely been of "feelgood" symbolism.

A rare student of this subject is the American economic historian Nicholas Mulder, who points out that more than 30 sanctions "wars" in the past 50 years have had minimal if not counterproductive impact. They are meant to "intimidate peoples into restraining their princes". If anything they have had the opposite effect. From Cuba to Korea, Myanmar to Iran, Venezuela to Russia, autocratic regimes have been entrenched, elites strengthened and freedoms crushed. Sanctions seem to instil stability and self-reliance on even their weakest victim. Almost all the world's oldest dictatorships have benefited from western sanctions.

Moscow is neither small nor weak. Another observer, the Royal United Services Institute's Russia expert Richard Connolly, has charted [Putin's response](#) to the sanctions imposed on him since his 2014 seizure of Crimea and Donbas. Their objective was to change Russia's course in those regions and deter further aggression. Their failure could hardly be more glaring. Apologists excuse this as due to the embargos being too weak. The present ones, perhaps the toughest ever imposed on a major world power, may not be working yet, but will apparently work in time. They are said to be starving Russia of microchips and drone spares. They will soon have Putin begging for peace.

If Putin begs, it will be on the battlefield. At home, Connolly illustrates how Russia is "[slowly adjusting](#) to its new circumstances". Sanctions have [promoted trade](#) with China, Iran and India. They have benefited "insiders connected to Putin and the ruling entourage, making huge profits from import substitution". McDonald's locations across the country have been replaced by a [Russian-owned chain](#) called Vkusno & tochka ("Tasty and that's it"). Of course the economy is weaker, but Putin is, if anything, stronger while sanctions are cohering a new economic realm across Asia, embracing an ever enhanced role for China. Was this forecast?

Meanwhile, the west and its peoples have been plunged into recession. Leadership has been shaken and insecurity spread in Britain, France, Italy and the US. Gas-starved Germany and Hungary are close to dancing to Putin's tune. Living costs are escalating everywhere. Yet still no one dares question sanctions. It is sacrilege to admit their failure or conceive retreat. The west has been enticed into the timeless irony of aggression. Eventually its most conspicuous victim is the aggressor. Perhaps, after all, we should stick to war.

- Simon Jenkins is a Guardian columnist
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| [Section menu](#) | [Main menu](#) |

OpinionSecond homes

Now Whitby, too, is finding out what happens when tourism takes over

[Alex Niven](#)

As in Devon and Cornwall, Whitby's rise in second homes is fuelling worsening inequality and a housing crisis



‘There has been a widespread sense that tourism is the only game in town when it comes to regenerating once-thriving ports and fishing villages.’

Photograph: Edwin Remsberg/Getty Images

Fri 29 Jul 2022 04.00 EDT Last modified on Fri 29 Jul 2022 11.24 EDT

If, like me, you grew up in a certain part of north-east England, the North Yorkshire coast felt like the nearest “exotic” destination for a summer holiday. The idea is not so fanciful as it sounds. In fact, in recent years comparisons between this part of the country and foreign expat hotspots like the Costa del Sol have begun to look more and more apt, not least due to the warming climate.

But all is not well in this picturesque corner of England. Last month, residents of the seaside town of Whitby – in effect the capital of the Yorkshire tourist trade – [voted overwhelmingly](#) in favour of making all new-build homes in the town full-time primary residences. The parish-level vote was, as the Scarborough borough council website [drily notes](#), “no more and no less than an expression of the views of the electorate”. But while the result is not binding, it shows that Whitby locals are increasingly feeling the burn of the [“frenzy” for second homes](#) in British coastal areas.

On the surface, Whitby has done well out of tourism – but look closer and you’ll see that its story embodies a wider sense that Britain’s social fabric is fraying at the seams. Asa Jones, a 21-year-old charity worker and founder of the Facebook group Whitby Homes for Whitby People, said the second homes problem had developed into a full-blown civic crisis. “If you go back to the 1990s, there were a lot of holiday lets in the centre of town,” Jones said, “[and] even in the early 2010s, there were still local residents in those areas.” But more recently, he said, “the last remnants of local housing in the centre of town have disappeared.”

Jones’s comments conjure images of a town centre turned into a virtual theme park for Whitby’s tourist offering of jewellery shops, seaside kitsch and [Dracula souvenirs](#). But he is most concerned about the spread of holiday lets into the outskirts of the town, leading many residents to seek cheaper housing as far away as Teesside. For Jones, a tipping point was reached in the last five years: “The big change since maybe 2016 has been in the suburban areas, where I currently live. Opposite me there used to be a big family home. They moved away, and now it’s a holiday let that’s only occupied for half the year.”

In some ways, the fact that Whitby has managed to attract such a high level of outside interest and investment makes it seem like a rare example of a flourishing northern seaside resort. Between 2009 and 2018, 50% of British coastal towns [saw a decline](#) in employment (a figure some 13% higher than in non-coastal towns). Population has declined in almost one in three smaller seaside towns over the same period. Indeed, much ink has been spilt by researchers and commentators over the last decade in trying to work out why

British coastal areas in general are on the wrong end of such socioeconomic statistics.

As manufacturing industries such as shipbuilding have mostly faded into memory, and as the fishing industry has undergone several major downgrades since its early-20th-century heyday, there has been a widespread sense in government and business that tourism is the only game in town when it comes to regenerating Britain's once-thriving ports and fishing villages. Cue endless initiatives to promote the holiday trade all around the coast, some of which have produced success stories.



An estate agent's window in Tavistock, Devon. Photograph: Andrew Matthews/PA

From large swaths of Devon and Cornwall (where [the fight against second homeownership](#) is well under way) to the “[honeypot](#)” stretch of the Yorkshire coastline that includes Whitby, the post-austerity rise of the “staycation” has enormously boosted the profit margins of holiday-home landlords and some small business owners. Over the last few years, the combined effects of Brexit and Covid have further stimulated demand for domestic holidays, [now undergoing yet another surge](#) in a chaotic summer for foreign travel.

And yet, in a local narrative that highlights a [deeper malaise](#) in the economy, even apparently elite tourist resorts such as Whitby are not working very well for their citizens. In the view of Neil Swannick, a Labour councillor for the Whitby Streonshahll ward, the rise of the staycation economy has done little to tackle the sorts of inequalities that have blighted small towns all over the country in recent decades.

“There are certainly people that have done well out of tourism in Whitby,” said Swannick, “but that benefit hasn’t been evenly spread across the residents of the town.” He highlighted the fact that in his ward, there are two areas that are among the [20% most deprived in England](#) (male life expectancy, he tells me, is about 10 years lower there than in the rest of North Yorkshire). “When the heating crisis and food prices start to bite in the autumn,” he said, “the situation in those pockets of poverty will only get worse.”

Whitby’s superficial resurgence in the 21st century shows that the post-Thatcher consensus that saw finance, property and leisure as viable replacements for the vanished industries of the past may have achieved a partial kind of success for a time. But, as in so many other walks of modern British life, these forces are also producing ever more fragmented communities, with an increasingly stark divide between owners and workers. For the former, rental and commercial profits have guaranteed standards of living ranging from mere comfort to exorbitant wealth. For the latter, even the high employment rate in a “honeypot” seaside town can do nothing to mitigate the combined effects of rising costs, low pay and a broken housing system.

The irony for Whitby itself is that although it appears to have avoided the fate of other seaside “ghost towns”, where social deprivation is even more widespread, the fact that both the owners and the workers in its economy increasingly live elsewhere means that its civic environment is, in one sense, just as hollowed-out as [somewhere like Hartlepool](#), a few miles up the coast.

In both cases – and indeed in many seaside towns throughout Britain – what is glaringly absent is a viable social infrastructure and system of rights for local residents. In the rush to do everything possible to encourage the private sector to lead the charge for coastal regeneration over the last few decades,

there has been a widespread feeling that local and national government must simply get out of the way and let the market work its magic.

As a tawdry Conservative leadership contest [raises the prospect](#) of yet more deregulation and slavish devotion to the market's invisible hand, the opposing idea that firm government intervention is needed to support the empowerment of local communities is only faintly audible in public outbursts like the vote to regulate Whitby's second homes. It is these voices from below – far more than the multimillionaires and career politicians of the latest Westminster talent contest – who must be listened to as we head towards a social cliff edge on all sides of the country.

- Alex Niven is a lecturer in English literature at Newcastle University and the author of *New Model Island*

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[The politics sketch](#)[Politics](#)

Tory hustings: a fresh circle of hell where we don't even get to enjoy Rish! and Radon Liz fighting

[John Crace](#)



The first of twelve in the show that never ends. For all her weirdness, Truss charmed the audience most – imagine that



We have entered a fresh circle of hell. We don't even get the pleasure of seeing Rish and Radon Liz disagree with each other. Photograph: Henry Nicholls/Reuters

Thu 28 Jul 2022 17.19 EDT Last modified on Fri 29 Jul 2022 00.36 EDT

Welcome back my friends to the Show that Never Ends. The Tory leadership contest is only just in its third week but it already feels interminable. Timeless even. As if it's almost impossible to imagine life without it. First we had a series of unedifying debates in which Liz Truss and [Rishi Sunak](#) – with occasional contributions from three other, long-since archived, contenders – picked fights and traded fantasies with one another.

Now we have entered a fresh circle of hell. Twelve hustings where Radon Liz and Rish! each face an hour's worth of questions from party members, one after the other. So we don't even get the pleasure of seeing them disagree with each other. Rather they do battle to feed the delusions of the 160,000 or so Tory members who are the only voters that count for this particular election with ever more far-fetched rightwing policies. If you can call them that.

We began with an event hosted by LBC's Nick Ferrari in front of an audience of 1,400 at the Centenary Pavilion, opposite the football ground in

Leeds. Not more than a long stone's throw from the Roundhay school where Truss grew up in [grinding middle-class poverty](#). Fed on a diet of beetroot quiche. It's a wonder she can now read and write. Let alone that the school failed her so badly she went on to do PPE at Oxford.

Just like Rish! Fancy that. His only connection with Leeds is that his constituency is in the same county. So he knows all about the hassle of trying to get planning permission for a tennis court, swimming pool and gym. Just one of the hardships of being worth three-quarters of a billion. He feels the country's pain.

Or not. It was Rish! who won the coin toss and got to go first in making his 10 minute opening pitch from a platform in the centre of the auditorium. He did so without notes, but came across like an empty vessel. Davos man, full of slick superficiality. Completely oblivious to the fact he had been in government and was responsible for the dire straits in which the country found itself.

“I’m having the time of my life,” Sunak began. Well, that’s nice. Because millions of people are struggling with the cost of living and using food banks. But as long as Rish! was having a good time, all was well. He went on to make a joke about his skin colour that died on its feet. Thank you and good night. He’ll be here all week. Sadly for us he’ll be here for the next five weeks. Though that gag should be dumped from his next eleven gigs.

We then got the imaginary backstory about how his parents hadn’t had two Mogadon to rub together at their Southampton pharmacy. But he loved this country for what it had given him. Which is why he wanted to [stop other refugees getting here](#). Rish! had done his homework on the priorities of the Tory members. He ended by talking about honesty – he couldn’t explain why it had taken him so long to realise that Boris Johnson was pathologically unable to tell the truth – and the need to rebuild the economy and reunite the country. He said this with no sense of irony. Or responsibility. Time and again he paused for applause that never came.

Radon Liz also spoke spontaneously without a script. Or as spontaneous as a late 90s computer with obsolete software can manage. Often she seemed to

stop mid-sentence. Not because she couldn't remember how it was meant to end: but because she seemed to think she had already finished. It made for a staccato 10 minutes. Not that the audience seemed to mind as Truss did a whirlwind tour of name checks. Her time as a local councillor. Northern powerhouse rail. Don Revie. Standing up to Putin. Anti-wokery. All got applause. She may be awkward but she had done her homework.

After a short interval, Rish! reappeared. This time to be interviewed for 15 minutes by Ferrari and the audience. The LBC presenter didn't pull his punches, but Sunak was well prepped. Up to a point. His panicked U-turn promise to reduce VAT on fuel bills that was un-Conservative last week was now a well-considered, time-limited policy. Hmm.

Margaret Thatcher would have done exactly what he was doing. They might as well be soul siblings. Hmm. He hadn't stabbed Boris in the back. He had been totally cool about Boris lying about parties and ignoring allegations of sexual assault, he had just had a difference of opinion on the direction of the economy. Hmm. He even voiced his enthusiasm for grammar schools. Yes, it was that bad. The applause was almost audible at times.

Things didn't much improve when Truss got her turn under the spotlight. She claimed that she was public enemy No 1 of President Putin – apparently she is the most feared woman in the world – and she too insisted she was a blood sister of Maggie. After that, everyone seemed to tune out rather. It was all just a wee bit flat. Dull, even. But for all her weirdness, Radon Liz was the one who charmed the audience most. Imagine that.

Rish! must be in despair. The boy with the golden touch to whom life has effortlessly bestowed anything on which he sets his heart, is going to be denied. The Tory members have spoken and they just don't like him or trust him enough. And the rest of us will be lumbered with Radon Liz as prime minister. There is no coming back from the hubristic road to perdition. We can only forget our patriotism and succumb to satire. Sit back and enjoy the ride. So we beat on, boats against the current, borne back ceaselessly into the past.

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

2022.07.29 - Around the world

- [Hong Kong Horror at concert as video screen falls on performers](#)
- [Nepal's tiger numbers recover but attacks on people cause alarm](#)
- ['What about my life?' West Virginia girl, 12, speaks out against anti-abortion bill](#)
- [Brazil Paved highway to run through Amazon gains initial approval](#)
- [Business live Germany stagnates, but France, Spain and Italy beat forecasts](#)

[Hong Kong](#)

Horror at Hong Kong boyband concert as huge video screen falls on to performers

Two dancers injured as suspended LED screen crashes down on to stage during show by Cantopop band Mirror

Hong Kong government launches inquiry after screen falls on boyband dancers – video

Associated Press in Hong Kong

Thu 28 Jul 2022 19.58 EDT Last modified on Fri 29 Jul 2022 07.04 EDT

Two dancers have been injured at a Cantopop concert in [Hong Kong](#) after a massive video screen suspended above the stage fell on to performers below.

The concert on Thursday, by Cantopop boyband Mirror, was the fourth of a series of 12 scheduled concerts by the band held at the Hong Kong Coliseum.

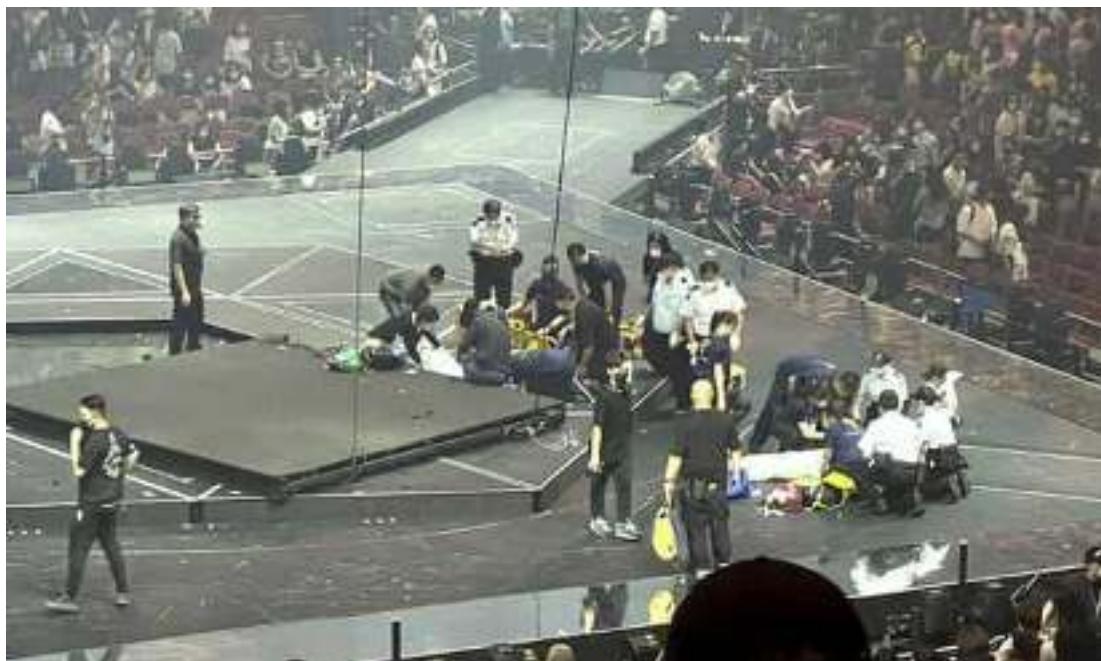
Video clips circulated on social media showed Mirror members Anson Lo and Edan Lui performing with a dozen dancers on stage when one of several suspended LED screens above the stage came crashing down.

The falling screen appeared to directly hit one dancer on the head and body, before toppling over on to another performer as the audience screamed in horror, according to clips.

The rest of the performers on stage rushed to help those hit by the screen, videos showed.

Police said that they received a report at 10.36pm about the incident, and that two male dancers were sent to the Queen Elizabeth Hospital in a conscious state.

Local media reported that the hospital said one of the dancers was in a “serious condition”, while the other was stable.



Two dancers receive medical treatment after the LED screen fell at the concert. Photograph: Vivian/AP

Apart from the two performers who were injured onstage, three other female audience members were also reported as injured, police said. One of them felt unwell and was sent to the same hospital in a conscious state, while two others were in a state of shock but required no medical treatment.

Following the incident, the concert was halted and audience members were asked to leave the venue.

The falling LED screen is the latest accident in the series of concerts. On Tuesday, one of Mirror's members, Frankie Lui, appeared to lose his footing and fall off the edge of the stage while giving a speech, according to clips on social media.

An online petition about the safety issues of the Mirror concerts was launched the same night, and has since garnered over 13,000 signatures from fans. The petition urged organisers to ensure safety for Mirror and its dancers and refrain from using unnecessary stage mechanisms or raised platforms.

Viu, the company that created and currently manages Mirror, did not immediately respond to an emailed request for comment.

Mirror, a 12-member group which has skyrocketed in popularity in Hong Kong, has been credited with the revival of Cantopop and amassed tens of thousands of fans in the city.

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

The age of extinctionEndangered species

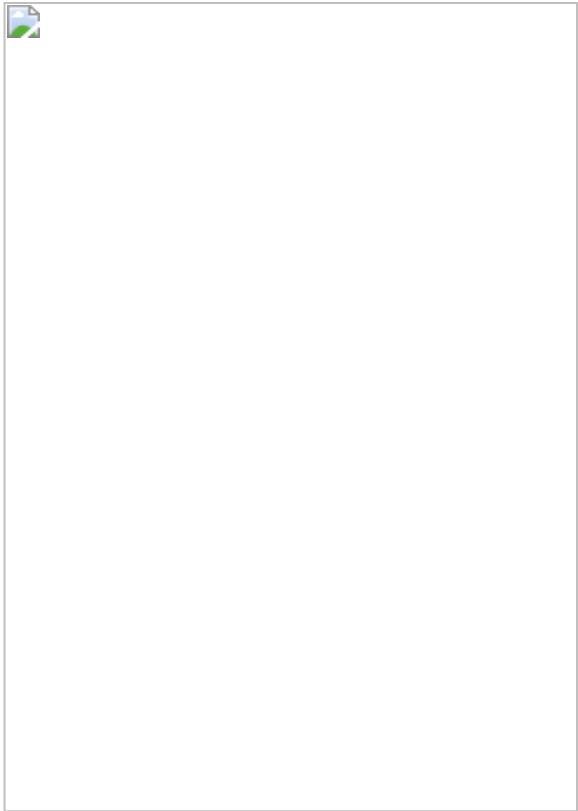
Nepal's tiger numbers recover but attacks on people cause alarm

Nepalese population of Bengal tigers has nearly tripled in 12 years and conflict with humans is increasing



A Bengal tiger in the wild. Photograph: WWF Nepal

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Fri 29 Jul 2022 05.33 EDT Last modified on Fri 29 Jul 2022 13.37 EDT

Nepal's tiger population has nearly tripled in 12 years, the country's prime minister has announced. But concerns about the human cost of the big cat's recovery are growing after a rise in fatal attacks.

From a low of 121 in 2010, the Nepalese population of Bengal tigers has risen to 355, according to the latest survey, revealed by the prime minister,

Sher Bahadur Deuba, to mark International Tiger Day on Friday.

Conservationists have paid tribute to Nepal's success in helping the big cat to recover through a crackdown on poaching, an expansion of national parks and the [creation of wildlife corridors](#) with neighbouring India.

Nepal is the first of the 13 tiger-range countries to update its figures before a summit due to be held in Vladivostok, eastern Russia, in September to evaluate global conservation efforts to protect the big cat.

In 2010, governments committed to doubling the world's wild tiger population by the next Chinese year of the tiger, which is this year. Numbers reached an all-time low of 3,200 in 2010, having been about 100,000 a [century before](#).

But in Nepal dozens of recent tiger attacks on humans have led some to say that communities living near protected areas are paying a high price for the animal's recovery.

Over the last three years there have been 104 tiger attacks inside protected areas and 62 people have been killed, according to the [Kathmandu Post](#). The victims were often attacked while collecting firewood, grazing livestock or searching for food in the forest.

Shiv Raj Bhatta, a conservation programme director at WWF Nepal, said the rise in tiger numbers was good news but cautioned that the country was entering a new stage of the big cat's recovery in which humans had to learn to live alongside tigers.

"People are now seeing and encountering tigers everywhere, so cases of tiger-human conflict are increasing. This indicates that the tiger population is almost at a maximum level in Nepal. We are a small country. This increase is a new challenge for the government. Now we need to show tigers and people can coexist," he said.

The figure of 355 tigers announced on Friday is close to Nepal's estimated [capacity of up to 400](#) along the Chitwan-Parsa complex, a landscape in the

foothills of the Himalayas in India and Nepal that is rich in wildlife, including elephants and rhinos. Owing to the climate crisis, the Nepalese tiger population is also expanding farther north to higher altitudes.

Mayukh Chatterjee, a member of the IUCN's human-wildlife conflict and coexistence specialist group, said the problems associated with rising tiger populations were not limited to Nepal, and tiger-range governments had to carefully manage the situation.

Sign up to Down to Earth, our exclusive weekly newsletter from our top climate crisis correspondents.

"We are seeing the ill effects of increased tiger numbers in India and the rise in conflict with humans. I think it's going to spell doom for tigers if governments don't roll their sleeves and start working with communities living nearby. In the last three to five years we've seen a very high increase in electrocution of tigers, snaring of tigers, as well as lynching by people. Ten years ago you would not see that," he said.

Chatterjee is studying the reasons behind tiger attacks on humans in national parks in India that link with those in Nepal. He has found that cases of predators are rare, with the majority of incidents caused by accidental encounters.

"People end up bumping into tigers much more often, so it results in accidental encounters where tigers get startled when they're resting and they respond by attacking. Our data shows that around 80% of attacks are accidental encounters where tigers have been disturbed or younger animals have mistaken humans for prey. Man-eating cases are around 1%," he said.

Find more [Age of Extinction coverage here](#), and follow our biodiversity reporters [Phoebe Weston](#) and [Patrick Greenfield](#) on Twitter for all the latest news and features.

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

West Virginia

‘What about my life?’ West Virginia girl, 12, speaks out against anti-abortion bill

Plea by Addison Gardner during public hearing against bill that would prohibit procedure in nearly all cases goes viral

'What about my life?': twelve-year-old speaks out against West Virginia abortion ban – video

[Maya Yang](#)

Fri 29 Jul 2022 21.38 EDTFirst published on Fri 29 Jul 2022 02.00 EDT

An impassioned plea from a 12-year-old girl has gone viral after she spoke to [West Virginia](#) Republican lawmakers during a public hearing for an abortion bill that would prohibit the procedure in nearly all cases.

On Wednesday, Addison Gardner of Buffalo middle school in Kenova, West Virginia, was among several people who spoke out against the bill.

Addressing the West Virginia house of delegates, Gardner, among about 90 other speakers, was given 45 seconds to plead her case.

“My education is very important to me and I plan on doing great things in life. If a man decides that I’m an object and does unspeakable and tragic things to me, am I, a child, supposed to carry and birth another child?” Gardner said.

She went on to add, “Am I to put my body through the physical trauma of pregnancy? Am I to suffer the mental implications, a child, who had no say in what was being done with my body? Some here say they are pro-life. What about my life? Does my life not matter to you?”

As Gardner – a volleyball and track athlete at her middle school, spoke, she was looked on by Rita Ray, an 80-year-old woman who had an abortion in 1959, 14 years before terminations were deemed a constitutional right.

In a photo captured by Kyle Vass, a journalist from the American Civil Liberties Union of West Virginia, Ray can be seen smiling in the background as Gardner issued her impassioned plea.

One user who tweeted the photo [wrote](#), “Rita Ray, 80, who risked her life pre-Roe by getting an abortion from someone who wasn’t a healthcare provider, watches on as Addison Gardner, 12, contemplates her own future without access to legal abortion in WV.”

Despite speeches from Gardner and other abortion rights activists, the house passed the bill by an overwhelming vote of 69 to 23. Shortly after Gardner delivered her address, house members adopted an amendment that would allow abortions in cases of rape or incest.

However, the amendment, which passed narrowly with 46 to 43 votes, only allows for the procedure to be performed up to 14 weeks of pregnancy and only if the rape or incest is reported to the police.

The state senate’s adoption of at least two of a dozen offered amendments on Friday means the bill must now go back to the house of delegates for consideration.

Unlike some other states which have “trigger bans” that would ban abortions within 30 days of Roe being overturned, West Virginia has a 150-year-old pre-Roe abortion ban that would come back into effect in the absence of Roe.

Last week, Kanawha county circuit judge Tera Salango blocked the enforcement of the abortion ban and granted the Women’s Health Center of West Virginia, the state’s only abortion clinic, the ability to continue performing the procedure.

Salango said its patients, “especially those who are impregnated as a result of a rape or incest, are suffering irreparable harm”, the Associated Press

reports.

West Virginia's attorney general, Patrick Morrisey, described the ruling as "a dark day for West Virginia".

The Associated Press contributed reporting

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2022/jul/28/west-virginia-girl-12-speaks-out-against-anti-abortion-bill>

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

[Amazon rainforest](#)

Paved highway to run through Amazon gains initial approval in Brazil

Fears that turning muddy route BR-319 into an all-season road will make it an artery for illegal logging and deforestation



A truck loaded with logs travelling on the BR-319 highway in Amazonas state, Brazil. Photograph: Bruno Kelly/Reuters

Reuters in São Paulo

Thu 28 Jul 2022 22.22 EDT

Brazil's environmental authority has granted an initial permit to allow a major highway to be paved through the centre of the [Amazon rainforest](#), the minister of infrastructure said, in a move that threatens to increase deforestation.

On the campaign trail, Brazil's rightwing president, Jair Bolsonaro, had pledged to repave the road, called BR-319, that would connect the largest Amazon city of Manaus year-round to the rest of [Brazil](#).

The road was originally constructed by Brazil's military dictatorship in the 1970s but fell into disrepair in the harsh conditions of the rainforest. Much of the route is an impassable stretch of mud during the roughly six-month rainy season.

Paving the road would allow illegal loggers and land grabbers to more easily access remote and relatively untouched areas of the forest, environmental experts said. A study estimated the project would result in a fivefold rise in deforestation by 2030, the equivalent of an area larger than the US state of Florida.

Bolsonaro's [weakening of environmental protections](#) has already spurred soaring deforestation, with clearing of the Brazilian Amazon hitting a 15-year high in 2021.

On Thursday, Marcelo Sampaio, the infrastructure minister, announced the permit on Twitter, posting an image of the licence from the environmental agency Ibama.

“In an alignment of engineering and respect for the environment, we are going to take the society of Amazonas state out of isolation,” he wrote. Sampaio did not immediately respond to a questions about environmental concerns.

The initial licence will allow the government to contract companies to pave the largest middle section of the road that is in worst condition. Contractors will draw up plans but would need another permit in order to begin construction.

This first licence would stipulate many conditions in the plans that must be met to start construction, said Marco Aurelio Lessa Villela, a former environmental analyst at Ibama.

“There must be an enormous list of things … that would be necessary for a road in that place not to be a tragedy,” Villela said.

An initial licence meant a good chance the road could move forward, he said.

Bolsonaro celebrated the licence in his weekly live internet address. “I hope soon there’s one more licence on the way and our [transportation department] can start bidding and work for paving BR-319.”

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

[Skip to key events](#)

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

ExxonMobil and Chevron shatter profit records; eurozone inflation hits record 8.9% – business live

US oil companies post huge earnings, as sky-high fuel costs hit consumers and drive up inflation

Updated 2d ago

[*Graeme Wearden*](#)

Fri 29 Jul 2022 11.50 EDTFirst published on Fri 29 Jul 2022 01.45 EDT

Key events

- [2d ago](#)
[Full story: Oil company profits boom as Americans reel from high fuel prices](#)
- [2d ago](#)
[Closing summary](#)
- [2d ago](#)
[Five western oil supermajors on track for \\$50bn profits last quarter](#)
- [2d ago](#)
[ExxonMobil and Chevron shatter profit records](#)
- [2d ago](#)
[Global stocks on course for best month since November 2020](#)
- [2d ago](#)
[Lloyd's insurer and broker provide insurance cover for Ukraine sea corridor](#)
- [2d ago](#)
[Eurozone inflation hits new record of 8.9%](#)
- [2d ago](#)

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- 2d ago
Credit card borrowing rising at fastest in 17 years
- 2d ago
ING: German technical recession looks like a done deal
- 2d ago
German economy stagnates
- 2d ago
Austria grew 0.5% in Q2
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Bloomberg: France faces an electricity 'Waterloo' this winter
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An Exxon gas station in Washington, DC. Photograph: Stefani Reynolds/AFP/Getty Images

[Graeme Wearden](#)

Fri 29 Jul 2022 11.50 EDTFirst published on Fri 29 Jul 2022 01.45 EDT

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ExxonMobil and Chevron shatter profit records



Photograph: Matt Slocum/AP

The soaring energy prices that are driving up inflation worldwide have helped US oil giants Exxon and Chevron to smash profit records.

Exxon Mobil has reported a record \$17.85bn in net income during the second quarter, a period in which Americans struggled with painfully high prices at the pump.

Revenue jumped to \$115.68bn, up from \$67.74bn a year ago, as Russia's invasion of Ukraine drove up crude oil and natural gas prices.

Chevron reported earnings of \$11.62bn, also a record, during the three-month period, up from \$3.08bn in the second quarter of 2021.

Earnings and revenue beats from Exxon Mobil and Chevron. [\\$XOM](#) and [\\$CVX](#) both up [#premarket](#). [pic.twitter.com/VoTwzfRDHx](#)

— Paul R. La Monica (@LaMonicaBuzz) [July 29, 2022](#)

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Updated at 07.52 EDT

Key events

- [2d ago](#)
[Full story: Oil company profits boom as Americans reel from high fuel prices](#)
- [2d ago](#)
[Closing summary](#)
- [2d ago](#)
[Five western oil supermajors on track for \\$50bn profits last quarter](#)
- [2d ago](#)
[ExxonMobil and Chevron shatter profit records](#)
- [2d ago](#)
[Global stocks on course for best month since November 2020](#)
- [2d ago](#)
[Lloyd's insurer and broker provide insurance cover for Ukraine sea corridor](#)
- [2d ago](#)
[Eurozone inflation hits new record of 8.9%](#)
- [2d ago](#)
[Eurozone beats forecasts with 0.7% growth](#)

- [2d ago](#)
[Credit card borrowing rising at fastest in 17 years](#)
- [2d ago](#)
[ING: German technical recession looks like a done deal](#)
- [2d ago](#)
[German economy stagnates](#)
- [2d ago](#)
[Austria grew 0.5% in Q2](#)
- [2d ago](#)
[Spain beats forecasts with 1.1% growth](#)
- [2d ago](#)
[German cities impose cold showers and turn off lights amid Russian gas crisis](#)
- [2d ago](#)
[ASOS, Boohoo and Asda face greenwashing probe](#)
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Full story: Oil company profits boom as Americans reel from high fuel prices



Dominic Rushe

The US's biggest oil companies pumped out record profits over the last few months as Americans struggled to pay for gasoline, food and other basic necessities.

On Friday, ExxonMobil reported an unprecedented \$17.85bn (£14.77bn) profit for the second quarter, nearly four times as much as the same period a year ago, and Chevron made a record \$11.62bn (£9.61bn). The sky-high profits come one day after the UK's Shell shattered its own [profit record](#).

Soaring energy prices have rattled consumers and become a political flashpoint. “We’re going to make sure everybody knows Exxon’s profits,” Joe Biden said in June.

“Exxon made more money than God this year.”

The record profits came after similarly outsized gains in the first quarter when the largest oil companies made [close to \\$100bn in profits](#).

High energy prices are one of the major factors driving inflation to a four-decade high in the US. Gas prices have fallen slightly in recent weeks but are [now averaging \\$4.25](#) a gallon across the US, more than \$1 a gallon higher than a year ago.

Consumers are facing high fuel prices not just at the pump. Soaring energy prices are being baked into delivery costs, which is driving up the cost of everything from apples to toilet paper.

Here's the full story:

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[2d ago](#)[10.40](#)

Closing summary

Time for a recap...

[Two more oil giants have smashed profit records for the last quarter](#), thanks to the surge in energy prices following the Ukraine war.

ExxonMobil made a net profit of \$17.8bn, beating forecasts, while **Chevron**'s quadrupled its earnings to \$11.6bn.

That follows record results at Shell yesterday, just as UK families are warned that average bills will soar this winter.

Charities have warned that some of the most vulnerable households could miss out on the £400 to help with soaring energy bills this autumn:

Energy costs have helped to push inflation in the euro area to [a new record high of 8.9% this month](#).

The eurozone did grow faster than forecast, though, with GDP rising 0.7% in Q2 thanks to [a strong recovery in Spain, Italy and France](#).

Germany stagnated, though, leading to [warnings of a winter recession](#)... as energy-saving measures are brought in.

Portugal's economy shrank, though, after a strong start to the year. GDP also fell in Latvia and Lithuania as the Ukraine war caused economic disruption.

Eurozone GDP, Q2 2022

Struggling UK families have turned to credit to pay their bills, with credit card borrowing jumping at the fastest rate since 2005.

Jane Tully, the director of external affairs and partnerships at the Money Advice Trust, the charity that runs [National Debtline](#) and [Business Debtline](#), said the figures were “a warning sign that for some the pressure is already beginning to tell”.

The UK's summer of industrial unrest continues, with workers at BT holding their first strike in 35 years.

[Rail services will be severely disrupted](#) on Saturday because of a strike by train drivers.

[Global stock markets are on track for their best month since late 2020](#), as investors shake off fears over rising interest rates.

In London, the [FTSE](#) 100 index is up 83 points, or 1.1%, at a seven-week high.

In other news...

Suppliers to the online fashion retailer Missguided are expected to be paid less than 2% of the £30m owed to them by its main trading entity after the company collapsed in May.

The UK government is in line for a £1bn payout from its near-50% stake in [NatWest Group](#) despite a dip in the bank's second-quarter profits and "uncertainty" over the UK's economic outlook.

The Competition and Markets Authority has [launched an investigation](#) into whether eco-friendly and sustainability claims made by the fast fashion chains Asos, Boohoo and George at Asda constitute greenwashing.

