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Russia-Ukraine war: UK sanctions Iran over drones used in Russian attacks in Ukraine; Kyiv restricts power use – as it happened

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Russia-Ukraine war latest: what we know on day 239 of the invasion

Ukraine to restrict electricity use; Putin declares martial law in four Ukraine provinces; Kyiv describes Moscow's plans to resettle civilians in Kherson as 'propaganda show'



A Ukrainian tank crew member fighting on the frontline is seen in Bakhmut, Donetsk, Ukraine on 19 October. Photograph: Anadolu Agency/Getty Images

[Samantha Lock](#) and [Martin Belam](#)

Thu 20 Oct 2022 04.36 EDTFirst published on Wed 19 Oct 2022 19.55 EDT

- **Moscow-backed self-appointed officials in Ukraine's southern Kherson region have begun moving civilians into Russian territory, citing fears of a [Ukrainian counteroffensive](#).** The Russian-installed head of the key southern city **Vladimir Saldo** spoke of plans to move

up to 60,000 people across the Dnipro River. Images of people using boats to flee the city were broadcast by Russian state TV.

- Ukrainian officials described Russia's announcements as "a propaganda show" and told people not to comply with the evacuation request. A number have reported receiving mass text messages warning the city would be shelled and informing them that buses would be leaving from the port from 7am on Thursday. **Andriy Yermak**, chief of staff to the Ukrainian president, described Russian announcements as "a propaganda show" as Kyiv said the population transfers amounted to "deportations".
- Russia's recent admission that a "difficult situation has emerged" in the **Kherson** region is highly unusual and likely indicates that authorities are considering a major withdrawal of their forces from the area west of the Dnipro river, British intelligence has said.

Russia is planning mass removal of civilians from Kherson

- Ukraine will begin restricting electricity supplies across the country starting from 7am today in response to Russia's strikes against its energy infrastructure. Ukrainians will now need to prepare for "rolling blackouts" and people will have to conserve energy, the deputy head of the president's office, **Kyrylo Tymoshenko**, warned.
- A Russian air strike that hit a major thermal power station in the city of **Burshtyn** in western Ukraine on Wednesday has caused "quite serious" damage, the region's governor said on Thursday.
- German Chancellor **Olaf Scholz** said on Thursday that Russian President **Vladimir Putin** was using energy and hunger as weapons but has failed to break the west's unity and will not achieve his war aims through scorched earth tactics. "We will not let Moscow's latest escalation go unanswered. Scorched earth tactics will not help Russia win the war. They will only strengthen the unity and resolve of Ukraine and its partners," Scholz told the German parliament.

- **Nato** allies will act if **Sweden** or **Finland** come under pressure from **Russia** or another adversary before they become full members of the alliance, Nato secretary general **Jens Stoltenberg** said on Thursday.
- On Wednesday Vladimir Putin **declared martial law in the four provinces of Ukraine** where Russia controls territory. The law gives far-reaching emergency powers to the Russian-installed heads of **Luhansk, Donetsk, Zaporizhzhia** and **Kherson** provinces, which Russia recently proclaimed as annexed after sham referendums. Ukraine's presidential adviser **Mykhailo Podolyak** described the announcement as the "pseudo-legalisation of looting of Ukrainians' property".
- In his overnight address, Ukraine's President **Volodymyr Zelenskiy** urged residents not to comply with a military call-up in occupied areas.
- Putin also ordered an "economic mobilisation" in six provinces that border Ukraine, plus Crimea and Sevastopol, which Russia **illegally annexed in 2014**. In televised remarks he said he was **granting additional authority to the regional leaders of all Russian provinces** to maintain public order and increase production in support of Moscow's war. The law also limits the freedom to move in and out of the eight provinces.
- **Russia's strikes on critical energy infrastructure are "acts of pure terror"** that amount to war crimes, the head of the European Commission has said. Ursula von der Leyen's remarks to the European parliament on Wednesday came after **hundreds of thousands of Ukrainians were left without power or water** as a result of Russian strikes.
- **Zelenskiy spoke of "significant results" in downing Iranian drones**, claiming 233 Shahed UAVs and dozens of missiles were shot down during the month. Several Russian missiles were shot down over Kyiv on Wednesday afternoon, its mayor, Vitalii Klitschko, said. Greek diplomats have confirmed that the country's foreign minister, **Nikos Dendias, who is visiting Ukraine, was forced to seek refuge** in a bomb shelter in Kyiv.

- **The cost to Ukraine of downing “kamikaze” drones vastly exceeds the sums paid by Russia in sourcing and launching the cheap Iranian-made technology, analysis suggests.** The total cost to Russia of the failed drone attacks unleashed on Ukraine in recent weeks is estimated by military analysts to be between \$11.66m (£10.36m) and \$17.9m (£15.9m). The estimated cost to Ukraine to bring down the drones stands at more than \$28.14m (£25m).
- **The EU plans to impose sanctions on three senior Iranian military commanders** and the company that develops drones believed to have been used in Russia’s attacks on Ukraine. The draft sanctions list, seen by the Guardian, is expected to be agreed within days, indicating EU ministers do not believe Iran’s denials that it has supplied Russia with the low-flying lethal weapons.
- **Russia will reassess its cooperation with UN secretary-general** António Guterres and his staff if Guterres sends experts to Ukraine to inspect downed drones that Ukraine and the west assert were made in Iran, Russia’s deputy UN ambassador Dmitry Polyanskiy told reporters on Wednesday.
- **Putin will face “severe consequences” if he uses nuclear weapons in the war in Ukraine, Downing Street has said.** Britain’s defence secretary, Ben Wallace, has been in Washington for talks with his US counterpart amid reports the Russian leader could detonate a nuclear warhead over the Black Sea.
- **The European parliament awarded the people of Ukraine its annual Sakharov prize for freedom of thought** to honour their fight against Russia’s invasion. “They are standing up for what they believe in. Fighting for our values. Protecting democracy, freedom and rule of law. Risking their lives for us,” the European parliament president, Roberta Metsola, said.

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Food banks

UK's biggest food bank network to spend millions on parcels this winter

Exclusive: Trussell Trust to distribute 1.3m emergency food parcels to help soaring numbers of households in need



The Trussell Trust said the expenditure was needed as donations from the public was failing to keep pace with rapidly increasing demand. Photograph: Jonathan Brady/PA

[Patrick Butler](#) Social policy editor

Thu 20 Oct 2022 01.00 EDT

The UK's biggest food bank network is preparing to spend millions of pounds topping up charity food parcels this winter as it offers help to record numbers of families at risk of going hungry as a result of the cost of living crisis.

The [Trussell Trust](#) said the expenditure was needed to ensure food banks had adequate food reserves because its customary main source of food supplies – donations from the public – was failing to keep pace with rapidly increasing demand.

The trust said it expected 1.3m emergency food parcels would be distributed by its members over the next six months to help soaring numbers of households in need – including 500,000 to families with children.

Its 420 food banks have already this year had to buy three times as much food as they did the previous year to maintain supplies, it said, each spending £1,400 a month on average to ensure they met the growing need for food parcels.

Unexpectedly high demand for food parcels in August and September when demand is normally slower meant its food banks have been unable to stockpile sufficient food, leaving many with relatively depleted stores as they prepare for their busiest time of year.

Food banks traditionally relied on food donations from the public, businesses, schools and faith groups, tending to only use cash reserves to meet occasional shortages in specific food stuffs. With need currently far outstripping food donations, however, almost a sixth of Trussell Trust food banks' food supplies are typically now bought in.

The Trussell Trust chief executive, Emma Revie, warned the government “food banks could not be the only response” to the cost of living crisis, and called on ministers to offer a fresh round of targeted financial support to low income households over the winter to head off growing hardship.

Although the government introduced a package of [cost of living payments](#) in July for people on low incomes, Trussell Trust research in August found two-thirds of recipients had already spent the first tranche of support they received. “It went to the right people but it wasn’t enough,” said Revie.

The Trussell Trust on Thursday launches an emergency fundraising appeal to enable its UK-wide network of local food banks to top up food supplies,

offer financial advice services to food bank users and give out non-food aid such as blankets and hot-water bottles.

“We never wanted to run an appeal like this, we would rather there was no need for food banks at all. But right now they are on the frontline of this cost of living emergency, we have no other option,” Revie said.

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Jamie Ginns, the head of Greenwich food bank in south London, part of the Trussell Trust network, said it was currently giving out around a tonne of food a week in food aid more than it received in food donations, requiring it to spend about £9,000 a month on buying food.

With soaring food prices helping push up inflation to [10.1% in September](#), on top of rising energy bills, the Trussell Trust and other food banks are bracing themselves to meet what Revie called a “tsunami of need”.

Food Foundation data [published earlier this week](#) showed the UK is experiencing alarming levels of food insecurity. Hunger levels have soared since the turn of the year, with nearly 10 million adults and 4 million children regularly skipping food.

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2022.10.20 - Spotlight

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‘I wouldn’t admit I was an actor. I once said I was a tree surgeon’: Gina McKee on confidence, class and #MeToo

[Zoe Williams](#)



‘Basically, what I seek is variety’ ... Gina McKee. Stylist: Ella-Louise Gaskell at Stella Creative Artists. Photograph: David Levene/The Guardian

After more than 40 years in film and TV, the star of Our Friends in the North is about to share the screen with Harry Styles. She talks about 90s sexism, her start in drama and playing the villain



[@zoesqwilliams](#)

Thu 20 Oct 2022 01.00 EDT Last modified on Thu 20 Oct 2022 08.19 EDT

I've actually seen Gina McKee in real life once before, about 15 years ago, on the tube. There were only three of us in the carriage. I whispered urgently yet extremely quietly to my then-husband: “That’s Gina McKee,” and he boomed out in this huge man-voice: “That is *not* Gillian McKeith.” The ghost of a smile crossed her face, which was otherwise averted in a palpable desire not to get drawn in. I drew three conclusions, one of which I knew already: this actor has an exquisitely readable face – her eyes can throw out 100 distinct emotions a second; she does not like the limelight, not at all; and I bet she’s nice. Happy to report, having met her properly on a hotel rooftop in London, that I am once again completely right.

McKee looks exactly the same now, at 58, as she did back then, indeed, the same as she did in 1996’s Our Friends in the North, though middle-aged

people always say that kind of thing about each other. She is tall and fine-boned, with a slightly grave set to her face, complicated by frequent bursts of laughter.