Aston Martin, James Bond's carmaker, saw pre-tax losses crash to £285.4m for the first half of this year as supply chain shortages hit production, leaving hundreds of its supercars unfinished.

TikTok has said it refused an attempt by the Chinese government to open a disguised account on the platform for the purpose of spreading propaganda.

And **British Airways** has returned to profit for the first time since the start of the pandemic, with its owner [International Airlines Group](#) saying demand was strong despite "historic challenges" still facing the industry.

Have a lovely weekend, we'll be back on Monday. GW

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Updated at 11.25 EDT

2d ago **10.17**

Wall Street is ending July on a strong note.

The **S&P 500** index of US stocks is up almost 1%, or 39 points, at 4111, taking its gains this month to around 7%.

The **Dow Jones industrial average** is 0.35% higher, while the tech-focused **Nasdaq Composite** has jumped 1.3%.

Apple is 3% higher, while Amazon has surged 11%, after their results cheered investors last night.

Fiona Cincotta of City **Index** explains:

Amazon trades 11% higher after posting its second consecutive quarterly loss but posted strong earnings.

Sales rose 7% in the three months to June to \$121 billion, which marked one of the slowest growth periods in history, although it was still better than forecast.

Amazon reported a quarterly loss of \$2 billion against a profit of \$7.8 billion in the same period a year earlier. Amazon's strong revenue guidance also reassured Wall Street. Apple is also rising pre-market after beating on revenue and profits. Apple recorded revenue of \$83 billion despite high inflation.

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2d ago **10.12**

Exxon's shares have jumped 3.4% in early Wall Street trading, while **Chevron** has soared 7%.

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[2d ago](#)[09.58](#)

Five western oil supermajors on track for \$50bn profits last quarter

The five western oil supermajors are together on track to generate well over \$50bn in profits, in just the last quarter.

[Exxon and Chevron's record earnings](#), of \$17.8bn and \$11.6bn each, come a day after Shell recorded earnings of \$11.5bn in April-June.

France's **TotalEnergies** nearly trebled its adjusted net income in the quarter, to \$9.8bn, yesterday.

BP reports its Q2 results next Tuesday, with [analysts predicting it made underlying profits of \\$6.8bn](#), more than double a year ago.

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[2d ago](#)[09.33](#)

UK rail passengers are being warned that services will be severely disrupted on Saturday because of a strike by train drivers in the latest outbreak of industrial unrest in the industry.

Members of the drivers union Aslef at seven train operators will walk out for 24 hours over pay.

The Rail Delivery Group said the industrial action has been timed to coincide with the Commonwealth Games in Birmingham and the start of the new season for most English football league clubs.

There will be disruption to parts of the rail network on Saturday and into the morning of Sunday.

The strike is hitting Arriva Rail London, Greater Anglia, Great Western, Hull Trains, LNER, Southeastern and West Midlands Trains.

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[2d ago](#)09.30

While stocks had a good July, shipping companies saw their prices fall amid weaker demand as economies slowed.

The Baltic Exchange's main sea freight index logged its worst month since January on Friday as rates across its component vessel segments saw double-digit monthly declines.

The overall index, which factors in rates for capesize, panamax and supramax shipping vessels, shed 50 points, or 2.6%, to 1,895 points, its lowest in over five months, *Reuters flags*.

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[2d ago](#)09.28

Joe Middleton



Paint technicians inspecting the first production DBX 707 as it prepared to leave the Aston Martin St Athan factory in Barry, Wales, back in May
Photograph: Ben Birchall/PA

Back in the City, luxury carmaker Aston Martin is among the fallers (down 1.7%) after shortages of parts pushed into a loss.

Aston Martin, James Bond's carmaker, saw pre-tax losses crash to £285.4m for the first half of this year as supply chain shortages hit production, leaving hundreds of its supercars unfinished, my colleague Joe Middleton explains:

The company said it had difficulty meeting high levels of demand for new cars and has been hit by wider supply chain shortages, such as the global shortage of semiconductors, and logistics issues.

More than 350 of Aston Martin's latest SUV, the DBX707, were not delivered to customers as they waited for final parts at the end of June, which cost the company more than £80m.

It comes [amid a tumultuous few years for the company](#) that is best known as the maker of the flash sports cars driven by 007 in the popular Bond films.

The company said it expects its finances to improve in the second half of the year despite posting a widening deficit compared with a loss of £90.7m in

the same six-month period a year earlier.

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2d ago08.49

Over in the US, an inflation measure closely followed by the Federal Reserve has hit a new 40-year high.

The personal consumption expenditures price index rose 6.8% from a year ago in June, the Bureau of Economic Analysis reports, up from 6.3% in May.

Core PCE, which strips out volatile components, kept rising too - to 4.8% from 4.7%.

They may persuade Fed policymakers that further interest rate hikes are needed, after they voted for their second 75-basis point rise in a row this week.

Fed's favorite inflation indicator - PCE Deflator - was expected to accelerate in June and both the headline and core increased significantly (+6.8% YoY and +4.8% YoY respectively) - both higher than expected. The headline print is the highest since 1982

— Roberto Mulažzi (@robertomulazzi) July 29, 2022

But... consumer spending and personal incomes were hotter than forecast too:

US Personal Incomes jumped by 0.6% in June, while spending was 1.1% higher as inflation pushed up prices.

Consumers spending with a grin

► [#Consumer](#) spend +1.1% (June) but only +0.1% in real terms

□ Disposable income +0.7%

△ Inflation-adjusted -0.3%

↘ Savings 5.1%: low since 09

□ PCE [#inflation](#) 6.8% (+0.5pt)

□ PCE prices +1.0%

□ Core inflation 4.8% (+0.1pt)

□ Core prices +0.6% pic.twitter.com/L1Y4iziDGV

— Gregory Daco (@GregDaco) [July 29, 2022](#)

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[2d ago](#) 08.14

French finance minister Bruno Le Maire has welcomed France's return to growth, with a 0.5% rise in GDP in the last quarter.

Le Mesaid this morning's GDP figures for the second quarter were a form of "victory for the French economy", adding that France will meet its target of economic growth of 2.5% this year (*via Reuters*).

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[2d ago](#) 08.06

Back in the eurozone, Portugal's economy shrank a little in the last quarter, as inflation weighed on private consumption.

Portuguese GDP fell by 0.2% in the second quarter of the year, the National Statistics Institute (INE) said, due to weaker domestic demand.

That followed strong growth of 2.5% in Q1, when Portugal bounced back from its Covid-19 winter lockdowns.

Still, net exports of services, including the key tourism sector that represented almost 15% of GDP before the pandemic, increased in Q2.

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[2d ago](#) [07.57](#)

Quite...

Exxon's sky-high profits come at a dicey political time for the industry, which has been accused of profiteering from the fallout from Russia's invasion of Ukraine <https://t.co/GFxUped1h3> via [@CrowleyKev](#)

— Simon Casey (@sjcasey) [July 29, 2022](#)

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[2d ago](#) [07.35](#)

ExxonMobil and Chevron shatter profit records



Photograph: Matt Slocum/AP

The soaring energy prices that are driving up inflation worldwide have helped US oil giants Exxon and Chevron to smash profit records.

Exxon Mobil has reported a record \$17.85bn in net income during the second quarter, a period in which Americans struggled with painfully high prices at the pump.

Revenue jumped to \$115.68bn, up from \$67.74bn a year ago, as Russia's invasion of Ukraine drove up crude oil and natural gas prices.

Chevron reported earnings of \$11.62bn, also a record, during the three-month period, up from \$3.08bn in the second quarter of 2021.

Earnings and revenue beats from Exxon Mobil and Chevron. [\\$XOM](#) and [\\$CVX](#) both up [#premarket](#). pic.twitter.com/VoTwzfRDHx

— Paul R. La Monica (@LaMonicaBuzz) [July 29, 2022](#)

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Updated at 07.52 EDT

2d ago **07.03**

Global stocks on course for best month since November 2020

Britain's blue-chip FTSE 100 index is firmly on track for its best month of 2022, despite anxiety over the global economy.

The index of leading shares has gained 3% in July, its best result since last December, as it clawed back around half of June's losses.

Investors have been cheered by some forecast-beating results, including record profits of nearly £10bn at **Shell** in just the last quarter amid the energy crisis.

Global shares have also had a strong month, with technology companies strengthening after a rough first half of the year.

The **FTSE All World** index of developed and emerging market shares has gained 5.8% in July, which would be its best month since November 2020 ([hat-tip to Naomi Rovnick of the FT](#)).

Stocks on course for best month since November 2020
<https://t.co/cqvX4DjOYM>

— FT Markets (@FTMarkets) [July 29, 2022](#)

European stocks have rallied too, even though fears of winter gas shortages have mounted, with the **Stoxx 500** up over 7% in July.

Victoria Scholar, head of investment at [Interactive Investor](#), tells us risk appetite is growing, after the worst first half of the year since 1970.

The S&P 500 lost 20% through the end of June, slumping from an all-time high at the start of the year. But so far the second half has kicked

off in a much more bullish mood.

A lot of the negativity around rising interest rates and inflation was baked in by the end of June, prompting some investors to go bargain hunting for stocks. On top of that, there have been tentative signs that the pace of tightening, particularly from the Fed could ease, given that the FOMC has now carried out two consecutive 75 basis point aggressive hikes and given concerns about an economic slowdown with the US now in a technical recession.

The market is now anticipating that the Fed will cut interest rates at some point next year to try to offset an economic slowdown, but first inflation needs to come back down closer to target. Earnings season has helped propel US stock markets ahead of month-end with results from Amazon in particular, which sent the stock up double digits after-hours last night. US futures are pointing to an ebullient Friday when markets open at lunchtime with the tech-heavy Nasdaq on track to gain more than 1%, thanks to results from Apple as well as Amazon.

Keep it simple. [#equities](#) and [#bonds](#) are bouncing back mainly because 1H2022 was the worst ever in real return terms. Worst than 1932! [@PictetAM #multiasset @CNBCWEX pic.twitter.com/1kSLVjtwVB](#)

— Luca Paolini (@luca_paolini) [July 29, 2022](#)

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[2d ago](#)[06.56](#)

Inflation in the eurozone could hit double-digit levels later this year, warns **Moody's Analytics'** senior economist **Kamil Kovar**:

“The preliminary estimate of euro zone inflation surpassed our expectations, hitting a new record of 8.9% y/y in July.

Energy prices surprised with another monthly increase despite significant easing in petrol prices, suggesting large jump in consumer gas and electricity prices. Meanwhile, food prices recorded another monthly increase that was close to record levels, while goods and services continued with their recent robust price dynamics.

The fact that overall index increased despite significant easing in petrol prices and favourable government policies means that the eurozone is unlikely avoid double digit inflation in the autumn. Together with strong GDP growth in second quarter this will lead the ECB to implement quick tightening.”

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Updated at 07.22 EDT

[2d ago](#)[06.07](#)

Lloyd's insurer and broker provide insurance cover for Ukraine sea corridor

A new insurance facility that will help grain and other foods to be shipped out of Ukraine has been agreed.

It will provide cover for vital grain and food products moved through safe corridors established by [the treaty agreed between Russia and Ukraine last week.](#)

The **Lloyd's of London** facility, provided by insurer **Ascot** and broker **Marsh**, will provide up to \$50m of cover in marine cargo and war insurance for vessels transporting grain, and other designated food products from Ukrainian ports.

Chris McGill, Head of Cargo at **Ascot**, explains:

This bespoke, mission focused facility allows the insurance market to play its part in enabling the vital transportation of grain and food products out of Ukraine to the wider world.

Under the terms of the treaty, ships can transit designated Ukrainian ports through safe access corridors.

The Black Sea is infested with [hundreds of mines](#), which had disrupted global shipping.

David Roe, Head of Cargo, UK, **Marsh**, says the facility will help cargo clients manage the risks associated with operating in the Black Sea “during this terrible time of war”.

Roe adds:

Not only will it help unlock supply chains, it will alleviate mounting pressures on global food security, which will benefit nations and communities around the world.”

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[2d ago](#)[05.41](#)

[With inflation hitting 8.9% this month](#), the eurozone faces some difficult months ahead despite growing faster than expected in April to June.

Janet Mui, head of market analysis at wealth manager **Brewin Dolphin**, explains:

“Despite the better Q2 reading the data is backward looking. More high-frequency data such as business surveys suggest private sector activity was in contraction in July and business confidence slumped to levels not seen since the global financial crisis.

Outlook is set to weaken with [the IMF downgrading Eurozone growth again in its July forecasts](#) driven by concerns on high inflation and

energy supply risk.

“Meanwhile, inflation has not seen a peak yet with the latest CPI rising to 8.9% from 8.6%. Aside from surging energy costs, underlying prices (core CPI) also accelerated.

The spike in natural gas prices in recent weeks, or potentially beyond, means energy prices will remain a big challenge for consumers and businesses as winter looms.”

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[Previous](#)

1
of
4

[Next](#)

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- [Conservative leadership Rishi Sunak ‘aggressive’ in Tory leadership debate, say Truss supporters](#)
- [‘Gloves are off’ What the papers say about the Tory leadership TV debate](#)
- [Live Keir Starmer says he would fix ‘broken’ water and energy markets through regulation not nationalisation](#)
- [Live Russia-Ukraine war: Odesa region, Kharkiv and Mykolaiv struck by Russian missiles, regional officials say](#)

Conservative leadership

Rishi Sunak ‘aggressive’ in Tory leadership debate, say Truss supporters

After BBC debate against Liz Truss, former chancellor accused of ‘mansplaining’

- [Politics live: latest updates](#)

Rishi Sunak and Liz Truss clash in their first head-to-head TV debate – video highlights

Jessica Elgot Chief political correspondent

Tue 26 Jul 2022 03.54 EDT Last modified on Tue 26 Jul 2022 04.49 EDT

A Treasury minister has said his former boss Rishi Sunak took an “extremely aggressive” approach in the [Conservative leadership](#) debate with Liz Truss, after allies of Truss accused him of “mansplaining”.

Simon Clarke, the chief secretary to the Treasury who is backing Truss, said Sunak was “certainly extremely aggressive” in parts of the debate. “It was a pretty intense approach to the early parts of the debate last night,” he told LBC.

But the former cabinet minister David Davis defended Sunak, saying he gave sound warnings on the economy.

The two [Conservative leadership](#) hopefuls traded blows at the BBC debate over tax cuts, China and inflation, with the former chancellor Sunak accusing the foreign secretary of seeking “a short-term sugar rush” by cutting national insurance.

Truss accused her former cabinet colleague of raising taxes to their highest level for 70 years.

The exchanges at the BBC debate followed a weekend of deeply personal attacks, with Sunak [criticised over his wealth and wardrobe](#) while Truss faced claims she was economically illiterate and was reminded that she was formerly a remaineर.

Davis repeated warnings made by Sunak that Truss's economic policies could push up mortgage rates. "I think you've got to win the arguments, and the arguments that matter, which is why the 7% matters," he told Sky News, referring to the argument made by Truss's economic adviser Patrick Minford for a 7% base interest rate, which could push up mortgage rates.

"That's why that matters. It's very important. The Tory party, generally speaking, is a bit older than average. It's a little bit more middle class, but not so much these days, but a little bit more middle class. It will care about things like their offspring having to face these sorts of interest rates in the future, so that matters."

He defended Sunak's style of interrupting Truss. "Sometimes it's important to intervene in debates," he said. "When we're in the Commons we have these comparatively fierce exchanges lots of times, all the time."

Davis added: "This is a debate to find the prime minister of this country. Facing a time when the decisions are going to be really tough ... We need the person who a) knows what he stands for, b) is courageous enough to take the difficult decisions and c) is determined enough to do it. And that's [Rishi Sunak](#)."

Sign up to First Edition, our free daily newsletter – every weekday morning at 7am

Clarke told Times Radio that Truss believed that low taxes would be the route to growth. "Crucially we have to go to the heart of this question. Do you believe the tax cuts grow the size of the economy? Do you believe that they are in themselves something which can create more fiscal space by growing the underlying economy?" he told Times Radio.

"The answer to that as a Conservative must be yes. And that is the point that Liz is making. We've got to break with the orthodoxies which have frankly

held us back for too long. And we got to get back to the principles which drove the Thatcher government, which is a lower tax economy is a good in its own right, and that is what Liz is pressing.”

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2022/jul/26/rishi-sunak-tory-leadership-debate-aggressive-style-mansplaining>

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

UK news

‘Gloves are off’: what the papers say about the Tory leadership TV debate

Tax cuts and recession fears among the front page topics as the fight between Rishi Sunak and Liz Truss intensifies in first televised debate

- [Politics live: latest updates](#)



How some of the UK papers after the Tory leadership debate on Monday night. Composite: i / Metro / The Daily Express / The Daily Mail / The Daily Telegraph

[Martin Farrer](#)

Mon 25 Jul 2022 22.02 EDT Last modified on Tue 26 Jul 2022 04.49 EDT

The newspaper coverage of the increasingly personal battle between Rishi Sunak and Liz Truss for the Tory leadership reveals a fascinating picture of the party's divisions.

The tone of the front pages of titles that were most loyal to Boris Johnson are strongly in favour of the foreign secretary, with the chancellor struggling to shake off his image as the man who knifed the outgoing prime minister.

The **Telegraph** goes in hard with its lead story on Truss's unfavourable comparison between Sunak and the former Labour prime minister Gordon Brown. "PM Sunak would be a new Gordon Brown, claims Truss", and reports her claim that her rival's refusal to cut taxes straight away would usher in a recession.

The front page of tomorrow's Daily Telegraph:

'PM Sunak would be a new Gordon Brown, claims Truss'[#TomorrowsPapersToday](#)

Sign up for the Front Page newsletter<https://t.co/x8AV4Oomry>
pic.twitter.com/csSxZZQHhi

— The Telegraph (@Telegraph) [July 25, 2022](#)

The **Express** also focuses on the tax issue, which is one of the few signs of clear blue water between the candidates with Truss positioning herself as the don't-tax-but-spend-anyway choice to Sunak's more sober view that the country probably can't afford another tax giveaway. "The great divide ... tax cuts now or later", its splash reads in a clear nod that Truss has the Crusader's vote.

Tuesday's front page: The great divide... Tax cuts now or later
[#TomorrowsPapersToday](#)

Also in tomorrow's paper: Fury as judge rules on tragic Archie despite dad's collapse
<https://t.co/RXTHJm0DM6>
pic.twitter.com/F9vqfMUfN2

— Daily Express (@Daily_Express) [July 25, 2022](#)

The **Mail** sees the spirit of Margaret Thatcher in Truss and proclaims in its splash headline: “Truss vow to curb militant unions”, adding that “Liz unveils blueprint to stop strikes crippling Britain”.

Mail: Truss vow to curb militant unions [#TomorrowsPapersToday](#)
pic.twitter.com/dxQMkhXkDM

— George Mann ☰☒☐ (@sgfmann) [July 25, 2022](#)

The **Times**’ lead story says “Bitter Tory rivals get personal”, reporting that the two candidates ignored pleas from party grandes to end the “blue on blue” hostilities in the television debate.

Times: Bitter Tory rivals get personal [#TomorrowsPapersToday](#)
pic.twitter.com/oBKTHf7nLf

— George Mann ☰☒☐ (@sgfmann) [July 25, 2022](#)

“Tory leadership rivals trade blows over tax and inflation” is the headline in the **Guardian** and highlights Sunak’s attack on Truss’s plans to borrow and spend rather than raise taxes.

Guardian front page, Tuesday 26 July 2022: Tory leadership rivals trade blows over tax and inflation pic.twitter.com/lHDRjOeiTL

— The Guardian (@guardian) [July 25, 2022](#)

Metro also gives greater play to Sunak’s attacking lines which included the jibe that Truss’s economic plans would push the country into recession. “You’ll lose us the next election”, says Metro.

Tomorrows Paper Today ☰

YOU'LL LOSE US THE NEXT ELECTION

□ Sunak and Truss scrap in TV debate [#TomorrowsPapertoday](#)
pic.twitter.com/l70fFsGtVn

— Metro (@MetroUK) [July 25, 2022](#)

The **i** says “Gloves are off: Tory contest turning nasty”.

Tuesday's front page - Gloves are off: Tory contest turning nasty [#TomorrowsPapersToday](#)

Latest by [@HugoGye](#): <https://t.co/qeIy5U37tr>
pic.twitter.com/z6EBmWctHP

— i newspaper (@theipaper) [July 25, 2022](#)

The **Financial Times** went to print a bit too early to capture the action on its front page and leads instead on “Fears of European gas crisis mount as Russia cuts Nord Stream 1 flows”. It also carries a cautionary story for the two candidates as they plot Britain’s post-Brexit place in the world economy. “Homegrown red tape doubles Brexit bill for chemical companies to £2bn”.

Just published: front page of the Financial Times, UK edition, Tuesday 26 July <https://t.co/Go49Adcqfj> pic.twitter.com/Oa0iWFwa9z

— Financial Times (@FinancialTimes) [July 25, 2022](#)

The **Sun** leads on a report that Cristiano Ronaldo is heading back to Manchester for talks aimed at securing an exit from Old Trafford – “Ron his way” – while the **Mirror’s** lead is a crime investigation: “Kids sold deadly knives”.

Tuesday's Sun: Ron his way [#TomorrowsPapersToday](#) [#TheSun](#) [#Sun](#)
pic.twitter.com/wAzhm1by9E

— Tomorrows Papers Today (@TmorrowsPapers) [July 25, 2022](#)

Mirror: Kids sold deadly knives [#TomorrowsPapersToday](#)
pic.twitter.com/gouALwB45z

— George Mann 🇩🇪 (@sgfmann) [July 25, 2022](#)

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

[Skip to key events](#)

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TV debate between Rishi Sunak and Liz Truss called off after presenter faints – as it happened

TalkTV says that Kate McCann ‘is fine’ but ‘the medical advice was that we shouldn’t continue with the debate’

- [TV debate between Truss and Sunak cancelled after presenter faints](#)

Updated 4d ago

[Andrew Sparrow](#) and [Rachel Hall](#)

Tue 26 Jul 2022 14.39 EDTFirst published on Tue 26 Jul 2022 04.27 EDT

Key events

- [4d ago](#)
[Evening summary](#)
- [4d ago](#)
[TalkTV says presenter Kate McCann fine now after fainting earlier, but debate won't resume](#)
- [4d ago](#)
[Debate suspended after medical issue, says News UK](#)
- [4d ago](#)
[TalkTV/Sun debate halted after Truss interrupted by sound of crash in studio](#)
- [4d ago](#)
[Truss says Sunak's tax rises were 'morally wrong'](#)
- [4d ago](#)

[Truss says she will use general taxation to fill the gap in NHS funding left when she scraps national insurance rise](#)

- [4d ago](#)
[Sunak stresses funding, Truss decentralisation, as candidates quizzed on NHS](#)
- [4d ago](#)
[TalkTV/Sun Tory leadership debate starts](#)
- [4d ago](#)
[Truss and Sunak take part in TalkTV/Sun debate](#)
- [4d ago](#)
[Labour pledges to fast-track rape and domestic violence cases through courts](#)
- [4d ago](#)
[Questions from readers answered](#)
- [5d ago](#)
[Truss suggests Sunak's economic policies would be 'disaster' for Britain](#)
- [5d ago](#)
[Unite leader says Truss's 'madcap' plans for unions are 'attempt to outlaw strike action'](#)
- [5d ago](#)
[Labour claims Johnson's account of meeting with former KGB agent Lebedev suggests he has 'something to hide'](#)
- [5d ago](#)
[Johnson claims meeting with ex KGB agent Lebedev not pre-arranged, and no official business discussed 'as far as I'm aware'](#)
- [5d ago](#)
[SNP accuses Sunak of using 'warped logic' to justify opposing second independence referendum](#)
- [5d ago](#)
[Tory members think Truss beat Sunak in BBC debate, and outscored him on all measures bar being best PM, poll suggests](#)
- [5d ago](#)
[Wrong time for second Scottish independence referendum, says Sunak](#)
- [5d ago](#)
[Labour would fix 'broken' water and energy markets through regulation - Starmer](#)
- [5d ago](#)

[Tory leadership candidates Liz Truss and Rishi Sunak clash in fierce TV debate](#)

Liz Truss and Rishi Sunak debate pulled off air after presenter faints on stage – video

[Andrew Sparrow and Rachel Hall](#)

Tue 26 Jul 2022 14.39 EDTFirst published on Tue 26 Jul 2022 04.27 EDT

Show key events only

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Live feed

From 4d ago

[14.06](#)

TalkTV says presenter Kate McCann fine now after fainting earlier, but debate won't resume

TalkTV has confirmed that Kate McCann fainted earlier. She is now fine, but the debate won't continue, it says.

Kate McCann fainted on air tonight and although she is fine, the medical advice was that we shouldn't continue with the debate. We apologise to our viewers and listeners.

— TalkTV (@TalkTV) [July 26, 2022](#)

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Updated at 14.37 EDT

Key events

- [4d ago](#)
[Evening summary](#)
- [4d ago](#)
[TalkTV says presenter Kate McCann fine now after fainting earlier, but debate won't resume](#)
- [4d ago](#)
[Debate suspended after medical issue, says News UK](#)
- [4d ago](#)
[TalkTV/Sun debate halted after Truss interrupted by sound of crash in studio](#)
- [4d ago](#)
[Truss says Sunak's tax rises were 'morally wrong'](#)
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- [4d ago](#)
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- [4d ago](#)
[Labour pledges to fast-track rape and domestic violence cases through courts](#)
- [4d ago](#)
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- [5d ago](#)
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- [5d ago](#)
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- [5d ago](#)
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- [5d ago](#)
[Wrong time for second Scottish independence referendum, says Sunak](#)
- [5d ago](#)
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- [5d ago](#)

Tory leadership candidates Liz Truss and Rishi Sunak clash in fierce TV debate

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4d ago 14.36

Evening summary

- The second one-to-one televised debate between Liz Truss and Rishi Sunak, organised by TalkTV and the Sun, was halted midway after the presenter, TalkTV's political editor Kate McCann, fainted on the set. She is now fine, TalkTV says.
- **Truss, the foreign secretary and favourite in the Tory leadership contest, said in the debate that the tax rises implemented by Sunak as chancellor were “morally wrong”.** She said:

What has happened is that the tax has been raised on families through national insurance so that they are having to pay more money to the Treasury. I do think it is morally wrong at this moment when families are struggling to pay for food that we have put up taxes on ordinary people when we said we wouldn't in our manifesto and when we didn't need to do so.

In response, **Sunak** said it was morally wrong to raise borrowing, which would have to be paid off by future generations. He said:

What's morally wrong is asking our children and grandchildren to pick up the tab for the bills that we are not prepared to meet.

- **Truss said that she would use general taxation to fill the gap in NHS funding left by her plan to reverse Sunak's national insurance**

increase, which funded the health and social care levy. She said:

I am committed to the extra money that was announced for the NHS. It is needed to deal with the backlog and I would fund that money out of general taxation.

- Truss suggested earlier in the day that Sunak's economic policies would be a “disaster” for Britain. (See [3.59pm](#).)
- A YouGov poll of Tory members suggests they thought Truss comfortably won last night's BBC debate. In the poll she was seen as outperforming Sunak on every measure, except who looked most prime ministerial, where Sunak was just one point ahead. (See [1.13pm](#).)
- Boris Johnson has told MPs that no government business was discussed “as far as I am aware” when he met the former KGB agent Alexander Lebedev at an Italian palazzo without officials present when he was foreign secretary.



Liz Truss and Rishi Sunak with TalkTV political editor Kate McCann (centre) at the start of the debate. Photograph: Dominic Lipinski/PA

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Updated at 15.19 EDT

[4d ago](#) [14.13](#)

Politicians are sending their best wishes to Kate McCann.

From **Amanda Milling**, the Foreign Office minister

Hope [@KateEMcCann](#) is ok. She was doing a brilliant job. Get well soon!

— Amanda Milling (@amandamilling) [July 26, 2022](#)

From **Lord Falconer**, the [Labour](#) former lord chancellor

Very best wishes to Kate McCann. She hosted the debate brilliantly before it stopped. Had authority and forced both contenders to focus on their own answers. The extraordinary summer of 2022 makes another superstar.

— Charlie Falconer (@LordCFalconer) [July 26, 2022](#)

From **Sir Robert Buckland**, the Welsh secretary

Hope [@KateEMcCann](#) is ok [#thesun](#) [#LeadershipDebate](#)

— Robert Buckland (@RobertBuckland) [July 26, 2022](#)

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[4d ago](#) [14.06](#)

TalkTV says presenter Kate McCann fine now after fainting earlier, but debate won't resume

TalkTV has confirmed that Kate McCann fainted earlier. She is now fine, but the debate won't continue, it says.

Kate McCann fainted on air tonight and although she is fine, the medical advice was that we shouldn't continue with the debate. We apologise to our viewers and listeners.

— TalkTV (@TalkTV) [July 26, 2022](#)

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Updated at 14.37 EDT

[4d ago](#) [14.03](#)

The Talk TV/Sun debate is unlikely to resume, according to ITV's **Carl Dinnen**, reporting from the spin room. It was due to finish at 7pm anyway.

The team in the spin room think it is very unlikely the debate will resume

— Carl Dinnen (@carldinnen) [July 26, 2022](#)

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[4d ago](#) [13.58](#)

Rishi Sunak and Liz Truss have carried on taking question off air from the Sun readers in the studio, the Spectator's **Katy Balls** reports.

Sunak and Truss now chatting with the audience at the Talk TV debate
pic.twitter.com/NBct9h8K6a

— Katy Balls (@katyballs) [July 26, 2022](#)

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[4d ago](#)[13.55](#)

Julia Hartley-Brewer, the TalkTV presenter, says she has been told that Kate McCann, the TalkTV political editor who was hosting the programme, is okay. There have been [reports](#) that she fainted on set, although News UK has just said there was a medical issue.

Ok. I've been told that [@KateEMcCann](#) is ok. That's all I know.

— Julia Hartley-Brewer (@JuliaHB1) [July 26, 2022](#)

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Updated at 14.37 EDT

[4d ago](#)[13.44](#)

Debate suspended after medical issue, says News UK

News UK says there has been a medical issue, and the debate will resume soon. This is from the Sun's **Noa Hoffman**.

News UK spokeswoman: "There's been a medical issue, it's not a security issue and the candidates are okay - if we can get back on air we will" [#TalkTV](#)

— Noa Hoffman (@hoffman_noa) [July 26, 2022](#)

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[4d ago](#) [13.36](#)

Here is the moment when the debate was interrupted by the sound of a crash in the studio.

The leadership debate has just gone off the air after a loud crash
pic.twitter.com/FpM9O0Q3G8

— Alexander Brown (@AlexofBrown) [July 26, 2022](#)

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Updated at 13.37 EDT

[4d ago](#) [13.34](#)

TalkTV/Sun debate halted after Truss interrupted by sound of crash in studio

The next question is about winter fuel bills.

And whether Sunak has the guts to stand up to Vladimir Putin if he turns off the gas taps this winter.

Yes, says **Sunak**. He says:

Yes, Andrew, is the quick answer and the reason you can believe me is because as chancellor I did a couple of things that demonstrates that strength. A year and a half ago I made sure that our armed forces got the largest uplift in funding that they've had since the end of the Cold War to make sure that we're protected against threats like Putin.

As chancellor I also worked with all my finance ministers around the world to put in place a sanctions package, the likes of which we had never seen, to try and tighten the grip on Putin's war machine, stop funding going to him and it does require toughness to stand up to him and it is going to require all of us to go through some difficult times.

McCann asks Truss how she will keep people supporting her when the cost of standing up to Putin is immense.

Truss says the cost of not standing up to him would be worse. He would go on.

Something has crashed on set. It sounds as though something has collapsed. The broadcast has stopped.

Truss looked shocked.

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Updated at 15.12 EDT

[4d ago](#)[13.30](#)

Truss and **Sunak** both say they support fracking, if local communities are in favour.

And they both say they will keep the fuel duty cuts already in place.

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Updated at 15.10 EDT

[4d ago](#)[13.29](#)

Truss says Sunak's policies are making the UK less competitive.

If you raise corporation tax too high, you get less money into the exchequer, she says.

She says we are projected to have the lowest growth in the G7. That is about jobs, she says.

Sunak says Sun readers are sensible enough to know that you do not get something for nothing.

So the question is - how do you pay for things? He thinks it is reasonable to ask big companies to pay more, he says.

He says he has spent his life in business. Of course he cares about competitiveness. The key thing is to get firms to invest. So he will cut taxes for businesses that invest in the economy.

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[4d ago](#)[13.27](#)

Truss says Sunak's tax rises were 'morally wrong'

The next question from a woman who asks if her family should go vegetarian. She talks about the cost of meat.

Truss says she would cut red tape for farmers and focus on food production. She also wants resilience in the food supply.

She says she is the proud representative of a rural constituency. They produce good meat, she says.

Q: But often it is not affordable?

That is why she wants to help farmers produce food more cheaply. She would do that by cutting regulation for farmers.

Sunak says lots of families are facing rising bills. He hopes the questioner will be getting some of the support already on offer. He wants to get inflation out of the system, so the problems do not get worse, he says.

He says supermarkets should be held to account. He represents a rural area with many farmers. The supermarkets should not be exploiting the farmers, he says.

He wants supply chains to be fair. Shops should not be passing on price increases that are not right.

Truss says she wants to tackle inflation too. The Bank of England thinks it will fall.

On food bills, she says she wants to ensure people keep more of their own money.

It is “morally wrong” to put up taxes for ordinary people when it is not necessary, and when the Tory manifesto said the party would not do that.

Sunak says what is “morally wrong” is asking our children and grandchildren to pick up the bills we are not prepared to meet now.

He says it is fair to ask companies to pay a bit more through corporation tax. They received a lot of help during the pandemic. Truss wants to cut taxes for big business, he says.

Truss says that is a misrepresentation. (She wants to scrap a planned rise.)

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Updated at 15.10 EDT

[4d ago](#)[13.20](#)

Asked about their experience of the NHS, **Sunak** says his grandfather has just come out of hospital, and his daughter has needed A&E treatment. **Truss** says she has called 111 recently, and had a good experience, and her daughter has received treatment recently.

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[4d ago](#)[13.18](#)

Truss says she will use general taxation to fill the gap in NHS funding left when she scraps national insurance rise

McCann puts it to Sunak that money on its own has not worked.

Sunak says technology offers big potential too, like blood screening technology. He says he would like to see more specialised hubs where surgeons can work very effectively. Using innovations will address the backlogs.

He says he has published a plan saying from day one tackling the NHS backlog will be his number one priority.

McCann asks Truss where the extra money for the NHS will come from if she scraps the health and social care levy.

Truss says she is committed to the extra money for the NHS already promised. She would fund it from general taxation, she says.

She is committed to the 40 new hospitals the government has agreed to build.

(Except, of course, [they aren't new hospitals](#).)

She says she wants to give more doctors on the frontline freedom to deliver.

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Updated at 15.08 EDT

[4d ago](#)[13.14](#)

Sunak stresses funding, Truss decentralisation, as candidates quizzed on NHS

John Hughes from Birmingham asks a question. He was diagnosed with cancer. He has had to rely on a charity for help, he says. He has had no help from cancer nurses. Why is the NHS broken?

Sunak says he grew up in an NHS family. He knows what a difference healthcare can make.

The NHS is under strain because it is recovering from Covid. It is under pressure. People are waiting for care. He made sure the NHS got the funding it needed, through the national insurance rise. That was not easy and he got criticised for it. But it was the right thing to do, he says.

That is why people can be reassured the NHS is safe in his hands, he says.

Truss says she is incredibly sorry to hear about John's experience. She says her mum worked as a nurse in cancer research.

She says there is too much micro-managing in the NHS. People should not be directing everything from Whitehall. She wants to give more power locally.

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Updated at 15.07 EDT

[Newest](#)[Newest](#)

[Previous](#)

1
of
4

[Next](#)

[Oldest](#)[Oldest](#)

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[Ukraine war live](#)[Ukraine](#)

Zelenskiy accuses Russia of using rising gas prices to terrorise Europe – as it happened

This live blog is now closed, you can find our [latest coverage of the Russia-Ukraine war here](#)

Updated 4d ago

[Samantha Lock](#) (now); [Joanna Walters](#), [Tom Ambrose](#) and [Martin Belam](#) (earlier)

Tue 26 Jul 2022 20.29 EDTFirst published on Tue 26 Jul 2022 00.04 EDT

Key events

- [4d ago](#)
[Summary](#)
- [4d ago](#)
[Ukraine shells Kherson's Antonivskiy bridge - reports](#)
- [4d ago](#)
[First Russian train reaches Kaliningrad,.governor says](#)
- [4d ago](#)
[Russia to pull out of International Space Station](#)
- [4d ago](#)
[Summary](#)
- [4d ago](#)
[Zelenskiy accuses Russia of using rising.gas prices to terrorise Europe](#)
- [4d ago](#)
[Russian economy better than expected despite sanctions - IMF](#)
- [5d ago](#)
[Summary](#)

- [5d ago](#)
[Erdogan announces visit to Russia on 5 August](#)
- [5d ago](#)
[EU agrees plan to ration gas use over Russia supply fears](#)
- [5d ago](#)
[EU renews Russian sanctions until January 2023](#)
- [5d ago](#)
[Summary of the day so far ...](#)
- [5d ago](#)
[Russia to make drastic cut to Europe's gas supply](#)
- [5d ago](#)
[Zelenskiy calls on Europe to hit back against Russia's 'gas war'](#)
- [5d ago](#)
[Mykolaiv also hit by Russian missile strikes - reports](#)
- [5d ago](#)
[Kharkiv also hit by Russian shelling - reports](#)
- [5d ago](#)
[Ukraine hopes to start exporting grain this week](#)
- [5d ago](#)
[Russian missile attack strikes Odesa region - reports](#)
- [5d ago](#)
[Summary and welcome](#)



Firefighters conduct search and rescue operations after a Russian strike in Chuhuiv, Kharkiv, on Monday. Photograph: Anadolu Agency/Getty Images

[Samantha Lock](#) (now); [Joanna Walters](#), [Tom Ambrose](#) and [Martin Belam](#) (earlier)

Tue 26 Jul 2022 20.29 EDTFirst published on Tue 26 Jul 2022 00.04 EDT

Show key events only

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Live feed

From 4d ago

[16.35](#)

Zelenskiy accuses Russia of using rising gas prices to terrorise Europe

Ukrainian president Volodymyr Zelenskiy on Tuesday said Russia was deliberately cutting supplies of natural gas to impose a “price terror” against Europe, and he called for more sanctions on Moscow, Reuters reports.

“Using Gazprom, Moscow is doing all it can to make this coming winter as harsh as possible for the European countries. Terror must be answered - impose sanctions,” he said in a late-night video address.



Ukrainian president Volodymyr Zelenskiy speaking yesterday during a joint press conference with President of Guatemala Alejandro Giammattei. Photograph: Alexey Furman/Getty Images

Meanwhile, a deal agreed by EU states to curb their gas use should yield enough gas savings to last through an average winter, if Russia were to fully cut supplies in July, the bloc’s energy chief **Kadri Simson** said.

The Kremlin said a repaired gas turbine for Nord Stream 1, Russia’s biggest gas pipeline to Europe, had not yet arrived after maintenance in Canada, and

that a second turbine was showing defects.

Russian gas giant Gazprom has sharply increased pressure in the Urengoy-Pomary-Uzhgorod pipeline that delivers Russian gas to Europe without prior notice, the Ukrainian state pipeline operator company said.

Such pressure spikes could lead to emergencies including pipeline ruptures, according to the Ukrainian company.

The Guardian's [Jennifer Rankin](#) reports from Brussels and has written [an explainer](#) tackling the question 'How does the EU plan to cut gas usage by 15% this winter?'

EU member states have agreed a plan for gas savings to avoid a winter energy crisis, but loaded with exemptions. Said to be overwhelming consensus in favour, but one member state objected — Hungary.

— Jennifer Rankin (@JenniferMerode) [July 26, 2022](#)

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Updated at 17.02 EDT

Key events

- [4d ago](#)
[Summary](#)
- [4d ago](#)
[Ukraine shells Kherson's Antonivskiy bridge - reports](#)
- [4d ago](#)
[First Russian train reaches Kaliningrad, governor says](#)
- [4d ago](#)
[Russia to pull out of International Space Station](#)
- [4d ago](#)
[Summary](#)

- 4d ago
Zelenskiy accuses Russia of using rising.gas prices to terrorise Europe
- 4d ago
Russian economy better than expected despite sanctions - IMF
- 5d ago
Summary
- 5d ago
Erdogan announces visit to Russia on 5 August
- 5d ago
EU agrees plan to ration gas use over Russia supply fears
- 5d ago
EU renews Russian sanctions until January 2023
- 5d ago
Summary of the day so far ...
- 5d ago
Russia to make drastic cut to Europe's gas supply
- 5d ago
Zelenskiy calls on Europe to hit back against Russia's 'gas war'
- 5d ago
Mykolaiv also hit by Russian missile strikes - reports
- 5d ago
Kharkiv also hit by Russian shelling - reports
- 5d ago
Ukraine hopes to start exporting.grain this week
- 5d ago
Russian missile attack strikes Odesa region - reports
- 5d ago
Summary and welcome

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4d ago20.23

Summary

Thank you for joining us for today's live coverage of the war in Ukraine.

We will be pausing our live reporting overnight and returning in the morning.

In the meantime, you can read our comprehensive summary of the day's events below.

- **The strategic Antonivskiy bridge in the Russian-occupied region of Kherson has reportedly been struck by Ukrainian forces** hoping to disrupt Russia's main supply route into the southern Ukrainian city. Multiple, yet unconfirmed, suggest Ukrainian forces conducted new strikes late on Tuesday night. "Explosions in the Antonivskiy Bridge area," Ukraine's armed forces said in a Telegram [update](#) just before midnight alongside a video purportedly showing the strikes.
- **Russian forces continued to strike civilian infrastructure in Kharkiv**, Ukraine's second-largest city, and the surrounding region in the country's northeast. Regional governor, Oleh Syniehubov, said the strikes on the city resumed around dawn Tuesday. "The Russians deliberately target civilian infrastructure objects hospitals, schools, movie theatres. Everything is being fired at, even queues for humanitarian aid," Syniehubov told Ukrainian television.
- **Russia's defence ministry plans to hold strategic military exercises in the east of the country from 30 August to 5 September.** Interfax reported that the militaries of unspecified other countries will be taking part in the regular 'Vostok' exercises, citing the defence ministry.
- **Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoan will hold a one-day visit to the Russian resort of Sochi on 5 August, his office announced.** It is anticipated that he will meet with his Russian counterpart Vladimir Putin.

- The EU has been forced to water down its plan to ration gas this winter in an attempt to avoid an energy crisis generated by further Russian cuts to supply. Energy ministers from the 27 member states, except Hungary, backed a voluntary 15% reduction in gas usage over the winter. Ministers agreed opt-outs for island nations and possible exclusions for countries little connected to the European gas network.
- Zelenskiy has accused Russia of deliberately cutting supplies of natural gas to impose a “price terror” against Europe. “Using Gazprom, Moscow is doing all it can to make this coming winter as harsh as possible for the European countries. Terror must be answered - impose sanctions,” he said in a late-night video address.
- A joint coordination centre (JCC) for Ukrainian grain exports under a UN-brokered deal will be opened in a ceremony in Istanbul on Wednesday, Turkey’s defence ministry said. Ukraine, Russia, Turkey and the United Nations signed the accord last week to resume Ukraine’s grain exports.
- Insurance uncertainty poses the biggest obstacle to grain ships leaving Ukraine’s Black Sea ports this week, exporters say. Questions remain over whether insurance companies will be willing to insure the vessels as they navigate the mined waters, while buyers are hesitant to make new orders given the risk of Russian attacks.
- The first train with sanctioned goods has arrived from Russia to Kaliningrad via Lithuania in the first such trip since the EU said Lithuania must allow Russian goods across its territory. Russian news agency Tass cited regional governor Anton Alikhanov as saying: “It is

indeed the first train to have arrived after the EU decision ... [it is] quite an important achievement.” The train reportedly consisted of 60 freight cars with cement.

- **Russia will pull out of the International Space Station (ISS) after 2024** and focus on building its own orbiting outpost, the country’s space chief said. Yuri Borisov said Russia would fulfil its obligations to its partners on the ISS before leaving the project. “The decision to leave the station after 2024 has been made,” Borisov said, to which Putin responded: “Good.”
- **Ukraine aims to strike a deal for a \$15-\$20bn programme with the International Monetary Fund** before year-end to help shore up its war-torn economy, the country’s central bank governor, Kyrylo Shevchenko, told Reuters.
- **The Russian economy appears to be doing better than expected despite western sanctions.** On Tuesday, the International Monetary Fund upgraded Russia’s Gross Domestic Product (GDP) estimate for this year by 2.5%, although its economy is still expected to contract by 6%. “That’s still a fairly sizeable recession in Russia in 2022,” IMF chief economist Pierre-Olivier Gourinchas told AFP, adding that rising energy prices are “providing an enormous amount of revenues to the Russian economy”.
- **Boris Johnson compared Volodymyr Zelenskiy’s leadership of Ukraine to the war-time exploits of Sir Winston Churchill.** The British prime minister said he believed “Churchill would have cheered and probably have wept too” when the Ukrainian president insisted he needed “ammunition, not a ride” out of Kyiv when Russia invaded in February.

- A British citizen who video blogs pro-Kremlin material from Russian-occupied areas of Ukraine has been [added to a UK government sanctions list](#). Graham Phillips – the first UK citizen to be added to the growing sanctions list – has been accused of being a conduit for pro-Russian propaganda, receiving medals from the Russian state for his reporting.
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Updated at 20.29 EDT

[4d ago](#) [19.40](#)

Ugandan President Yoweri Museveni has defended his country's relationship with Russia, as Moscow's top diplomat toured Africa to rally support over the war in [Ukraine](#).

“How can we be against somebody who has never harmed us,” the Ugandan leader said alongside Russian foreign minister Sergei Lavrov at a press conference in the town of Entebbe, according to Agence France-Presse.

“If Russia makes mistakes, we tell them. When they have not made mistakes, we can't be against them,” he added, hailing Russia for backing anti-colonial movements in Africa.

Uganda was one of 17 African nations to abstain during a vote in March on a UN resolution that overwhelmingly condemned the Russian invasion of Ukraine.

□ □ □ □ Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov and President of Uganda Yoweri Museveni held a meeting in Entebbe. [#RussiaUganda](#) [#RussiaAfrica](#) pic.twitter.com/aAojBveWL1

— MFA Russia □□ (@mfa_russia) [July 26, 2022](#)

As Russia's relations with the west have collapsed over the conflict, Lavrov said Africa would play a greater role in Russia's foreign policy.

Museveni also said Uganda would cooperate with Moscow in a range of fields including space, energy, agriculture and vaccines.

"Our interest with Russia is when there is progress with Russia, we (Africa) benefit," he added.

Lavrov continued in Ethiopia later on Tuesday on the latest leg of his four-day trip.

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[4d ago](#) [19.22](#)

Ukraine shells Kherson's Antonivskiy bridge - reports

In the Russian-occupied region of Kherson in southern [Ukraine](#), there are multiple, yet unconfirmed, reports of Ukrainian forces conducting new strikes on the strategic Antonivskiy bridge across the Dnieper River.

"Explosions in the Antonivskiy Bridge area," Ukraine's armed forces said in a Telegram [update](#) just before midnight alongside a video purportedly showing the strikes.

Kiev Independent defence reporter, Illia Ponomarenko, tweeted late Tuesday night: "Reportedly, we have another heavy Ukrainian strike upon the Antonivsky Bridge, the key Russian supply line in occupied Kherson."

Pending official confirmation: the Russian-held Antonivs'kyy Bridge next to Kherson has been reportedly destroyed by the [#Ukrainian army](#). [#HIMARSoCLOCK](#).

— KyivPost (@KyivPost) [July 26, 2022](#)

The Antonivskiy Bridge is the main supply route for Russian troops and if damaged, Moscow's forces would potentially be trapped in Kherson with little ammunition and little supplies - part of Ukraine's plan to re-take the city.

[Kherson is accessed by four key bridges.](#)

Kherson is accessed by four key bridges.

Kherson, captured in early March, has long been a focus for the Ukrainians, with the defenders making limited gains in the countryside between Mykolaiv and the target city since April. But, apparently helped by the longer-range weapons, with an effective firing distance of up to 50 miles (80km), the Ukrainians are growing more confident.

The city is accessed by four key bridges. Ukraine's goal appears is not want to destroy the bridges as food supplies are still needed to cross into the city but rather to damage them to the point where the Russians cannot transport heavy equipment across them.

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[4d ago](#)[18.58](#)

Ukraine aims to strike a deal for a \$15-\$20bn programme with the International Monetary Fund before year-end to help shore up its war-torn economy, the country's central bank governor Kyrylo Shevchenko told Reuters.

Battered by Russia's invasion, Ukraine faces a 35%-45% economic contraction in 2022 and a monthly fiscal shortfall of \$5bn and is heavily reliant on foreign financing from its western partners.

Shevchenko, 49, speaking during his visit to London, also said he hoped to agree on a swap line with the Bank of England “within weeks”, though he did not specify the amount.

Kyiv had already submitted its request to the IMF, the governor said, and was now in consultation with the fund over the new financing that he hoped would provide as much as \$20bn over two or three years in form of a Stand-By Arrangement (SBA) or an Extended Fund Facility (EFF).

It was the first time Ukraine has put a number on the fresh financing it needs from the Washington-based lender. A \$20bn programme would be the second largest currently active loan from the IMF after Argentina.

“The IMF has always acted as Ukraine’s partner during the war,” Shevchenko told Reuters. “My hope is to start the programme this year.”

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[4d ago 18.36](#)

First Russian train reaches Kaliningrad, governor says

The first train with sanctioned goods has arrived from Russia to Kaliningrad via Lithuania in the first such trip since the European Union said Lithuania must allow Russian goods across its territory, according to the regional governor.

Russian news agency Tass cited regional governor Anton Alikhanov as saying:

It is indeed the first train to have arrived after the EU decision ... [it is] quite an important achievement.”

The train reportedly consisted of 60 freight cars with cement.

Wedged between Lithuania and fellow EU and Nato member Poland, Russia's heavily militarised enclave of Kaliningrad depends on mainland Russia for a sizeable portion of its supplies. But these must transit through Lithuanian territory.

The region has found itself increasingly isolated since Russia sent troops into [Ukraine](#) in February.

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Updated at 18.40 EDT

[4d ago](#)[18.26](#)

Russia to pull out of International Space Station

Russia will pull out of the International Space Station after 2024 and focus on building its own orbiting outpost, the country's new space chief has

confirmed.

The announcement throws into question the future of the 24-year-old space station, with experts saying it would be extremely difficult to keep it running without the Russians.

Nasa and its partners had hoped to continue operating it until 2030.

“The decision to leave the station after 2024 has been made,” Yuri Borisov, head of Russian space agency, Roscosmos, said during a meeting with President Vladimir Putin.

He added: “I think that by that time we will start forming a Russian orbiting station.”

Nasa officials said they had yet to hear directly from their Russian counterparts on the matter. NASA Administrator Bill Nelson issued a statement saying that the agency was “committed to the safe operation” of the space station through 2030 and continues “to build future capabilities to assure our major presence in low-Earth orbit.”

US state department spokesman Ned Price called the announcement “an unfortunate development” given the “valuable professional collaboration our space agencies have had over the years.”

National Security Council spokesperson John Kirby said the US is “exploring options” for dealing with a Russian withdrawal.

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[4d ago](#)[18.00](#)

Summary

The time in Kyiv is around 1am on Wednesday July 27. Here is a round-up of the day’s top headlines:

- Ukrainian president Volodymyr Zelenskiy said Russia was deliberately cutting supplies of natural gas to impose a “price terror” against [Europe](#), and he called for more sanctions on Moscow. “Using Gazprom, Moscow is doing all it can to make this coming winter as harsh as possible for the European countries. Terror must be answered - impose sanctions,” he said.
- Despite damaging Western sanctions imposed on Moscow in the wake of the invasion of [Ukraine](#), Russia’s economy appears to be weathering the storm better than expected as it benefits from high energy prices, the International Monetary Fund said. The IMF’s World Economic Outlook upgraded Russia’s Gross Domestic Product (GDP) estimate for this year by a remarkable 2.5%, although its economy is still expected to contract by 6%.
- EU member states have agreed to ration gas this winter, in an attempt to avoid an energy crisis generated by further Russian cuts to supply. Energy ministers from the 27 member states mostly backed a plan for a voluntary 15% reduction in gas usage over the winter, but added in several opt-outs for island nations and countries unconnected or little connected to the European gas network, which will blunt the overall effect.
- Russia’s defence ministry plans to hold strategic military exercises in the east of the country from 30 August to 5 September, news agencies reported on Tuesday. Interfax reported that the militaries of unspecified other countries will be taking part in the regular “Vostok” exercises, citing the defence ministry.

- A British citizen who video blogs pro-Kremlin material from Russian-occupied areas of [Ukraine](#) has been added to a UK government sanctions list. Graham Phillips, who has been accused of being a conduit for pro-Russian propaganda, is one of 42 new designations added to the UK's [Russia](#) sanctions list.
- Boris Johnson has compared Volodymyr Zelenskiy's leadership of [Ukraine](#) to the war-time exploits of Sir Winston Churchill. The British prime minister said he believed "Churchill would have cheered and probably have wept too" when the Ukrainian president insisted he needed "ammunition, not a ride" out of Kyiv when the Russian invasion was renewed in February.
- Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoan will hold a one-day visit to the Russian resort of Sochi on 5 August, his office has just announced. Reuters reports that no further details were immediately available, but it is anticipated that he would meet with his Russian counterpart Vladimir Putin.
- Worries over insurance are the biggest obstacle to grain ships leaving Ukraine's Black Sea ports this week, exporters say. Questions remain over whether insurance companies will be willing to insure the vessels as they navigate the mined waters, while buyers are hesitant to make new orders given the risk of Russian attacks.
- A joint coordination centre (JCC) for Ukrainian grain exports under a UN-brokered deal will be opened in a ceremony in Istanbul on Wednesday, Turkey's defence ministry said. Ukraine, Russia, Turkey and the United Nations signed the accord last week to resume Ukraine's grain exports, which had stalled after Russia's invasion of its neighbour.

- The Kremlin said on Tuesday that it believes former German chancellor Gerhard Schroeder is in Moscow and did not rule out possible contact with him. “As far as we know, he is in Moscow,” Kremlin spokesperson Dmitry Peskov told reporters when asked if the Kremlin was aware of reports that Schroeder had travelled to Moscow on Tuesday.
- Russia’s armed forces destroyed eight Ukrainian missile and artillery arms depots in the southern Mykolaiv region and in the eastern Donetsk region, the defence ministry said in its daily briefing on Tuesday. Ukrainian officials said earlier on Tuesday that Russia launched a “massive missile strike” against the south of the country overnight, including hits against infrastructure in the black sea port of Mykolaiv.
- A major fire broke out at an oil depot in the Budyonnovsky district of the Russian-backed Donetsk People’s Republic in eastern Ukraine after Ukrainian troops shelled the province, according to local media reports. No casualties or injuries have been reported so far, but the occupying forces of the so-called Donetsk People’s Republic issued photographs which showed train tank cars on fire.

Your United States blogger today now hands over the war news baton to Australia, where our colleagues will continue to bring you developments as they happen.

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[4d ago](#)[17.09](#)

Russian forces continued to strike civilian infrastructure in **Kharkiv**, Ukraine's second-largest city, and the surrounding region in the country's northeast, the Associated Press writes.

Kharkiv governor **Oleh Syniehubov** said the strikes on the city resumed around dawn Tuesday and damaged a car dealership.

The Russians deliberately target civilian infrastructure objects hospitals, schools, movie theaters. Everything is being fired at, even queues for humanitarian aid, so we're urging people to avoid mass gatherings," Syniehubov told Ukrainian television.

Here are some images from the region.

Chuhuev, Kharkiv oblast, Jul.26. Cat sitting in the rubble of his house ruined by a russian missile.

Photo: Vyacheslav Madievsky [#russiaisateroriststate](#) [#RussianWarCrimes](#) pic.twitter.com/RHrvVBHjbf

— Stratcom Centre UA (@StratcomCentre) [July 26, 2022](#)

More damage.



Consequences of a Russian missile hitting a private house in Chuhuyiv, Kharkiv region on July 26. Photograph: Anadolu Agency/Getty Images

Some of the people affected in the region.



A group of elderly women sit outside their apartment building on Tuesday, which has suffered months of shelling in Saltivka, Kharkiv. Photograph: Anadolu Agency/Getty Images

More.



A rescuer hugs a man who helped find his wife's body under the rubble of the cultural center of the city of Chuhuiv, under which two more people have been found. Russia shelled the city on Monday night. Photograph: Anadolu Agency/Getty Images

Sorting through rubble, where people were trapped.



Ukrainian rescuers and local residents are sorting through the rubble of the cultural center of the city of Chuhuiv, hit on Monday night. Photograph:

Anadolu Agency/Getty Images

More from the bombed Chuhuiv cultural centre.



For the second day, rescuers have been sorting through the rubble in order to get three people out from under the destroyed cultural centre in Chuhuiv, Kharkiv region. Photograph: Anadolu Agency/Getty Images

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[4d ago](#)[16.35](#)

Zelenskiy accuses Russia of using rising gas prices to terrorise Europe

Ukrainian president Volodymyr Zelenskiy on Tuesday said Russia was deliberately cutting supplies of natural gas to impose a “price terror” against Europe, and he called for more sanctions on Moscow, Reuters reports.

“Using [Gazprom](#), Moscow is doing all it can to make this coming winter as harsh as possible for the European countries. Terror must be answered - impose sanctions,” he said in a late-night video address.



Ukrainian president Volodymyr Zelenskiy speaking yesterday during a joint press conference with President of Guatemala Alejandro Giammattei. Photograph: Alexey Furman/Getty Images

Meanwhile, a [deal agreed](#) by EU states to curb their gas use should yield enough gas savings to last through an average winter, if Russia were to fully cut supplies in July, the bloc's energy chief **Kadri Simson** said.

The Kremlin said a repaired gas turbine for Nord Stream 1, Russia's biggest gas pipeline to [Europe](#), had not yet arrived after maintenance in Canada, and that a second turbine was showing defects.

Russian gas giant Gazprom has sharply increased pressure in the Urengoy-Pomary-Uzhgorod pipeline that delivers Russian gas to Europe without prior notice, the Ukrainian state pipeline operator company said.

Such pressure spikes could lead to emergencies including pipeline ruptures, according to the Ukrainian company.

The Guardian's [Jennifer Rankin](#) reports from Brussels and has written [an explainer](#) tackling the question 'How does the EU plan to cut gas usage by 15% this winter?'

EU member states have agreed a plan for gas savings to avoid a winter energy crisis, but loaded with exemptions. Said to be overwhelming consensus in favour, but one member state objected — Hungary.

— Jennifer Rankin (@JenniferMerode) [July 26, 2022](#)

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Updated at 17.02 EDT

[4d ago](#)[16.09](#)

Russian economy better than expected despite sanctions - IMF

Despite [damaging Western sanctions](#) imposed on Moscow in the wake of the invasion of Ukraine, Russia's economy appears to be weathering the storm better than expected as it benefits from high energy prices, the **International Monetary Fund** said on Tuesday, Agence France Presse reports.

The sanctions were meant to sever [Russia](#) from the global financial system and choke off funds available to Moscow to finance the war.

But the [IMF](#)'s latest World Economic Outlook upgraded Russia's Gross Domestic Product (GDP) estimate for this year by a remarkable 2.5%, although its economy is still expected to contract by 6%.

"That's still a fairly sizable recession in Russia in 2022," IMF chief economist **Pierre-Olivier Gourinchas** told AFP in an interview.

He explained a key reason that the downturn was not as bad as expected:

The Russian central bank and the Russian policymakers have been able to stave off a banking panic or financial meltdown when the sanctions were first imposed , [while rising energy prices are] providing an enormous amount of revenues to the Russian economy,” he said.

After starting the year below \$80 a barrel, oil prices spiked to nearly \$129 in March before easing back to under \$105 on Tuesday for Brent, the key European benchmark, while natural gas prices are rising again and approaching their recent peak.

Major economies including the United States and China are slowing, the report said. But

Russia’s economy is estimated to have contracted during the second quarter by less than previously projected, with crude oil and non-energy exports holding up better than expected [but] there is no rebound [ahead]. In fact [IMF is] revising down the Russian growth in 2023,” he said, 1.2 points lower than the April forecast, for a contraction of 3.5%.

The penalties already in place, as well as new ones announced by Europe, mean:

The cumulative effect of the sanctions is also growing over time,” he said.

Gourinchas noted overall that the world may soon be on the edge of recession.

World may soon be on edge of recession, says IMF's top economist Pierre-Olivier Gourinchas

[@moneycontrolcom](#)

<https://t.co/NXRgD7AwUe>

— Shounak Banerjee (@shounak1985) [July 26, 2022](#)

Appeal for IMF funds:

LONDON, July 26 (Reuters) - Ukraine aims to strike a deal for a \$15-\$20 billion programme with the International Monetary Fund

before year-end to help shore up its war-torn economy, the country's central bank governor Kyrylo Shevchenko told Reuters.

— Idrees Ali (@idreesali114) [July 26, 2022](#)

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Updated at 17.21 EDT

[4d ago](#) [15.45](#)

Ukraine's Naftogaz has become the first Ukrainian government entity to default since Russia's invasion of its smaller southern neighbour five months ago, after the state-owned energy firm failed to make payments due on international bonds before the expiry of a grace period on Tuesday, Reuters reports.

The company said in a statement that it had failed to get creditors' support for a proposal to freeze payments on some of its bonds for two years which it had launched last week.

"Naftogaz has not received consent from the cabinet of ministers of Ukraine to make the necessary payments. Certain events of default have or will occur as a result of the resolution and the resulting failure to pay," the company said in a statement.

Naftogaz also said that it was working with relevant parties to launch a fresh proposal for debt treatments that had been drafted by the Cabinet.

While some details are yet unclear (and a lot of finger pointing is ongoing), Naftogaz says that the default endangers the company's ability to raise funds necessary for the purchase of imports of gas for the heating seasons 2022/23. That's not good... /end

— Mattia Nelles (@mattia_n) [July 26, 2022](#)

Naftogaz, which accounted for almost 17% of Ukraine's public revenue last year, had submitted two requests to the government to approve payments to creditors and avoid a hard default, though both were rejected.

The firm - which had been overdue to transfer US \$335 million in principal and interest payments, as well as a separate interest installment on another bond that runs up to 2024 by Tuesday - issues its bonds through its financing arm Kondor Finance.

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Updated at 15.53 EDT

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of
6

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2022.07.26 - Spotlight

- [Ferdinando Scianna I've taken a million pictures – 50 were good](#)
- ['The council tenants weren't going to be allowed back' How Britain's 'ugliest building' was gentrified](#)
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Interview

‘I’ve taken a million pictures – 50 were good’: photographer Ferdinando Scianna

[Maurizio Fiorino](#)



‘I photographed Sicily wherever I went’ ... one of Ferdinando Scianna’s images of life in the Sicilian village Capizzi. Photograph: Ferdinando Scianna/Magnum/Magnum Photos Paris

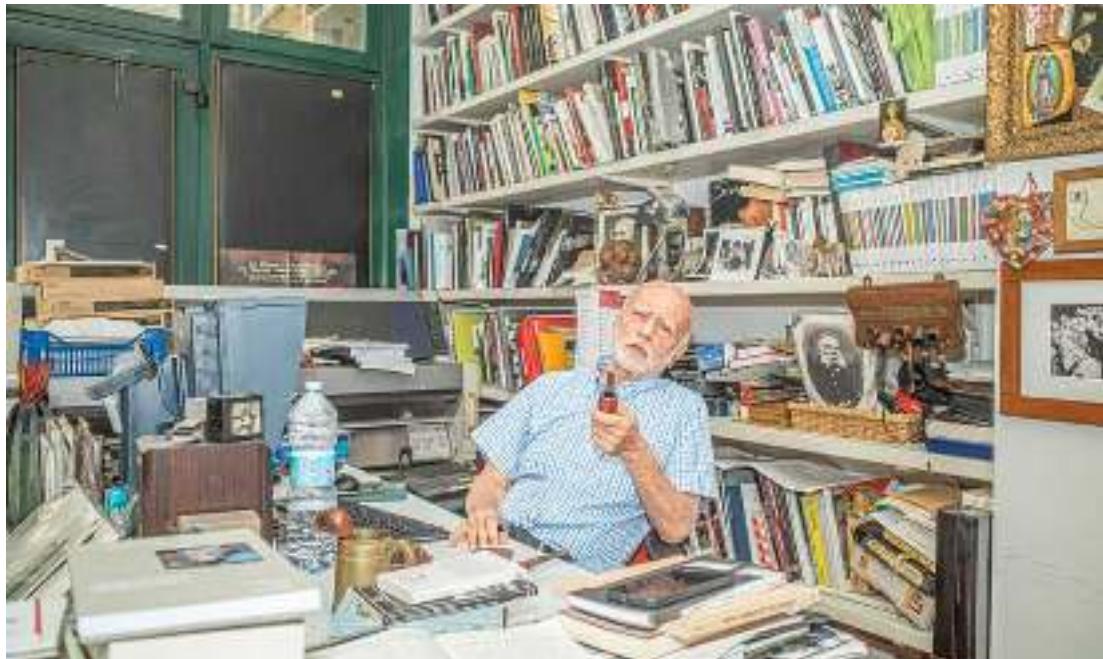
He’s photographed Scorsese, shot fashion for Dolce & Gabbana and created art from the religious rituals of his native Sicily. Now, at 79, Scianna declares his six-decade obsession with the camera is over

Tue 26 Jul 2022 01.00 EDT Last modified on Tue 26 Jul 2022 02.14 EDT

‘Do not call me master, for heaven’s sake,’ says Ferdinando Scianna, welcoming me inside his studio, a cosy ground-floor space in the centre of Milan. “I do not teach anything to anyone. Come in, take a seat.”

Scianna has just turned 79. [Photography](#), for him, was an obsession that lasted 60 years. “And it is over today,” he declares. He has not taken pictures for years and says that when young photographers approach him for advice, he wants to ask them for theirs instead. “I tell them the most obvious thing: photograph what you love and what you hate. But they should tell me how to sneak around in this weird era that I do not really know.”

Scianna has taken more than a million photographs and, in his words, the good shots number about 50, including the series on the Roma photographed in the late 90s; the portraits of writers – Leonardo Sciascia, Jorge Luis Borges, Manuel Vázquez Montalbán; and one of his most famous photos, a boy running through Capizzi, a small Sicilian village, shadows imprinted on a wall behind him.



‘Taking pictures has given me a lot of happiness.’ ... Scianna in his studio in Milan. Photograph: Maurizio Fiorino

He loves to work on books though. He has published over 70; more, he says, than prudence would have advised him. The first was published in 1965 and is about religious rituals in Sicily (*Feste Religiose in Sicilia*). “I was just a 21-year-old Sicilian kid, and that book built my career. Today, when I leaf through the pages, I feel confused. I look at my photos and I ask myself, who took those images? I was too young and ignorant. You know, I learned to take pictures over the years – basically, just by taking them.”

I know my photographs will not change the world, but a bad picture can make it worse

Scianna was born in Bagheria, a village near Palermo. His first camera was a gift from his father when he was 16. “He wanted me to be a doctor or an engineer. Honestly, I do not think I have ever had the vocation of a photographer, I just wanted to leave Sicily and back in those days, I assumed photography was a passport,” he muses, lighting a pipe. His luck, he claims, is that he was part of a generation that had a zeal to change things, from women’s liberation to the 1968 student riots, while he was there to

photograph it all. “In all of my generation, there was an unstoppable desire to fix the fragments of our world.”



The model Marpessa in Sicily in 1987. Photograph: ©Ferdinando Scianna/Magnum Photos

Nonetheless, he says, he remained a Sicilian at heart. “Even if I left Sicily, I photographed Sicily wherever I went. A few years ago, I made a book about a mining village in the Andes, and someone said it is my most Sicilian book. At the end of the day, a photographer always takes the same photos. I do not know if that is a style or just a repetition. Well, maybe it’s just boredom.”

He unexpectedly achieved international fame in the mid-80s when the fashion designers Dolce & Gabbana chose him to shoot their campaigns. His photos drew on the subject matter he had always shot: social traditions, religious symbolisms, the matriarch as the leader of the family. “What an unexpected adventure, that one,” Scianna says. “I do not disown it, of course not. It allowed me the economic freedom to go and photograph just for myself.”

Scianna considers himself a diehard *bressoniano* – the Italian fan of Henri-Cartier Bresson – and he was the first Italian to be admitted into Magnum, the prestigious photo agency. In his lengthy career he has taken

pictures around the world but, unlike many photographers of his generation, never in war zones. I ask if he has ever been afraid of taking a picture. He smokes, thinks for a while, and says: “It’s like with dogs, basically. If you are afraid, people feel it and they become more aggressive; if they understand you are looking at them as human beings, they are OK. But no, I have never been afraid to take a picture. I was too afraid of losing my girlfriends,” he jokes.

Scianna doesn’t care for social media. He has [an Instagram profile](#) but it is managed by Nanà, one of his daughters. He knows that his black and white neorealist-style pictures collect thousands of likes and that most of them go viral, like the one he took of the Dutch model, Marpessa, for the Dolce & Gabbana campaign. In the picture she is posing while a little boy, who may symbolise Scianna’s alter ego, is photographing her.



Portrait of Martin Scorsese with a picture of his mother as a child.
Photograph: Ferdinando Scianna/Magnum/Magnum Photos Paris

“I do not think I can change the world with my photographs, but I do believe that a bad picture can make it worse,” he says. “And the point is that we have too many images. If you eat caviar every day, eventually you will want *pasta e fagioli*.” He thinks that photography went into an irreparable crisis a couple of decades ago, when we stopped building family photo albums.

“Today we all take photos with our phones, but they are background images. Even a selfie is not a self-portrait but a kind of neurosis about a moment of existence that must immediately supplant another, and so on. And we all know what happens when something loses the identity that has determined its success and cultural function. It dies.”