We're here to discuss *My Policeman*, in which the cast is split into the young 'uns – Emma Corrin (*The Crown*), David Dawson (*The Hollow Crown*) and Harry Styles (you know who he is), engaged in a doomed love triangle in the 50s – and the same characters 40 years later, played by McKee, Rupert Everett and Linus Roache. It's essentially the animation of a tragedy that's well-known but quite well-buried culturally, the era when homosexuality was still a criminal offence and the awful, echoing layers of brutality and sorrow that created.

McKee/Corrin's character, Marion, is emphatically not the good guy in all this, but McKee plays her chin-out and challenging. "You can be a conduit to remember the past, or introduce others to that time," she says, "but you mustn't apologise for it or try to change what it was. They're all victims of their time. She [Marion] behaves the way she behaves because she's living in the world she lives in in the 1950s."



McKee with Rupert Everett in *My Policeman*. Photograph: Parisa Taghizadeh/© 2022 Amazon Content Services LLC

It's an unusual and presumably quite hard task, job-sharing one character with another actor, complicated further by the pandemic. "Because it was 2021, the protocols were really strict. We couldn't meet the younger cast."

For precisely no reason, I suggest it's like having to keep dogs apart in a pound when they get kennel cough, and she dissolves into laughter, which must be polite but sounds so *authentic*. From this point on, it's my mission to make her laugh again. I almost tell her the joke about the priest, the imam and the rabbit going to donate blood together, and the rabbit saying: "I think I'm most probably a type-O."

"I had never met Emma," she says, "so obviously I watched everything I could, watched the way she moved, thought: 'Is that something you would carry through the decades?' You can think like that, and then you have to let it absorb a bit and then you have to forget about it. You're not doing an impression."

She adds hastily: "Obviously I didn't look as beautiful as Emma when I was young," which is super-dumb and untrue, but never mind.

There's been a lot of chatter about whether Styles can act or not, but it's not relevant here, so drop it, OK? McKee's performance is arresting. The film delivers a lot of its emotional punch visually, going from this sumptuous, effervescent scene in the 50s to the awful drab claustrophobia of the 90s, like a pictorial record of society extinguishing the human spirit.

My Policeman is based on the novel by Bethan Roberts, who took the germ of the story from E M Forster's life – he ends up being nursed at the end by his lover's wife – and "it never hurts for all of us to be reminded that it wasn't that long ago," McKee says. "What does that mean, how does that give us a fresh perspective or a new energy to appreciate those who have helped make the change? I think until we have a real sense of equality, we still have masses of work to do."



Christopher Eccleston, McKee, Mark Strong and Daniel Craig in Our Friends in the North. Photograph: BBC Photolibrary

That's not why she chooses the roles she does – to be socially useful. She does describe how she makes her decision. First, is the writing any good? Second, what's her role? Third, who else is involved? Fourth, what's the medium? Subject matter only just inches into the top five. “Because sometimes you're asked to be involved in something that might put the cat among the pigeons and so you've got to know how you're going to deal with that and what it means to you.”

Does she hate putting the cat among the pigeons? “No, not if it's the right thing,” she says, “but I don't seek it.” She takes a moment to refine what that means. “I seek challenges, personally. In my private life. Not in my private life! I meant in my professional life.” She's laughing again, but I can't take credit as she did it to herself – and it's funny because the following Wednesday is her 33rd wedding anniversary to Kez Cary, which in showbiz years is, what, a platinum jubilee? You only have two things you can control as an actor, she says: whether you're doing the best work you can, and whether you say “yes” or “no”. Does she say no to a lot? “If I say ‘yes’, I'm gonna sound shitty, and if I say the other thing, I'm going to sound shitty! You've put me in a cul-de-sac.”

Born in Peterlee, County Durham, McKee was the daughter of a coalminer and a bookmaker. Neither parent had acting ambitions for her; indeed, no one in the family even realised what a big deal it was that she got into the National Youth Theatre, aged 15. By the time she got there, she'd already been in Quest of Eagles, a children's TV show, but still felt incredibly green and clueless. "I just quietly watched, learned, listened and absorbed. I remember listening to a conversation between some girls that were on the same course as me at the National Youth Theatre. I was not contributing. They were all really thrilled. One was saying: 'They made an announcement in the school assembly that I was coming here,' and another had been interviewed in the local paper. Another one was saying her mum was so pleased. I remember thinking: 'Oh, so this is like a big deal.' I didn't know that."

She got some A-levels, "didn't do the university thing" and describes a powerful early-career insecurity. "I am not well read. I've always been aware of that. There would be conversations during rehearsal and I'd be thinking: 'I don't know what these people are talking about.' Whereas now, I'll just say: 'I've got a complete hole there – tell me what should I read.' But back then, I didn't even know how to do that."

But there was something else; she'd known since forever that she wanted to act, but absolutely hated all its trappings. "It took me a long time before I would tell anybody I was an actor, even when I was earning money as an actor." What did she say she did instead? "I once told somebody I was a tree surgeon, which was a really stupid thing to do. After that I just used to say: 'I temp in offices.'"

I ask her if that strikes her as at all strange, because it does me. "No, it strikes me as necessary. I didn't know how to deal with it. Or I didn't want to deal with it. 'So what have you done? What have you been in?' That conversation over and over again. It felt like pressure. It felt to me like I was still in the water, looking around thinking, where do I swim to?" This pressure ramped up with Our Friends in the North, an absolutely stunning drama that launched the careers of every damn person in it: besides McKee, Christopher Eccleston, Daniel Craig and Mark Strong. "We'd all done enough work to feel comfortable on the shop floor, but nothing that had been given a massive amount of attention," she remembers.



With Tim McInnerny in Notting Hill. Photograph: Moviestore/Shutterstock

Our Friends was a critical hit and a lasting monument to a particular era of British drama – it was fierce, political, passionate and intensely human. I moan, briefly, that you rarely see that dignity accorded to working-class culture in modern British TV, and she asks: “What did you think of Sherwood?” And I go: “Oh, OK then, maybe you do.” She says, with an optimism underpinned by deep pessimism: “Obviously, we’re going through such a massive amount in terms of what’s happening nationally that we are going to have more narratives exploring poverty and inequality. We may need some time, but it will happen. You’ll get those stories and we will have that representation. It will be imperative.”

After Our Friends in the North, she sealed her status as an obvious lead, and went on to play Clive Owen’s girlfriend, Marion, in Croupier, Nadia in Michael Winterbottom’s fabulous Wonderland, Bella (the one who threw Hugh Grant over for Tim McInnerny) in Notting Hill. These all came thick and fast in the late 90s, and McKee has mixed feelings about the era. “There was a time, particular to young women, when you were expected to be a personality as well. And that was part of the machine, if you like. Nobody says: ‘This is what happens,’ it’s not like it’s spoken about. But there was a well trodden path, and when I said: ‘I don’t really want to do that,’ it jarred with a lot of the rhythms of the way things go. That element, I didn’t know

what to do with, when it came my way. I just go to work, and now I'm home, and this home is mine, go away.”

She speaks elliptically, and it's often hard to figure out whether she's talking about just ambient sexism, openly predatory behaviour, or the more amorphous sense of actors being cannon fodder in periodic volleys of greedy attention. The predatory behaviour passed her by: “I've been extremely fortunate to have that relationship in my life for such a long time, in this business,” she says of her marriage. But when #MeToo broke, “and the stories began to emerge, it certainly wasn't a surprise”. But times have really changed, she says. “I think that sometimes there's a way of speaking to one another which has to do with some kind of perceived banter, like a way of getting on. And I think that has been examined. Because what lies below it sometimes is not brilliant for young women.”



‘I'll always make a decision hoping I'll exercise different muscles’ ...
McKee. Stylist: Ella-Louise Gaskell at Stella Creative Artists. Photograph:
David Levene/The Guardian

She describes a Carol Morley film she has made but that has not yet been released, *Typist Artist Pirate King*, where they had an on-set therapist (“I have no idea if they were busy. I guess you shouldn't have any idea”). McKee says it's common practice, now, at the start of a shoot, “to watch a

video about what to do if you feel like you've witnessed behaviour, or you've been party to behaviour, which is not acceptable. Over the years, you learn to negotiate, but you learn the hard way. I don't think we should keep doing that to young people."

When you look at how McKee's career has unfolded, you get a sense not that she holds herself back for the highbrow (she was great in *Line of Duty* and *Catherine the Great*), nor that she's in low demand (there's generally been around a feature film a year since *Our Friends*, including *Hector*, *Atonement* and *In the Loop*), but rather that she was never looking to maximise her screen time, would rather be in an ensemble than at the centre. The general vibe is ask not what the part will do for you but what you will do for the part.

That's not it at all, she says. "Basically, what I seek is variety. If I feel like I've had a very strong experience – for example, we've just finished a Pinter play – what I usually seek then is the opposite. It's not like I have loads of choices, but I'll always make a decision hoping I'll exercise different muscles, think differently and have different creative requirements. It's almost sometimes a bit obtuse. I'm chasing it because it's different."

At this point, I laugh, because obtuse is so far from being the right word for such a subtle, searching actor. And she laughs, too, even though she doesn't know what I'm laughing at, just because, as I predicted, she's nice.

My Policeman is out in UK cinemas on 21 October and will be available on Prime Video from 4 November. *Our Friends in the North* is streaming now on BBC iPlayer.

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[Games](#)

Silent Hill 2 remake announced as Konami exhumes hit horror series

The legendary psychological horror franchise will return with three video games, a movie and an interactive streaming series



Back in town ... Silent Hill 2 gets a remake. Photograph: Konami

Keith Stuart

[@keefstuart](#)

Wed 19 Oct 2022 19.02 EDT Last modified on Thu 20 Oct 2022 03.38 EDT

After 10 years in exile, fans of gruelling psychological horror can finally pack their bags: Silent Hill is reopening to visitors. During a YouTube presentation on Wednesday evening, Konami announced a reboot of the acclaimed sequel Silent Hill 2 and two new adventures, Silent Hill Townfall and Silent Hill F. A new movie tie-in, Return to Silent Hill, and an interactive live stream series, Silent Hill Ascension, were also teased.

The remake is being developed by the Polish studio Bloober Team, known for horror titles such as Blair Witch and The Medium. Also involved are key members of the original Silent Hill development team, including the composer Akira Yamaoka and concept artist Masahiro Ito, best known for his creation of Silent Hill's most infamous monster, Pyramid Head.