His office desk is full of novels, essays, books and a collection of pipes. Hanging on the wall are some photos of Martin Scorsese that he took some years ago for Vogue Paris. He decided to photograph the director holding a childhood portrait of his mother as a girl. “A photo can happen a few metres from your house or in the farthest away place in the world. You will never know in advance,” he says. After taking a long puff on his pipe, he declares: “Today everyone wants to write the fictional novel of what they would like reality to be: it is the era we are living in.”



Spanish writer Manuel Vázquez Montalbán. Photograph: ©Ferdinando Scianna/Magnum Photos

He also disdains the pace of change driven by the internet. “On the web, everything is consumed quickly. Culture, on the other hand, is slowness and choice. I made my theory; it is the theory of the three risottos. Do you want to hear it?” He clears his throat. “If someone has never eaten a risotto in his life – and if they have never been to Sicily, they certainly never have eaten a

good one – the first time they taste it, they can only say if they liked it or not. The second time, however, they can argue that it was better or worse than the first one. Only from the third time on can they have their own theory of risotto and, if they want, give advice on how it should be cooked. Culture, to me, is knowing things and having a choice.”

Scianna returns to the idea that photography is an obsession. “And, believe me, one day obsessions finish. When you are 79, you will find that the obsession with sex, for example, no longer exists.” He smiles, coughs a little and smokes again. Then he presses on his stomach and his face suddenly contracts in an expression of pain that lasts a few seconds. “Doctors say I still have a little more time to live. And for me, living means thinking about new books, exhibitions, working on my archive.”

His last solo exhibition was at the prestigious Palazzo Reale in Milan. More than 200 photos were on show and, on some days, there were long queues waiting to get in. “Graham Greene once wrote, while travelling from Marseille to Paris, at some point he deeply believed in the existence of God. With photographs it is a bit the same. And the world, you know, practises forgetfulness. Millions of men lived before us, men who had dreams, who have done things. We do not know anything about them.”

But then, I ask, what remains in history? “Things that have found their shape,” he replies instinctively, adding: “I have walked my entire life only to take photos. I am like those little dogs who, while walking, have left their poop around the streets. But if you really want to know the truth, then yes, taking pictures has given me a lot of happiness.” He takes another puff on his pipe and watches the smoke slowly rise towards the ceiling until it becomes a giant white cloud that evaporates in a second.

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‘The council tenants weren’t going to be allowed back’: how Britain’s ‘ugliest building’ was gentrified



The Balfron Tower in Poplar, east London, in 2016. Photograph: Jack Taylor/Getty Images

The east London brutalist landmark Balfron Tower was conceived as the perfect neighbourhood in the sky by its Marxist architect. Now its flats are being sold as ‘trophy properties’



[Oliver Wainwright](#)

[@ollywainwright](#)

Tue 26 Jul 2022 01.00 EDT Last modified on Thu 28 Jul 2022 03.33 EDT

A dizzying dining deck crowns the summit of the newly renovated Balfron Tower in Poplar, east London, perched like a crow’s nest on top of the brutalist concrete lift shaft. Floating almost 30 storeys up in the air, with spectacular views across the city, it marks the apex of a new dedicated tower of leisure facilities. Inside what was once the building’s service core and boiler house, connected to the flats by glazed bridges, there is now a cinema, library, gym, yoga space and music room, as well as a whole floor dedicated to table tennis.

It sounds like the kind of lively, communal vision for high-rise living that Hungarian-born architect [Ernő Goldfinger](#) imagined when he first designed the building in 1963, as part of the wider Brownfield estate of council homes on this slum clearance site. “The success of any scheme depends on the human factor,” he said, “the relationship of people to each other and the frame of their daily life which the building provides.”

As a committed [Marxist](#), he intended his great concrete castle to provide exactly that kind of social frame for everyone, from all walks of life. He included rooms for table tennis and billiards, a “jazz/pop room” as well as a hobby room designed with older residents in mind. As far as possible, families were rehoused in the tower street by street, in an attempt to retain the neighbourly bonds along the new “streets in the sky”, designed like “East End pavements,” Goldfinger said, “on which the normal life of the neighbourhood continues”.

Almost 60 years later, Balfron’s streets have been scrubbed up and the residents’ facilities turbo-charged, but the kind of community that Goldfinger imagined has long since been evicted. In one of the most high-profile examples of a cash-strapped housing association flogging off a desirable tower block to pay for new homes nearby – and using resident artists to raise the property values in the process – the 146 flats have been gutted and gussied up to be sold to wealthy buyers. Where once Balfron looked out over declining docks, it now winks at the towers of Canary Wharf, whose bankers are a target audience for the new flats, which [went on sale](#) this weekend.



Hungarian architect and designer Ernő Goldfinger in front of Balfron Tower, 1968. Photograph: David Cairns/Getty Images

“We’ve had a phenomenal amount of interest,” says Elliot Tucker of the developer [Londonewcastle](#) as he shows me around the building, alongside a couple of Notting Hill estate agents who specialise in selling villas in Ibiza. “It’s mostly coming from young first-time buyers in east London, as well as some affluent architects looking for a trophy property.”

He says that one such architect has his heart set on flat 130 on the top floor. The reason? It is the very apartment where Goldfinger himself once lived with his wife, Ursula, when they moved into the building for two months in 1968 as a social experiment, hosting champagne parties to gather feedback from residents. The response was mostly positive, and Goldfinger used some of the lessons, including adding an extra lift, to inform the design of his taller [Trellick Tower](#), built in west London in 1972. “Bar the complaints of draughts from some windows, heating that didn’t work, they all said the flats were lovely,” Ursula wrote in her diary during their Balfron stay. “Those I have been into are beautifully kept, people are going to a lot of trouble to install them mostly with outrageously terrible furniture, carpets, curtains and ornaments.”



A living space in one of the flats in the renovated tower. Photograph: Publicity image

As part of the refurbishment, flat 130 has been designated as one of six “heritage” apartments, preserving the original layout and colour scheme, with some period fixtures added to match the originals. A high-cistern pull-chain toilet stands next door to an enamel steel bath (in separate rooms, as they were), while the kitchen features stainless steel worktops and vintage taps sourced from eBay, so brutalism fans can cosplay at being the Goldfingers. Tucker says the flat in question is being held back for now, and will probably be sold to the highest offer through sealed bids – an ironic fate for the champagne socialists’ penthouse.

More than 1,200 interested buyers have already signed up, but Balfron hasn’t always been so desirable. When it opened in 1968, commissioned by the London County Council as one of the tallest towers in Europe, there was an immediate vocal backlash. “Although perversely beautiful,” wrote Terence Bendixson in the Guardian in 1969, the tower “conjures up thoughts of prisons and pillboxes. Here, too, vandalism is setting in.” Goldfinger was typecast as a megalomaniac, imposing dangerously foreign ideas on Britain – a reputation that was amplified [by the James Bond author Ian Fleming naming his monstrous Soviet villain after him](#). It didn’t much help that even the building’s fans hailed its aggressive, alienating form. “It is as though Goldfinger, from among the Functionalist totems, had chosen as a source of inspiration the artefacts of war,” [wrote his former colleague James Dunnett in 1983](#). “The sheer concrete walls of the circulation tower are pierced only by slits; cascading down the facade like rain, they impart a delicate sense of terror.”



One of Balfron's streets in the sky in the renovated tower. Photograph: Oliver Wainwright

While the flats were enjoyed by most of their residents, the maintenance and upkeep of the tower plummeted after the dissolution of the Greater [London](#) Council (the LCC's successor) in the 1980s, when it was taken over by Tower Hamlets council. Its new caretaker described it as "a disaster area ... burnt-out cars, black soot stains, bin rooms full of old rubbish," and it became a focus for vandalism and drug use in the 1990s. "The Balfron Tower gives Poplar a final mugging," wrote Simon Jenkins in the Times in 2000. "Its footings are a no-go area for humanity. Trash, chicken-wire and graffiti abound. The tower is without charm or visual diversion. It makes Wormwood Scrubs seem like the Petit Trianon. Poverty is not Poplar's curse. The curse is architecture."



Balfron's new facade. Photograph: Oliver Wainwright

Two years on, the building provided an apocalyptic [film set for the zombie horror movie 28 Days Later](#), and by 2014, it was branded “Britain’s ugliest building” by the Mirror. Yet, the very same year, the National Trust opened a pop-up flat in the tower, with [retro interiors styled by Wayne Hemingway, charging visitors £12 a time to sample the vintage timewarp](#). It was a sign that, outside the tabloid hatred of postwar modernism, [the popular tide was turning to embrace Balfron’s brutalist aesthetics](#). With its striking form emblazoned on tote bags, cushions and coffee cups, just like Trellick (which remains predominantly council housing) and [the Barbican](#) (which never was), the building took on a marketable image that transcended its original social purpose. Egalitarian quotes from Goldfinger are proudly printed on the construction hoardings, and the marketing suite is something of a Goldfinger shrine, despite the luxury flats bearing no relation to his aims.

Given that the development’s chief selling point is Balfron’s status as a beloved icon of brutalism, and that many of the potential buyers are likely hardcore fans, it is strange that, apart from the six “heritage” units, all of the flats have been completely stripped of their original details. In the hands of lead architects Studio Egret West, working with Ab Rogers Design, the partition walls have been removed to create open-plan living spaces, of a

kind familiar to most new-build apartment blocks, while the fixtures and fittings reflect generic contemporary taste, with some faintly retro touches.



The plant stand, designed by Ab Rogers, built using concrete from the building, which is to be given to new buyers. Photograph: Oliver Wainwright

The flats designed by Rogers are a little more quirky, with red bathroom ceilings and oversized tiles, while the other half, by Egret West, opt for cork bedroom floors and terrazzo splash-backs. But both could be anywhere. The sole reminder that you are in a brutalist landmark is a ghoulish plant stand, to be given to new buyers, made from little concrete cylinders that were drilled out of the building during structural testing. It's like mutilating an old friend and putting their dismembered limbs on show.

Outside the flats, in the common areas of the building, the architects have dutifully restored the original finishes as far as possible, sourcing similar coloured tiles for the walls of the different streets, and rich green marble for the entrance lobby. An exception is the new door numbers: typographers may have a heart attack when they see the jaunty curves of what looks suspiciously like Comic Sans (but which turns out to be a custom designed font by Ryan Gander, based on Ursula Goldfinger's handwriting in her diary). It's a minor detail compared with the most egregious alteration of this

Grade II*-listed building, found on the facade itself. Where once rose Goldfinger's striking grid of white-painted wooden window frames, now stretch sleek bands of dark glass framed by brown-anodised aluminium, as if transplanted here from a 1980s business park.

"It's a tragic missed opportunity," says Catherine Croft, director of the Twentieth Century Society, which successfully campaigned to have the tower's status upgraded from Grade II to II* in 2014. "Surely brutalism now has enough fans that a conserved Balfron could be successfully marketed as a unique opportunity to live in a genuinely iconic brutalist masterpiece. Now all that's left is an ersatz hybrid."

The 2012 renovation of Carradale House, another Goldfinger block next door, saw its windows replaced with modern double-glazed timber frames to the original design, showing it could have been eminently possible at Balfron, too. But the architects defend their decision as in keeping with the spirit of the building. "Throughout the project, we have aimed to imagine what Goldfinger would do today," says Christophe Egret, "and felt replacing the windows was in tune with his original vision."

From the outside, the building may look like it has had its eyes gouged out and replaced with naff mirrored shades, but the real impact of the change is felt on the inside. While the original windows were fully openable, allowing gusts of air to flow through the double-aspect flats from one side to the other, most of the new bedroom windows are sealed shut. On my morning visit, one east-facing bedroom had reached 30C, while it was in the low-20s outside.



The Balfron Tower music room.

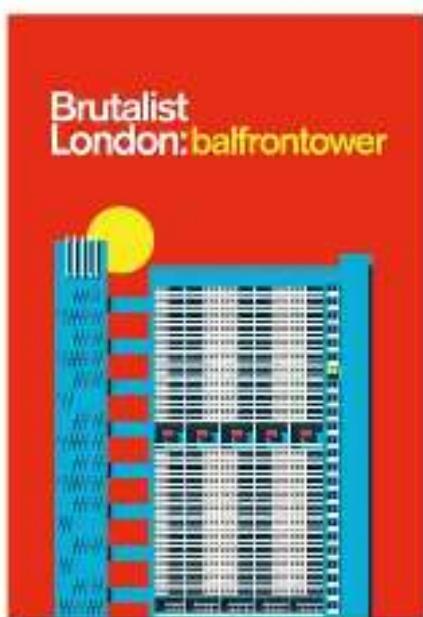
The architects say the proximity of the busy A13 road meant that non-openable windows were required to protect the residents from noise and pollution, and that a “sophisticated natural ventilation system” will keep the rooms cool (the developer says it was not switched on during my visit). But if you’re shelling out £375,000 for a one-bed flat, or £800,000 for a four-bed – along with an average annual service charge of £3,300 – the least you might expect is to be able to open your bedroom window.

For Michael Newman, the transformation of Balfron Tower is a bitter blow. He lived in a council flat on the 21st floor from the late 1980s, until he was “decanted” a few years ago to make way for the new buyers. “I really loved living there,” he tells me. “It was a complete cross-section of society. My neighbours included a retired soldier who had been in Burma, a carpenter in his 80s who cycled everywhere, a young Somali family and a born-again Christian. The views were amazing – I was woken by the sun rising every morning, then saw the sun setting over the city from my living room and kitchen. It was beautiful.”

He describes the moment when the estate was transferred from the ownership of Tower Hamlets council to the Poplar Harca housing association in 2007, after a residents’ ballot. “We were told that if we voted

for it, they would refurbish our flats," he says. "They even built a show flat, kitted out with the brand-new kitchens and bathrooms we would all get."

After years of inaction, residents received a notice in 2010 that they would have to leave the building while refurbishment works took place – but there was no mention of whether they would be able to return to their homes after the renovations. "I kept asking Harca, but they just said they didn't know," says Newman. "The psychological stress was unimaginable." Residents were informed that it was "possible but not probable" that they would have a right of return, with Poplar Harca citing "the impact of the global financial downturn" and planning setbacks as reasons for the uncertainty. In an FAQ factsheet distributed to residents by the housing association, "Can I move back in when the works are complete?" was listed as "one of the questions we just don't know the answer to yet".



The Balfron Tower art print. Illustration: Mathanki Kodavasal

David Roberts, a researcher at University College London who co-led the Grade II*-listing campaign, has documented the building and its regeneration process in forensic detail. As part of his award-winning PhD research, he compiled dozens of documents from five decades on [a dedicated website](#), including a confidential [viability report](#) produced by the

Homes and Communities Agency in 2012. The report confidently stated in no uncertain terms: “Balfron will become a leaseholder-only block.”

Rubbing gentrifying salt into the gaping wound, as the building was being emptied of its tenants, Harca invited artists to occupy some of the flats in a temporary [“guardianship”](#) scheme, in collaboration with Bow Arts Trust. “I went to a cheese and wine party of one of the painters,” Newman recalls. “He had made beautiful paintings of the building, but there were no local residents in the room. Most of the artists didn’t realise that the council tenants weren’t going to be allowed back, and they were being used to celebrate the death of the community. When I look at the building now, it feels like a gravestone.” He adds that he doesn’t blame Poplar Harca, and that he is happy in his new home in Carradale House, but he sees the project as a symptom of “a political system that prioritises economics over community”.

Others see the refurbishment as a pragmatic solution, given the lack of government funding for social housing. “Some residents were very happy there,” says one former Balfron leaseholder, who was part of the residents’ association. “But there were also a great many families living in overcrowded conditions who couldn’t wait to leave. I think it made sense to capitalise on the niche love of the heroic brutalist building, and sell the flats to people who actually wanted to live there, in order to provide much more suitable homes for families nearby.”



The Balfron Tower roof garden. Photograph: Oliver Wainwright

It chimes with Poplar Harca's justification: "By concentrating sales in the higher-valued Balfron Tower, it was found that fewer social rented properties would need to be sold overall," says a spokesperson, "and a sensitive refurbishment of the Grade II*-listed building could be achieved." So how much has the great sell-off achieved? Across the Brownfield estate, Harca says the regeneration has seen a net increase of 45 habitable rooms, due to the higher number of larger family properties – but an overall loss of 21 social rented homes.

From their new private rooftop garden, in between games of ping pong and cinema screenings, the new Balfron residents will be able to look down on what they helped to pay for, elevated on the summit of what was taken away from the community in the process. Although, actually, they won't see much: for health and safety reasons, the roof garden has been surrounded by a new 2-metre high concrete balustrade that almost entirely blocks the view.

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Protest

Interview

‘This is fascism – we’re all being attacked’: ‘Stop Brexit Man’ Steve Bray on lies, police powers and free speech

Emine Saner

For five years the top-hatted maverick has roamed Westminster, shouting at leave-supporting politicians, heckling interviews, belting out songs. Why did he make this his mission – and will the law against noisy protests shut him up?



‘This government has shown how bad a system run on trust is’ ... Steve Bray outside parliament. Photograph: Graeme Robertson/The Guardian



[@eminesaner](#)

Tue 26 Jul 2022 05.00 EDT Last modified on Thu 28 Jul 2022 07.23 EDT

Cars beep their horns as they turn off Parliament Square, tourists stop to chat and a protester with long white hair stands up on the railings at the end of a traffic island, as if on the prow of a pirate ship heading for Westminster. In the shade on one side of the street is Steve Bray, also known as Stop [Brexit](#) Man, slightly pink-faced under his top hat, tapping an unlit cigarette on its packet. He is planning to get back to vaping, he says, “but let’s get these stressful days out of the way first”. Every so often, a passerby will stop to shake his hand.

In the five years Bray has been protesting here, the past few weeks have been among the most memorable. At the end of June, [police seized two of his amplifiers](#), and today there is a group of police officers watching him. The new Police, Crime, Sentencing and Courts Act strengthens police powers to place conditions on protests – even one-person protests – to control noise levels; it also increases the “controlled” area around parliament. “I feel that was kind of aimed at me,” he says. “So last week, on the Tuesday, they warned me twice. I said: ‘Look, I’m a protester, we’re about sound and vision – I’m not altering how we protest. It’s up to you what you do.’ They gave me two warnings.”

Equipment of 'Stop Brexit Man' Steve Bray seized – video

In retaliation he put the Italian antifascist song Bella Ciao on, “and I went to the front [of the traffic island] with Gareth [he of the long white hair] to wave the flags. I could see them coming down to seize the stuff. I’m trying to wrap my leg around one amp; Gareth is holding on as well. We were doing everything we could to stop them taking the amps.” He says there were “at least 20 officers in the end”, and his microphone got broken. Is he worried about the prospect of prosecution? “Not in the slightest because what I’m doing is right, and what they’re doing is wrong.”

He describes the new powers as “fascist”: “People who feel so passionately that they have to protest, they’ve been put in that position by a government which is trying to shut them up; this is why I say it’s fascism. Our right to protest is fundamental and we’re all being attacked.” A few days after we speak, Bray posts a video on Twitter of a conversation with a police officer who says he has been ordered to stay with Bray all day. “This is not North Korea, this is not the Soviet Union: you are not following me around all day,” Bray tells him.



‘If you can’t be seen, you’ve got to be heard’ ... With fellow protesters outside parliament, on the eve of Brexit, 30 January 2020. Photograph: Guy Bell/REX/Shutterstock

On the day we speak, in early July, Bray has another amp, “an old one, which is on its way out, but I’ve been using it. Today the police are ‘advising’ me, not warning me. So every time I play it, they come over and ‘advise’ me. They’ve changed tack. I’m not going to push it too far today.” That morning – in the background of a Good Morning Britain broadcast – he had played Bye Bye Boris, a parody song: “I’ve played it so much it’s driving me nuts.” As government ministers start resigning one after the other, people turn up to join the protest – about 40 over the course of the day, Bray says, in addition to the usual four or five core members. And money has poured into his crowdfunder – more than £180,000 was donated in the time since his amps were seized, he reports; the total now stands at about £230,000 – which pays for him to keep going. There is, he says, “a hell of a lot of support and it’s growing week on week”.

When we speak again a couple of days later, he has made it on to TV again, this time playing the Benny Hill theme tune in the background of media broadcasts; a clip of the Conservative MP Chris Philp being interviewed on Sky News, the music playing as he spoke, went viral. The actor [Hugh Grant had tweeted Bray](#) that morning to request it. “I thought, OK,” says Bray, who stood on the ramp to the underground car park by College Green. “I know where to make a noise where nobody can do anything about it. I could see somebody on the corner waiting to go [on TV]; I didn’t realise it was Chris Philp. I thought it was a presenter, but I saw when he started and I just went for it.” He laughs.

What they promised, I knew there was no way they could deliver it.
People were being cheated out of a better life

Bray has become an enduring presence on TV, [moving in to shot](#), or shouting, during broadcast interviews. “We’re about getting the message out. I would always rather be silent and just stand behind with a placard. But my view is if you can’t be seen, you’ve got to be heard. In shutting me out, they are actually making it a bit worse for themselves – someone silent in the background, or someone shouting or playing what I like to call trolling songs?” Politicians have sworn at him and mocked him – his tactic of following and filming them, while insistently shouting questions, is clearly annoying and at times uncomfortable in its aggression – and he isn’t exactly

popular with TV presenters and camera crews (nor, I suspect, with a large number of viewers who would rather listen to a broadcast without Bray disrupting it). “I do feel sorry for them,” he says. “They say: ‘This is our job. We set up here; we’ve only got a couple of minutes.’ But I say: this is for our futures; this is for all of us.”

It can be difficult to understand the intensity of feeling that leads to someone giving their life over to a protest like this, standing in a square day after day, shouting and berating politicians. Bray likes to say he had never been on a protest in his life until the Brexit protest. In the run-up to the referendum on the UK’s EU membership, he was living in Port Talbot in Wales. “I know how much money the European Union had put into Port Talbot, one of the most deprived areas of the United Kingdom, and I was shocked at people there: that the majority voted to leave.” He believed, he says, the leave campaigns were lying. “What they promised, I knew there was no way they could deliver it. Port Talbot, a poor community, were being cheated out of a better life: being told they were going to get a better life when in fact they were going to be far worse off. I’m not an economist but I knew from the get-go it was all lies. Here we are, and it’s actually worse than I expected.”

He started posting online, then realised he needed “to move offline because I wasn’t achieving anything. It was just arguments and trolls. It took up so much time and it achieved very little.” He says he volunteered to drive a float from a carnival in Germany – featuring a huge model of Theresa May with a gun in her mouth – around London and Norwich, and joined other anti-Brexit protesters. Following the [snap election in 2017](#), May made [a deal with the DUP](#) to give Northern Ireland £1bn to prop up the minority government, and Bray spent a week living on the streets in London, sleeping in Hyde Park, to protest against it. “The point was I couldn’t spend any money, therefore I wasn’t paying any tax for that week. It was called ‘not a penny more’.” For the last couple of days of that week he stood outside parliament with his EU flags, and he became a full-time protester.



‘Brexit was the start of something far bigger’ ... Near 10 Downing Street in October 2021, after Conservatives voted against a bill that would have cracked down on water companies pumping out raw sewage. Photograph: Andy Rain/EPA

The numbers joining him grew, and they were there Monday to Friday for the first year; they also went on marches and to party conferences. Bray and the group moved to the traffic island at the beginning of last year to get more attention, even if the noise, cars and people can be draining. He has also been attacked and spat at by members of the far right, had “cuts and grazes” and his trousers ripped. “I’m trying to watch all the time. You’ve got agitators, the police. I’m watching for the MPs, the cars.” They are there a few times a week, especially on days with key votes. How much of it is still about Brexit? “Brexit was the start of something far bigger,” he says. “Our political system is very flawed. This government has shown how bad a system run on trust is. There is no integrity, no honour, no decency and no morals.” He would like to rejoin the EU, he says, “but we need to change [the political system] first”.

Bray, 53, was born in Cardiff, but his father was in the RAF and he spent his childhood moving around, living on military bases in Germany for many years, which he thinks created a feeling of rootlessness. It also drew him to

the idea of the EU, one of whose countries he vaguely planned to retire to. “I don’t belong anywhere, but everywhere, if that makes sense.”

He was into punk music, and the anti-establishment spirit plainly stayed with him. As a teenager, he says, he was “quite a rebel, a bit of a handful”. With the family now back in Wales, living in Bridgend, Bray ran away to London when he was 15. He only lasted four weeks but it sounds adventurous – using a fake name, he says, he got a job in a canteen at the Lloyd’s of London insurance market, and lived in a burnt-out house in south London. The police stopped and searched him and, thinking he looked young, took him to the station where he eventually called his dad, who came up on the train to collect him.

Back in Bridgend, he moved into a bedsit and started on a youth training scheme in retail. Shortly afterwards, he got together with a young woman and they moved into a council-owned static caravan; their daughter was born just before Bray turned 18. The relationship didn’t last: “We had our problems; we were both young.” When I ask what his daughter makes of his protest, he laughs sadly and says, “That’s a long story,” in a way that makes it clear he is not going to go into it, but adds: “We haven’t spoken in years.” He has grandchildren he has never met, though his own parents are close to them. Despite his troubled relationship with his parents as a teenager, he says everything is fine between them now.

A day with Mr Stop Brexit: crashing TV interviews and fighting Ukip – video

Bray worked as an electrical engineer, and also became a rare coin dealer, a passion he’d had since he was six. He sold a few of his most valuable ones at the start of his protest, “which covered me into the first year, and then the crowdfunding was set up”. The money donated pays for a flat in London and “keeps me going at the moment”. For a couple of months in 2019, Bray’s team – known as [Stand of Defiance European Movement](#), or Sodem – rented an Airbnb flat in a townhouse on the same street as the Conservative party headquarters, around the corner from parliament. “We would start at six in the morning and finish at midnight. They were hard weeks but they were worth their weight in gold.”

The protest has changed his life, given him a sense of purpose. “I’ve never met so many people in all my life. It’s given me an understanding of people, whatever their views. It’s brought me out of my shell. In a way, it’s a better life than the life I had, because I now have goals and things I want to achieve.” He is “a little bit more outgoing” than he was, he says. “I’m a bit more tolerant. I do try to put the shoe on the other foot and see it from the other angle, whereas before I never would.”

He never expected to be in the public eye, he says, and there are downsides: he is regularly attacked online by people claiming he uses a fake name, and making other allegations about him. “I never really wanted it, but now it’s happened I want to use that 15 minutes of fame to do some good.” In the 2019 general election, Bray stood as the Liberal Democrat candidate for Cynon Valley, a Labour safe seat he knew he couldn’t win (he got 949 votes). “I didn’t actually want to be an MP,” he says. “I don’t want to be in that den of iniquity – that’s not my cup of tea. I’m happy to fight for people’s rights, but in a way I know best.” He can’t see a time that he won’t be protesting. “I think this has probably changed my life for ever. I think there’s so much wrong with this country. The mess will never be undone, but you have to start somewhere.”

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Sand, sea and blazing blue skies: my car-free break in Cumbria



Natural high ... the view over Wastwater from the Wasdale Head route up to Scafell Pike. Photograph: Anna Stowe Landscapes UK/Alamy

Untouched beaches, poetry and spectacular views are among discoveries on this exploration of the Lake District's coastal fringe by rail, bus and on foot

Phoebe Taplin

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The sand outside the windows stretches for miles. The sea is glinting in the distance and there are egrets standing guard along the estuary, their white feathers bright against caramel-gold sandbanks. “Could be the French Riviera. Look at it!” says one of my fellow passengers, waving his arm at the expansive views. His enthusiasm, partly fuelled by cans of morning cocktails, is not misplaced. The scenery gets better and better as winding saltmarsh gives way to the rising fells.

Map for car free

Much of Cumbria has become too popular for its own good. But if you visit the overlooked coast and access the famous lakes without a car, you’ll find deserted beaches and unbeatable countryside without adding to the traffic. The swaying [Avanti West Coast](#) train from Euston to Lancaster takes just two-and-a-half hours to speed 250 miles while the leisurely Northern railway round the Cumbrian coast takes nearly as long again to cover less than half that distance. But this is a journey worth savouring. Each station and stretch of track has a distinct atmosphere, from the retro-romantic tea room at Carnforth, where 1945’s Brief Encounter was filmed, to the trackside Ratty Arms and flowerbeds at Ravenglass.

I’ve been hoping for a reason to revisit Ravenglass since [my last trip three years ago](#) and now two new things to interest car-free travellers have come along at once: the [free weekend shuttle bus to beautiful Wasdale](#) this summer runs through from Ravenglass station in the morning and back in the evening (until 4 September). And new stretches of the England coast path around Cumbria have opened, which are easy to get to by rail, taking walkers through sand dunes and post-industrial nature reserves.



On the right track ... Ravenglass railway station. Photograph: David Chapman/Alamy

Sam Bowden runs the [Ravenglass Handmade Ice-Cream company](#) with her family. They opened a new shop in June and the most popular flavour is sea buckthorn. There are inns nearby, next to the estuary, just minutes from the station, but this time I'm staying in the grounds of [Muncaster Castle](#). Fuelled by rhubarb and ginger ice-cream, I hike a mile or so up through the woods to find the old granary, a converted barn that sleeps four. It's part of the castle's unpretentious Coachman's Quarters. There are more self-catering rooms, including a dorm with four bunkbeds, across the courtyard with a communal kitchen and sitting room.

The USP is after-hours access to Muncaster's 77 acres of gardens. Paths climb through jungles of rhododendron and magnolias. There is a huge panorama from the mile-long terrace with its neat yew trees and borders full of tiger lilies. The view was once described by Victorian writer John Ruskin as the "gateway to Paradise": the winding River Esk gleams blue and the fells flush scarlet in the setting sun.



Terrace Walk, Muncaster Castle. Photograph: Kevin Eaves/Alamy

The logo for the Lake District national park is a stylised version of the view northwards along Wastwater towards fell-flanked Great Gable. Voted “favourite view” by an ITV poll in 2007, the valley often draws more than a quarter of a million visitors a year, causing queues of cars and campervans along the narrow scenic lanes of the Wasdale valley. The Wasdale shuttle aims to ease the weekend pressure and cut carbon emissions.

The winding River Esk gleams blue and the fells flush scarlet in the setting sun

The minibus stops to pick up a party of hikers from Cologne. “Weather like Italy and a free bus. What more could we wish for?” says Dirk Hertel. We all get off at the Wasdale Head Inn with rows of old climbers’ boots and ice axes over the mantelpiece. Tracks lead from here up Scafell and other mountains. The inn’s Victorian landlord, Will Ritson, famous for tall tales, gave his name to a nearby waterfall, Ritson’s Force.

Previous Cumbrian walking holidays have often involved trudging through rain and warming up by pub fires. Today, I’m striding under blazing blue skies and cooling off in lakes and rivers. I cross a little stone bridge and climb past rosebay willowherb and the yellow starry flowers of bog

asphodel. Ten minutes later, I'm floating in turquoise water under pine branches with the waterfall cascading into a pool above me. I head back down for a coffee at the [Barn Door](#) and set off along the valley on a steam-side path.



Ritson's Force waterfall. Photograph: Phoebe Taplin

The path along the scree on the far side of Wastwater looks far too much like hard work, but the little road I stick to instead is plagued by the traffic the Wasdale shuttle is trying to mitigate. Luckily, the bus can ferry walkers to the Greendale junction. Walk along the lakeside lane for half a mile until a path leads off through trees. I stop for another swim from a shingle beach under the branches: the water is bracing and the scenery spectacular.

Scafell Pike, at 978m, is England's highest mountain and Wastwater is England's deepest lake. It's this depth that keeps the water cool year-round and my feet start feeling icy after 10 minutes, so I crawl out and dry them on sun-warmed pebbles. Nether Wasdale has a choice of pubs and farm shop cafes, including the relatively new [Sawmill](#). I have tea on its waterside terrace and half an amber ale called Errmmm... from the [Strands](#) microbrewery, before flagging the bus down outside

A friend is joining me for the second day's walking. I meet her at the station and we have dinner at the village's newly reopened [Inn](#) by the estuary in Ravenglass. The food and drink are exceptional: we eat charred mackerel with watercress, garden pea falafels with pickled beetroot, courgette fritters with feta, and drink fresh, not-too-sweet homemade elderflower cordial.

The long summer evening smells of hot bracken, cut grass and meadowsweet. I lead the way up through the woods, over the sheep fields, and down through the gardens, pointing out the ruined Roman bath house and the sandstone walls of Muncaster Castle as proudly as if I'd built them myself. We see a hare lolling over the lawns, a heron flying slowly across the valley, and house martins flitting to their mud nests in the corner of almost every window of the castle and its outbuildings, including our granary.



Rocks of ages ... the prehistoric standing stones at Giant's Grave.
Photograph: Phoebe Taplin

We have coffee next morning at the Turntable cafe by [the little steam railway](#) and watch the first train puffing off towards Eskdale before we head to the Northern railway train next door and ask the guard if we can get off at Silecroft station ([£3.50](#)). "It's a lovely journey this. You never get bored of it," he says cheerfully.

The ambitious England Coast Path, due at 2,795 miles to be the world's longest coastal walking route, is opening in stages. Current plans, delayed by Covid, could see it finished by 2025. Last year, [a 40-mile stretch south from Whitehaven opened](#), followed in February 2022 by 11 miles from Silecroft to Green Road. This is the section we're following, as far as Millom, and we start with a short detour to see two standing stones called the Giant's Grave. They are tall, carved with cup marks, and backed by the frowning bulk of Black Combe. We catch up with the well-signed coast path and emerge on the pebbly beach just as the lower tide sand emerges, perfect timing for a swim.

The path winds through the flowers that cloak the side of Haverigg dunes: wild thyme, bedstraw, sheep's-bit, bright pink centaury and delicate purple dune pansies. We stop for homemade cake at the Haverigg beach cafe before setting off along the sea wall, which circles a flooded iron ore mine. There are plans to enhance this area as a visitor attraction called [Iron Line](#), drawing on its natural and cultural heritage.

Great crested grebes are swimming on the water and terns with beaks full of small silver fish fly over the path just in front of us, heading for their nests nearby. Looping through this RSPB reserve, past two old lighthouses and a ruined windmill, views open up across the wide sands of the Duddon Estuary towards the fells beyond. Inland, we can see the spire of St George's Church in Millom.



A view of Millom from across the lagoon. Photograph: Phoebe Taplin

The Cumbrian poet Norman Nicholson (1914-1987) lived in Millom and, with prescient environmental concern, celebrated this coast in his landscape poetry. Last year, [an app was launched](#) with heritage trails that trace the writer's footsteps. He describes the lagoon we've just passed in [Hodbarrow Flooded](#):

*Where once the shafts struck down through yielding limestone
Black coot and moorhen
Lay snail-wakes on the water*

From Millom station, we catch the train to Manchester via Barrow. Cancelled services mean we don't arrive until midnight, but it's worth it. One of the few good things about this delayed journey is watching the sun sink into Morecambe Bay, where the ribbed sands shine pink and the distant fells glow purple.

Train travel was provided by [Northern](#) and [Avanti West Coast](#). Lancaster from Manchester £20.50 return; advance tickets from London start around £30 each way). Accommodation was provided by [Muncaster Castle](#) (doubles at the Coachman's Quarters from £80, room only). See [visitlakedistrict.com](#) for more information.

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

2022.07.26 - Opinion

- [Here's why a border-free world would be better than hostile immigration policies](#)
- [I saw signs of monkeypox at Berlin's pride parade – but that doesn't mean it's a 'gay disease'](#)
- [Pandemic knocked you off your stride? An active woman's tips for getting fit again](#)
- [My relatives and I had been in the pub for hours. Then two strangers were unlucky enough to join us ...](#)

OpinionRefugees

Here's why a border-free world would be better than hostile immigration policies

[Luke de Noronha](#) and [Gracie Mae Bradley](#)

A world in which everyone has the freedom to move and to stay might sound pie in the sky, but it can work



Riot police cordon off the Spanish enclave of Melilla from Morocco.
Photograph: Javier Bernardo/AP

Tue 26 Jul 2022 05.24 EDT Last modified on Tue 26 Jul 2022 05.26 EDT

On 28 April, the Nationality and Borders Act passed, taking an axe to Britain's international legal obligations to refugees. This came just after we marked 10 years of the hostile environment, the set of policies introduced by the then home secretary Theresa May in 2012 – albeit trailed by New Labour minister Liam Byrne in 2007 – that saw immigration checks

outsourced to trusted public services, and the creation of a surveillance infrastructure to check people's entitlements and target migrants for removal. Despite the revelations of the Windrush scandal, the hostile environment endures; in the recent Tory leadership contest, all candidates were unanimous in their support for deporting refugees to [Rwanda](#).

And this hostility isn't unique to the UK. Day in and day out, we see the global impact of racialised border violence. Scores of [migrants found dead](#) in the back of a trailer truck in Texas. People [beaten by the authorities](#) and left for dead in the Spanish enclave of Melilla. Rescue ships in the Mediterranean unable to find a [safe port](#). Refugees on the Greek border [coerced by police](#) into pushing back their compatriots.

Pushbacks, vigilantism and mass deportations are only the most extreme manifestation of restrictive citizenship and immigration policies designed to police and control national borders.

But even as borders proliferate, resistance to them grows. In recent months, people have come together to [prevent immigration raids](#) in Glasgow, Edinburgh and London; others lay down at [Colnbrook detention centre](#) to stop the first mass deportation flight to Rwanda.

These movements demand not piecemeal reform or friendlier border guards, but often the abolition of borders altogether. We can do much more than defend an indefensible status quo.

Abolition is a concept we take from movements committed to prison and police abolition. For decades, activists have grappled with some simple truths. Policing and prisons do a lot to punish the poor, little to prevent or reduce violence, and enact much social harm in and of themselves, all at great expense. So they ask: what if rather than locking people up we transformed the original conditions to which policing and prisons are a response? What if people were given the resources they need to live flourishing lives, rather than responding to harm with more harm?

We want to apply this framework to borders. What we call border abolition is most concerned with expanding the freedom to move and to stay. This does not mean advocating for free movement in the world as it is now configured, but rather for transformation of the conditions to which borders are a response. Abolition is concerned with presence: the presence of life-sustaining goods, services and practices of care. And it is concerned with absence: of violent state practices such as detention and deportation. In a world like this, borders would become obsolete.

Even if we don't know exactly what a borderless world would look like, there is a vast array of changes we can make in the here and now to reduce the reach and harm of immigration controls, opening the way to a borderless world in the future. As prison abolitionist and educator Mariame Kaba tells us, "Hope is a discipline." We need not look far to see how the fractures in our present might open the way to radically different, flourishing futures.

Rather than simply trying to make more and more people eligible for citizenship, we should recoup the humanity of the non-citizen, and ensure universal access to essential services regardless of immigration status. We should scrap laws that criminalise undocumented migrants for working, renting and driving. We should keep up the fight to end immigration detention, raids and mass deportation flights, which would improve conditions for all non-citizens.

Of course, borders necessarily mediate relationships across countries, not simply within them, and so our agenda must be international too. We should agitate for all of the resources expended on border policing – the drones, surveillance watchtowers, armed guards, biometric recognition systems, data-mining tools – to be redirected in service of human flourishing. We should end the many development and aid programmes that enlist governments in the global south to prevent people from migrating in the first place.

We should defund Frontex, the EU's coordinated border force, and instead invest in global solidarity funds to enable the people and states in the global south to better mitigate climate catastrophe. We should support ongoing demands for debt cancellation and an end to arms exports. We should encourage the expansion of bilateral or regional free movement agreements.

We do not have to accept the necessity of mass surveillance and mass death in the name of nation and territory. To paraphrase the scholar and [activist Mike Davis](#), we have seen social miracles in our lifetimes, wins that seemed impossible until they weren't. Many more are possible. Perhaps one of the great rallying cries of May 1968 sets out the task most succinctly: "Let's be realistic, demand the impossible!"

- Gracie Mae Bradley and Luke de Noronha are the authors of [Against Borders: The Case for Abolition](#)
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| [Section menu](#) | [Main menu](#) |

OpinionMonkeypox

I saw signs of monkeypox at Berlin's pride parade – but that doesn't mean it's a 'gay disease'

Roland Bull

This latest virus looks like being my community's round three, after Aids and Covid. Let's not make the same mistakes we've made before

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'Where is the vaccination?' banner during the Christopher Street Day pride demonstration in Berlin, Germany on 23 July, 2022. Photograph: Emmanuele Contini/NurPhoto/REX/Shutterstock

Mon 25 Jul 2022 23.49 EDT

It was an idyllic Christopher Street Day in Berlin as we danced, drank, laughed and sang our way to the Brandenburg Gate in celebration of LGBTQ+ pride. A wonderful atmosphere for a city renowned for its social freedoms after two years of pandemic-induced constraint.

But all over the place were small signs and reminders of monkeypox, the less deadly but still serious cousin of the smallpox virus that's unexpectedly making its way around the Americas, Europe and Australia, and primarily affecting men who have sex with men.

Those recently recovered had tales to share of confused diagnoses and treatment and a disorganised vaccination program.

Word on the street was that Berlin has very limited supplies of monkeypox vaccine, and that those with active cases and any close contacts were having to spend days on end calling doctors and medical clinics trying to track down a dose, often to no avail.

Those accounts are reflected in guidance from the [German authorities](#) noting that the vaccination concept has yet to be worked out and that those who would like one should contact their family doctor or local health department.

Apparently, Berlin is set to receive [80 thousand doses of monkeypox vaccine in late July.](#)

Surveying the crowd, that could well be too little, too late. People had travelled from across Europe and around the world for [Christopher Street Day over the weekend.](#) They would be letting their hair down, then heading home. Other countries should be making their own preparations.

As I embraced one friend, I noticed two large scars on his face that he would later explain were the remnants of enormous pustules that had flared up, crusted over, scabbed and finally healed, indicating he was no longer infectious. The scars would likely never dissipate though, hence the effort of a bushy beard to hide them.

Expanding on his experience, he told me of red-raw tonsils and excruciating lymphadenopathy. “I didn’t know we had that many lymph nodes!” he marvelled.

I did. I’m an Australian medical student halfway through my degree, taking a year off to breathe after two years of pandemic study and my own health woes. I push the upper-limits of “mature-aged” at medical school, having come to the vocation late in life after a career in LGBTQ+ health.

Berlin has long been a kind of second home.

As the march progressed, amid the thumping techno and bustling rainbows, I heard more stories. Sores concentrated in the rectum obscuring diagnosis – in the absence of pox on the body, the man’s fever was just attributed to Covid or the flu. The rectal sores must have seemed an unwelcome anomaly though.

This [New Yorker article described a similar scenario resulting in screams of pain](#) when going to the bathroom and hours spent delicately trying to keep the area clean.

The mental health impact of forcing people into further isolation was also a topic of conversation, with [21 days generally recommended](#) in the event of a suspected infection. I shudder to think of the impacts of that on the socially and economically vulnerable, especially after the last couple of years.

By the time we reached the Siegessäule – Berlin’s victory column and namesake of a prolific, local queer rag – I had noticed more than a few suspect physical signs. A scar here, a rash there.

“Was that a pock or a pimple?” I wondered as I brushed past a group of scantily clad revellers. I had a feeling masks and sanitiser weren’t going to cut it this time, and I didn’t sense an appetite in this crowd for more lockdowns.

In 2021, as part of my medical studies, I interviewed Australian gay and bisexual men about their experiences of the Covid-19 pandemic. Of the many poignant findings, the one I keep coming back to is the fact that many

had experienced a pandemic before, with HIV/Aids devastating this community from the early 1980s.

In the western world, the situation is now more manageable due to breakthroughs in testing and treatment, but HIV/Aids continues to ravage parts of sub-Saharan Africa.

The pain of that first pandemic experience was reflected in my interviews, with participants expressing anger and resentment when comparing the two pandemic responses. These sentiments have also been reflected in research from Austria, Germany, the United States and Canada.

One man in Ontario pointed out: “There’s a Covid-19 panic and crisis so every healthcare system steps in and begins to work. That didn’t happen in the Aids epidemic. We had to fucking fight, and fight, and fight and fight to get the most basic things for people.”

Covid-19 was round two for many gay and bisexual men and men who have sex with men more broadly, not to mention our friends, families and allies.

With the World Health Organisation’s 23 July decision to declare monkeypox a global health emergency, it looks like we might be in for round three. The difference this time is that a viable vaccine to treat monkeypox is already available, along with antiviral medications to limit its severity.

We don’t need to wait for biomedical science to work its magic, and we shouldn’t have to fight and fight and fight – we have the means to address this right now.

Importantly, despite primarily affecting men who have sex with men at present, monkeypox isn’t strictly a sexual transmitted infection.

Rather, it’s borne of close contact and transmitted through respiratory droplets and vesicle fluid encountered on bodies or textiles. Congenital monkeypox transmission from mother to baby in utero is also possible.

It would be a mistake to write this off as a gay disease, in the same way that gay-related immune deficiency syndrome (Grids) and gay cancer served as

early iterations of what we now call HIV/Aids. Viruses aren't like humans, they hold no moral judgement about who's sleeping with whom. They infect organisms with no regard to sexuality.

One of the hard-won lessons from HIV/Aids was summed up on 23 July by the WHO director general, Dr Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, who noted "Stigma and discrimination can be as dangerous as any virus".

Let's just get the job done this time, and make sure we don't scar another generation of marginalised men by turning a blind eye as disease ravages their communities.

- *Roland Bull is a medical student, writer and stand-up comedian living in Canberra with an interest in sexual health, especially among the LGBTQ+ community*
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OpinionFitness

Pandemic knocked you off your stride? An active woman's tips for getting fit again

[Rose George](#)

Brain tricks and toothbrush squats might seem crazy, but it's all part of getting into a healthy routine



'I'd like to run like the fitter, faster version of me from 2019, when I got personal bests in every race I did.' Parkrun in Porthcawl, Wales. Photograph: Huw Fairclough/Getty Images

Tue 26 Jul 2022 01.00 EDT Last modified on Tue 26 Jul 2022 10.44 EDT

On Saturday, I did my local parkrun. For the unfamiliar, that means I walked to my local park and ran around it for 5km with about 100 other people, cheered on by volunteers who were cheering for nothing and who had set it up for nothing.

I should have been delighted: this was my first run since I got Covid two weeks ago. The sun was shining, the park at Potternewton in Leeds is beautiful. Instead, I watched a lithe and fit-looking woman running in front of me and thought: “I’d like to run like her.” And then corrected myself. No, I’d like to run like me. The fitter, faster version of me from 2019, when I got personal bests in every race I did and was at peak health.

Throughout lockdowns I did not waver: living room HIIT workouts, regular running and yoga. Then this year I got four months of long Covid, a month of health and another bout of Covid. My metrics on Strava are going down, not up.

Mentioning races and personal bests are two clues that I am not the majority. Half of women in the UK have [done no vigorous exercise](#) in the past 12 months, according to a survey of 8,000 people by the Healthier Nation Index. That is no vigorous exercise, no half-hearted moving: just nothing.

One in three women said their fitness had declined over the past 12 months; that when the gyms shut, so did their motivation, and it hasn’t come back. The NHS would like adults to do 150 minutes of moderate exercise a week (that includes walking, cycling, inline skating and pushing a lawnmower) or 75 minutes of vigorous exercise (where you can’t say a few words without pausing for breath). It also wants us to do two weight-bearing sessions a week. Add this to all the endless head-scratching and hectoring about food and drink (butter [good](#); butter [bad](#). Red wine [healthy](#); red wine [lethal](#)), and I can sympathise with the 47% of women surveyed who found it easier to give up exercising altogether.

That may not be the true picture. Sport England’s annual Active Lives Survey, last released in November 2021, surveyed nearly 100,000 women and [found](#) that 59% did 150 minutes of exercise a week. Only 27.9% were inactive. It’s likely that many women exercise informally – running around after children, doing the lion’s share of housework and care work, as was [definitely the case during the pandemic](#). But current rates of obesity – which have risen from 6% of men and 9% of women in 1980 to 27%-29% now – suggest otherwise.

What is the answer? There isn't a single solution. Here are the usual: join a club or organise to exercise with a friend or two. I would not get half the enjoyment I do out of fell running without my fell running clubmates and friends. Find a sport you enjoy and you will make time for it. Busy people will balk at making time, so the answer is to use the time you're already using. Even five minutes a day of exercise that raises the heart rate is good for you: those hackneyed messages about getting off a bus stop earlier, or taking the stairs, are old but good.

Cycling to work instead of sitting in a car or a bus, of course, is a great idea, and you need to get there anyway. But that only works if cyclists feel safe. In Leeds, where I live, my regular cycle route involves at least two near-misses with idiot drivers who cut me up, though I wear so much hi-vis and have so many lights a woman once wound down her window at me on a dark winter's night and said: "What are you, a Christmas tree?" I look wistfully at cycle lanes in the Netherlands that are extensive and separate from the road. But investment in cycling is still pitiful (Leeds' network of dedicated cycle paths has improved, but it was a low bar).

What else? Inspiration. But how are women meant to get inspiration when newspaper sports pages still, largely, think they are invisible? Men have had a Tour de France for 119 years. Women were allowed one for five years in the 1980s, and only allowed one again this year (it [started on Sunday](#)). At the [opening game](#) of Women's Euro 2022 at Old Trafford, the sight of thousands of young girls in the stands was far more invigorating than the match.

Finally, trickery. I know what it feels like to lose your fitness and feel out of shape, and how that can seem like an obstacle rather than a challenge. So trick your brain in small ways: I have trained mine to think it's weird not to do single leg squats when I clean my teeth. I get up from my desk at 45-minute intervals to do squats. Sports strategists talk of marginal gains, which could be anything from changing mealtimes to an afternoon nap. A toothbrushing squat may not seem like much, but marginal gains add up to major ones. You may be starting small but small is better than the sofa.

- Rose George is the author of Nine Pints: A journey through the miraculous, mysterious world of blood

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

OpinionFamily

My relatives and I had been in the pub for hours. Then two strangers were unlucky enough to join us ...

[Zoe Williams](#)



Jim and his partner were looking forward to a quiet night out. What they got was a scene out of a sci-fi dystopia



‘Wave after wave of delicious snacks arrived and everyone went: “Wow, this is more like a funeral.”’ Photograph: Thomas Barwick/Getty Images (posed by models)

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“Can you even call it a reunion if it happens every year?” Mr Z asked, saltily. This might have indicated that he didn’t want to come to the Williams family reunion, but he had Covid so he couldn’t attend anyway. I have to assume, therefore, that it was a genuine question. Here is my genuine answer: yes, you can.

The first time it didn’t happen was 2020. The first time it happened in my house was 2021 (almost no one came). The first time it was catered, in a pub, was 2022.

It is impossible to overstate what a departure from the norm this was. Usually, five branches of the family, only one of which is called Williams, turn up with exactly the same couscous, as if a penchant for too-large chunks of red pepper has been passed down genetically. Once, one of my stepmothers arrived with her couscous in an ice-cream tub with holes poked in the top. After sustained interrogation, it transpired that this was because

the container had, until very recently, contained frogspawn. This was the only occasion on which the couscouses were distinguishable.

This year, however, wave after wave of delicious snacks arrived, on huge plates, and everyone went: “Wow, this isn’t like a reunion at all, this is more like a funeral,” and we all cheered.

These novel circumstances came with the reasonable expectation that the event, having started at 2pm, would, at some point, end. A single table had been booked in the middle of the pub garden we were occupying for Jim, at 6pm. That is not how we roll. If we had a motto, it would be: “It’s not over till it’s over.”

So, at 6pm, Jim arrived, with Mrs Jim, for what they thought would be a nice, quiet night in a south London pub. Instead, it was like walking into a 50s sci-fi dystopia, with scores of people who looked vaguely similar all making no sense.

“Jim!” everyone yelled, with that drunk overcorrection, where you don’t want someone to feel unwelcome, so you make them way *too* welcome. He had to sit through the speeches, in which he was thanked explicitly for his patience. He is in all the photos. By 2023, we won’t be able to remember whether he is from the Sheffield branch or the Isle of Wight one.

Zoe Williams is a Guardian columnist

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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2022.07.26 - Around the world

- [Myanmar US presses China to rein in junta over executions](#)
- [Jared Kushner Trump son-in-law says he had thyroid cancer while aide in 2019](#)
- [Donald Trump He's back: ex-president returns to Washington for first time since leaving office](#)
- [Tunisia President speaks of 'new phase' as referendum set to give him almost total power](#)
- [Technology UK satellite firm OneWeb and France's Eutelsat sign initial merger deal](#)

[Myanmar](#)

Myanmar executions: US presses China to rein in junta, saying it cannot be ‘business as usual’

State department says military government in Yangon has not faced enough economic and diplomatic pressure, amid global outrage at killings



Phyo Zeya Thaw, a rapper and former lawmaker from Aung San Suu Kyi's party, was executed on Monday. The US State department has urged China to wield its influence with Myanmar's junta. Photograph: EPA

[Rebecca Ratcliffe](#) South-east Asia correspondent, and agencies

Tue 26 Jul 2022 05.55 EDTFirst published on Mon 25 Jul 2022 21.34 EDT

A senior US official has urged China to do more to rein in Myanmar's military after its execution of four people, saying that "it cannot be business as usual with the junta", as the killings drew widespread international condemnation.

State department spokesperson Ned Price [told a briefing](#): “Arguably, no country has the potential to influence the trajectory of Burma’s next steps more so than the PRC [People’s Republic of China]”, noting that the junta “has not faced the level of economic and in some cases diplomatic pressure that we would like to see”.

Price noted in-depth discussions had already been held with China and India on how to put Myanmar back on the path to democracy.

US secretary of state Antony Blinken, who met activists from Myanmar in Bangkok this month, voiced confidence the killings would not hinder the country’s democracy movement. “The regime’s sham trials and these executions are blatant attempts to extinguish democracy; these actions will never suppress the spirit of the brave people of Burma,” Blinken said in a statement, using Myanmar’s former name.

We condemn the Burmese military’s executions of pro-democracy activists and elected leaders Ko Jimmy, Phyo Zeya Thaw, Hla Myo Aung, and Aung Thura Zaw. These executions demonstrate a further escalation in the level of regime brutality and horrific violence.
pic.twitter.com/RzjPHRNBRh

— Ned Price (@StateDeptSpox) [July 26, 2022](#)

The remarks came after China, a longtime ally of Myanmar’s military, refused to comment on the executions. Foreign ministry spokesperson Zhao Lijian said Beijing “always upholds the principle of non-interference in other countries’ internal affairs”.

The execution on Monday of four prisoners including a former lawmaker from Aung San Suu Kyi’s party and a prominent democracy activist, was Myanmar’s first use of capital punishment in decades, and has heightened concerns that more death sentences will follow. Since the coup in February last year, 76 prisoners have been sentenced to death, including two children, according to advocacy group Assistance Association for Political Prisoners

(AAPP) Burma. A further 41 people have been sentenced to death in absentia.

Global condemnation has followed, with attention turning to what can be done to prevent further atrocities. A joint statement from the European Union, Australia, Canada, Japan, New Zealand, Norway, South Korea, Britain and the United States called the killings “reprehensible acts of violence that further exemplify the regime’s disregard for human rights and the rule of law”.

The UN special rapporteur Thomas Andrews said he was “outraged and devastated” by the executions and called for a strong international response. “The widespread and systematic murders of protesters, indiscriminate attacks against entire villages, and now the execution of opposition leaders, demands an immediate and firm response by member states of the United Nations,” he said.

Myanmar’s junta lashed out on Tuesday against the international condemnation, saying the four executed prisoners “deserved many death sentences.”

Spokesman Zaw Min Tun insisted the men “were given the right to defend themselves according to court procedure”.

“If we compare their sentence with other death penalty cases, they have committed crimes for which they should have been given death sentences many times,” he said at a regular press briefing in the capital Naypyidaw. “They harmed many innocent people. There were many big losses which could not be replaced.”

Aung Myo Min, the human rights minister in Myanmar’s national unity government (NUG), which was formed in exile by elected politicians, ethnic minority representatives and activists, earlier rejected the allegations the killed men were involved in violence, telling the Associated Press: “Punishing them with death is a way to rule the public through fear.”

The United Nations also condemned the executions, with human rights chief Michelle Bachelet calling them “cruel and regressive”. A spokesperson for

António Guterres said the secretary general opposes the death penalty “in all circumstances” and urged the immediate release of all arbitrarily detained prisoners, including President Win Myint and State Counsellor Aung San Suu Kyi.

Myanmar expert Richard Horsey of the International Crisis Group said the executions were “an outrageous act. And one that will create political shock waves, now and for a long time to come”.

Among the executed men were Phyo Zeya Thaw, a rapper and former lawmaker from Aung San Suu Kyi’s party, and the prominent democracy activist Kyaw Min Yu, known as Jimmy. They were accused of conspiring to commit terror acts and were sentenced to death in January in closed trials.

The two other executed men – Hla Myo Aung and Aung Thura Zaw – were accused of killing a woman they suspected was a military informer in Yangon, according to Agence France-Presse.

Local media reported that the families of the men had travelled to Insein prison in Yangon demanding to see their loved ones’ bodies. Prison officials refused to hand the body over to relatives, a source close to the family of Kyaw Min Yu said, despite prison regulations stating it must do so unless there is a special reason.

A total of 14,847 people have been arrested since the coup, while 11,759 remain in detention, according to AAPP Burma.

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[US news](#)

Jared Kushner says he had thyroid cancer while aide to Trump in 2019

In forthcoming memoir Donald Trump's son-in-law writes that he had treatment while involved in trade negotiations with China



Jared Kushner with Donald Trump in the White House in November 2019, around the time of Kushner's diagnosis with thyroid cancer. Photograph: Mandel Ngan/AFP/Getty Images

Reuters

Tue 26 Jul 2022 01.37 EDT

Jared Kushner, a former senior aide to then-president Donald Trump who is married to Trump's daughter, Ivanka, wrote in a [memoir to be published next month](#) that he had a bout with thyroid cancer in 2019 that was previously undisclosed.

According to excerpts of the book seen by Reuters, Kushner wrote that White House physician Sean Conley pulled him aside on Air Force One as Trump flew to Texas to tell him his test results from Walter Reed Medical Center showed he had cancer and “we need to schedule a surgery right away”.

Kushner had the surgery right before Thanksgiving that year and managed to keep his cancer diagnosis secret despite working in a White House where news leaks were rampant. The book excerpts were first reported by the New York Times.

Unbeknownst to Kushner, Trump was aware of the cancer diagnosis. Kushner wrote: “The day before the surgery, Trump called me into the Oval Office and motioned for his team to close the door. ‘Are you nervous about the surgery?’ he asked.”

Kushner asked how Trump knew, to which he replied: “I’m the president. I know everything. I understand that you want to keep these things quiet. I like to keep things like this to myself as well. You’ll be just fine. Don’t worry about anything with work. We have everything covered here.”

Kushner reveals the cancer diagnosis in his memoir *Breaking History: A White House Memoir*, to be published on 23 August.

Kushner said a substantial part of his thyroid was removed during the surgery, which came during tense negotiations with China about a trade deal.

Kushner was a [lead negotiator](#) in a US-brokered normalisation deal between Israel and several Arab countries in 2020. He now [runs global investment firm Affinity Partners](#), and has stepped away from politics for the time being.

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

Donald Trump

He's back: Trump returns to Washington for first time since leaving office

Ex-president to give keynote address at rightwing thinktank, days after January 6 panel exposed his inaction during Capitol attack



Donald Trump and his family at Joint Base Andrews in Maryland on 20 January 2021, the day of Joe Biden's inauguration. Trump chose not to attend. Photograph: Alex Edelman/AFP/Getty Images

[Joan E Greve in Washington](#)

Tue 26 Jul 2022 02.00 EDT

Mr Trump is going (back) to Washington. The former president will return to the nation's capital on Tuesday, marking his first visit to the city since leaving office last year.

Trump will deliver the keynote address at a summit held by the America First Policy Institute, a thinktank formed by some of his former White House advisers.

AFPI's leaders have said the America First Agenda Summit will focus on the Republican party's plans to combat inflation and improve the US immigration system, but that agenda is unlikely to stop Trump from recirculating his lies about the 2020 election.

The summit comes less than a week after the House select committee investigating the January 6 insurrection held its [second primetime hearing](#), which focused on Trump's inaction during the deadly Capitol attack. The committee outlined how Trump refused for hours to intervene and instead watched television coverage of the violence, even as some of his closest advisers pleaded with him to take action.

Trump is expected to confront the committee's accusations in his Tuesday speech, as he has remained determined to criticize those who did not support his efforts to overturn the results of the 2020 election.

Speaking at the Faith and Freedom Coalition's "Road to Majority" conference in Nashville, Tennessee, [last month](#), Trump again attacked Mike Pence, his former vice-president, for refusing to interfere with the congressional certification of Joe Biden's victory on January 6.

"Mike Pence had a chance to be great. He had a chance to be frankly historic," Trump said. "But just like [former Attorney General] Bill Barr and the rest of these weak people, Mike – and I say it sadly because I like him – but Mike did not have the courage to act."

The select committee has shown how Trump's pressure campaign on Pence incited his supporters, who chanted "Hang Mike Pence!" as they stormed the Capitol. According to the committee, Pence was [just 40ft from the mob](#) on January 6, as he was evacuated from the Senate chamber due to security concerns. A former Trump administration official [told investigators](#) that

members of Pence's security detail were so concerned for their safety they called family members to say goodbye.

Pence was supposed to have his own opportunity to address the committee's revelations on Monday, as he was scheduled to speak at an event for the Heritage Foundation, a conservative thinktank. The event was delayed because of bad weather in Washington, which impacted Pence's flight.

Trump's speech comes as both he and Pence consider presidential campaigns in 2024. Trump has teased the idea of a Washington comeback since leaving office last year, and he has recently been [dropping more hints](#) that an announcement could come soon.

Pence's speech at the Heritage Foundation is the latest in a series of public appearances for the former vice-president, which have [intensified speculation](#) about his 2024 plans. In addition to his busier speech schedule, Pence has recently formed his own political advocacy group, and he has been visiting battleground states that could decide the next president.

But both Trump and Pence will have their work cut out for them if they run for office in 2024. According to a [New York Times/Siena College poll](#) taken this month, nearly half of Republican primary voters said they would support someone other than Trump if he ran again in 2024. Only 6% of those voters said they would support Pence in the primary.

Trump's approval rating also remains alarmingly low if Republicans hope to regain control of the White House in 2024. A recent [Quinnipiac University poll](#) found that 37% of Americans have a favorable opinion of Trump, while 55% have an unfavorable impression.

The winner of the Republican primary in 2024 will ([most likely](#)) face off against Biden, who has seen his [own approval rating drop](#) in recent months, as high inflation and the war in Ukraine have soured the nation's mood. A majority of Democrats [now say](#) they would prefer a different nominee for 2024.

Trump will try to capitalize on Biden's vulnerabilities with his speech on Tuesday – if he can avoid fixating too much on his election lies.

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

[Tunisia](#)

Tunisia referendum approves expansion of president's powers – officials

Electoral commission – controlled by President Kais Saied – says 95% voted yes in constitutional referendum, which was boycotted by opposition groups



President Kais Saied greets his supporters in Tunis. Photograph: Tunisian Presidency/Reuters

[Martin Chulov](#) Middle East correspondent, and agencies

Tue 26 Jul 2022 19.35 EDTFirst published on Tue 26 Jul 2022 01.08 EDT

Tunisian president Kais Saied has celebrated the almost certain victory of the yes vote in a referendum on a new constitution that hands him wide-ranging powers and risks the return of authoritarian rule in the birthplace of the Arab spring.

Preliminary results for the vote, held a year to the day after [Saied sacked the government and froze parliament](#) in what rivals have called a coup, were due

late on Tuesday, with a full tally not expected until next month. However, according to an exit poll taken by the Sigma Conseil institute, an overwhelming 92-93% of those who voted on Monday supported the new constitution.

After the projected outcome was announced on national television, Saied supporters drove cars in procession through central Tunis, waving flags and beeping their horns, with some singing the national anthem or shouting “We would sacrifice our souls and our blood for you, Saied!”

At around 2am local time on Tuesday, the president appeared in front of a jubilant crowd.

“Tunisia has entered a new phase,” he said, according to local television, adding that “there was a large crowd in the polling stations and the rate would have been higher if the vote took place over two days”.

Without naming them, the president promised “all those who have committed crimes against the country will be held accountable for their actions”.

Only around a third of 9.3 million registered voters cast ballots, Tunisia’s ISIE electoral commission said, showing widespread apathy with the political process. Still, turnout was higher than many observers had expected, suggesting that Saied continues to enjoy personal popularity almost three years into his mandate.

Tunisia’s main opposition alliance on Tuesday accused the electoral board of falsifying turnout numbers. Ahmed Nejib Chebbi, head of the National Salvation Front that includes Saied’s main rivals, said the figures were “inflated and don’t fit with what observers saw on the ground” across Tunisia.

The president seized control of ISIE in April, giving himself the authority to name three of the seven members of the commission including its chief.

Saied’s critics have warned the new constitution would lock in presidential powers that could tip Tunisia back into dictatorship.

The new text would place the president in command of the army, allow him to appoint a government without parliamentary approval and make him virtually impossible to remove from office.

He could also present draft laws to parliament, which would be obliged to give them priority.



Election officials count ballots. President Saied is likely to cement a new constitution that gives him more control over a country he has ruled by decree since suspending parliament a year ago.

Photograph: Anadolu Agency/Getty Images

The referendum generated few ripples across a region that is still regrouping after a decade of direct challenges to the foundations of its autocracies, which sparked a groundswell of hope that citizens, rather than autocrats, could shape their own destinies.

As revolutions were overturned by [military coup in Egypt](#), by [Saudi intervention in Bahrain](#) and – eventually – by [Gulf support for Syria's government](#), Tunisia was seen as the last hope among the moves to reset the contract between citizen and state, and redefine how politics was done in the Middle East.

Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates have emerged as supporters of Saied, who now appears to have a clear path to transforming the country's governance from a hybrid parliamentary system to a presidential model that gives him a vice-like grip on the country.

"Although Tunisia was on the right track of political reform, the economic challenges coupled with corruption had been ringing the alarm bells well before Saied's presidency. A power grab was his answer to the challenges," said Nancy Okail, a human rights advocate and CEO of the Centre for International Policy

"The regional dynamics 11 years on are certainly not promising," she added. "The transactional relationship between the west and the region, prioritising oil, with a narrow view of security and the normalisation of relations with autocrats are only making things worse."

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Many voters seemed oblivious to the content of the referendum, or unconcerned by the wide-ranging powers it gave the country's president. Apathy and fatigue had become constants in Tunisia's political discourse, which had been beset by corruption and economic woes over the course of several democratically elected governments.

While many view Saied's moves as a [nail in the coffin of the Arab spring](#), other observers say change on such a scale needs a generational and historical perspective.

"Of course, today's referendum in Tunisia is a setback for the rooting of a democratic culture in Tunisia," said HA Hellyer, a non-resident scholar at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace. "But the history of revolutionary change across the world is like that: a step forward, a step back, and so on. Tunisia, and frankly the Arab world, is no different."

Agence France-Presse and Reuters contributed to this report

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/jul/26/tunisia-president-referendum-result-new-phase-kais-saied>

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

[Technology sector](#)

UK satellite firm OneWeb and France's Eutelsat sign initial merger deal

British company, bailed out by government, and former rival could take on Elon Musk's Starlink after tie-up



A Russian Soyuz-2.1b carrier vehicle with OneWeb communication satellites launches at Baikonur Cosmodrome in Kazakhstan. Photograph: Roscosmos Press Service Handout/EPA

Reuters

Tue 26 Jul 2022 05.09 EDT Last modified on Tue 26 Jul 2022 05.15 EDT

The British satellite company OneWeb and its French rival Eutelsat have announced they have signed an initial merger deal that could help them challenge the likes of the Elon Musk-owned SpaceX's Starlink.

The transaction, following [reports that both companies were in tie-up talks](#), values OneWeb at \$3.4bn (£2.8bn). It would be structured as an exchange of

OneWeb shares by its shareholders with new shares issued by Eutelsat, leaving the latter owning 100% of OneWeb.

A deal would combine the companies' resources in the race to build a [constellation of low-orbit satellites](#). It is also potentially sensitive politically, as it would bring together the Indian billionaire Sunil Bharti Mittal, along with France, China and the UK, as shareholders of the combined group.

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Demand for satellite launches is expected to accelerate after recent sanctions sidelined the Russian space launch industry, and giant satellite constellations could offer a new channel to beam broadband internet from space.

Eutelsat and OneWeb said their new, combined entity would have revenue of about €1.2bn (£1bn) and core earnings of about €700m by the 2022-23 financial year, while revenue was forecast to grow at a low double-digit compound annual growth rate over the next decade.

Eutelsat's Dominique D'Hinnin would be chair of the combined entity. OneWeb's Sunil Bharti Mittal would be co-chair, while Eva Berneke would be chief executive.

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/business/2022/jul/26/uk-satellite-oneweb-france-eutelsat-merger-deal-elon-musk-starlink>

Headlines saturday 30 july 2022

- [Live Rail strikes: union accuses Grant Shapps of lying about negotiations as millions face disruption](#)
- [Train strikes Industrial action brings widespread disruption to Great Britain](#)
- [Politics Rishi Sunak seeks to revive No 10 bid by attacking 'woke nonsense'](#)
- [Liz Truss Tom Tugendhat backs foreign secretary](#)

[Skip to key events](#)

[Rail strikes](#)

Rail strikes: union accuses Grant Shapps of lying about negotiations as millions face disruption – as it happened

Head of Aslef says transport secretary ‘misrepresenting’ the truth after claim the union was ‘dragging its feet’ in pay talks

Updated 15h ago

[*Clea Skopeliti*](#)

Sat 30 Jul 2022 12.16 EDTFirst published on Sat 30 Jul 2022 02.52 EDT

Key events

- [16h ago](#)
[How will journeys on Sunday be affected?](#)
- [17h ago](#)
[Will there be more rail strikes this summer?](#)
- [19h ago](#)
[Hitachi rail workers to strike from Sunday](#)
- [20h ago](#)
[Which rail services are affected and for how long?](#)
- [21h ago](#)
[Labour party needs to back trade unions, Tarry says](#)
- [22h ago](#)
[Sam Tarry joins Aslef picket line at Paddington station](#)
- [23h ago](#)
[Union leader accuses Shapps of lying about negotiations](#)
- [24h ago](#)
[Why are train drivers striking?](#)
- [1d ago](#)

Which services are affected?