During an interview video shown as part of the presentation, Bloober Team's creative director, Mateusz Lenart, explained that while the studio wanted to stay true to the atmosphere of the original game, certain elements were being modified for the modern era; this would include a move from a third-person camera to an "over-the-shoulder" viewpoint. "We want the game to make the same strong impression today as the original did 21 years ago," he explained. A [post on the PlayStation blog](#) added further details, including the game's development using the new Unreal Engine 5.

There was no information about a release date but the game will be launched on [PC](#) and PS5, the latter as a console exclusive for 12 months.

The first of the two new Silent Hill titles, subtitled Townfall, is being developed by No Code, the Glasgow-based studio behind the spooky adventures Stories Untold and Observation, in conjunction with the producer Annapurna Interactive. [A teaser trailer](#) featuring a retro portable TV device gave little away, and no details about a release date or platforms were revealed. The second new title, Silent Hill F, is set in Japan and is being written by Ryukishi07, author of the visual novel series When They Cry. Another [teaser](#) hinted at a combination of Japanese mythology and the Swedish folk horror film Midsommar. Again, there was no mention of a release date.

Two new spin-offs were also announced. A movie is on the way, Return to Silent Hill, from the director Christophe Gans, responsible for the original Silent Hill film. Several media companies, including the interactive livestream specialist Genvid and the JJ Abrams-founded Bad Robot, are also collaborating on an interactive streaming series named Silent Hill Ascension, set to begin next year, which will allow viewers to change the course of the narrative as it happens.

During the transmission, the producer Motoi Okamoto confirmed that Konami is working with other developers around the world on further Silent Hill projects, yet to be announced.



Nice bonnet ... Silent Hill F promises folk horror galore Photograph: Konami

The Silent Hill series has been dormant for a decade, with the last instalment, the poorly received Silent Hill: Downpour, arriving in 2012. At that time, a reboot of the series, titled Silent Hills, went into development at Kojima Productions, the studio set up by Hideo Kojima, creator of Metal Gear. That project was announced via a short playable demo titled PT, released in 2014 and widely considered the scariest video game experience ever made. A year later however, Silent Hills was cancelled amid [reports of nosediving morale and poor working environments](#) within Konami studios.

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For a number of years it looked as if Konami was more interested in its hugely profitable pachinko machine business than the somewhat unpredictable video games market. Two years ago, however, rumours began circulating that the publisher was to re-ignite three of its key video game franchises – Metal Gear, Castlevania and Silent Hill – with numerous projects and development studios mentioned, but without any official confirmations. At the time, gaming news sites speculated that there might be more than one new Silent Hill title in development, including a reboot or continuation of the main series.

It wasn't until Sunday night, however, that a tweet from the official Silent Hill account, beginning with the tantalising sentence “In your restless dreams, do you see that town?”, promised an official announcement video. Konami may have been absent from Silent Hill for a decade, but after the 45-minute stream, the extent of its commitment to that eerie little town became very clear indeed.

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‘I’m shedding tears of rage!’ How the Tories’ ‘war on nature’ outraged everyone from the RSPB to farmers



‘All the polling indicates that people hold nature very close’ ... protesters in London in 2018. Photograph: Penelope Barritt/Alamy

Liz Truss's ministers seem determined to rip up environmental protections. But they're facing resistance from an extraordinary alliance of wildlife charities and green-minded Conservatives



[Patrick Barkham](#)

[@patrick_barkham](#)

Thu 20 Oct 2022 05.00 EDT

Over several surreal days in late September, as the ill-fated Kwasi Kwarteng launched his short-lived mini-budget, the government announced a bewildering range of measures to reach its holy grail of economic growth. These appeared to be aimed squarely at trashing the environment. Ministers proposed to remove all environmental laws inherited from the EU; review (ie, weaken) post-Brexit farm subsidies that were designed to improve soils, alleviate flooding and boost biodiversity; create investment zones with minimal planning regulations; remove rules about river pollution; start fracking, and drill for more oil and gas in the North Sea.

We have since witnessed a series of U-turns and political obituaries but, so far, the government has not performed a handbrake turn on what outraged wildlife charities call an “attack on nature”. Planetary health appears bottom of the government’s overwhelming to-do list. When green-minded

Conservatives tell me they have been shedding “tears of rage” at Liz Truss’s proposed bonfire of environmental regulations, you know something’s afoot.

Nature charities are sometimes chastised for their timidity, but this time the fury was quick to rise. Within hours of the “Kamikwasi budget”, [the RSPB tweeted](#): “Make no mistake, we are angry. This government has today launched an attack on nature … We are entering uncharted territory.”

That uncharted territory includes an unusually unified response from nature charities. For the first time ever, the chief executives of the National Trust, the RSPB and the Wildlife Trusts, with a combined membership of 8 million people, appeared together on BBC News, calling on their membership – many of whom vote Conservative – to oppose the measures and protest to MPs. The Woodland Trust, Friends of the Earth, Greenpeace, Bat Conservation Trust and the Ramblers, among others, are on board, too. Since then, more than 100,000 furious RSPB members have emailed their elected representatives, and petitions defending nature have attracted more than 330,000 signatures.

“I was slightly amazed by how much it was taken up in that first weekend, but all the polling indicates that people hold nature very close and the pandemic has helped with that,” says Beccy Speight, the chief executive of the RSPB. “A lot of people became closer to the nature on their doorstep.”



Chris Packham on the walk for wildlife in 2018. Photograph: Dominic Lipinski/PA

Protesters have since taken to the streets, with constituency-focused #AttackOnNature actions planned and Chris Packham leading efforts to arrange a second “walk for wildlife” – [the first was in 2018](#) – in [London on 26 November](#). Packham is heartened by surging popular awareness of environmental travesties such as water companies discharging sewage into the rivers. “Sewage impacts on so many people – children paddling, wild swimming, surfing, angling, wildlife, farming … it touched so many people that it became a very significant issue very quickly,” he says. “There’s an opportunity here. I’m rather hoping that something symbolic like a walk for wildlife will galvanise people and bring about change. There will be a turning point where the environment is up there with the economy because people’s homes will be underwater, fires will be licking at the windows, and the price of food will have gone through the roof, and the tragic number of people crossing the Channel in rubber boats will be nothing compared with the mass migration of people moving around the planet as the water runs out.”

The current government is widely derided by nature lovers, and sorely lacking environmental credentials. One wildlife ranger has a grim memory of Truss’s visit to their national nature reserve seven years ago, when she

was environment secretary. “So tell me truthfully,” she reportedly asked the ranger, surveying marshland filled with rare plants and a sky full of wading birds, “is there more biodiversity in your nature reserve than on a potato field?” Recalling this experience, the ranger is genuinely baffled by her ignorance, exclaiming: “Where do they get these people?”

“These people” in the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra), alongside the new secretary of state, Ranil Jayawardena, now include minister Mark Spencer, a farmer, of whom former environment minister [Zac Goldsmith tweeted](#) in the summer: “Mark was the biggest blocker of measures to protect nature, biodiversity, animal welfare. He will be our very own little Bolsonaro.” Unsurprisingly, environmental expert Goldsmith was moved out of Defra when Spencer was appointed by Truss.

Yet partly what’s at stake is good environmental work undertaken by recent Conservative administrations. The Cameron government’s husky- and tree-hugging was widely mocked, but it wasn’t all simply imagemaking, according to Julian Glover, a former government adviser who led an influential but still-to-be-implemented review of national parks. The Cameron government got offshore wind going, but even bigger changes came under Theresa May when Michael Gove was made environment secretary in 2017. The arrival of the scourge of the teaching unions was greeted with dismay by many environmentalists – but Gove surprised them. When he was appointed, Glover gave him a list of books to read (including Our Place by the Guardian’s country diarist Mark Cocker). “He actually bought them all and read them,” says Glover.

Environmental reforms under Gove included bans on microplastics and bee-harming neonicotinoids, a target to phase out new [petrol and diesel vehicle sales by 2040](#) (now [brought forward to 2030](#)), and a range of measures to reduce cruelty to animals, including bans on the ivory trade and wild animals in circuses.



An Extinction Rebellion protest in London in October. Photograph: Mike Kemp/In Pictures/Getty Images

The most important Gove reform was to set targets for nature recovery (enshrined in law by Boris Johnson's government) and devise a new post-Brexit plan for farm subsidies. Rather than simply pay farmers for the land they farm (area-based payments the EU remains wedded to), Gove established a new principle of "public money for public goods". Taxpayers' money would be spent only if farmers improved soils, prevented floods and boosted wild populations of, for instance, invertebrates on which pollination and food security ultimately depends.

Gove moved on in 2019 but his reforms are still in play. The old area-based payments to farmers are being phased out, and are scheduled to be replaced by the "public money for public goods" payments of various environmental land management (ELM) schemes. One of Gove's many unexpectedly radical moves was to appoint the former Friends of the Earth campaigner Tony Juniper as chair of Natural England, the government's conservation watchdog. Last week, Juniper, still in post, wrote to Jayawardena to warn him that the government's legally binding commitment to halt biodiversity decline by 2030 was not possible without ELMs.

“I’m much more concerned about ELMs than anything else,” says Ben Goldsmith, an influential green financier, rewilding enthusiast and brother of Zac. “ELMs is the most important initiative for recovering nature in this country by far and the most vulnerable because they can pull it apart without any legislation.”

Goldsmith, who is willing to join a walk for wildlife, hopes that government wheels will “run into treacle of various kinds – be it legal challenges or the Treasury or NGOs or their own MPs”. Already, however, it seems that the treacle of the wildlife charities might be having an effect – Spencer has been on a charm offensive this week and Defra is [hinting that its review will give ELMs a reprieve](#). The government’s opponents are still sceptical and fear that ELMs will be stripped of its ambitious “landscape recovery” schemes.

What do farmers think? The National Farmers’ Union (NFU) favours a return to area-based payments, but many are more ambivalent. Ben Taylor, who farms the 1,200-hectare (3,000-acre) Ilford Estate near Lewes, east Sussex, is planning radical changes on the farm he manages, taking 800 hectares of marginal (unproductive) farmland out of production and into “nature recovery”, creating new meadows, woods and scrub in the South Downs national park, and raising water levels on the floodplain to help wading birds. Now it’s all in jeopardy because ELMs – and money for such landscape recovery – is under review. “I’m really excited about nature recovery. I just want to get on and do it and I could do it tomorrow. It’s not the doing it that’s difficult – it’s the paying for it.”

But Taylor says he understands the NFU’s concern for basic payments being phased out before adequate alternatives, such as ELMs, are in place. “Uncertainty is never helpful. There’s been a lot of muddying of the waters over the last month. I don’t know who is right and who is wrong but I don’t think anything has been said other than the government will look at farm subsidies. I’ll withhold judgment until they have looked at it.”



‘There’s no holistic planning’ ... Rebecca Mayhew at her farm in Norfolk.
Photograph: Phil Fisk/The Observer

Rebecca Mayhew, who runs [a smaller family farm](#) in Norfolk with a dairy, native rare-breed beef cattle, chickens, pigs and a vineyard, is more critical. “With the conflict in Ukraine, it feels like the moment after the second world war where the authorities are saying: ‘Grow more, grow more’ at any cost. That’s just wrong. We must not go down that path again. It’s all reductionist thinking. There’s no holistic planning. There’s some good people in Defra but they are not allowed to make decisions.” Mayhew’s farm is regenerative, which means she is restoring soil health and reducing chemical and fertiliser inputs. Where she was in a tiny minority three years ago, she estimates about 15% of farmers are now following a similar path – restoring nature regardless of whether they are helped by government.

Craig Bennett, the chief executive of the Wildlife Trusts, lists a decade of Conservative attacks on environmental regulations, which he says have erroneously been viewed as impeding economic growth. For Bennett, the most dangerous part of the current #AttackOnNature is [the repeal of retained EU laws](#), as championed by Jacob Rees-Mogg. About three-quarters of Britain’s environmental legislation originated in the EU. A new bill proposes that all EU-derived legislation – incorporated into British law after Brexit – will simply cease to exist by 2024.

“This is a cataclysmic torching of environmental protections,” says Bennett. “We’re getting bland reassurances from ministers – ‘Don’t worry, we’ll put in something better’ – but if we believe that, they would have to pass 570 pieces of environmental legislation in the next 13 months. It’s absurd and no one is buying it.”

Bennett, who met Rees-Mogg this week, urges fellow environmentalists not to settle for a technocratic discussion of policy detail. He wants to challenge the #AttackOnNature’s wider dogma, “the framing that regulation is bad for growth. There’s no actual evidence that that’s the case – it’s pure ideology. We should be having a more intelligent debate about growth in this country – some forms of economic activity are good for human and environmental wellbeing and improve the quality of life in the long term, such as investing in renewable energy, and some forms of economic activity are bad for progress.”

Every environmentalist I spoke to says the #AttackOnNature presents Labour with a great opportunity. “Labour is very good on decarbonisation and the green economy, but has historically been really quite rubbish on nature,” says Goldsmith. “You’d hope that Keir Starmer and his strategy team would spot an opportunity to use nature recovery as a way of winning over middle England, but they just don’t talk about it. I don’t hold out a huge amount of hope that we’d be in a much better place under Labour than we are now.”

“Labour needs to build what I’ve never seen it do in the past – an authentic heartfelt Labour narrative about how nature matters,” says Bennett. “The role of nature in physical and mental wellbeing, how important it is around our towns and cities, how the poorest people in society have the least access to nature.” Bennett doesn’t think it’s harder to make nature matter during a cost of living crisis. “At such a time, to celebrate and protect the things that you can get on your doorstep that are good for your physical and mental wellbeing and are free is surely more relevant than ever before.”

Constantly fighting rearguard actions imbues many environmentalists with pessimism – informed by science, of course, such as the latest stat that [global wildlife populations have declined by an average of 69% since 1970.](#) But there is hope. Packham sees it in the unified #AttackOnNature

campaign. Glover finds it in the Defra civil servants who once wanted to intensify farming and now, he says, completely grasp the climate and ecological emergency. Goldsmith detects it in the fact that businesses are willing to pay for nature restoration without government support. “The market has moved,” he says. “Businesses want to be net zero carbon and net zero nature [no nature loss]. And they are going to do quite a lot via carbon and biodiversity offsets, which will help farmers build new nature-friendly businesses.” And a growing minority of farmers are restoring soils and wildlife before any government demands it.

There’s just one final thing required: politicians have to catch up. “If you’re a politician in the current government, even if you weren’t at all interested in the environment, why have this fight with the public?” says Speight of the RSPB. “It just seems crazy to me.”

“The absolutely inexplicable, bewildering thing is that the public are massively in favour of a better environment,” says Glover. “When you ask people what makes them proud of Britain, the countryside is up there with the NHS and the Queen. And yet in politics it’s still seen as this embarrassing thing, not a grownup issue, and that’s so bizarre. The public are way ahead on this.”

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2022/oct/20/im-shedding-tears-of-rage-how-the-tories-war-on-nature-outraged-everyone-from-the-rspb-to-farmers>

[Google](#)

Google Pixel Watch review: a good first attempt

Small smartwatch gets much right but comes up short versus cheaper rivals and cannot be repaired



The Google Pixel Watch is a small, smooth and fairly refined smartwatch, but it stumbles at the final hurdles. Photograph: Samuel Gibbs/The Guardian



[Samuel Gibbs](#) *Consumer technology editor*

Thu 20 Oct 2022 02.00 EDT Last modified on Thu 20 Oct 2022 12.20 EDT

Google's first Pixel smartwatch is finally here after years of waiting, integrating the company's Fitbit health-tracking tech and hoping to take on Samsung and the dominant Apple Watch.

The Pixel Watch costs £339 (\$350/A\$549) and, while designed as a companion for the company's smartphones, it will work with most Android phones with access to the Google Play Store but not with Apple's iPhone. It runs Google's Wear OS software based on Android but is heavily integrated with Fitbit – the fitness tracker firm [Google bought in 2019](#) – potentially making it the best of both worlds.

Unusually for a smartwatch, the [Pixel](#) Watch only comes in one small size with a 41mm case. Its domed Gorilla Glass 5 screen merges smoothly into its stainless steel body, which is available in a choice of three colours. It is a simple and unfussy design.



One side of the watch has a button and a crown, and the other a mic and speaker for taking calls on your wrist or talking to Google Assistant.

Photograph: Samuel Gibbs/The Guardian

The 20mm bands detach with a small button each side but the slightly fiddly proprietary attachment mechanism means standard watch straps won't fit. Each Pixel Watch comes with a high-quality rubber band, with other types available from £59.

The watch certainly looks and feels well made, and is comfortable to wear. Despite being quite thick, its smooth finish slides under shirt cuffs without issue.

For those with smaller wrists, the compact size will be a boon, but it was a bit too small for me. The screen is bright and crisp and can be turned on all the time, which I think is an essential feature for a watch. But it is smaller than you might expect, with large bezels around the outside. The predominantly black interface hides well but text, images and information look pretty small on the 3cm display.



The 41mm case and 3cm screen makes the watch on the small side compared with rivals that offer more than one size. Photograph: Samuel Gibbs/The Guardian

The watch is responsive. Taps, swipes and crown turns are smoothly executed. Apps open swiftly, and Google Assistant loads and responds quickly to queries. It's not quite as snappy as an Apple Watch but it is miles faster than most rivals on the Android side, matching [Samsung's Galaxy Watch line.](#)

The battery only just lasts long enough on a day-to-day basis. With the screen always on, the health-monitoring features active and the “bedtime mode” with sleep tracking overnight, the watch lasted about 25 hours between charges.

But if you track any exercise during the day, the watch won't last the night, meaning you will have to charge it for at least 15 minutes before bed to track your sleep. A full charge takes just shy of 80 minutes from dead using the USB-C charging puck and your own power adaptor.



There are plenty of good watch faces included, most with customisations for colour, design and complications, with loads of third-party options available in the Play Store. Photograph: Samuel Gibbs/The Guardian

Specifications

- **Screen:** 3cm AMOLED (320ppi)
- **Case size:** 41mm
- **Case thickness:** 12.3mm
- **Band size:** 20mm proprietary
- **Weight:** 36g
- **Processor:** Samsung Exynos 9110 + M33 co-processor
- **RAM:** 2GB
- **Storage:** 32GB
- **Operating system:** Wear OS 3.5 (Android 11)

- **Water resistance:** 50 metres (5ATM)
- **Sensors:** barometer, gyro, HR, ECG, mic, speaker, NFC, GNSS, compass
- **Connectivity:** Bluetooth 5, wifi n, NFC, optional 4G/eSIM

Sustainability

Google does not provide an expected lifespan for the battery but it should last in excess of 500 full charge cycles with at least 80% of its original capacity. It cannot be replaced and the watch is currently unrepairable.

It contains 80% recycled stainless steel. The company publishes [environmental impact reports](#) for some of its products including the [Pixel Watch](#). Google will [recycle old devices](#) free of charge.

Wear OS 3.5 for plenty of apps



The latest version of Wear OS can run third-party apps such as Spotify and has built-in Google Assistant for voice queries. Photograph: Samuel Gibbs/The Guardian

The watch runs the latest version of Wear OS 3.5, with Google's customisations making it look a little different from Samsung's version of it. Google will support the watch until at least October 2025. It will run third-party apps downloaded from the Play Store including Strava and Spotify with offline music downloads.

Google Assistant is baked in for quick voice assistance, which works significantly faster than older-generation Wear OS watches and Fitbits. Press and hold the side button to bring it up or just say "Hey Google". Google Maps, Gmail, Calendar and Wallet apps are available, too, alongside Home for controlling smart lights and other bits.

It displays full notifications from your phone, including images in alerts and chats, with the ability to respond to them. Typing replies on the watch is hard as the keyboard is tiny but voice dictation works pretty well.

Fitbit



The watch can show four basic metrics during activity, which are small, but the screen is bright enough to see outdoors in direct sunlight. Photograph: Samuel Gibbs/The Guardian

Google's Fitbit takes care of health and fitness-tracking features, both on the watch and a companion app on the phone. The experience is very similar to what you get on Fitbit's Versa and [Sense](#) fitness trackers, providing solid general health tracking including steps, calories, sedentary alerts, all-day heart rate and ECGs, but no irregular heartbeat notifications, temperature sensor or fall detection yet.

Sleep tracking is good, with cycles, breathing rate and heart-rate variability all recorded.

Exercise tracking is a bit more of a mixed bag. The Fitbit app nails the basics with pretty fast GPS and heart-rate monitoring, which beat actual Fitbit devices for accuracy.