- [1d ago](#)
[Biggest strike by train drivers in decades begins](#)



Passengers board a train at Paddington station during industrial strike action
Photograph: Chris J Ratcliffe/Getty Images

[Clea Skopeliti](#)

Sat 30 Jul 2022 12.16 EDTFirst published on Sat 30 Jul 2022 02.52 EDT

Show key events only

Please turn on JavaScript to use this feature

Live feed

From 20h ago

[07.12](#)

Which rail services are affected and for how long?

Here's a quick recap to get you up to speed about the services affected by industrial action.

Aslef union members are striking on Saturday, with 5,500 members of staff expected to walk out. Drivers are striking over pay, with Aslef's general secretary, Mick Whelan, saying many members have not had a pay rise for three years.

The following services will be affected:

- **London Overground** - no service
- **Greater Anglia** - greatly reduced
- **Heathrow Express** - no service
- **Great Western Railway** – greatly reduced
- **Hull Trains** - reduced timetable
- **LNER** – greatly reduced
- **London Northwestern Railway** - no service
- **Southeastern** - no service
- **West Midlands** – greatly reduced

The strike will last for 24 hours, and customers should expect some rail disruption to continue into Sunday 31 July.

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Updated at 08.58 EDT

Key events

- [16h ago](#)
[How will journeys on Sunday be affected?](#)
- [17h ago](#)
[Will there be more rail strikes this summer?](#)
- [19h ago](#)
[Hitachi rail workers to strike from Sunday](#)
- [20h ago](#)
[Which rail services are affected and for how long?](#)
- [21h ago](#)

[Labour party needs to back trade unions, Tarry says](#)

- [22h ago](#)

[Sam Tarry joins Aslef picket line at Paddington station](#)

- [23h ago](#)

[Union leader accuses Shapps of lying about negotiations](#)

- [24h ago](#)

[Why are train drivers striking?](#)

- [1d ago](#)

[Which services are affected?](#)

- [1d ago](#)

[Biggest strike by train drivers in decades begins](#)

Show key events only

Please turn on JavaScript to use this feature

[16h ago](#)[11.31](#)

How will journeys on Sunday be affected?

Disruption from industrial action will continue into the early hours of Sunday.

Services on Southeastern Railway will resume from 6.30am, it said:

- Our network is closed today. Please do not travel.
- Services resume from 06:30am tomorrow.
- Check your journey at: <https://t.co/P7IK8GPdPo> [#RailStrike](#)
pic.twitter.com/0LVhY51c0S

— Southeastern (@Se_Railway) [July 30, 2022](#)

Here's how tomorrow is looking for those travelling on other services:

- The London Overground will return to a good service by 9am, [TfL said](#).

- Greater Anglia has said its Sunday morning services will start later than usual, with some morning trains cancelled.
- Great Western Railway warned there will be significant disruption on Sunday, and advised [customers to only travel by train if necessary](#).
- Three trains journeys between London and Hull on Sunday have been cancelled, [Hull Trains said](#).
- The strikes will affect morning services by London Northwestern Railway and West Midlands Railway. Neither company specified exact times.

We'll be closing this blog soon – thanks for following along today.

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Updated at 12.16 EDT

[16h ago 11.25](#)



Rail passengers wait for announcements at Euston train station on July 30, 2022 in London. Photograph: Chris J Ratcliffe/Getty Images



Rail passengers wait for announcements at Euston train station on July 30, 2022 in London Photograph: Chris J Ratcliffe/Getty Images

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16h ago 11.05

Aslef general secretary, Mick Whelan, has said the strike shows the “determination” of union members to stand up to the government and train companies.

Describing Saturday’s strike as “solid”, Whelan said: “That shows the solidarity of our members and their determination not to be pushed around by Grant Shapps, the Department for [Transport](#), and the train companies.”

“After keeping Britain moving during the pandemic, they expect our members, who have not had an increase in pay since 2019, to keep working, effectively for a pay cut.”

The union leader said that the union is asking for a wage increase in line with rising costs. “Soaring inflation is not the fault of working people in this

country, it's the fault of this government and its inept handling of the UK economy," he said.



Mick Whelan, General Secretary of the British trade union ASLEF
Photograph: Nick Ansell/PA

He accused Shapps of "ducking and diving" instead of finding a solution to the dispute. "He could solve this in an instant by allowing the train companies to come to the table with a sensible offer and negotiate with us."

Whelan has accused Shapps of "lying" about negotiations over this summer's rail strikes after Shapps claimed the RMT is "stalling on reform" and that Aslef "is dragging its feet in negotiations".

The Department for Transport issued a statement on Saturday saying that it is "misleading" to suggest that Shapps should get involved in negotiations over pay and working practices.

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Updated at 11.08 EDT

[16h ago](#) [10.45](#)

The former shadow transport minister Sam Tarry, who was sacked after giving broadcast interviews from a picket line, has said he “absolutely” still thinks Sir [Keir Starmer](#) is the best person to lead the country – but that Labour needs to show solidarity with striking workers.

My colleague Joe Middleton has the full report here:

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[17h ago](#)[10.18](#)

Will there be more rail strikes this summer?

More rail strikes are planned for next month, with disruption expected to continue amid negotiations over pay and conditions in the industry.

Industrial action is planned for the following dates:

- **Saturday 13 August**
- **Thursday 18 August**
- **Saturday 20 August.**

Additionally, London Underground staff will strike on 19 August.

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[17h ago](#)[09.51](#)

Zarah Sultana, the Labour MP for Coventry South, has joined the Aslef picket line outside Coventry railway station.

She tweeted that “Labour was founded to represent the interests of workers. The clue is in the name” – a reference to the divisions within the party over Labour’s relationship with the trade union movement amid industrial action.

Labour was founded to represent the interests of workers. The clue is in the name.

That's why I was proud to join the [@ASLEFunion](#) picket outside Coventry Railway Station today, supporting their fight for fair pay ☺️
pic.twitter.com/o79yQVUb6e

— Zarah Sultana MP (@zarahsultana) [July 30, 2022](#)

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Updated at 09.51 EDT

[18h ago](#)[09.02](#)

As we reported this morning, disruption on some services is expected to continue into tomorrow.

Trains will continue to be disrupted tomorrow (Sunday). Please only travel if absolutely necessary.

— GWR (@GWRHelp) [July 30, 2022](#)

☐ Due to industrial action, we will be operating a reduced service on 27 July, with no trains on 30 July. This will also affect services on the mornings of 28 and 31.

We are sorry for the inconvenience this will cause.

For more information, visit > <https://t.co/XvfgGLaI5l>
pic.twitter.com/PxAoiWnA0

— West Midlands Railway (@WestMidRailway) [July 25, 2022](#)

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Updated at 09.06 EDT

[19h ago](#) 08.33



The picket line outside Leeds train station in Leeds as members of the drivers union Aslef at seven train operators walk out for 24 hours over pay.
Photograph: Danny Lawson/PA



Rail strikes

Photograph: Danny Lawson/PA

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[19h ago](#)08.10

The Department for [Transport](#) has said it is “misleading” to suggest that Grant Shapps should get involved in negotiations over pay and working practices.

Mick Whelan, the general secretary of Aslef, accused the transport secretary of “lying” about negotiations over strikes, telling Times Radio: “We’re not dragging our feet in negotiations; we negotiate with 14 private companies. We do not work for the government or the DfT [Department for Transport].”

Whelan said the strikes were “the last resort”. Many of Aslef’s members have not had a pay rise for three years, he said, despite working through the pandemic, and are now experiencing a pay cut in real terms because of inflation.

The Department for Transport described the suggestion that Shapps should get involved as “extremely misleading”. Its statement said: “His role is to protect the public purse, ensuring value for money for the hardworking people of this country.

“As such, he’s required to set the limits of taxpayer support and ultimately sign off on any deal, not to be involved in negotiating one, and his contracts with operators allow him to do precisely that.”

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Updated at 08.15 EDT

[19h ago](#)[07.47](#)

Hitachi rail workers to strike from Sunday

Hitachi rail workers will strike for three days from Sunday in a row over pay and conditions.

Members of the Rail, Maritime and [Transport](#) union (RMT), whose jobs include maintenance, are in dispute over pay and issues including breaks, leave entitlement and shift length.

The RMT’s general secretary, Mick Lynch, said: “Our members know the value of their work and will not be shortchanged by Hitachi Rail.

“I congratulate our members on this strong industrial response and RMT will support further stoppages until they receive a just settlement.”

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Updated at 07.57 EDT

[19h ago](#)[07.41](#)



Jessica Murray

The Guardian's Midlands correspondent, **Jessica Murray**, reports from Birmingham, where rail strikes are disrupting one of the busiest days of the Commonwealth Games:

Snow Hill station in central Birmingham was closed on Saturday as no trains were running from the site, where picketers stood just yards away from the marathon route that closed many roads in the city.

The picket line featured a cardboard cutout face of Keir Starmer, in reference to the Labour leader's ban on MPs joining strikers.



The Aslef picket line outside Snow Hill station in Birmingham. Photograph: Gary Calton/The Observer

The strikers, from the train drivers' union Aslef, said they were striking because rising inflation meant the value of workers' wages was falling, while rail bosses were pocketing huge salaries.

Andy Street, the Conservative mayor of the West Midlands, said the RMT strike on Wednesday had had little impact on the Games, but that Saturday would be a "big test".

"We are utterly determined that people should still be able to travel to the West Midlands and then use public transport to get to the venues. This has always been a public transport Games," he said, adding that an additional 600 buses were being used to help visitors get to the 16 venues where events were taking place.

"We're determined not to let Aslef destroy the success of the Games," he said. "It is a rather cynical manipulation of the Games for them to call their strike on the first Saturday of the event. It is an international celebration and I feel it is a great shame it is being targeted in this way."

A number of rail operators, including Avanti, Chiltern and Cross Country, were expected to be operating as normal, meaning it would still be possible

for people around the country to travel to Birmingham for the event, although services were expected to be very busy.

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Updated at 07.49 EDT

[20h ago 07.17](#)

Mick Whelan, the general secretary of Aslef, the train drivers' union, has said that Grant Shapps "can't keep hiding" and has to "stop misinforming the public".

When asked what he would say to the transport secretary, Whelan replied: "Mr Shapps, you can't keep hiding. At some point, somebody is going to have to stop misinforming the public [and] tell the truth about the contracts that you signed with these people."

It comes after Whelan accused Shapps of "lying" about negotiations over this summer's rail strikes. He told Times Radio [this morning](#):

I say Mr Shapps is lying, quite simply, quite clearly.

We're not dragging our feet in negotiations; we negotiate with 14 private companies. We do not work for the government or the DfT [Department for Transport]."

I would like Mr Shapps to get us out of this catch-22 situation that he misrepresents at every opportunity.

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Updated at 07.21 EDT

[20h ago 07.12](#)

Which rail services are affected and for how long?

Here's a quick recap to get you up to speed about the services affected by industrial action.

Aslef union members are striking on Saturday, with 5,500 members of staff expected to walk out. Drivers are striking over pay, with Aslef's general secretary, Mick Whelan, saying many members have not had a pay rise for three years.

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- **Hull Trains** - reduced timetable
- **LNER** – greatly reduced
- **London Northwestern Railway** - no service
- **Southeastern** - no service
- **West Midlands** – greatly reduced

The strike will last for 24 hours, and customers should expect some rail disruption to continue into Sunday 31 July.

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Updated at 08.58 EDT

[21h ago](#)[06.36](#)

Sam Tarry, the former shadow transport minister, said Labour clearly needed a “more comprehensive” economic policy offer for workers to see how the party could get them a decent pay rise.

Speaking on the Aslef picket line outside Paddington station, he said that workers “have had enough” and people were “prepared to fight back”.

He told the PA news agency: “For me to be here is about showing that the Labour Party and a massive majority of Labour Party members and MPs do support the striking workers.”

He said he had spoken to several MPs across the country who were backing the workers.

Tarry ruled out any potential Labour leadership bid and said he was “focused on being the MP for Ilford South” and “doing the best job” he could for the people of Ilford South.

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[21h ago](#) 06.17

Labour party needs to back trade unions, Tarry says

The former shadow transport minister Sam Tarry has said he “absolutely” still thinks Sir Keir Starmer is the best person to lead the country – but that Labour needs to show solidarity with striking workers.

The Labour MP for Ilford South told the PA news agency: “I believe Keir Starmer is absolutely still the best person to become prime minister and I’ll be campaigning every day for a Labour government”.

But Tarry, who was sacked from the shadow cabinet this week after joining a picket line, said that the Labour party needed a “fundamental recalibration” of its relationship with the trade union movement and needed to show it was on their side.

Speaking on the Aslef picket line outside Paddington station, he said: “We should never have been in a situation where we had an edict that you can’t join a picket line. This is the Labour party, the clue is in the name. We are the party founded by the trade unions.”

He added that the link between the union movement and the Labour party was “indivisible” and “part of the same fabric”.



Sam Tarry (left), the former shadow transport minister joins the picket line outside Paddington train station Photograph: Maighna Nanu/PA

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Updated at 06.21 EDT

[21h ago](#)[06.11](#)

Richard Burgon is the latest Labour MP to make an appearance on the picket line.

Visiting the [@ASLEFunion](#) picket line here in Leeds this morning.

Solidarity with ASLEF members taking strike action today! □
pic.twitter.com/rKGkyBzmtE

— Richard Burgon MP (@RichardBurgon) [July 30, 2022](#)

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[22h ago](#)[05.36](#)

More Labour MPs have showed support for Aslef members, as Ian Lavery and Ian Mearns, MPs for Wansbeck and Gateshead respectively, join the picket line in Newcastle along with the North of Tyne mayor, Jamie Driscoll:

Fantastic support and solidarity at Newcastle from [@IanLaveryMP](#) [@MayorJD](#) [@IanMearnsMP](#) and local activists □
pic.twitter.com/q5975us05q

— ASLEF (@ASLEFunion) [July 30, 2022](#)

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Updated at 05.49 EDT

[22h ago](#)[05.09](#)

Sam Tarry joins Aslef picket line at Paddington station

Sam Tarry, the former shadow transport minister who was sacked from the frontbench this week, has joined another picket line at London's Paddington station.

Tarry and the London Assembly transport lead, Elly Baker, joined Aslef members at the station as thousands of train drivers from seven companies walked out for 24 hours.

Proud to join my brothers and sisters in [@ASLEFunion](#) and [@MickWhelanASLEF](#) on the picket line at Paddington station earlier this morning.

There is power in a Union. Solidarity  pic.twitter.com/xa7gqSxVep

— Sam Tarry MP (@SamTarry) [July 30, 2022](#)

Tarry was sacked on Wednesday hours after joining strikers at an RMT picket line at Euston Station.

The Labour leader, Sir Keir Starmer, who previously banned frontbenchers from joining picket lines, said he was sacked for conducting a media round without any prior warning.

Tarry wrote about his decision and sense of duty to join the picket line for the Guardian. You can read it here:

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Updated at 05.16 EDT

[Newest](#)[Newest](#)

[Previous](#)

1

of

2

[Next](#)

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

Rail strikes

Rail strike brings widespread disruption to Great Britain

Industrial action by Aslef union members at seven companies is the biggest strike by drivers in decades



The industrial action by drivers is escalating a bitter pay dispute on the railway
Photograph: Steve Taylor/SOPA Images/REX/Shutterstock

[Gwyn Topham](#) Transport correspondent

Sat 30 Jul 2022 01.00 EDT Last modified on Sat 30 Jul 2022 02.42 EDT

Rail passengers around Great Britain face another day of widespread disruption on Saturday owing to a strike by train drivers at seven operating companies.

The industrial action by members of the Aslef union represents the biggest strike by drivers in decades and will halt some train operators' services.

The services affected include West Midlands Trains, which runs to sporting venues around [Birmingham](#), the host city of the Commonwealth Games.

Rail bosses accused the union of targeting its action on the opening weekend of both the Games and the new English football league season.

Intercity services on LNER, which runs from London to [Scotland](#) via Leeds, will be vastly reduced. Great Western services will be severely curtailed. All Heathrow Express trains are cancelled and no GWR services will run west of Bristol into Wales.

A minimal Greater Anglia service, and just one Hull Trains service in each direction, will operate. No trains will run on Southeastern, and the majority of the London Overground services will also be stopped.

Other train operators such as Southern and Thameslink have warned that services could be crowded and disrupted as passengers switch to alternative services.

The AA motoring organisation has meanwhile issued an “amber alert”, warning that the train strikes will contribute to heavy road congestion at peak times, with more journeys expected due to sporting events and holiday getaways.

Some rail disruption is expected to persist into Sunday.

The action by drivers is escalating a bitter [pay dispute](#) on the railway, and follows shortly after the latest [national strike](#) by members of the RMT union. About 40,000 RMT members, including Network Rail signallers and onboard crew at 14 train operators, went on strike on Wednesday.

Further strikes are planned by Aslef on 13 August, and by the RMT on 18 and 20 August, when simultaneous industrial action by the TSSA union could reduce the number of contingency staff available, meaning even fewer trains are likely to run.

Industry body the Rail Delivery Group said it was “really disappointed” that the union was taking action upsetting the plans of millions of passengers, particularly those hoping to attend the sporting events.

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The RDG urged passengers to plan ahead and check the latest travel advice, and said anyone with advance tickets could use them up until Tuesday, change them or claim a refund.

Aslef general secretary Mick Whelan said: “We regret the disruption caused. We understand that’s what happens when we take industrial action, but it’s in the hands of the companies to put this right.”

Whelan said the strikes were “the last resort”, but many of his members had not had a pay rise for three years, despite working through the pandemic, and the high level of inflation meant they had taken a pay cut in real terms.

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

Conservative leadership

Rishi Sunak seeks to revive faltering No 10 bid by attacking ‘woke nonsense’

Ex-chancellor vows to stop leftwing agitators ‘bulldozing’ British values as Tugendhat backs Truss



Rishi Sunak attends a campaign event in Tunbridge Wells, Kent, on 29 July.
Photograph: Peter Nicholls/AFP/Getty Images

[Heather Stewart](#) and [Aubrey Allegretti](#)

Fri 29 Jul 2022 18.51 EDTFirst published on Fri 29 Jul 2022 17.30 EDT

Rishi Sunak will seek to revive his flagging bid for the premiership on Saturday by wading in to a series of so-called culture war issues, vowing to stop “leftwing agitators” from “bulldozing” British values.

With [Liz Truss](#) the firm favourite ahead of a critical few days in the leadership contest, and ballot papers set to be received by Conservative party

members from Monday, Sunak will give a speech attacking “woke nonsense”.

While the former chancellor [came first](#) in a vote of Tory MPs, Truss has consistently led in party members’ polls and [won the endorsement](#) of former favourite Ben Wallace on Thursday, underlining the sense that her campaign is picking up momentum. On Friday night it was also announced that her former leadership rival Tom Tugendhat, who popular among Conservative party members and a senior figure in the One Nation group of centrist Tory MPs, would back Truss. He praised her plans for tax cuts, saying they were “founded on true conservative principles”.

Sunak has taken up a series of increasingly hardline positions in a bid to close the gap with his rival.

Addressing members in West Sussex on Saturday, he will say: “What’s the point in stopping the bulldozers in the green belt if we allow leftwing agitators to take a bulldozer to our history, our traditions and our fundamental values?

“Whether it’s pulling down statues of historic figures, replacing the school curriculum with anti-British propaganda or rewriting the English language so we can’t even use words like ‘man’, ‘woman’ or ‘mother’ without being told we’re offending someone?”

Sunak will say that a government led by him would review the 2010 Equality Act and associated guidance to make clear that “sex means biological sex”.

He will also pledge to put guidance on relationships and sex education on to a statutory footing to ensure children are “shielded from inappropriate material”.

It follows Truss’s promise, at the first leadership hustings on Thursday, to ensure schools provide single-sex toilets.

Questioned about the issue by an audience member, Truss said: “I’ve been very clear that single-sex spaces should be protected, particularly for young people, as well as vulnerable people … as prime minister I would direct that to happen, because it’s a difficult time being a teenager, being a young girl, and you should be able to have the privacy you need in your own loo.”

While Sunak will insist “we have zero interest in fighting a so-called culture war”, his announcement appears to be a fresh bid to enthuse Tory grassroots by talking tough on controversial issues as he fights to remain in the leadership race.

Already in recent days, Sunak has promised to ban building on the green belt, cap the number of refugees the UK will accept and double deportations of foreign criminals. He also said he would slash VAT on domestic fuel to help tackle the cost of living crisis, in a reversal of his previous position.

Rishi Sunak says he was 'silly' to say he had no working class friends – video

With the contest to become PM increasingly hard-fought and acrimonious, both campaign teams issued statements on Friday condemning the leak of government documents and promising to report any such leaks to the cabinet secretary, Simon Case.

Two sources suggested Case asked for such statements to be released amid concerns about sensitive cabinet discussions being used for political purposes.

After Truss was widely viewed as having performed more strongly in Thursday’s hustings in Leeds, a senior supporter of the foreign secretary claimed some of Sunak’s backers were now turning on him.

The source said Sunak’s backers were “kicking themselves” and had believed he was “going to walk this and that’s why we backed you, but you’re fucking it up”.

Sunak has been more cautious in setting out tax and spending plans than Truss, promising Tory members he will not indulge in “fairytales”.

But with surveys of members suggesting Truss has a commanding lead – 62% to 38% according to a YouGov poll last week – some of his supporters are now urging him to be more forthright.

“He’s got to be absolutely ruthless: she’s getting away with blue murder at the moment on all sorts of fronts,” said one former cabinet minister who is backing Sunak.

Speaking about Truss’s poll lead, they added: “If he doesn’t get it to something more like neutrality in the next few days, it will start to set in concrete.”

Despite having backed Boris Johnson to the last, Truss has presented herself as the change candidate, offering a break in economic policymaking – including more than £30bn of unfunded tax cuts.

She told reporters on a visit to Norfolk on Friday: “What is risky is carrying on on the same economic path, which is currently forecast to lead us to recession. That is the risk. What I’m talking about is unleashing opportunity, unleashing growth, keeping taxes low.”

Asked if she was confident of winning the contest, the result of which will be announced on 5 September, she said: “I’m not at all complacent. I’m fighting for every vote across the country.”

Sign up to First Edition, our free daily newsletter – every weekday morning at 7am BST

Both candidates are crisscrossing the UK, meeting hundreds of Conservative members every day, with another 11 hustings to come as well as scores of smaller-scale events in town halls, pubs and back gardens.

Truss’s team insisted she would go “full pelt” through the remaining month of the contest, and was only taking one day off in the next three weeks.

“She’s loving it,” said a source on her team, who conceded she had not enjoyed the ill-tempered television debates but relished meeting members.

Sunak addressed Tory members in Tunbridge Wells on Friday, following hot on the heels of Truss, who paid a visit to the Kent town last weekend.

His key messages were “blue meat” policies aimed at motivating the membership, including the pledge to block housebuilding on the green belt. Sunak also insisted he would be better-placed than Truss to lead the Tories to victory at the next election.

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

Conservative leadership

Tom Tugendhat backs Liz Truss in race for No 10

Former rival praises foreign secretary's tax cut plans as Rishi Sunak submits to grilling by Andrew Neil



Liz Truss and Tom Tugendhat at a leadership debate earlier this month.
Photograph: Victoria Jones/PA

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Liz Truss has won the backing of former Tory leadership rival [Tom Tugendhat](#).

In a major boost for the foreign secretary's campaign, Tugendhat wrote in the Times that her plans for vast tax cuts are "founded on true Conservative principles".

The chairman of the foreign affairs select committee also criticised Rishi Sunak's fiscal policy, saying it is "not right" that the tax burden should be rising when people are heading into winter with "dread".

His endorsement is important as he is popular among Conservative party members and a senior figure in the One Nation group of centrist Tory MPs.

It is another blow to Sunak, after the defence secretary, Ben Wallace, also came out in support of Truss.

Earlier Sunak admitted a [video](#) of him as a youngster saying he had no working-class friends was "silly", as he defended holding off on tax cuts and claimed Truss's plans would fuel an inflation "sugar rush".

The Tory leadership contender, who is trailing in the race to replace Boris Johnson, also insisted, during an interview with Andrew Neil, that he would ensure some asylum seekers were [removed to Rwanda](#), even if it was only several hundred as thousands more would be deterred.

Sunak faced a tough grilling from the Channel 4'presenter in the interview on Friday night that was dodged by his rival.

Rishi Sunak says he was 'silly' to say he had no working class friends – video

Asked by Neil if there was "not something unsavoury about the son of successful middle-class migrants prepared to turn away asylum seekers with a valid claim", he replied defiantly: "No."

Though Sunak admitted only several hundred migrants may be removed under the plan that will cost millions, he said many thousands would be deterred from trying to cross the Channel to claim asylum in the UK.

Among the questions put to him was whether he was embarrassed by a clip aired on the BBC when Sunak was in his early 20s. It showed the now-Tory leadership contender being interviewed as part of a programme on class.

"I have friends who are aristocrats, I have friends who are upper class, I have friends who are working class – well, not working class," said Sunak in

the 2001 clip.

The footage was latched upon in the race to replace Johnson when it resurfaced several weeks ago, with rivals scornful and suggesting it showed the wealthy Tory MP would not be able to relate to those struggling during the cost of living crisis.

Rishi Sunak criticised after footage emerges of him saying he has 'no working-class friends' – video

Sunak addressed the video when pressed about whether he was out of touch by Neil. "We all say silly things when we're students," he admitted.

"I grew up working in my mum's pharmacy, and you don't end up doing that unless you interact with lots of people. I spent my time making sure we served our community.

"My parents worked incredibly hard to provide opportunities for me and that's ultimately why I want to be prime minister because this country allowed my family to provide a better opportunity and future for me."

Sunak, who several polls of Tory members have found is trailing behind Truss in the leadership contest, was also tackled over his [refusal to cut taxes](#) and an alleged "U-turn" over cutting VAT on energy bills.

Sunak had argued against the tax cut in question in February when he was chancellor, telling the Commons the policy "would disproportionately benefit wealthier households".

On Friday, he admitted it was a blunt instrument but said it was one of the few levers that politicians could pull quickly.

He said the apparent volte-face was "absolutely not" a case of poor judgment initially and claimed [Truss' tax cuts – £30bn](#) to be funded by borrowing – would put "fuel on the fire" of already-spiralling inflation.

Sunak said the move would be a "sugar rush" that would also push up interest rates and make worse the economic difficulties many will face this winter.

Despite being invited for a similar grilling by Neil, Truss followed the lead of Johnson at the last general election and refused to do so.

At the end of Friday's programme, Neil said: "She declined our invitation. Her choice of course. That invitation still remains open."

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

2022.07.30 - Spotlight

- The Vardy Effect Going to court to deny something a rock could see is true
- Poisoned oaks, slain sycamores Who's behind Britain's tree murders?
- James Norton My greatest fear? Rats. We had one swim up our loo recently. It was horrific
- 'Ambition greater than ability' Liz Truss's rise from teen Lib Dem to would-be PM

Rebekah Vardy

The Vardy Effect: Going to court to deny something a rock could see is true

Rebekah Vardy probably isn't buzzing at the ruling, a character assassination that has left her well and truly stung by libel



Rebekah Vardy leaves the Royal Courts of Justice, in London, during earlier part of the trial in May, 2022. Photograph: John Sibley/Reuters



[Hadley Freeman](#)

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Sat 30 Jul 2022 02.00 EDT Last modified on Sat 30 Jul 2022 04.38 EDT

Oscar Wilde, Barbra Streisand, and now – Rebekah Vardy. When news broke that Vardy had lost her libel case against [Coleen Rooney](#), she joined this heady roster of celebrities who have launched brain-bogglingly misguided and self-wounding legal cases. Like Wilde – who sued the Marquess of Queensberry for revealing his homosexuality – Vardy went to court to deny something that a rock could see was true: she'd passed on private stories about Rooney to the press. And like Streisand – who sued a website for featuring an image of her house, thereby drawing the world's attention to it – she believed going to court was the best way to control her image. She was wrong.

Vardy traded private details of her husband's colleagues and their wives in the hope of currying positive coverage in the media. And because of that, Mrs Justice Steyn delivered a verdict that was even more of a character assassination than Vardy's own memorable description of Rooney to a Daily Mail journalist: "Arguing with Coleen Rooney would be as pointless as arguing with a pigeon: you can tell it that you are right and it is wrong, but it's still going to shit in your hair." Well, Rebekah, you're covered in shit now.

I sat just a few yards from Vardy every day of the trial, and it was obvious that she deserved to lose this case. But it was not always obvious she would do so. Rooney took a big risk in publicly accusing Vardy – or, to be precise “It’s.....Rebekah Vardy’s account” – of leaking stories about her to the tabloids, because in English law the burden of proof falls on the person who made the defamatory claim. She took an even bigger risk in refusing to back down even after [Mr Justice Warby decreed in November 2020](#) that Rooney would have to prove Vardy herself was the source of the leaks, not just someone with access to Vardy’s account.

Yet from the first day of the trial, Rooney, who sat every day alongside her husband, Wayne, radiated certainty and sanity, like a holy figure in a painting by Vermeer, waiting for their blessing. Vardy, by contrast, was more like a character on Dynasty, hysterically crying and collapsing in the witness box as Rooney’s barrister, David Sherborne, repeatedly read out her own words, from [WhatsApp](#) messages and tabloid interviews, that disproved Vardy’s claims.

Did she leak stories? No she did not. So why had she sent a WhatsApp telling her agent, Caroline Watt: “Leak the story about her shagging G behind H’s back?” Did she endorse revealing personal details about other people? No she did not. So why did she do a kiss and tell about Peter Andre in 2004 in which she described him as “hung like a chipolata”?

And this was the evidence we did see. So much we did not. Watt’s phone, which somehow ended up at the bottom of the North Sea, and endless WhatsApp messages on Vardy and her husband Jamie’s phones that mysteriously vanished – these should be discussed alongside the Hanging Gardens of Babylon and the Colossus of Rhodes as mythical objets d’art that were tragically lost to mankind.

Justice Steyn concluded that their disappearance was “not accidental” and it was “likely that Ms Vardy deliberately deleted her WhatsApp chat with Ms Watt, and that Ms Watt deliberately dropped her phone into the sea”. Vardy probably isn’t buzzing – to use one of her favourite terms – at that ruling, but she can console herself that at least the judge didn’t accept Vardy’s own barrister’s argument that she would have to have been “very clever or very

cynical” to delete her WhatsApps. In other words, that she was too thick to bin her own messages. Better too cynical than too thick, Becky.

And Justice Steyn clearly thinks Vardy was very cynical indeed. At the trial, Vardy tried to chuck Watt into the North Sea (although probably not to retrieve her phone) by insisting that, if Watt did leak stories to the Sun, she did so without Vardy’s knowledge, consent or approval. Justice Steyn writes simply: “I reject that contention.” I wonder what made her think that? Oh maybe, the various messages from Vardy to Watt saying “leak it” and “I want paying for this”.

The index to Justice Steyn’s ruling is endearingly revealing in its own way: “The Flooded Basement Post”; “The Soho House Posts”; “Ms Rooney’s Decision to Remove Ms Vardy as a Follower”. This is what that £3m trial was ultimately about: whether someone blabbed that Rooney’s basement flooded and other similarly newsworthy stories, and Vardy being annoyed at her removal from Rooney’s [Instagram](#). The argument between the two women, Justice Steyn concluded, “can fairly be described as trivial, but it does not need to be important to meet the sting of libel … The essential sting of libel has been shown to be true”.

Vardy has been well and truly stung. Perhaps, to paraphrase and homage her own immortal words about pigeons, that rare but apparently possible phenomenon of shitting in your own hair can now be known as The Vardy effect.

And what of Rooney? Not since her husband scored a hat-trick in his Old Trafford debut has a Rooney scored so magnificently. Her Wagatha sleuthing might have showed heretofore hidden canniness, but it was her strength during the trial that really left an impression. She didn’t even blink at references to her husband’s repeated infidelities, didn’t stumble under questioning, but conducted herself like someone who truly has the courage of her convictions, and her convictions are that you don’t cross Coleen or her family. Vardy, by contrast, couldn’t even look at Rooney, and the only conviction she seems to have is an appetite for the shallowest kind of fame. Well, she’s got it now.

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Poisoned oaks, slain sycamores: who's behind Britain's tree murders?



Illustration: Lissa Sheehan/The Guardian

In affluent areas across the UK, unknown assassins are striking. Their weapons? Herbicides and hatchets. Their victims? Once mighty trees. We join the plant detectives on their trail



[Sam Wollaston](#)

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As crime scenes go, Whitecliff Harbourside Park in Poole must be one of the lovelier ones. At 9am on a Monday in springtime, it's already buzzing with activity. Well-groomed pedigree dogs tow their well-groomed pedigree owners around on long leads; joggers and power walkers are out in force; wading birds busily forage on the foreshore. On a clear day you can see all the way to Corfe Castle across the world's second-largest natural harbour (after Sydney, Australia). It's a bit hazy today, but still the view, which is central to this case, is pretty good.

And yet Whitecliff Park is the scene of two shocking double murders. Most recently, during the night of 15 February, an attack left two dead on Turks Lane, along the southeastern edge of the park. Six months earlier, two much-loved elderly residents – fine, upstanding pillars of the community – were poisoned to death on Whitecliff Road, at the top of the park. In a statement Dorset Police said: “Officers carried out inquiries into these incidents; however, no arrests have been made.”

It could have been worse: the victims could have been people. They are – were – trees: two sycamores and a pair of English oaks. John Challinor, who chairs the local Parkstone Bay Residents Association, still considers it murder, though. “If you deliberately kill, that’s murder, isn’t it?” he says.



The two dead oaks in Whitecliff Park, Poole. Photograph: Peter Flude/The Guardian

We'll come to Challinor, and the sycamores. But first to those oaks, which Steve Cox calculates were around 80 years old. Cox used to be the council's senior tree officer; now he runs an aboricultural consulting firm in Poole. He has worked with the trees around here for more than 20 years. He points up to the branches of the neighbouring trees in the line of oaks bursting into life, then at two dark skeletons that will never wake from winter again.

We go closer, up to the trunk of one of them, where Cox points out a small dark circle, about a metre above the ground, and another, and another – five or six in total, around the trunk. The same marks are on the other tree. Drill holes. A twig poked into one of them goes in about 10cm, angled downwards. That's where the poison was injected. Most probably a horticultural glyphosate herbicide such as Roundup, he reckons, but he's heard of bleach and diesel being used. You don't need a chainsaw to kill a tree and the internet will quickly tell you how.

Cox explains that the drill holes take the poison into the live vessels in the most recent few years of growth, under the bark. “The wood cells are oriented vertically, so each one of those vessels is a long tube connecting the root system to the leaves, sucking up nutrients and water the whole time. If you drill into those vessels and introduce a poison, that can disrupt the tree’s transport system and its growth processes to the extent that the tree dies. You’re disrupting the connection between the root and the leaf. If it was Roundup, it’s designed to go down into the root system as well as up, so it’s a very effective way of killing a tree.” Put like that, it certainly sounds like murder.

Who would benefit from these trees dying? People who would get an improved view of the harbour

Cox is down to earth, matter of fact, practical. He knows that in urban areas the relationship between trees and humans can be a delicate balance, and it needs to be managed, but he will list the benefits of trees at any opportunity. “We know they’re providing oxygen and taking carbon dioxide out of the atmosphere, soaking up water, reducing storm surge levels, filtering pollution from the air. Trees are fabulous organisms that do all of those things effortlessly, it seems.”

Does he love trees? “Yeah. Trees have given me a career. I love spending time with them and learning about them. Our work can be stressful, but also I’m looking at trees, which is therapy.” As well as loving the trees here in Dorset, he has lived and worked with trees in Cameroon and the Solomon Islands and has written a book on urban tree management (as well as a novel). I think if you drilled into Cox, sap might come out, and if you sawed him in half there would be rings: 63 of them.

To a motive, then. “You’ve got to ask who would benefit from these trees dying and it’s people who would get an improved view of the harbour,” says Cox, looking up from the base of the trees to the houses behind, on Whitecliff Road. They’re mostly newbuilds, and of a certain style: lots of glass, big, brash and boxy.



Arboricultural consultant Steve Cox. Photograph: Peter Flude/The Guardian

I don't find anyone at home in the house directly behind the dead trees, but you could say that several houses might benefit from their removal, including a development under construction further back. A little way along the road, a couple washing their cars say they heard about the trees but they've only just moved in. Anyway, it doesn't affect them – the oaks don't go this far along; they've got some low scrubby bushes in front of them, which they like because they screen the playground in the park without taking away the harbour view. No, they wouldn't like to give their names.

How much is a view worth? A lot, around here. A house with a good view on Whitecliff Road can go for £2m-£2.5m, says Adrian Dunford, director of Tailor Made estate agents up the road in Sandbanks, where the houses sell for even more. "A house with no view there? Probably £1.5m. A house with a tree in front of it has probably got a partial view, but the gain in value by removing the tree might be about 20%." Not bad for a quiet night's work, with a drill and a bottle of Roundup.

Of course the trees also play a big part in making the area so desirable. "It's that sylvan setting," says Dunford, slipping into estate-agent speak. "The tranquility of being surrounded by trees, and having tree-lined avenues, it all adds to the pleasure of living in the area." Just with a hefty dollop of Not-In-

My-Front-Garden. “There’s always been a pressure to remove trees in order to gain more housing development, or to make a house larger, or to improve a view,” he says.

Cox has never known a prosecution for an attack on a tree in a public space, which is classed as vandalism. Nick Perrins, current head of planning at BCP council which covers Bournemouth, Christchurch and Poole, says it’s hard “unless you’ve got some evidence from CCTV cameras, or someone’s seen it.” No one is surprised that no arrests have been made for the Whitecliff Park killings.

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You’re much more likely to get caught killing a tree on your own land. Trees on private land are often protected by Tree Preservation Orders made by the local authority. A TPO is a recognition that a tree has some presence in the locality and provides some public amenity. A TPO map of the Poole area shows thousands of individual trees marked. “Trees are a really important part of the character of our area, they’re a key part of why it’s so beautiful and special,” Nick Perrins tells me. Unauthorised pruning or felling of protected trees is a criminal offence that can lead to prosecution.

Of course, attacks on trees on both private and public land aren’t limited to one affluent corner of Dorset. It’s difficult to put numbers to the issue, because some of it just comes under vandalism, and records of TPO breaches are kept by local authorities, of which there are 333 in England alone. A trawl of local papers and websites throws up incidents in Newlyn in Cornwall or Beverley in Yorkshire, and any number of other places. But a day spent with Steve Cox confirms that Poole is certainly a hotspot.

Now, the tree is gone – poisoned not by Vladimir Putin or Kim Jong-un but by a retired accountant

After inspecting the poisoned oaks at Whitecliff, Cox takes me on a little tour of some other recent crime scenes in the area. To the Lilliput district

first, and a large detached house on a road called Avalon. The owner, a retired accountant named Robert Page, had agreed to sell the property to a developer who was going to knock it down and build a block of luxury flats. But the lucrative deal fell through when planning was refused, one of the reasons being a 20-metre Monterey Pine in the garden. The 65-year-old tree, described as “huge and historic”, had been under a tree protection order since 1989. Page applied to have the tree felled, claiming it was a risk, but this was turned down, too.

Guess what? Not long afterwards the hitherto healthy tree began to wither and die. Cox’s company was involved in the council investigation, which found that herbicide had been injected into drill holes and concrete poured around the roots, and led to prosecution. Now, the tree is gone: it eventually toppled on to the roof of a garage block during Storm Arwen last November. But its ghost lives on in Google Maps street view, blackened and shrivelled, poisoned not by Vladimir Putin or Kim Jong-un but by a retired accountant.

At the trial at Salisbury Crown Court in December, Nick Cotter, prosecuting, told the jury: “When you start placing the evidence together it becomes like dead wood on the shoulders of Mr Page, weighing him down.” Page claimed a vigilante had come onto his property and killed the tree. The jury said that was rubbish. Sentencing him, Judge Robert Pawson branded Page “arrogant”, said he had “murdered” the Monterey Pine, and “lied through his teeth over its demise”. He went on: “That tree cast a literal shadow over your house and garden. Now that tree casts a metaphorical shadow over you and your family.” I think Judge Pawson might have quite enjoyed that one.

Page was found guilty, and ordered to pay £80,000: £25,000 in court costs, five grand for the loss in public benefit, and perhaps most significantly, £50,000 for the amount his property had gained in value through the loss of the tree.

“We’ve always had a pretty good record of taking action where needed,” says the council’s Nick Perrins. “Everyone understands the trees are special – therefore we tend to have people reporting things to the council, and we will respond to them.” You might think you can get away with cutting down that yew you don’t like in your own garden, but your neighbour may well dob you in.

Poole is the tree murder capital of Britain. The leafier and wealthier parts of Poole, anyway

Next, we're off to Sandbanks proper, home to some of Britain's most expensive real estate, and another crime scene. In 2019, businessman Trevor Beale had two Scots pines hacked back at the rear of his luxury home because they shaded his patio and balconies. One of the trees was actually in his neighbour's garden. Beale claimed an overzealous tree surgeon had got carried away, but pleaded guilty to two charges of contravening tree preservation regulations. He was fined £2,700, plus £15,000 court costs, and the judge ordered him to pay back £40,500, the calculated value Beale's crime had added to his property.

And there's more: a £7,500 fine for a man who tried over a year to kill a large pine tree in his mother's Sandbanks garden by pouring Jeyes fluid over it; attacks on the trees along Panorama Road – the list goes on. Everyone I speak to here thinks it's a big issue in the area, and getting bigger. I'm going to come out and say it: Poole is the tree murder capital of Britain. The leafier and wealthier parts of Poole, anyway. And I wonder if there's a connection, between the wealth and the tree crime. "Trees are such a big issue in this area," says Cox. "There are so many of them and so many people, and the people have got a lot of money. If it was a destitute area there would be less money thrown at the issue."

John Challinor – chair of the Parkstone Bay Residents Association, remember – agrees. "You get some people who feel, quite frankly: I've got some money, I can do what I like." I've returned to Whitecliff Harbourside Park to see the remains of its two other victims – young sycamores felled during the night of 15 February. Challinor, along with local councillor Ann Stribley, and Michele Beesley of the Whitecliff volunteers group, have brought me to where they stood, now just a couple of sorry stumps, about 15cm across. The cuts are quite smooth; Stribley thinks they were felled using a handsaw. "There were no bits – a chainsaw always leaves bits. And no one heard a thing." Stribley, who has represented the area for more than 40 years, says attacks on trees are definitely on the increase.



The remains of one of the sycamores on Turks Lane, Poole. Photograph: Peter Flude/The Guardian

“When I saw what had happened, I was appalled,” says Beesley, who has lived here since 1956 and walks in the park every day. “I couldn’t believe anyone would have the nerve to do that. It’s vandalism. We have enough trouble with youths and antisocial behaviour – actually, this is worse: how can you expect them to behave if adults are doing this?”

“We pay council tax,” says Challinor. “The council works hard to maintain really lovely outside spaces for people, and then someone decides they don’t care, they’d rather have a nice view. It’s selfish, whether it’s a homeowner or a developer – either way, it’s purely for their own gain.”

For Stribley, blocking the view was one of benefits of the trees, but she is looking in the other direction. “To block the view of the horrid houses,” she says, with a shudder. Not a fan of boxy, brash architecture, I think.

The houses along Turks Lane behind the sycamore stumps are indeed boxy newbuilds, more modest than some I’ve seen today. The most recent to sell went for a mere £1.25m. None of them benefits massively from the removal of the trees – a bit of extra view, maybe, but only of the park, not of the

water. Still, I nervously ring the bell of the house directly behind where the trees stood.

A woman comes to the door, buzzes open the gate. Her name is Cassandra. She's been here a year. She says she knows nothing about the demise of the sycamores, but that the falling seeds were a nuisance, and had cut her daughter's face. Nor is she after a bigger or better view; her living room is at the back of the house, and as I can see, she keeps the curtains closed on this side. She does say something about cultural attitudes to trees and people in different places. In Hong Kong, where she is from, they put people before trees: "Here, plants are more important than the people."

A few weeks later and I'm getting strong déjà vu. I'm back in Dorset, talking to another man named Steve who knows a lot about trees. We're in another bit of the county, Charminster, near Dorchester, and Steve Maros, arboricultural manager of Dorset county council, is telling me about some more trees that have been killed, deliberately – murdered, you might say.

It seems this crime wave has spread, like the poison itself, and is infecting the entire county. I went to see one of the victims on the way here – a lime tree on Court Orchard Road in Bridport. If the killing of the oaks in Poole, with their drill holes and poison injection, represents a scientific approach to the crime, then this is the opposite: crude butchery. The lime, which is 50 or 60 years old, has been hacked with a hatchet, all the way round the circumference of the trunk, "to stop the translocation of water and nutrients up and down the tree", Maros tells me. It's called ring-barking.

The tree won't survive, even if there are still some signs of life. "But we have left it up just to spite him, until it gets to the stage where it becomes dangerous. Once the timber dies it becomes brittle and is a health and safety issue."

It sounds as if he knows who did it. "We nearly always know who it is," says Maros. "But unless you catch them red handed it's impossible to prove. And neighbours don't want to get involved." Five years ago they used to see the odd case. "In the last couple of years there's been a massive increase," he says. And he shows me a list of attacks – poisonings and ring-barkings –

from the past year: a birch in Coventry Close in Corfe Mullen; Churchill Close in Sturminster Marshall (although that one, another lime, survived); Woodroffe Meadow in Lyme Regis; Noake Road in Sherborne; several in Weymouth, in Alexandra Road, the Southill estate, Belle Vue Road. “Not surprisingly, many of those were to do with blocking a view of the sea,” Maros says.

Why this sudden surge? “I think during lockdown a lot of people were sitting at home thinking, ‘We keep asking the council to get rid of that tree. They won’t do it so I’m going to take matters into my own hands.’ I think, in general, society is taking things into its own hands. We certainly get more Mr Angrys on the phone than we ever did before.” Mrs Angrys, too, he adds.



Steve Cox examines a drill hole on one of the poisoned oaks. Photograph: Peter Flude/The Guardian

Does he have any sympathy for the people whose light and views are blocked? “None whatsoever. The tree was often there long before the house. We find people will buy a house with a massive tree on the pavement outside. It’s not hidden – they must have seen it when they looked at the house. Then, within a week or two, the phone rings. ‘Oh hello, we just bought this house with a big tree outside, can you come and fell it because it’s blocking the light?’ And I say, ‘Well, no.’”

Maros, and Dorset county council, are asking anyone with information about attacks to get in touch with the arboriculture department. They've had some responses, but nothing that is going to lead to prosecution, and again Dorset has never seen a successful prosecution of an attack on a council tree. Maros would like to see justice done, in the way that it has been for people cutting down trees on their property. "I think you've only got to make a couple of examples for the message to get across that this is actually not acceptable. At the end of the day, it's criminal damage, like putting a brick through someone's window. They would expect to get fined or taken to court for that. Trees are no different and they are public assets."

I wonder if he knows what they've done in a couple of places in Australia in an effort to curb the same problem? When 200 new street trees were removed or damaged in the Perth suburb of Stirling, the local authority started to put up signs in front of houses saying that a tree had been vandalised *outside* this property: publicly branding the culprits. "If someone has lopped a tree purely and simply to get a view of the city it is quite obvious it's the owner of the property," Stirling's mayor Giovanni Italiano told a local radio station. "If we can't prove who it was, the sign will go up and stay there for 12 months."

On the other side of the country, at Blacks Beach in Queensland, when 40 trees were illegally axed in order to open up a view to the ocean, Mackay regional council erected huge billboards in their place. You take away the trees to get a better view, we take away that view. There's something delightfully direct about both approaches – shame 'em and block 'em. Maros, who hadn't heard about it, seems to approve of the Aussie tactics.

On the way home I stop off once more at Whitecliff Park in Poole, scene of the poisoned oaks. Of all the tree attacks I've seen and heard about, these are the most upsetting – because of their scale, and age, and because they were part of an ancient row that is now so rudely interrupted. They're still standing – no one's getting a tree-free view yet. But with the other oaks in the row now in full leaf, their demise is even more stark – a pair of black ghost ships in an armada in full sail.

As I approach, I can see the ivy has started to take over, creeping up and around, covering the drill holes, hiding the evidence. A flock of crows – a murder of crows, fittingly – has taken up residence in one of the two and is adding to the macabre mood by cawing menacingly.

Hang on, though: the other, the bigger of the two trees, has a fuzz of pale green about one of its lower branches. Not ivy, but actual growth. Oak leaves. It doesn't look healthy at all – the leaves are blotchy, wrinkled, sickly. And it is only one branch. I'm sure the fate of the tree is sealed and this is a last gasp rather than a new breath. But this one old oak isn't quite dead yet.

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Interview

James Norton: ‘My greatest fear? Rats. We had one swim up our loo recently. It was horrific’

[Rosanna Greenstreet](#)



James Norton: 'I'd like to be remembered with smile lines.' Photograph: Dan Rowley/BIFA/Shutterstock

The actor on the hell of his teenage years, having a nose like a dodo and being terrified of these questions

Sat 30 Jul 2022 04.30 EDT Last modified on Sat 30 Jul 2022 13.47 EDT

Born in London, James Norton, 37, studied theology at Cambridge University. In 2015, he was Bafta-nominated for his performance in *Happy Valley*, the BBC drama that is returning for a third series. His other television work includes *War & Peace*, *Grantchester*, *McMafia*, *The Trial of Christine Keeler* and *The Nevers*. His recent movies are *Little Women*, *Nowhere Special* and *Rogue Agent*, which is out on Netflix. He lives in London and is engaged to the actor Imogen Poots.

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What is your greatest fear?

Rats. We had one swim up our loo recently, it was horrific.

Which living person do you most admire, and why?

Greta Thunberg, for obvious reasons.

What is the trait you most deplore in yourself?

I have a habit of sabotaging the moment in pursuit of perfection.

What is the trait you most deplore in others?

Selfishness.

What was your most embarrassing moment?

The years between 14 and 17. My teenage years were a disaster.

Aside from a property, what's the most expensive thing you've bought?

A Rose Wylie painting.

What is your most treasured possession?

Insulin and sugar. I need to carry both with me. I am a type 1 diabetic.

Describe yourself in three words?

I choose one: Tigger.

What makes you unhappy?

Missing a party.

What do you most dislike about your appearance?

My nose has been compared to a dodo.

What scares you about getting older?

Not being ready to die.

Who is your celebrity crush?

Mads Mikkelsen.

What is the worst thing anyone's said to you?

I was bullied, but luckily I seemed to have blocked out the bullies.

Would you choose fame or anonymity?

Fame, for all the free snacks.

What is your guiltiest pleasure?

There is a drawer in our house that I keep stashed full of chocolate. My partner calls it "Mum's treats".

To whom would you most like to say sorry, and why?

My 13-year-old self, for all the resentment.

Which words or phrases do you most overuse?

I should this, I should that.

What is the worst job you've done?

I worked in the customer services department of a mobile phone gambling company and it was very depressing, because the people calling up were usually not happy.

If you could edit your past, what would you change?
I would have started therapy earlier.

When did you last cry, and why?
On a plane, watching a movie.

What do you consider your greatest achievement?
Finding something that I love doing and getting paid for it.

What has been your closest brush with the law?
I got caught once ...

How would you like to be remembered?
With smile lines.

What is the most important lesson life has taught you?
Don't take it too seriously.

Tell us a secret
These questions terrify me.

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Liz Truss

‘Ambition greater than ability’: Liz Truss’s rise from teen Lib Dem to would-be PM

We look at the shapeshifting Tory leadership candidate who loves to promote Thatcher comparisons



Liz Truss at the Conservative party leadership election hustings at the Elland Road Conference Centre in Leeds. Photograph: Peter Powell/EPA

[Rajeev Syal](#), [Emine Sinmaz](#), [Ben Quinn](#) and [Peter Walker](#)

Sat 30 Jul 2022 01.00 EDT

Liz Truss is tantalisingly close to acquiring the keys to No 10. But her constituency party members recall a meeting when the question of her entering parliament at all hung in the balance, after she was accused of failing to disclose an extramarital affair to activists.

It was 2009 – 12 years before she would be elevated to her current role as foreign secretary – and she was on the verge of finally becoming an MP after being selected to stand in the safe seat of South West Norfolk.

Dozens of hardline, rural Tory activists, dubbed the “Turnip Taliban”, had called an urgent meeting, angry that an 18-month affair with the Conservative MP Mark Field had not been disclosed when she was endorsed as a candidate. Some wanted her to stand down because they believed she was being parachuted in by unwanted moderates under David Cameron’s leadership.

Roy Brame, a self-declared member of the Turnip Taliban, had gone to the packed meeting convinced she should not stand in the safe seat at the next general election. But instead, he recalls Truss winning over a sceptical audience with a characteristic mix of charm and a thick skin.

He voted against her that evening, but Brame said he was impressed by her responses, telling reporters after the meeting: “We have just seen the new Thatcher.”

“People say that she’s not very good at presenting herself. But at that particular meeting, when well over 200 [people] were asking her some personal questions, and a lot about where she thought she wanted to go, she came over extremely well,” he said.



Liz Truss in a Margaret Thatcher-inspired pussybow blouse. Photograph: Victoria Jones/PA

Truss survived the meeting – local websites claimed that the Turnips had been mashed – and won a vote supporting her as the candidate by 132 votes to 37.

Thirteen years later, Truss has now held six ministerial jobs under three different prime ministers – and in 2016 became the first female lord chancellor. Crucially, she appears to have currently won over a majority of the 160,000 Tory party members who will choose the next prime minister in September.

The comparison with Thatcher is one that has been pushed hard by her team. From wearing a pussybow blouse, to driving tanks and being photographed wearing a fur hat in Moscow's Red Square, they claim Truss is ready to shake up the Tory establishment just as her hero did.

She was raised by Labour-supporting parents, was a Liberal Democrat, and went to what she describes as a “woke” comprehensive school in the north of England. All qualities she has been keen to promote against the Wykehamist, internationalist credentials of Sunak.

Her critics – and she has many within her own party – say she lacks many of Thatcher’s skills. She fails to display intellectual gravitas, they say, relying instead upon cheap slogans, and struggles to make convincing speeches, another facet of her character that could be quickly exposed under the intense scrutiny of Downing Street.

Dominic Cummings, Boris Johnson’s former chief adviser, told the online magazine [UnHerd](#) in May that Truss was “as close to properly crackers as anybody I have met in parliament” and would be an “even worse” prime minister than Johnson.

Others doubt if Truss really believes anything she says, and relies upon a gut instinct to fulfil her own ambitions. Anna Soubry, the former MP who served as a minister alongside Truss, said many had questioned whether she had the skills necessary to lead the UK.

“She was the most ambitious person many people had encountered. I honestly believe she was given jobs – ministerial promotions – just to shut her up. Her ambition is, undoubtedly, considerably greater than her ability,” said Soubry.

Mary Elizabeth Truss was born in Oxford on 26 July 1975, the eldest of four siblings and the only girl. Her left-leaning father, John Kenneth Truss, was a professor of pure mathematics at the University of Leeds. Her mother, Priscilla Mary, was a nurse, teacher and prominent member of the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament.

They lived in Paisley for some of Truss’s childhood, before moving to Leeds. Truss has sought to portray her former senior school, Roundhay – which sent her and many others to Oxford University – as repeatedly letting children down with “low expectations, poor educational standards and lack of opportunity”. Too much talent, she declared, “went to waste”. She even claimed it was within a “red wall” seat.



Liz Truss speaks at the 1994 Liberal Democrat conference, in which she discusses ‘abolishing the monarchy’. Photograph: YouTube

Her claim seems to have surprised former fellow pupils. The school is part of Leeds North East, a constituency that had voted Conservative for almost half a century until 1997. It was a rugby union-playing ex-grammar set in 22 acres of grounds in a well-to-do part of the city. Alumni include a university vice-chancellor, judges, neuroscientists, an award-winning playwright, four current or former parliamentarians and a former editor of the Sunday Telegraph.

Lord Kirkhope of Harrogate, the Tory MP for Leeds North East when Truss was a pupil at Roundhay, said he knew the school well at that time and claimed Truss’s comments appear to be “patently untrue”.

He said: “I think she was suggesting she was the only person who went to any sort of university and all the others were poor, inner-city kids, which was certainly not the case for Roundhay ... Politicians in this sort of situation should be very cautious about what they say because they have a knock-on effect to the staff and former pupils.”

Truss read PPE at Merton College, Oxford, and became a leading member of the Liberal Democrats. At the party conference at the age of 19, she called

for the abolition of the monarchy. “We do not believe people are born to rule,” she said.

Fellow former Lib Dem members said the intervention angered the late leader Paddy Ashdown, who had been assured she would remit the motion and avoid a vote. But the vote took place, drawing unwanted publicity for the party leader. “Paddy was not forgiving of those responsible for hijacking the conference,” said Lord Rennard, then a senior party figure.

At one freshers’ week, Lib Dem members including Alan Renwick, a friend of Truss who is now an academic on constitutional affairs, were decorating a stall and Truss, then a believer in cannabis legalisation, had a particular vision of how it should look. “She wanted the whole stall to be covered with these posters saying: ‘Free the Weed’, so I was scurrying around after Liz, trying to take these down again and put up a variety of different messages rather than just having this one message all over the stall,” Renwick told BBC Radio 4. She was putting them up again just as quickly.

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Truss was an enthusiastic participant in Oxford’s Hayek society, which celebrated the work of the Austrian political philosopher best known for his defence of classical liberalism. The same group included other Lib Dems who went on to become Tories.

“She was incredibly difficult to work with,” recalled Neil Fawcett, now a Lib Dem councillor, who campaigned alongside her in the 90s. “On a personal level, I could never really work out what she actually believed because she always seemed to be playing to the gallery, rather than putting forward a genuine belief.”

Truss joined the [Conservatives](#) in 1996 when the party was being torn apart by factionalism under John Major’s leadership. The following year she met her future husband, Hugh O’Leary, an accountant, at Conservative party conference, and they married in 2000.

At 25, she made her first steps towards parliamentary politics, taking on the dispiriting task of carrying the Tory message into a northern seat in the Labour heartlands. In 2001, she contested Hemsworth, in West Yorkshire, and secured a 4% swing from Labour to Conservative, which brought the Labour majority down from nearly 24,000 to less than 16,000.

To improve her chances of securing a more winnable seat next time, she was assigned Field, the MP for Cities of London and Westminster, as a mentor and soon after their relationship began. His marriage of 12 years ended in divorce, while hers survived.



Liz Truss, right, and Rishi Sunak take part in the BBC Conservative party leadership debate in Stoke-on-Trent. Photograph: Jacob King/AP

After David Cameron became the Conservative leader, Truss was placed on the “A-list” of parliamentary candidates, and was tipped to be the next MP for the Tory seat of Bromley and Chislehurst, through a by-election after the death of the local MP. But after the Daily Mail broke the story of her relationship with Field, Truss was informed she would not be the candidate.

After finally winning over the executive of the South West Norfolk Conservative party in 2009, Truss was elected to parliament the following year with a 13,140 majority. Once in parliament, she founded the Free

Enterprise Group of MPs, championing deregulation and lower taxes. She co-authored *Britannia Unchained*, a pamphlet that described the British as “among the worst idlers in the world”.

After a junior education role, Truss was appointed as environment secretary in 2014 for two years, during which she became a meme after a cringeworthy speech at Conservative party conference. “Britain imports two-thirds of its cheese,” she said cheerily, before quickly changing her expression to one of dark foreboding. “That. Is. A. Disgrace.”

Her supporters insist Truss really is one of the people – she does not enjoy public speaking and prefers a closed meeting or a party. Knowing that her staccato delivery is regularly mocked, she has attempted to take the sting out of the criticism by saying she knows she is not the most polished of performers.

During the EU referendum, she argued for remain, signing a cross-party declaration with Ed Miliband, Ed Davey and Caroline Lucas which described leave campaigners as “extreme and outdated”. After the referendum, she performed a 180-degree turn and is now one of the most vociferous supporters of leave.

Under Theresa May, Truss was appointed justice secretary, a job that quickly ran into trouble. She initially failed to defend the judiciary after they were branded “enemies of the people” by the Daily Mail because they ruled parliament had to be given a vote on triggering Brexit. Truss later issued a statement supporting the judges but this was seen as too little, too late.

Her actions drew unprecedented criticism from Lord Thomas, the lord chief justice, who told MPs she had been “completely and absolutely wrong”.

She was demoted to become chief secretary to the Treasury, but she embraced the change. In fact she became increasingly mischievous, reprimanding the then environment secretary Michael Gove publicly in one speech. “Too often we’re hearing about not drinking too much … eating too many doughnuts … or enjoying the warm glow of our wood-burning Goves … I mean stoves,” she said. “I can see their point: there’s enough hot air and smoke at the environment department already.”

Her office has gained an unwanted reputation among cabinet colleagues for leaking stories. It was often assumed that the leaks came direct from Truss, but her friends have denied this.



Liz Truss in Moscow in February. As foreign secretary, Truss has documented her jet-setting diplomatic trips on social media. Photograph: Maxim Shemetov/Reuters

After May's resignation, Truss became one of the first cabinet ministers to support Johnson's bid to lead the party. She was appointed international trade secretary and for two years signed trade deals across the world.

As foreign secretary Truss has become increasingly active on social media, exhaustively documenting her jet-setting diplomatic trips around the world.

Her condemnation of Vladimir Putin's actions in Ukraine – which saw Russian officials explicitly cite comments she made in a BBC interview as the reason for its decision to place the country's military on high alert – has led to a rise in popularity within the Tories.

Her solution to the impasse over the Northern Ireland protocol was to scrap large parts of that agreement. Critics said she risked a trade war with the EU and had damaged the UK's reputation for adhering to international law.

Her supporters say that her creative thinking also meant that she secured the release of Nazanin Zaghari-Ratcliffe, a task that had eluded three previous foreign secretaries. She enlisted Oman as an intermediary and paid a historical debt to Tehran.

For many of the MPs who are backing Sunak, she is also the “[Johnson continuity candidate](#)”. They are fuming that she appears to have won over the party.

“If she wins, you will see pretty much the same groups of people – the same Crosby Textor [global consultants] types and the same donors. Liz is certainly very determined to get there, but the people won’t change that much and no one really knows what she might do if she gets there,” an MP said.

Truss has been approached for comment.

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2022.07.30 - Opinion

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- [As a German in England for Euro 2022, Wembley will see the perfect final](#)
- [A sex worker gave my autistic son the gift of confidence – and I organised the encounter](#)
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OpinionConservatives

Spoilt and unruly children playing dress-up: how the Tories stopped being serious

[Alan Finlayson](#)

Rebelliousness against any rule they don't like has replaced a political philosophy that was once reckoned with



Illustration by Ellie Foreman-Peck

Sat 30 Jul 2022 04.00 EDT Last modified on Sat 30 Jul 2022 09.53 EDT

What has happened to English Conservatism? The party was once believed to have a sophisticated grasp of statecraft and a “natural” capacity to hold on to power. Here it is now, spending the summer trapped in a nightmare of its own making. The cakeist unseriousness of the celebrity [Boris Johnson](#) has been spun off into a TV game show: charmless candidates for the next prime minister pander to judges who form not so much a party as a youth

subculture that has grown geriatric – its codes and styles opaque to anyone who doesn’t collect Thatcherite “merch” from the 1980s.

All this – like Johnson’s reign of backfire – is symptomatic of a longer, wider and deeper ideological decline. Conservative political philosophy used to make arguments with which opponents had to reckon: sharp and informed scepticism about the grand plans of those who know the world through books alone and the expectation that technocrats in Whitehall could manage benevolently and wisely all of the time. Emphasising the tragic flaws in human nature, warning that efforts to perfect ourselves can give free rein to our imperfections, it was an important counterbalance to political arrogance. Such big ideas challenged the rationalists and progressives of the liberal centre and socialist left.

But the [Conservatives](#) of today are possessed of a small idea: that they should be able to do whatever they want, whenever they want (to whoever they want), and that the rest of us should not just accept this but facilitate and celebrate them – or be condemned as “snowflakes”.

In recent years, casual asides have shown up this intellectual decline. Andrew Murrison MP, complaining about the National Trust’s research into the history of the slave trade, said he wanted only to see “an [elegant pile of bricks](#) or a beautiful landscape before going for a nice cup of tea and a slice of cake” – as if Britain’s land were but a play park and its history mere homework.

The initial response of the defence secretary, Ben Wallace, to the invasion of Ukraine was not ministerial gravitas but schoolboy enthusiasm; his old regiment had “[kicked the backside](#)” of the tsar in the Crimean war and could “always do it again”. Alongside such idlers and fantasists, the party is full of student politics sectarians self-identifying as culture warriors and acting like excitable teenagers. They warn of conspiratorial elites they read about online, using imported American slang such as “deep state”, a penchant [Johnson indulged](#) in his speech on the no-confidence motion his government called on itself.

Now the party, advised by spads who can't hold a drink – if the wine stains on the walls of Downing Street are anything to go by – has chosen two ideal avatars of its own self-images, and set them to fight over who started it. On one side is a man thought to be the richest in the House, a public schoolboy who never had any working-class friends and for whom politics is a hobby; on the other, a politician unrestrained by commitments to anything other than her own advancement, and whose success lies in realising that she can tickle the Tory tummy by talking about British cheeses and Yorkshire tea while looking as if she's imagining the execution of her speechwriter.

What accounts for this extraordinary infantilisation of English Conservatism?

The core of Conservative ideology has always been a principled commitment to inequality. It exists to defend aristocracy – not the rule of the posh but the rule of the best. Part of its success lies in how it can always change the definition of “the best”: from ancient landowners to new entrepreneurs creating wealth and nobly allowing it to trickle down; from great Britons to plucky Englishmen throwing off the shackles of backwards Brussels and rebellious Scots.

According to conservative political philosophy, nature has made only a few fit to rule, enabling them to see further, deeper and higher than ordinary people. Accordingly, they cannot be confined by conventions and regulations. They have an aristocratic licence to break the rules because they serve a higher value: defence of the realm; market innovation; the mystical will of the people. Crucially, this idea has mutated into the belief that, because the best aren't bound by the rules, if you break the rules you must be one of the best. Refusing to be bound by the decisions of judges, being ostentatiously uncivil online, ignoring the international treaty you just signed, is reimagined as proof of fitness for office.

Long embedded in a culture that celebrates daringly naughty aristocrats, this kind of thinking has been particularly animated by the concept of the “nanny state”. The term originated, naturally, in a column in the Spectator in 1965. A metaphorical trump card, it has been played endlessly to block any and every proposition about what it might be in our common interest to regulate. It makes selfish obstinacy feel like a bold assertion of maturity,

independence and self-reliance. The myth of the nanny state gives believers a teenage thrill of anti-authoritarianism. But because the high is fleeting, they must always search again for a nanny against whom they can prove themselves: trade unionists, judges and human rights lawyers; virologists, statisticians, people wearing face masks; the BBC, the SNP, the ECHR. In extreme cases they assert themselves against the nannying laws of physics, which insist on governing the interactions of CO₂ molecules with solar radiation.

Once it has succumbed to this childlike conception of political freedom, other parts of conservatism also retreat to the nursery. For instance, the British right has always appreciated the aesthetic dimensions of political life, or, rather, the theatre of power. [Margaret Thatcher](#) was a skilled player, artful political instinct informing her performances of Boudicca, Britannia and the Iron Lady. Her political grandchildren know only how to cloak themselves in secondhand stereotypes. Johnson's cultivated dishevelment evokes a naughty but clever schoolboy: Just William Goes to Parliament. Jacob Rees-Mogg has long since lost himself in method-acting the part of an indifferent aristocrat. And so the leadership candidates argue over their cosplay: Liz Truss's low-rent Thatcher tribute act wrapped up in a bow versus Rishi Sunak's suits and Prada shoes.

For Conservatives today, politics is a role-playing game in which the winners get to do whatever they want. They offer neither the maintenance of tradition nor a well-managed economy but, having broken the social contract, promise their nervous supporters that they too can be one of the best, jumping the queue and speaking their mind without consequence. Confined by our unfit, decaying and inequitable constitution, the rest of us can only look on at this unruly children's party, knowing full well who is paying for the breakages.

But playtime cannot last for ever. Reality – a broken ambulance service, inflation outstripping wages, the climate crisis – never goes away. It's up to us to take back control from these political juveniles, and school them properly.

- Alan Finlayson is professor of political and social theory at the University of East Anglia
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| [Section menu](#) | [Main menu](#) |

[The Observer](#)[Women's Euro 2022](#)

For Germany, England is more than a football rival: We want to be like you

Oliver Fritsch

Euro 2022 final is a match against Germany's favourite opponent but culturally England is in a league of its own



Germany's Alexandra Popp sends fans into ecstasy after her second goal in the semi-final against France. Photograph: Sarah Stier/Uefa/Getty Images

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About this content

Sat 30 Jul 2022 05.00 EDT Last modified on Sun 31 Jul 2022 00.32 EDT

What a night of football in Brighton! [England beat Spain 2-1](#) after extra time in a thrilling match I could have watched for hours. And what a party in the stadium! It's loud at women's football matches, the atmosphere is like a mixture of school trip and youth disco.

Five-year-old girls, three Lionesses on their shirts, sitting on their father's shoulders, waving the St George's cross flag. A bell-bright children's choir sang "Football's coming home", grandfathers also joined in with *Wonderwall*. The last time I had been allowed to feel so English was four years ago when I visited my relatives and watched the Royal wedding on the South Pier in Blackpool, throwing a coin into the slot machine.

As a German reporter, I was in England up to and including the quarter-finals to cover the Euros. I have been watching football for more than four decades. I remember many battles against Italy, the Netherlands or Argentina. But we Germans have a favourite opponent and that is England.

So London is experiencing the perfect final on Sunday. Is it my imagination or do I hear a slight despair in English commentaries that the opponent is, of

all things, Germany, the four-time men's world champions and eight times the women's European champions – who (almost) always win in the end?

For me and most people my age, England is more than a rival. We've won many times on the football pitch and it's quite possible that it will happen again this time. But actually we want to be like the English. England is a place of longing for my generation, who grew up with music from London, Manchester, Liverpool and Newcastle and, perhaps, became a bit cosmopolitan.