But while the watch tracks 41 different workouts with heart-rate zones and different goals, the data it captures and displays during the activity is fairly basic. For running, you have no cadence or route guidance. You can't set up interval workouts. Cycling lacks power and other bits. All workout controls are touch-screen based for pausing or setting laps, which makes doing so much harder than it needs to be.



The watch syncs with the Fitbit app on your phone, showing decent summaries of your workouts and combining them with your general health

data. Photograph: Samuel Gibbs/The Guardian

Fitbit also offers a “premium” subscription, which costs from £7.99 a month and unlocks some extras in the app. For sleep it will show you restlessness and sleeping heart rate, more mindfulness sessions, a breakdown of your stress through the day and a daily “readiness” score, which shows recovery from exercise. You get a free six-month trial with the watch.

The built-in exercise options will be fine for casual users but are certainly more limited than competitors including Apple and Samsung. They can be augmented with third-party Wear OS apps, such as [Strava](#) or [Komoot](#) for route guidance.

Price

The Google Pixel Watch costs [£339 \(\\$350/A\\$549\)](#) or £379 (\$400/\$649) with 4G (data contract required).

For comparison, the Samsung Galaxy Watch 5 costs [£269](#), the Fitbit Sense 2 costs [£270](#), the [Apple Watch Series 8](#) costs [£419](#) and the Garmin Venu 2 costs [£230](#).

Verdict

The Pixel Watch is a good first try for Google but it isn’t yet up to par with rival smartwatches, including Samsung’s Galaxy Watch line, which use the same software.

It is a small, well-made watch that is responsive and merges the best of Fitbit with Google’s Wear OS. You can run third-party apps and use all of Google’s various services, from Gmail and Calendar to contactless payments.

However, the battery life is a bit too short – only just enough for 24 hours without exercise. Fitbit isn’t as capable as rivals when it comes to workout tracking yet. It is relatively expensive and might be a bit small and plain for some, too.

But a bigger issue is that the watch is currently unrepairable, so if the battery wears out or you break the screen, you're out of luck. Google said it was looking at repair options but for now that loses it a star.

Pros: responsive, smooth design, 50m water resistance, Fitbit, Play Store, all Google apps including Maps, Pay and Assistant, good integration with Google ecosystem, good watch faces, works with most Android phones.

Cons: short battery life, Fitbit limited for workout tracking, not repairable, expensive, small size only, strap release a bit fiddly, not compatible with an iPhone.



The Pixel Watch hits 30% charge in about 15 minutes but unlike Samsung's watches that can charge from the back of a phone, it will only charge via the included USB-C magnetic puck that clips to the back. Photograph: Samuel Gibbs/The Guardian

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2022.10.20 - Opinion

- We think of Britain as a world-beating economy. We would be better off thinking about Taiwan
- I've finally found the perfect accessory for my work-from-home setup: a fellow human
- Involuntary celibacy is a genuine problem, but a 'right to sex' is not the answer
- I left my job in London to grow food. This deep connection with nature gives my life meaning

[**Opinion**](#)[**Economic policy**](#)

We think of Britain as a world-beating economy. We would be better off thinking about Taiwan

[Larry Elliott](#)



Instead of living with this delusion, leaders should examine emerging market economies and try to emulate their success



‘While Jeremy Hunt is right to point out the things Britain does well, he is really only looking at the asset side of the balance sheet.’ Photograph: Jessica Taylor/UK Parliament/AFP/Getty Images

Thu 20 Oct 2022 03.00 EDT Last modified on Thu 20 Oct 2022 06.50 EDT

Inflation is at a [40-year-high](#). Food bills are soaring. Pensioners are so fearful of rising energy costs that they are delaying turning on their central heating. There are “[eye-watering](#)” cuts in public spending and tax increases to come. But never mind. All will be fine now that the grownups are back in charge.

Jeremy Hunt was at his emollient best in his Commons debut this week. The government has learned the hard way that you dispense with orthodoxy at your peril. Abacus economics – [derided by Liz Truss](#) during her leadership bid – is vital if the UK is to take advantage of its fundamental strengths.

For now, the new chancellor admitted, it was impossible to avoid decisions of eye-watering difficulty, but in the long term the future looked bright. Hunt then launched into a familiar riff, listing all the things Britain had going for it, provided it swallowed its latest dose of austerity medicine: three of the world’s top 10 universities; a global financial sector; “incredible strength” in the creative industries, science, engineering, manufacturing and innovation.

To which there are several things to say. The first is that the record for doing things the orthodox way has been pretty dreadful in the 15 years since the global financial crisis. Real wages have barely grown, investment has been weak, the public finances have never been licked back into shape and Britain's trade deficit has hit new records. Truss was wrong about many things, but her basic critique was spot on: the UK's economic model isn't working.

And while Hunt is right to point out the things Britain does well, he is really only looking at the asset side of the balance sheet. The debit side makes much grimmer reading. Britain is dependent on foreign investors to finance its massive twin budget and trade deficits; the NHS is in a state of [permanent crisis](#); a lack of critical energy infrastructure means the lights may well go out this winter; faith in the police to investigate crimes such as burglary is at rock bottom; the transport system is ramshackle.

The economy relies on hot money flowing through the City of London to finance the trade deficit and to keep the housing market booming. It works for a wealthy elite, living in London and the south-east of England, but not for the population as a whole. Inequality is rife and there has been a rapid expansion of the informal labour market, where work is sporadic and badly paid. All of which are features of a struggling developing or emerging market economy, rather than one in the first rank of nations.

What's more, it's hard to see how the new age of austerity is going to make matters better. There will be less money for upgrading infrastructure and more cuts for already cash-starved police forces, courts and prisons. Treasury-enforced pay restraint in the public sector will accelerate the loss of staff to the private sector, while the highest tax take in more than 70 years will discourage private investment. It will be harder for people to get around the country but easier for them to slide into poverty. There is a good case for the state protecting its citizens from an external inflationary shock, but that support will now last for only six months. Raising taxes and cutting spending during a downturn will deepen and prolong the recession.

Truss's botched experiment represents a setback to new thinking of any kind, and that's a depressing prospect. The perpetuation of abacus economics may keep the financial markets quiet for a while, but what rule

by technocrats like Hunt really offers is a managed decline. The only sustainable way to get healthy public finances is to improve the performance of the economy.

This is not, as some fondly imagine, merely a question of reversing Brexit. Since the 2016 referendum the [UK's growth](#) has been nothing to write home about, but it has been faster than that of Italy and Germany, and only slightly lower than that of France.

One way forward would be to rethink the UK as an emerging market economy, with the aim of emulating the success of – say – a country like Taiwan, which makes 65% of [the world's semiconductors](#) and 90% of its advanced chips.

There are a number of stages to this process. Stage one involves owning up to the fact that the UK is not a world-beating economy, and hasn't been for some time. Stage two involves braining up: a sustained commitment to improving education and skills. Stage three involves building up developing sectors that will provide the goods and services to boost exports, reduce the trade deficit and make the economy less reliant on the financial sector.

Assuming they survive Hunt's axe, [Truss's investment zones](#) – areas that will benefit from tax incentives and planning deregulation – are one possible way of building up. This was the model that led to the development of Canary Wharf, home to a large chunk of the financial sector, on reclaimed land in London's Docklands.

An alternative would involve a national development plan designed to nurture the industries and the services of the future. The tiger economies of east Asia used the full range of measures available to them, including tax, procurement, public ownership, state aid, infant industry support and capital controls.

Governments here have been wary of activist economic strategies, in large part due to the belief that the UK's problems are minor and transitory. It is becoming increasingly clear that they aren't.

- Larry Elliott is the Guardian's economics editor
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OpinionWork & careers

I've finally found the perfect accessory for my work-from-home setup: a fellow human

[Nell Frizzell](#)



After a decade alone at my desk, I have someone to talk to, make tea for and annoy with my phone calls. Who'd have thought it would make such a difference?



No more procrastination ... working from home with an 'office buddy'.
(Picture posed by models.) Photograph: Abraham Gonzalez Fernandez/Getty Images

Thu 20 Oct 2022 02.00 EDT Last modified on Thu 20 Oct 2022 02.31 EDT

As I type this, a friend of mine is sitting about 80cm away, working on her laptop and eating the apple I picked from a tree beside the ring road during my morning run. We are both in unelasticated trousers. We are both sitting at screens. We are both trying to look busy.

Yes, I have a work buddy. After many, many years of talking to no other adult between the hours of 7am and 6pm (and no, Twitter does not count), I realised that I needed to stop spending so much time on my own. I asked another freelance friend if she would like to come and work in my shed – on a separate computer, doing a separate job, but close enough that, should I want to, I could reach over right now and push a raisin up her nose.

I can't speak for her (I mean, I could: I could turn 45 degrees to the left, ask her the question and just type her reply here), but so far I love the arrangement. First, it means we each have someone witnessing our faffing, procrastination and knuckle-examination, which makes all of the above slightly less easy to get away with guilt-free. Second, it means I am not

tempted to do the washing-up or change the bedsheets or all the other manifold tasks that sit 30 seconds away from my home computer. And finally, after a decade, three books and several million words produced at my kitchen table, I have someone to talk to. To bounce ideas off. To make tea for and annoy with my phone calls.

Have I just reinvented the office? No. But do I think that a working-from-home buddy system is excellent and probably deserves its own Bumble-style networking app? Sure. If you can sort the details. And don't push raisins up each other's noses.

Nell Frizzell is the author of [The Panic Years](#) and [Square One](#)

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OpinionSex

Involuntary celibacy is a genuine problem, but a ‘right to sex’ is not the answer

[Zoe Williams](#)



The defining argument of incels should be consigned to history, not used as a solution for this ever-increasing social problem



‘We gave Michel Houellebecq’s book Whatever the time of day because, who knew, perhaps it wasn’t about sex at all, perhaps it was all just a metaphor for libertarianism.’ Photograph: Guillaume Souvant/AFP/Getty Images

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In 1994, the French novelist Michel Houellebecq published *Whatever*, a novel about two involuntarily celibate men. It involves a lot of railing about the market conditions that deny these men the sex they deserve, particularly the ugly one, who in a more communitarian age would have just found a similarly ugly woman in his village. In the modern world he’s forced to compete against other men who aren’t ugly, so when he kills a woman (whoops, spoiler!), that is fine, actually.