Pop-culturally, England is in a league of its own – you don't have to go to the penalty shootout. We don't have Monty Python and James Bond, we don't have the Beatles, the Stones, Joy Division, the Smiths, Depeche Mode, the Kinks, the Cure, Oasis, Queen ... sorry, it's football, we don't have Wembley or Nick Hornby either. We were disappointed when England and the rest of the UK left us in 2016. But if England don't want to be in our club any more, maybe we can join theirs? That's what many of us think after the third pint at the latest.

“Attention, Surrender! For you Fritz, ze Euro 96 is over!” The headlines in the English tabloids gave us a bit of a fright back then. But no one has to explain to me, the grandson of a Nazi, how Germany's image abroad comes about. Of course we liked winning in 1996, and in 1990, too. But we cried with Gazza and Gary Lineker is the coolest anyway. Admittedly, we laughed a bit at Gareth Southgate, but then so did he himself.

Now the women continue the tradition. Both teams represent what their footballing nations are known for. Germany went into the tournament as underdogs. They are a *turniermannschaft* – a tournament team. They can endure difficult phases of the game, like against Spain. They are hard to beat and know how to score a goal, even a cheap one. Magic is alien to us, our virtues are effectiveness and mentality.



Lena Oberdorf (right) is Germany's physical wonder in midfield.
Photograph: Vincent Mignott/EPA

Germany has a physical wonder in midfield – Lena Oberdorf cleans up there. In goal, it will come as no surprise, there is quality. Merle Frohms is petite, but jumps higher and further than other goalkeepers. Tip to England: you'd better have decided the final after 120 minutes at the latest.

The German team is represented by Alexandra Popp. The goalscorer was injured for a long time, thought about ending her career, was infected with Covid shortly before the tournament and was not in the starting XI in the first match. Then she became the first woman to score in five European Championship matches in a row. When she scored the header for the [2-1 win against France](#), she took a running jump into her opponent, but luckily only her pigtail hit her in the face. The aerial battles between Popp and Millie Bright could make a racket.

And England, as you can see in Germany, are having the time of their lives. The quality and variety of Beth Mead's goals is probably unique in women's football, and we have dedicated an entire podcast episode to her in our editorial department. Lucy Bronze defends as hard as Kyle Walker. In Munich, everyone is talking about Sadio Mané and Matthijs de Ligt, but

perhaps Georgia Stanway is Bayern's most spectacular transfer. Her fight with Oberdorf in the centre will matter in London.

Georgia Stanway's winning goal against Spain was a highlight of the tournament – it raised me out of my seat

Stanway's winning goal against Spain was a highlight of the tournament. Like everyone at Brighton's stadium, it raised me out of my seat. All the power in one shot. That is female empowerment, that is football as we love it. We English and Germans are kin in our ideas of the game, rooted in centuries past. We are closer than we are to France or Spain.

The day before the opening game I met my cousin who is English and grew up and lives near Warrington and who is descended from the same Nazi grandfather as me.

He told me about his love for women's football. He rejects the men's professional game, but watches the women's games with enthusiasm. Many feel the same way. My impressions from the stadiums in Manchester, Brentford or Brighton: those who are there have become infected with the game, which for a long time was only for men. They recognise themselves in the players. In Germany, the TV ratings are high, the anticipation for Sunday's final is enormous. If you want a seat at the fan zone in Berlin, you have to be there two hours in advance. This summer, the women are making both our nations proud and happy.

Sign up to Moving the Goalposts, our women's football newsletter.

It has been marred by one sad piece of news. As I was on the London Underground on my way to Brentford's stadium, I learned of [Uwe Seeler's death](#). The images of the 1966 West Germany captain creeping across the Wembley pitch with his head bowed or bowing to the Queen at the victory ceremony are iconic. He is for ever the tragic, upright loser. He, like Beckenbauer or Haller, Hurst or Charlton, will never be forgotten.

It can be a grand final on Sunday. This time women have the chance to write themselves into the history books. That they will still be talked about in

England and Germany in half a century.

Oliver Fritsch is sports editor for Zeit Online, Berlin

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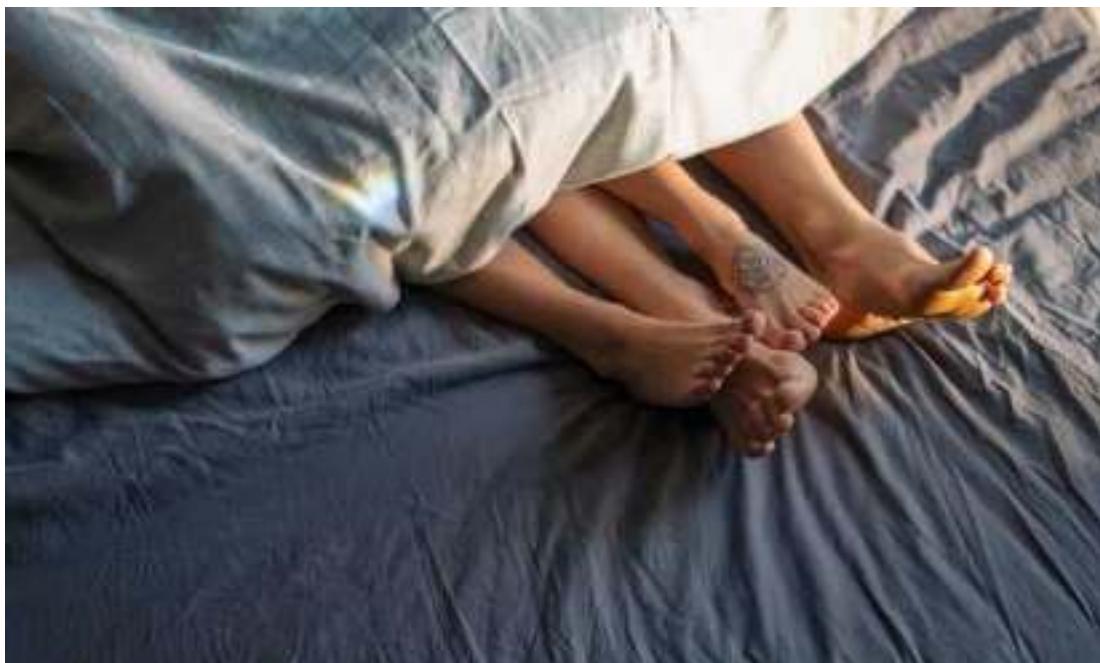
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OpinionAutism

A sex worker gave my autistic son the gift of confidence – and I organised the encounter

Anonymous

Until he finds the right girl and a loving relationship, how better to channel his sexuality in a healthy way?



‘I left them alone and did what any other mother would do after dropping her child off at a sex worker’s: I cooled my heels in a coffee shop, read magazines and avoided using my imagination.’ Photograph: Frank and Helena/Getty Images/Image Source

Fri 29 Jul 2022 16.00 EDT Last modified on Sat 30 Jul 2022 01.22 EDT

Parenting takes you on some interesting twists and turns, but as I lay in the maternity ward gazing into my newborn’s eyes, never in my wildest dreams could I ever have imagined that 21 years later I’d be trawling the websites of

sex workers looking for a suitable young lady to take his virginity. Yet that's exactly where I found myself earlier this year.

We'd not long left the hospital when I noticed my baby's gaze had a distant quality. A few days after his third birthday, he was diagnosed with autism.

He's now learning to drive and to catch public transport, having finished high school. But navigating social relationships is harder than reading a train timetable or Google Maps. Physically and sexually, he is a young man, but his social skills lag by several years.

I hope one day he will find the right girl, his own version of [Love on the Spectrum](#). But how can we healthily channel his sexuality until then?

Briefly I wondered whether he might prefer to meet the right boy, as more autistic people identify as LGBTQ+ than those without autism. However, while my son thinks he's bisexual, it's clear from his comments that he's primarily attracted to women. "No filter," his teacher once observed.

This frankness is largely a blessing. Teenage boys now have unfettered access to internet pornography, but – unlike my son – don't confide their viewing habits to their mother, giving her the opportunity to correct misperceptions. There's a danger in socially isolated autistic males, with their obsessive tendencies, being exposed to misogynistic porn. Already they are overrepresented among "incels" (involuntary celibates), who are [known for their anti-women views](#).

So, when my son alluded to certain "activities" he'd obviously come across online, I was able to explain that, in real life, not all girls like that sort of thing. That good sex was about mutual caring and respect.

I'd suggested the idea of a sex worker to him a couple of years ago when he had trouble getting past his first rejection, his first broken heart. Unfortunately, the pandemic intervened. Then, late last year, I attended a webinar on disability and sexuality.

A male sex worker from [Touching Base](#), a Sydney-based charitable organisation that links up sex workers and people with a disability, answered questions, as well as a female worker called “Anna” who identified as neurodiverse. Touching Base’s vision aligns with that of [People with Disability Australia](#), which argues that “people with disability have a right to a sexual life, just like everyone else”.

Feeling validated, I asked Touching Base to email me a list of suitable sex workers and summoned my son to look through the candidates. After lobbying hard for this to happen, he suddenly became diffident. “You choose,” he said.

Ha-ha: a mother’s prerogative.

[Australia weekend](#)

I’m not opposed to tattoos, but the heavily inked women in black leather looked rather fierce. In contrast, there were a couple of workers who favoured a girl-next-door look. One of them I recognised as Anna, from the webinar. I had my girl.

Worried others might judge, I confessed our plans only to one good friend, who also has an autistic son. He had visited a brothel off his own bat. She was quietly proud of his initiative (parents of children with disabilities have a completely different frame of reference for achievement) but wryly added she’d have preferred to hear about it in less detail.

I emailed Anna, describing my boy and what he sought from the encounter, but also what I wanted. My son understood consent in theory, but I wondered if he could apply it. Who better, I thought, to educate him than an experienced sex worker? Anna was agreeable and we negotiated terms – a four-hour “immersion experience” for \$1,000.

She asked if we’d be using NDIS funding, but I demurred. Some brave souls have fought for and won the right to [have sex work included in their NDIS plans](#), but this was one battle with bureaucracy I preferred to avoid.

Finally, the day arrived. I'd once imagined that disability sex workers would be a distinct and rather dowdy bunch, not everyday workers who'd diversified. In my mind's eye, my son's first sexual encounter would be with a short-haired woman wearing sensible shoes, not the bare-footed sylph with pre-Raphaelite curls who opened the door to us.

It's probably all downhill from here, young man, I couldn't help thinking.

I left them alone and did what any other mother would do after dropping her child off at a sex worker's: I cooled my heels in a coffee shop, read magazines, window-shopped and avoided using my imagination.

Four hours later, after collecting him, I inexplicably choked up.

"Are you OK, Mum? You seem distressed," he said, in an impressive display of empathy for someone who (by nature of his condition) is supposed to lack it.

My son is keen on a second visit, but I told him that he'll have to save up for it himself.

I reassured him I was fine but did *not* want to know what happened, and mercifully he took this onboard. When he later admitted, "This has been the best day of my life," I knew I'd done the right thing.

Still, I wondered how it was from Anna's perspective. What was the protocol here – could I ask? Perhaps she read my mind because a few days later I received emailed feedback. My son was totally respectful and would make someone a lovely boyfriend when the time came, she wrote.

Throughout this my husband preferred to remain in the background, not out of misplaced prudishness but because he worries that sex work is exploitative. Which it can be, obviously. But none of this applies to Anna, who's her own boss and obviously comfortable in her choices.

My son is keen on a second visit, but I told him that he'll have to save up for it himself. Hopefully he will find a girlfriend one day and learn to enjoy sex

in a loving relationship. Whatever happens, I will remain forever grateful to Anna for the gift of confidence she has given my son.

- The author's name has been kept anonymous to protect the privacy of her son
-

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

[The Stephen Collins cartoon Boris Johnson](#)

Boris and Carrie Johnson find their dream home – Stephen Collins cartoon

[Stephen Collins](#)

Sat 30 Jul 2022 01.00 EDT Last modified on Sat 30 Jul 2022 01.01 EDT

[Boris and Carrie Johnson find their dream home – Stephen Collins cartoon](#)

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2022.07.30 - Around the world

- [Australia Campaigners welcome PM's commitment to hold referendum on Indigenous voice to parliament](#)
- [Twitter Elon Musk countersues over \\$44bn deal](#)
- [Donald Trump Former president said sorry to Ted Cruz for 2016 insults, Paul Manafort says in new book](#)
- [Domestic violence Australian teenager built spyware used by perpetrators across world, police allege](#)
- [US Russian man spent years as puppeteer behind political groups, officials say](#)

Garma festival

Uluru statement campaigners welcome Albanese's referendum commitment

Campaign director Dean Parkin says the prime minister flagging set referendum question brings 'level of clarity'

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Uluru Statement from the Heart campaigners Eddie Synot and Dean Parkin.
Photograph: Carly Earl/The Guardian

[Lorena Allam](#)

Fri 29 Jul 2022 23.00 EDT Last modified on Sat 30 Jul 2022 01.17 EDT

Key players in the [Uluru Statement from the Heart](#) campaign have welcomed the PM's commitment to a referendum question on an Indigenous voice to parliament and a form of words in the constitution, saying the proposal is almost identical to the wording they had put forward in 2018.

The From the Heart campaign director, Dean Parkin, said the announcement is a very promising step forward in a long campaign for change.

‘If not now, when?’: Albanese reveals wording of referendum question on Indigenous voice – video

“It’s great that this level of clarity is with us now, with the PM backing up an election commitment with a clear and simple set of words,” Parkin said, following the PM’s landmark speech to the [Garma festival](#) in Arnhem Land.

“It’s really encouraging to see those words and questions are familiar to people. They reflect a lot of very rigorous work that’s gone on by constitutional experts across the board. It’s showing the government has been listening, they recognise the work that’s gone before, they know they are on a strong foundation that can launch the next phase of the process that leads up to to a vote.”

On Saturday, the prime minister, [Anthony Albanese](#) told the Garma festival that the Australian people should be asked a “simple and clear” yes or no referendum question regarding whether an Indigenous voice to parliament should be enshrined in the constitution.

“We should consider asking our fellow Australians something as simple as: ‘Do you support an alteration to the constitution that establishes an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander voice?’,” Albanese said.



Anthony Albanese at the Garma festival. Photograph: Carly Earl/The Guardian

Albanese said he was putting forward the question as a “basis for dialogue”. It was not a final form of words but rather “something to give the conversation shape and direction”.

Indigenous law academic and Uluru Dialogue member Eddie Synot said the campaign already knew that the nation is ready for a debate, “but in terms of the detail, it may come as a surprise to some to see a government deliver on a promise”.

We welcome today's announcement as an important step toward finally giving Australians their opportunity to vote “Yes” at a referendum, and to robustly test the Government’s proposed question & amendment. It’s time! History is Calling! [#UluruStatement](#) [#auspol](#)
pic.twitter.com/VksjhJ3wl9

— ulurustatement (@ulurustatement) [July 29, 2022](#)

In 2018, Co-Chairs of the Uluru Dialogue Pat Anderson AO & Professor Megan Davis along with a team of legal experts first proposed a draft amendment & question in their submission to the then

Joint Select Committee for a First Nations Voice to Parliament.
[#UluruStatement #auspol](#) pic.twitter.com/pR0WXRC9Ga

— ulurustatement (@ulurustatement) [July 29, 2022](#)

Parkin and Synot agreed that the next steps would be to hold the government to account to deliver on their promise.

“The job is always to make sure the government, regardless of who they are, follows through on their promise,” Parkin said. “This is a step towards meeting that commitment but we still have to have a referendum, we need a date set, we need the detail of the wording in place before, so people understand what they are voting on and then we need to let that run its course.

“So it’s an encouraging step and we welcome it, but the work is yet to come.”



Ceremonial dancers at the Garma festival. Photograph: Carly Earl/The Guardian

They said criticism that the voice represents “empty symbolism” ignores the reality that both are important for the future wellbeing of First Nations

people.

“You can do two things at one, and this reform more than anything shows that,” Synot said.

“If you look at [Liberal] Senator [Jacinta] Price’s maiden speech and [Labor MP Marion] Scrymgour’s speech, they are talking about the exact same issues in their communities and it’s beyond party politics. The power of the voice will have an impact on that.”

Parkin said there was agreement that more of the same “wasn’t going to work”.

“What’s happening to women and families in those communities lies with those people who are actually affected by it. The solutions are not in Canberra, they are on the ground where these challenges are being faced and that’s what the voice is simply all about,” Parkin said.

Albanese is accompanied by a bipartisan delegation from Canberra, including the attorney general, Mark Dreyfus, the minister for [Indigenous Australians](#), Linda Burney, Labor’s NT senator Malarndirri McCarthy, new NT MP Scrymgour and the Coalition’s spokesman on Indigenous affairs, Julian Leeser. The show of bipartisanship is being interpreted by some as a sign there may be support across the aisle for the referendum, but the Coalition is yet to formally respond to the speech.

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The Uluru statement has been discussed at Garma for a long time but never [with such high hopes](#). The last prime minister to visit was Malcolm Turnbull in 2017, the same year he declared he could not support the voice as a “third chamber to parliament”.

About 2,000 Indigenous and non-Indigenous people have gathered at Gulkula, a site of great significance to Yolngu as the place where the ancestor Ganbulabula brought to life the yidaki (didgeridu).

Late on Friday afternoon, a large crowd assembled on the dance ground to hear Yolngu leadership officially open the ceremonies, in a powerful expression of manikay (music), bunggul (dance) and rom (law).

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

[Twitter](#)

Elon Musk countersues Twitter over \$44bn deal amid fresh legal action by shareholder

Musk's 164-page filing is under wraps for now, as Twitter shareholder launches separate action to force entrepreneur to close the deal



Elon Musk has countersued Twitter amid wrangling over their \$44bn purchase deal. Photograph: Ryan Lash/TED Conferences, LLC/AFP/Getty Images

Reuters

Fri 29 Jul 2022 20.17 EDT

Elon Musk has countersued Twitter, escalating his legal fight against the social media company over his bid to walk away from the \$44bn purchase.

Musk's lawsuit was filed on Friday, hours after chancellor Kathaleen McCormick of the Delaware court of chancery ordered a five-day trial beginning 17 October to determine if Musk can walk away from the deal.

The entrepreneur's 164-page document was not publicly available, however under court rules a redacted version could soon be published.

Twitter did not immediately respond to a request for comment.

Also on Friday, Musk was sued by a Twitter shareholder who asked the court to order the billionaire to close the deal, find that he breached his fiduciary duty to Twitter shareholders and award damages for losses caused.

The lawsuit, which seeks class status, alleges Musk owes a fiduciary duty to Twitter's shareholders because of his 9.6% stake in the company and because the takeover agreement gives him a veto of many of the company's decisions. The lawsuit was filed by Luigi Crispo, who owns 5,500 Twitter shares, in the court of chancery.

Musk, the world's richest person and chief executive of Tesla, said on 8 July he was [abandoning the takeover](#) and blamed Twitter for breaching the agreement by misrepresenting the number of fake accounts on its platform.

[Twitter sued days later](#), calling the fake account claims a distraction and saying Musk was bound by the merger contract to close the deal at \$54.20 per share. The company's shares ended on Friday at \$41.61, the highest close since Musk abandoned the deal.

McCormick [fast-tracked the case](#) to trial last week, saying she wanted to limit the potential harm to Twitter caused by the uncertainty of the deal.

Twitter has blamed the court fight for [slumping revenue](#) and causing chaos within the company.

The two sides had basically agreed to a 17 October trial, but were at odds over the limits of discovery, or access to internal documents and other evidence.

Musk accused Twitter this week of dragging its feet in response to his discovery requests, and Twitter accused him of seeking huge amounts of data irrelevant to the main issue in the case: whether Musk had violated the deal contract.

The chief judge in her order on Friday appeared to anticipate discovery disputes to come. “This order does not resolve any specific discovery disputes, including the propriety of any requests for large data sets,” said McCormick.

Musk also faces a week-long trial in Wilmington, Delaware, beginning 24 October. A Tesla shareholder is seeking to void as corporate waste and unjust enrichment the CEO’s record-breaking \$56bn pay package from the electric vehicle maker.

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

[**Books**](#)

Trump said sorry to Cruz for 2016 insults, Paul Manafort says in new book

In a memoir obtained by the Guardian, former campaign manager risks embarrassing powerful rivals with description of apology



Ted Cruz speaks at the Quicken Loans Arena in Cleveland, Ohio, in July 2016. Photograph: Chip Somodevilla/Getty Images

[Martin Pengelly](#) in New York

Sat 30 Jul 2022 02.00 EDT Last modified on Sat 30 Jul 2022 02.03 EDT

Donald Trump made an uncharacteristic apology to Ted Cruz after insulting his wife and father during the 2016 campaign – only for the Texas senator still to refuse to endorse Trump at the Republican convention.

In a new memoir, Trump's then campaign manager, Paul Manafort, writes: "On his own initiative, Trump did apologise for saying some of the things he

said about Cruz, which was unusual for Trump.”

The telling vignette – possibly an embarrassing one for two powerful [Republicans](#) who have since formed an alliance of convenience – is contained in Political Prisoner: Persecuted, Prosecuted, but Not Silenced, which will be published in the US next month. The Guardian obtained a copy.

Manafort was Trump’s campaign manager between May and August 2016.

Imprisoned on tax charges in a case arising from the investigation of Russian election interference and links between Trump and Moscow, Manafort did not turn on Trump and [received a pardon](#) just before the end of Trump’s time in power.

In his memoir, he denies collusion with Russia, bemoans his experiences at the hands of the US justice system, admits indirectly advising Trump in 2020 while in home confinement, and expresses strong support for another Trump campaign in 2024.

In 2016, in a brutal primary, Trump [insinuated Cruz’s wife was ugly](#) and [linked his father](#) to the assassination of John F Kennedy. He also [questioned](#) whether Cruz, born in Canada, was qualified to be US president and coined a lasting nickname, [Lying Ted](#).

Manafort’s description of a Trump apology for such slurs may come as a surprise to both men.

Trump is [famous](#) for never apologising, whether in his business career or in his seven-year career across the US political scene.

And when Cruz eventually [came onside](#) with Trump, in September 2016, he [said](#): “Neither he nor his campaign has ever taken back a word they said about my wife and my family.”

Now Manafort says Trump did apologise – and to Cruz’s face at that.

Describing a meeting meant to get Cruz’s support before the convention in Cleveland in July, Manafort writes that the senator said he would work with

the man who beat him into second in the primary but would not formally endorse him, “because his supporters didn’t want him to”.

Manafort writes: “It was a forced justification for someone who is normally very logical. Trump didn’t buy it.”

Trump nonetheless apologised, Manafort writes, then “told Cruz he considered him an ally, not an enemy, and that he believed they could work together when Trump was president.”

At least initially, Trump’s effort was in vain. In his speech at the convention, Cruz did not endorse Trump and was booed by the crowd. The senator’s wife, Heidi Cruz, was escorted out of the arena, out of concern for her safety.

Ted Cruz booed during his convention speech – video Guardian

Manafort accuses Cruz’s aides of “double dealing” and describes Trump declaring “This is bullshit” as the senator spoke, then walking to the back of the convention hall, “effectively pulling the attention away from Cruz and undercutting his speech.

“Cruz then got the message that there was a technical issue – a legitimate glitch – and the volume went out on his speech.”

Footage of the speech does not clearly show such a technical glitch.

Cruz, Manafort writes, was “very upset. It took months to bring that relationship back. But eventually Cruz came around to supporting Trump, and Trump harboured no ill will.”

Whether Cruz and Trump will harbour any ill will for Manafort, for undercutting Cruz’s claim never to have received an apology and for saying Trump delivered a rare one, remains of course to be seen.

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

Australian federal police

Brisbane teenager built spyware used by domestic violence perpetrators across world, police allege

Jacob Wayne John Keen, 24, is alleged to have created hacking tool when 15 years old and sold it to more than 14,500 people

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The Brisbane room searched by Australian federal police where Jacob Wayne John Keen allegedly created the spyware. Photograph: Australian federal police

[Michael McGowan](#)

[@mmcgowan](#)

Sat 30 Jul 2022 01.33 EDT Last modified on Sat 30 Jul 2022 02.04 EDT

Police allege that a teenager living in the suburbs of Brisbane created and sold a sophisticated hacking tool used by domestic violence perpetrators and child sex offenders to spy on tens of thousands of people across the globe – and then used the proceeds to buy takeaway food.

Jacob Wayne John Keen, now 24, was 15 years old and living in his mother's rental when he allegedly created a sophisticated spyware tool known as a remote access trojan (RAT) that allowed users to remotely take control of their victims' computers.

Called Imminent Monitor, once installed it could be used to steal victims' personal information, spy on them via webcams and microphones and track what they typed into emails or documents.

Keen allegedly sold the tool for \$35 on a hacking forum, making between \$300,000 and \$400,000 by selling it to more than 14,500 people in 128 countries.

Among them were domestic violence perpetrators and other criminals, according to a statement issued by the [Australian federal police](#). The AFP said on Saturday it had confirmed 201 Australians had bought the spyware.

Of those, the agency said, a “statistically high” proportion were named as respondents on domestic violence orders. The agency asserts that one buyer was on the child sex offenders register.

The AFP said it believed there were tens of thousands of victims globally, including 44 in Australia. It said investigations into potential suspects who may have used the device were ongoing.

According to the agency, a financial analysis had discovered that most of the money raised from allegedly selling the spyware was used to pay for food delivery services “and other consumable and disposable items”.

Keen was slapped with six charges earlier in July, and is due to appear at Brisbane's magistrates court next month. His mother, 42, has also been charged with allegedly dealing in the proceeds of crime.

The pair had been due to appear in Brisbane's magistrates court on Friday, but the case was laid over until next month.

The arrest was announced on Saturday following a coordinated global policing sting dating back to 2017.

Dubbed Operation Cepheus, it began when the AFP received information from cybersecurity firm Palo Alto Networks and the FBI about a suspicious malware.

A global investigation involving more than a dozen law enforcement agencies across Europe led to 85 search warrants being executed around the world, with 434 devices seized and 13 people arrested for using the malware for "alleged criminality".

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By 2019 the tool had been shut down, but after receiving evidence from overseas law enforcement, the AFP arrested Keen.

"The AFP-led investigation executed two search warrants in 2019 at the man's then home in Brisbane," the agency said in a statement. "Investigators seized a number of devices, including a custom-built computer containing code consistent with the development and use of the RAT."

The AFP commander of cybercrime operations, Chris Goldsmid, said the operation provided a real example of how dangerous tech-enabled crime could be.

"These types of malware are so nefarious because it can provide an offender virtual access to a victim's bedroom or home without their knowledge," he said.

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

US politics

Russian man spent years as puppeteer behind US political groups, officials say

Aleksandr Viktorovich Ionov charged over accusations he sought to spread division and propaganda and meddle in elections



The US attorney Roger B Handberg, with the St Petersburg police chief, Anthony Holloway, left, and the FBI special agent David Walker, speaks to reporters in Florida. Photograph: Martha Asencio-Rhine/AP

Guardian staff and agencies

Fri 29 Jul 2022 16.08 EDT Last modified on Fri 29 Jul 2022 16.33 EDT

A [Russian](#) man orchestrated a yearslong effort to puppeteer political groups in Florida, Georgia and California to sow discord in the US, spread pro-Russia propaganda and meddle in American elections, justice department officials alleged on Friday.

Aleksandr Viktorovich Ionov of Moscow was charged with conspiring to have US citizens act as illegal agents of the Russian government, according to a justice department statement. If convicted, he faces up to five years in prison.

The indictment against Ionov was linked to a raid by federal agents of the Uhuru Movement's headquarters in St Petersburg, Florida, on Friday, [the Tampa Bay Times reported](#), citing US officials.

The Uhuru Movement belongs to the African People's Socialist party and purports to unite "African people as one ... for liberation, social justice, self-reliance and economic development".

At a news conference on Friday, a Uhuru leader declared openly that his group was "in support of Russia" and dismissed the raid as an attack meant to isolate Africans in the US who are fighting for liberation.

"We can have relationships with whoever we want to make this revolution possible," said the leader, Eritha "Akile" Cainion.

The movement's St Petersburg headquarters recently made headlines for unrelated reasons after a man using a flamethrower [set fire](#) to a flag flying outside the building, [leading to his arrest](#).

According to the justice department, Ionov was acting on behalf of the FSB Russian intelligence agency when he financially supported the groups at the center of the case, none of which are explicitly named in the indictment. He allegedly ordered them to publish pro-Russian lies and coordinated actions by them intended to further Russian interests.

The department also claimed Ionov influenced a US political group in [Florida](#) under his control to interfere in local elections, supporting the St Petersburg, Florida, political campaigns of two people in 2017 and 2019. It listed the group and individuals as "unindicted co-conspirators" but did not name them.

From at least December 2014 to March 2022, the department said, Ionov and at least three other Russian officials engaged in a malign foreign influence

campaign targeting the US.

Separately, the US treasury department on Friday imposed sanctions on Ionov, his fellow Russian national Natalya Valeryevna Burlinova, and four Russian entities it accused of backing the Kremlin's mission of interfering in elections abroad, including in the US and Ukraine.

According to the justice department, the four entities in question are: the Anti-Globalization Movement of Russia (AGMR), which Ionov founded and presides over; Ionov Transkontinental; Stop-Imperialism; and the Center for Support and Development of Public Initiative Creative Diplomacy (Picreadi).

The Russian embassy in Washington did not immediately reply to an email seeking comment on the indictment or the US sanctions, which among other things block the property in American jurisdiction of those named.

Reuters contributed this report

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Table of Contents

[The Guardian.2022.07.31 \[Sun, 31 Jul 2022\]](#)

[Headlines monday 25 july 2022](#)

[Live Starmer dismisses Tory leadership contest as 'Thatcherite cosplay'](#)

[Boris Johnson James Cleverly 'comfortable' with current PM joining a Truss-led government](#)

[Rishi Sunak Would-be PM to promise curbs on China as UK's 'biggest long-term threat'](#)

[Keir Starmer 'Labour will fight next election on economic growth'](#)

[2022.07.25 - Spotlight](#)

[It's the ultimate Neighbours quiz! How well do you know Ramsay Street?](#)

[Sorted The 10 best Neighbours characters ever](#)

[Conservative leadership Who could be in the next cabinet under Rishi Sunak or Liz Truss?](#)

['There's never been a time when you could just say anything' Frank Skinner on free speech, his bullying shame – and knob jokes](#)

[2022.07.25 - Opinion](#)

[What the absurd class cosplay of Rishi Sunak and Liz Truss tells us about Britain](#)

[Stewart Lee Tory death-priests have our lives in their hands](#)

[For modern mothers, the toxic pull of the 'momfluencer' feels inescapable](#)

[The Gaelic language is stunningly beautiful, but I just can't get my tongue around it](#)

[2022.07.25 - Around the world](#)

[California wildfires Oak fire remains uncontained as governor declares state of emergency](#)

[Heatwave North-eastern US braces for record-breaking temperatures](#)

[Diana Kennedy Influential guru of Mexican cuisine dies at 99](#)

[France Government orders air-conditioned shops to save energy by shutting doors](#)

Headlines thursday 28 july 2022

[Conservatives Nadine Dorries suggests Rishi Sunak was part of ‘coup’ to oust Boris Johnson](#)

[Liz Truss Leadership candidate promises to build Northern Powerhouse Rail scaled back last year](#)

[Live Business: British Gas owner Centrica’s profits soar as UK households face winter energy bill pain](#)

[Shell Oil company posts almost £10bn quarterly profits as households struggle with bills](#)

2022.07.28 - Spotlight

[GoT vs LOTR Who will win the epic battle of the spin-offs?](#)

[‘Standup was a weapon to him’ Ian Cognito, the comedian who died on stage – literally](#)

[Bicycle graveyards Why do so many bikes end up underwater?](#)

[Reader, I married one – and moved there How Neighbours gave me a deep Australian kink](#)

2022.07.28 - Opinion

[What has happened to the Labour party that it can’t stand up for labour?](#)

[The ‘sadmin’ after my mother’s death was hard enough – then I encountered Vodafone](#)

[The difference between the Tory candidates’ tax plans? One is bad, the other is really bad](#)

[Athletic feats at Commonwealth Games cannot distract from Britain’s colonial sins](#)

2022.07.28 - Around the world

[Iraq Hundreds of protesters storm parliament in support of cleric Moqtada al-Sadr](#)

[Yang Huiyan Asia’s richest woman loses half her \\$24bn fortune in China property crisis](#)

[Trump 2020 Murdoch told Kushner on election night that Arizona result was ‘not even close’](#)

[US Capitol attack Justice department gets warrant to search Trump lawyer’s phone](#)

Headlines friday 29 july 2022

Energy bills Charities concerned as details of £400 support for Britain revealed

Labour Sacked shadow minister accuses Keir Starmer of ‘complete car crash’

Live Wallace says he is backing Truss because she understands ‘threats’ faced by UK

Conservative leadership Ben Wallace attacks Rishi Sunak’s cabinet resignation after backing Truss

2022.07.29 - Spotlight

The myth of Marilyn Monroe How her ‘sex bomb’ image buries the truth

Analysis Tribunal rulings for gender-critical women have key implications

Experience I look after the world’s oldest pot plant

‘So refreshing and joyful’ Readers on Euro 2022 and women’s football

2022.07.29 - Opinion

Travel chaos and understaffed airports are a wake-up call: Britain is unravelling

The rouble is soaring and Putin is stronger than ever - our sanctions have backfired

Now Whitby, too, is finding out what happens when tourism takes over

Tory hustings: a fresh circle of hell where we don’t even get to enjoy Rish! and Radon Liz fighting

2022.07.29 - Around the world

Hong Kong Horror at concert as video screen falls on performers

Nepal’s tiger numbers recover but attacks on people cause alarm

‘What about my life?’ West Virginia girl, 12, speaks out against anti-abortion bill

Brazil Paved highway to run through Amazon gains initial approval

Business live Germany stagnates, but France, Spain and Italy beat forecasts

Headlines tuesday 26 july 2022

[Conservative leadership Rishi Sunak ‘aggressive’ in Tory leadership debate, say Truss supporters](#)

[‘Gloves are off’ What the papers say about the Tory leadership TV debate](#)

[Live Keir Starmer says he would fix ‘broken’ water and energy markets through regulation not nationalisation](#)

[Live Russia-Ukraine war: Odesa region, Kharkiv and Mykolaiv struck by Russian missiles, regional officials say](#)

2022.07.26 - Spotlight

[Ferdinando Scianna I’ve taken a million pictures – 50 were good](#)

[‘The council tenants weren’t going to be allowed back’ How Britain’s ‘ugliest building’ was gentrified](#)

[‘This is fascism – we’re all being attacked’ ‘Stop Brexit Man’ Steve Bray on lies, police powers and free speech](#)

[Sand, scree and blazing blue skies My car-free break in Cumbria](#)

2022.07.26 - Opinion

[Here’s why a border-free world would be better than hostile immigration policies](#)

[I saw signs of monkeypox at Berlin’s pride parade – but that doesn’t mean it’s a ‘gay disease’](#)

[Pandemic knocked you off your stride? An active woman’s tips for getting fit again](#)

[My relatives and I had been in the pub for hours. Then two strangers were unlucky enough to join us ...](#)

2022.07.26 - Around the world

[Myanmar US presses China to rein in junta over executions](#)

[Jared Kushner Trump son-in-law says he had thyroid cancer while aide in 2019](#)

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