The book was extremely fashionable: everyone had read it, some people called it *Peu Importe* to indicate they’d read it in the original French, which was funny, because its French title was actually *Extension du Domaine de la Lutte*. We gave it the time of day because, who knew, perhaps it wasn’t about sex at all, perhaps it was all just a metaphor for libertarianism, and the slain woman was actually *maman*.

But it was also original, running directly counter to the dominant narrative: this was the high watermark of [ladette-ism](#), and the fundamental question of western culture in its most general sense was, why should women be seen as the gatekeepers of sex? Why should “slut” be an insult, why should chastity – or at least selectiveness – be considered feminine virtues, why shouldn’t women pursue their own sexual destiny? These fictional [incels](#) posed the opposite question: what if women shouldn’t be allowed to gatekeep? What if men have a right to sex?

What I was not expecting was for this to come around 30 years later as a serious question. The Philadelphia activist and Democrat politician, Alexandra Hunt, this week called for just this. “We should be moving toward [a right to sex](#),” she said, highlighting a 2019 Washington Post graph showing that 28% of men and 18% of women aged 18-30 had reported no sex at all in the preceding year. In the UK, the National Survey of Sexual Attitudes and Lifestyles released a mini Covid study earlier this year, which showed similar, though less precipitous [drops in sexual activity](#) and not as much of a gap between men and women.

Hunt’s tricky framing of sex as a rights-based notion inevitably instigated a number of spinoff conversations, most of which were means – varyingly sophisticated – of sticking the blame on women. Was this the result of the #MeToo movement, in which women had problematised every aspect of the initiation of sex, while declining to do the heavy lifting of initiating themselves? Was it because women actually didn’t like sex, preferring nail bars and mocktails, and TikTok had given them the courage to finally say so? (I may have compacted two arguments there, but never mind.)

Then there were those who situated the problem, instead, with men: had they just lost the custom of socialisation, through some combination of Call of Duty and Deliveroo? It is quite difficult to go straight from solitude to sex without some kind of couch-to-5k training programme. Are the cultural demands of masculinity simply too unrealistic, too contradictory? When Instagram wants you to be respectful and seek equality, while [Jordan Peterson](#) wants you to be tough and forceful, and eat steak without a knife and fork, at what point does this all become just too much?

While a lot of the angles were silly, none of this is trivial: the notion of men having a right to sex sits at the heart of the incel movement, which is a full-blown [terrorist philosophy](#), with real people killing other real people, predominantly women but sometimes men who get in the way, in its name. Frequently, incels leave behind screeds of text detailing why “Staceys” have brought them to this pass by withholding sexually. Such ideas are then taken up by mainstream conservatism which concludes, sadly, that while it would be wrong to force a woman into sex, if one of the ladies had taken [Elliot Rodger](#) for the team in 2014, six innocent people would still be alive.

There is no point approaching these arguments at a granular level, like, “What if someone had shagged Elliot Rodger and it hadn’t gone very well? Would that have resulted in less gratuitous murder, or more?” The case isn’t designed as a practical fix to a security issue, but rather as a waypoint on a return to a primitive understanding of sex and gender, where equality has been a hoax. Men must hunt, gather and dominate, women must, I don’t know, tidy up and submit? Violent misogyny is plainly dangerous in itself, but it also overlaps with white supremacist ideology which views the empowerment of white women as leading to the unwanted celibacy of white men, and thus contributing to the [coming replacement](#) of the race.

The sad thing is, we were actually getting somewhere in the 1990s, in tearing down the idea of any essential difference between men and women’s sex drive or agency. We were inching towards a collective understanding that tropes of masculinity and femininity didn’t map neatly on to any of us, that desire and its intensity, preference and its idiosyncrasy were decided at the level not of the chromosome but of the self, and we therefore didn’t have to think of sex as something one group owed to or withheld from another. It is only from a non-adversarial standpoint that you could ever have a fruitful conversation about celibacy, involuntary or otherwise. If you pose men and women as enemies, ultimately everyone (heterosexual) ends up celibate.

- 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 response of up to 300 words by email to be considered for publication in our [letters](#) section, please [click here](#).*
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Why I quit Farming

I left my job in London to grow food. This deep connection with nature gives my life meaning

[Claire Ratinon](#)

Cultivating organic produce may be backbreaking, but it's the most important thing I've ever done



'I tried to take on any job – each day a different one – that meant I could spend my days outside, my hands in the soil.' Claire Ratinon at Kensons Farm near Salisbury in 2018. Photograph: Joel Redman/The Guardian

Thu 20 Oct 2022 05.00 EDT Last modified on Thu 20 Oct 2022 07.44 EDT

In July 2016, I was sitting on the rooftop of a building in central London, listening to the gentle rumble of a nearby beehive, when I realised that my life had changed entirely. I didn't intend to quit – quitting crept up on me.

After eight years of working in the media, I was on a path to becoming an organic food grower, with a temporary side hustle of city beekeeping.

Not long before that point, I was just like the people in the office building below me. My work days were spent behind a desk or lugging around camera equipment, but now I am [devoted to a life](#) of nurturing the soil and growing the plants that end up on our plates.

I'm actually pretty comfortable with being a quitter. I used to work in television production, and with its short, temporary contracts I'd grown accustomed to making big changes every few months. In fact, it was a desire to evade a contract extension that put me on a plane to New York in 2010 without a return date.

I was growing tired of my life in London and I wanted to explore somewhere new, and it was in New York that a seed was (literally and figuratively) sown for my unexpected change of profession. I encountered the alchemy of food growing for the first time at [Brooklyn Grange](#) – a rooftop farm that sits above New York's busy streets and overlooks Manhattan. Dusky leaves of tuscan kale, peppers and tomatoes in unexpected shapes and colours, striped aubergines wearing spiked sepal hats – chaos of abundance in the most unlikely of places. I was captivated.

From that day, all I could think about was getting through each week of working in documentary production so that, come the weekend, I could join the other farm workers at Brooklyn Grange while they harvested, planted out and raked the earth to a fine tilth, ready for the next sowing of seeds. After two seasons of volunteering there, I was determined to make growing food a bigger part of my life. So, as the city I'd come to love was celebrating Halloween, I boarded a plane headed for London.

By the time I'd moved back to Hackney, I had a job working in the evenings – and occasionally nights – which left my days free to seek out the [unlikely spaces](#) where edible plants could be found growing in the city. After a year, I quit that role and tried to take on any job – each day a different one – that meant I could spend my days outside, my hands in the soil. I stepped into all kinds of roles and every one taught me something precious.

Working as a school gardener showed me how little room there is in the school day and national curriculum for children to learn about how food arrives on their plate; training as a beekeeper taught me that growing nectar-rich flowers is a far [better way of supporting](#) pollinators than keeping hives; and growing organic salad leaves to supply a veg box that filled the plates of people in Hackney made me realise there is nothing quite so ordinary and yet somehow remarkable than the act of feeding people.

Leaving London in 2019 to move to a more rural location changed the shape of my life. Now, in a garden of my own, I grow vegetables and fruit of my own choosing, and I write and talk about the importance of doing so while encouraging others to give it a try. I also write and talk about the issues around food growing that have captured my attention along the way – such as the inherently political nature of working the land and issues around [land justice](#), the dynamics of race and belonging especially in rural spaces, and how the legacies of colonialism manifest themselves throughout agriculture and horticulture.

I'm probably too romantic in the way I speak about working the land. The fact that it is a difficult and arduous way to make a living is worth stating – if only not to seem delusional. It is work that is backbreaking, exhausting and painfully underpaid. I have sacrificed my bodily wellbeing at its altar many times, yet it remains the most important thing I've ever done. This essential work has given my life more meaning than I have ever known and more purpose than I ever found pursuing a career in the media.

Learning how to grow the plants that feed us has enabled me to cultivate a sense of deep connection with the natural world that had, before then, been entirely absent. It is a humble, skilled and determined pursuit, and I happen to believe it was meant for me. I'm certain I would always have found my way back to the soil, one way or another.

- Claire Ratinon is an organic food grower and writer

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- [Donald Trump Ex-president testifies in E Jean Carroll lawsuit accusing him of rape](#)
- [Zimbabwe Country becomes first African nation to approve HIV prevention drug](#)
- [Brazil YouTube and Facebook letting election disinformation spread, NGO says](#)

Donald Trump

Trump signed statement alleging voter fraud knowing it was false, judge says

Document was part of lawsuit challenging results of 2020 election in Georgia



A video deposition showing John Eastman is played during a January 6 committee hearing this month. Photograph: Rex/Shutterstock

Maya Yang

Wed 19 Oct 2022 20.00 EDT Last modified on Fri 21 Oct 2022 13.06 EDT

Donald Trump signed a legal statement alleging voter fraud in the 2020 election despite being told the numbers underpinning the case were false, a federal judge said on Wednesday.

The disclosure was made by the US district judge David Carter, who ordered John Eastman, a former Trump lawyer, to provide more emails to the

congressional committee investigating the January 6 attack on the US Capitol.

Eastman was one of Trump's attorneys when the former president and his allies challenged his 2020 election loss to Joe Biden.

The legal document was part of a lawsuit by Trump's team challenging the results in Georgia, a state Trump narrowly lost to Biden, in which they claimed a Georgia county had improperly counted more than 10,000 votes of dead people, felons and unregistered voters.

In an 18-page [opinion](#), Carter said that the former president had “signed a verification swearing under oath” that the inaccurate fraud numbers were “true and correct” or “believed to be true and correct” to the best of his knowledge.

“The emails show that President Trump knew that the specific numbers of voter fraud were wrong but continued to tout those numbers, both in court and to the public,” the judge wrote, adding: “The Court finds that these emails are sufficiently related to and in furtherance of a conspiracy to defraud the United States.”

Carter previously ruled that Eastman and Trump had probably committed a felony by trying to pressure his then vice-president, Mike Pence, to obstruct Congress.

The ruling was made in a lawsuit filed by Eastman to block disclosure of the emails to the January 6 select committee, following a congressional subpoena.

Carter previously ordered Eastman to provide more than 200 emails to the committee, after the lawyer resisted the subpoena and claimed that the communications were privileged.

The judge said on Wednesday that the vast majority of emails still being sought by congressional investigators should not be handed over, as legal protections given to attorneys and their clients apply to the records.

He said eight emails that would normally be shielded under those protections must be given to the committee, after he found that the communications were in furtherance of a crime – one of the few times those legal safeguards can be lifted.

Carter found that four emails show that Eastman and other lawyers suggested that the “primary goal” of filing lawsuits was to delay Congress’s certification of the 2020 election results.

The judge said four other emails “demonstrate an effort by President Trump and his attorneys to press false claims in federal court for the purpose of delaying the January 6 vote”.

At one point, Eastman wrote that although the former president had signed documents related to a lawsuit in Georgia on 1 December, “he has since been made aware that some of the allegations (and evidence proffered by the experts) has been inaccurate. For him to sign a new verification with that knowledge (and incorporation by reference) would not be accurate.”

Carter wrote: “President Trump and his attorneys ultimately filed the complaint with the same inaccurate numbers without rectifying, clarifying, or otherwise changing them.”

Trump and his allies filed more than 60 lawsuits challenging the 2020 election, with some complaints alleging voter fraud without evidence to support those claims. Those cases were overwhelmingly rejected by judges, some of which Trump appointed to the federal courts.

The January 6 select committee last week voted to subpoena Trump in its investigation. It is expected to issue a report in the coming weeks on its findings.

Donald Trump

Trump deposed in E Jean Carroll lawsuit accusing him of rape

The deposition allowed the writer's lawyers to interrogate the ex-president, though details weren't immediately disclosed



A June 2019 photo showing E Jean Carroll in New York. Photograph: Craig Ruttle/AP

[Maya Yang](#) and agencies

Wed 19 Oct 2022 18.50 EDT Last modified on Wed 19 Oct 2022 19.01 EDT

Donald Trump answered questions under oath Wednesday in a lawsuit filed by E Jean Carroll, a magazine columnist who says the Republican former president raped her in the mid-1990s in a department store dressing room.

The deposition gave Carroll's lawyers a chance to interrogate Trump about the assault allegations as well as statements he made in 2019 when she told her story publicly for the first time.

Details on how the deposition went weren't immediately disclosed.

"We're pleased that on behalf of our client, E Jean Carroll, we were able to take Donald Trump's deposition today. We are not able to comment further," said a spokesperson for the law firm representing her, Kaplan Hecker & Fink.

Trump has said Carroll's rape allegation is "a hoax and a lie". Last week, the former president lashed out angrily, calling the legal system a "broken disgrace" after he was ordered to answer questions under oath.

"Now all I have to do is go through years more of legal nonsense in order to clear my name of her and her lawyer's phony attacks on me. This can only happen to 'Trump!'" he said.

Trump's legal team worked for years to delay his deposition in the lawsuit, which was filed when he was still president. A federal judge last week rejected Trump's request for another delay, saying he couldn't "run the clock out on plaintiff's attempt to gain a remedy for what allegedly was a serious wrong".

Carroll was to have been questioned by Trump's lawyers last Friday. Neither her attorneys nor Trump's have responded to questions about how that deposition went.

The lawyers haven't disclosed whether the deposition was done in person or remotely, over video. Trump was in Florida on Wednesday. The lawsuit is being handled in a court in New York City.

Anything Trump said during his deposition could potentially be used as evidence in an upcoming civil trial. He hasn't faced any criminal charges related to Carroll's allegations and any prosecution is unlikely. The deadline for criminal charges over sexual assaults that occurred in the 1990s has long expired.

Similar legal deadlines also apply to civil lawsuits over sexual assault. As a result, Carroll chose to sue Trump for defamation over comments he made in

2019 when he denied any wrongdoing. She maintains his denials and attacks on her credibility and character damaged her reputation.

However, New York lawmakers recently gave survivors of sexual violence a one-year window to sue their attackers over old assaults. Carroll's lawyer has told the court she intends to file such a suit against Trump after that window opens in late November.

According to Carroll's account, she bumped into Trump as the two were shopping at the Bergdorf Goodman store across Fifth Avenue from Trump Tower. At the time, Carroll was on television as the host of an advice program, "Ask E Jean."

She said the two engaged in friendly banter as she tried to help him pick out a gift. But when they were briefly alone in a dressing room, she said he pulled down her tights and raped her.

In a recent statement, Trump called that story "a complete con job".

"I don't know this woman, have no idea who she is, other than it seems she got a picture of me many years ago, with her husband, shaking my hand on a reception line at a celebrity charity event," Trump said.

At one point, the former president also said, "She's not my type."

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Fair AccessGlobal development

Zimbabwe becomes first African nation to approve HIV prevention drug

World Health Organization welcomes country's 'crucial step' in backing use of long-acting injectable cabotegravir (CAB-LA)



Zimbabwe has already reached a target called 90-90-90 – 90% of people living with HIV knowing their status, 90% getting antiretroviral treatment and 90% having the virus suppressed. Photograph: Jekesai Njikizana/AFP/Getty Images

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[Nyasha Chingono](#) in Harare

Thu 20 Oct 2022 02.00 EDT Last modified on Thu 20 Oct 2022 12.12 EDT

Zimbabwe has become the first country in Africa and the third in the world to approve an HIV prevention drug recently recommended by the World Health Organization (WHO).

Regulators in Australia and the US have already given their backing to use the long-acting injectable cabotegravir (CAB-LA), and the WHO welcomed the move by Zimbabwe.

The country's fight against HIV has seen Aids-related [deaths](#) fall from an estimated 130,000 in 2002 to 20,000 in 2021.

Last year it launched a strategic plan to end Aids by 2030 and has [already reached a target known as 90-90-90](#) – 90% of people living with HIV knowing their status; 90% getting antiretroviral treatment; and 90% having the virus suppressed.

Zimbabwe's healthcare system is facing extreme difficulties amid the country's economic crisis and no one at the Ministry of Health was available to comment on the new medicine.

The WHO said in a statement that regulatory approval was a “crucial step”, adding that it would support Zimbabwe “to design and develop programmes so that CAB-LA can be implemented, safely and effectively, for greatest impact”.

The drug has renewed hopes of further reducing deaths in southern Africa and follows the WHO’s [recommendation](#) in July that CAB-LA is highly effective at reducing transmission among people at most risk of contracting HIV.

Nyasha Sithole, of the Development Agenda for Girls and Women in [Africa](#) (DAWA) network, said: “Accelerating HIV prevention for girls and young women requires an expansion on choices available. I am excited and proud to know that my own country has approved the use of CAB-LA. This will contribute to our basket of HIV prevention tools that work for us as girls and women in Zimbabwe.”

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Brazil

YouTube and Facebook letting Brazil election disinformation spread, NGO says

Global Witness produced – and withdrew – purposely misleading ads that were all approved by YouTube, and half by Facebook



A man wrapped in a Brazilian flag prepares to cast his vote in São Paulo on 2 October. Photograph: Miguel Schincariol/AFP/Getty Images

[Andrew Downie](#) in São Paulo

Thu 20 Oct 2022 05.30 EDT Last modified on Sat 22 Oct 2022 15.13 EDT

YouTube and Facebook are allowing disinformation to be spread about [Brazil's election campaign](#), [adding to the bitterness](#) in an already polarized and violent election, according to a new report by the human rights organization Global Witness.

The NGO produced a series of purposely misleading ads during an election season that has been dominated by the bitter race between far-right

incumbent [Jair Bolsonaro](#) and his leftist challenger, former president [Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva](#).

Some of the mock ads urged people not to vote; others, [like Bolsonaro himself](#), questioned the credibility of the election; and a few gave a false date for the ballots.

YouTube approved all of them to run and [Facebook](#) approved half, Global Witness said, although it stressed it withdrew the ads before they were published to avoid spreading confusion.

“It’s frankly shocking that these massive firms with the technological prowess they clearly have, are unable to weed out such blatant disinformation being pushed onto their users,” said Jon Lloyd, Global Witness’s senior adviser.

“If it wasn’t already obvious it should now be undeniable to even the biggest sceptic – social media firms are fundamentally failing in their responsibility to stop democratic processes being undermined by false, misleading and purposeful deceit.”

The group said Facebook approved all of its 11 ads in late July and early August, two months before ballots for president, Congress and the governors and legislatures of 27 states.

Half of the ads were approved in a second test a month before the 2 October ballots and the same amount were approved after [Lula won the first-round election with 48.4% to Bolsonaro’s 43.2%](#). Some of the ads that passed Facebook’s tests had been rejected in earlier tests, Global Witness said.

That last wave, carried out between 11 and 13 October, was expanded to include YouTube “and every single ad tested was approved by the Google-owned platform”, including some giving false information claiming the run-off ballot was being put back a day from 30 to 31 October.

A Meta spokesperson said it invests “significant resources” to protect elections and rejected 135,000 Brazil-related ad submissions between 16 August and 30 September.

“These reports were based on a very small sample of ads,” it said of the Global Witness submissions, “and are not representative given the number of political ads we review daily across the world.”

YouTube said it “reviewed the ads in question and removed those that violated our policies”, although the Global Witness report showed all the ads submitted were approved by the Google owned site.

This year’s election is one of the most bitter in Brazilian history, pitting the far-right incumbent against his nemesis who governed for two terms between 2003 and 2010.

It has, like much of Bolsonaro’s four-year term, been pockmarked with nastiness and lies, and both sides are accused of promoting fake news.

The far-right has been particularly guilty, and experts with Netlab, a Rio centre for internet and social studies, said misinformation campaigns are more complex than ever this year, with multiple actors and bots blasting out coordinated messages of lies across different platforms at the same time.

“There is an ecosystem of fake news that is shared in seconds,” said Netlab’s director Marie Santini. “When you get the same message from several different sources at the same time you feel that it’s legitimate.”

This week Brazil’s electoral court told YouTube, Twitter and Google to take down dozens of sites or posts supporting Bolsonaro and said the far-right’s misinformation campaign was “harmful to Lula” and carried “significant repercussions and persistent effects”.

Experts said Brazil was not alone in facing such online challenges to democracy. Across the world social media empires have let bad actors influence ballots through bots, fake news farms and lax oversight and it is a problem that is worse outside the English-speaking world.

“You have to invest not just in AI technology able to understand Brazilian Portuguese but also in qualified Brazilian moderators to filter disinformation,” Santini said. “And they don’t want to do that because it is expensive.”

“But it’s also neglect. They don’t think it matters because it is Brazil. Facebook and Google’s shareholders are in the US, not here.”

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[China](#)

Xi Jinping tightens grip on power as China's Communist party elevates his status

Party amends constitution to enshrine Xi at its core and his political thought as its underpinning ideology

China: Xi Jinping passes constitution amendment as Hu Jintao escorted out – video

[Helen Davidson](#) in Taipei, [Verna Yu](#) and agencies

Sat 22 Oct 2022 01.17 EDT Last modified on Sat 22 Oct 2022 10.07 EDT

China's president, [Xi Jinping](#), has strengthened his power as leader and elevated his status within Communist party (CCP) history, with major political resolutions announced on the final day of a key political meeting.

On Saturday, the CCP congress approved amendments to its constitution, including the “Two Establishes” and “Two Safeguards”, aimed at enshrining Xi as at the core of the party and his political thought as its underpinning ideology.

A list of reappointed delegates also confirmed the premier, Li Keqiang, would be retiring from politics, along with several other senior party figures. Analysts said their exclusion was a strong sign that the next politburo standing committee (PSC), to be unveiled on Sunday, would be dominated by Xi's allies and his power would be further consolidated.

Xi, 69, began his closing speech around midday, as party officials announced the confirmation of the amendments, which all but confirmed that Xi would remain in power for another term.

He is widely expected to be reaffirmed this weekend as the party's general secretary, paving the way for him to gain a norm-breaking third term as Chinese president.

"Dare to struggle, dare to win, bury your heads and work hard. Be determined to keep forging ahead," he told those gathered.

Thousands of CCP delegates, ostensibly representing the tens of millions of party members, are meeting in Beijing. The purpose is largely to rubber-stamp reshuffles of senior party positions and constitutional changes likely to have been decided long before the meeting began.

The meeting is highly choreographed and mostly behind closed doors. However, shortly before Xi's speech began, [former leader Hu Jintao was escorted out of the room](#) without explanation.

Former Chinese president Hu Jintao unexpectedly led out of party congress – video

Since coming to power in 2012, [Xi has further consolidated his individual power](#), including spearheading the elimination of term limits in 2018. Before those changes, Xi would have been stepping down as leader this week, but instead has the potential to be leader for life.

Analysts are watching this weekend's events keenly, to see if Xi is also formally given the title of People's Leader, an honorific not officially used since Mao Zedong. There has also been speculation that the role of party chairman could be reinstated.

Prof Steve Tsang, the director of the Soas [China](#) Institute, said acquiring the title of People's Leader would put Xi "in a different league".

"He is the supreme leader of China by virtue of being the leader of the CCP, whether that office is styled general secretary or chairman," said Tsang.

"But ... the People's Leader cannot have a term limit and removing one from such a position is 'anti-people'." Giving Xi the title would signal that

Xi was “untouchable”, Tsang added, “and in effect to be honoured and treated as a demigod”.

“It [would] elevate him to least a position comparable to Mao, as the Great Helmsman.”

On Saturday, delegates also voted to endorse Xi’s “work report” [delivered at the congress's opening last Sunday](#), which passed assessment on the previous term and outlined [the direction of the new one](#).

Could Xi follow Putin's example and try to annex Taiwan? – video explainer

At its conclusion the congress also confirmed the re-election of about 200 elite central committee members, [who have voting rights within the party](#). The list of names released on Saturday afternoon [included just 11 women](#). It also did not include several party veterans, including four current members of the PSC.

Those missing included Li and Wang Yang, who heads the Chinese People’s Political Consultative Conference. Li was expected to retire from the premiership in March but whether he would fully retire from the CCP leadership framework was the subject of intense speculation.

Wang, a pro-reform politician with a relatively liberal image and rich regional experience, was previously seen by analysts as a likely candidate for the next premiership.

Analysts have said the departure of both men would be a signal that the new PSC is likely to be stacked with Xi loyalists. Both were eligible to continue serving under the party’s unofficial age limits.

“A central committee, politburo and standing committee dominated by Xi would mean a significant loss of checks and balances. Xi’s policy of putting ideology and national security over economic development will continue for the coming five or even 10 years as he is eager to rule until the 22nd party congress in 2032 when he will be 79,” said Willy Lam, a senior fellow at Jamestown Foundation, a Washington-based thinktank.

Two others who were missing from the list – the National People's Congress chair, Li Zhanshu, and the vice-premier, Han Zheng – had been expected to step down.

The new central committee is responsible for electing the 25-member politburo, of which the seven most powerful are appointed to the PSC. The lineup of the PSC, including the No 1-ranked general secretary, will be revealed on Sunday.

The revelation, usually by the PSC members filing out on stage in order of rank, will be the official confirmation of Xi's retention of the general secretary position.

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[China](#)

Former Chinese president Hu Jintao unexpectedly led out of party congress

A frail-looking Hu seemed reluctant to leave the front row in Beijing's Great Hall, with no explanation given for his departure

- [Xi tightens grip on power as Communist party elevates his status](#)

Former Chinese president Hu Jintao unexpectedly led out of party congress – video

Emma Graham-Harrison and Helen Davidson in Taipei

Sat 22 Oct 2022 08.19 EDTFirst published on Sat 22 Oct 2022 01.49 EDT

China's former leader [Hu Jintao](#) was escorted from the closing session of a key Communist party meeting in Beijing, a rare moment of unscripted drama in what is usually carefully choreographed political theatre.

Hu, who is 79, and stepped down as head of the party 10 years ago, seemed confused and reluctant to leave his seat on stage at the Great Hall of the People.

At one point he tried to pick up the notes of [Xi Jinping](#), his successor and China's current leader, which lay between them on the table. Xi reached out with his hand to hold the papers down.

Hu was then escorted from the stage, sparking speculation over whether the departure had been due to health problems, or was power politics played out for international media cameras.

Whatever the reason, his departure carried symbolic weight. The other living former leader of [China](#), Jiang Zemin, is now 96 and had not appeared at the

20th congress of the Chinese Communist party (CCP).

Xi has used the week-long gathering to cement his position in the CCP, bolster his personality cult and eliminate rivals. Once Hu had been escorted out, Xi was pre-eminent on the stage, as he now is in Chinese politics.

The incident happened after journalists had been let in to film the closing session of the party congress, and analysts scanned the videos for clues about what was happening.

China: Xi Jinping passes constitution amendment as Hu Jintao escorted out – video

It shows a young official or aide approaching a frail-looking Hu, leaning over to talk to him, reaching under his arms and trying to pull him to his feet as Hu resists.

Eventually, he is helped to his feet and starts walking away, turns to talk to Xi who replies briefly. He pats the outgoing premier, [Li Keqiang](#), an ally, on the shoulder then walks off escorted by two men.

Wen-ti Sung, a senior lecturer at the Australian National University, said the behaviour of other leaders sat in the front row made the departure seem “innocuous”.

“From the [close-up video], it seems that Li Zhanshu, who sat next to Hu Jintao, tried to help Hu to get up, and even briefly stood up to see Hu leave, which is a common gesture of respect. So Li didn’t seem to find Hu politically toxic to be paying respect to,” he said.

“So I think it’s too early to conclude that Hu’s sudden exit represents a political purge. Hu’s sudden exit from the party congress is just as likely to be due to unforeseen personal reasons.”

The CCP has so far provided no explanation for Hu’s strange departure, and it is possible that it will be weeks, months or far longer before the cause is known.

Xi himself vanished from public view for two weeks shortly before becoming China's top leader 10 years ago, an absence that has never been explained.

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Russia-Ukraine war live: Russia launches 36 rockets in ‘massive attack’; power outages in central and western Ukraine after shelling – as it happened

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Solar power

Landowners call for scrapping of plans to ban solar energy from England's farmland

Farmers say having solar sites allows them to subsidise food production during less successful years



Landowners say banning the use of farmland for energy infrastructure would hurt food security by severing a vital income stream. Photograph: Julio Cortez/AP

[Helena Horton](#) Environment reporter

Sat 22 Oct 2022 03.00 EDT

Farmers have urged whoever succeeds Liz Truss as UK prime minister to abandon plans to ban solar energy from most of England's farmland, arguing that it would hurt food security by cutting off a vital income stream.

Truss, who resigned on Thursday, and her environment secretary, Ranil Jayawardena, hoped to ban solar from about 41% of the land area of England, or about 58% of agricultural land, the [Guardian revealed](#) last week.

They planned to do this by [reclassifying less productive farmland](#) as “best and most valuable”, making it more difficult to use for energy infrastructure.

Members of the Country Land and Business Association (CLA), which represents 33,000 landowners, told the Guardian having solar on their less productive land allowed them to subsidise food production during less successful years, as well as providing cheap power for their estates and homes in their local area.

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Mark Tufnell, the president of the CLA, grows oats, wheat and barley on his Cotswolds estate. He said: “We have members who say these are temporary sites if needs be, they are then able to concentrate on growing more food on their other land.

“The solar would be on their less good land, and ... if that is what they so choose to do, why shouldn’t they be allowed to do it?”

He added that the land was not lost to agriculture as the sties were easy to remove, and the area could be grazed with sheep. “There is no reason as to why the area underneath it couldn’t be grazed with sheep, but it could also provide very good habitat for farmland birds and increase biodiversity so help the environment.

“I don’t see that saying with the stroke of a pen that we are going to exclude this land, I don’t see that it helps, and I think that it is unlikely to help food security in any case.”

The real problem with the government’s solar strategy, he said, was how difficult it was to put solar on rooftops.

Tufnell said: “There are so many things they could do that they aren’t doing, like incentivising solar rollout on roofs, changing the planning system to allow it. I already have 49kW, and I want to have another 100kW on my buildings, but the hardest thing to do is getting a connection to the grid at a price that is affordable. They are very slow, the price is incredibly high, and in my case I could have to put in a mini substation, which is very expensive.

“What I am trying to do is put solar panels on a building which I am converting into offices and workshops, if there is any excess I would like to use it for the houses in the village. But it is becoming so difficult and expensive that it is very off-putting, and if I wasn’t so persistent I would think frankly I can’t be bothered.”

Harry Teacher, a fruit and arable farmer in Kent, has a large solar park on his land, which helps bring in income when his farm has a bad year.

He said: “We put in a park in 2014, ground-mounted panels on frames on about 61 acres of land. We are a fruit and arable farm but we are quite highly diversified, and any farmer has been encouraged to find sources of income other than arable, and solar panels were part of that diversification. For us it is a source of constant income. It gives our business a greater resilience.”

Teacher does not understand all the fuss, adding: “As a proposition they are quite easily hidden by a large hedge. They don’t make noise, there are no moving parts. Carbon is a serious thing we all have to consider now, solar panels have to be part of that. If the argument is that the land is lost for food – you may be aware that the planning applications for solar parks are done on a temporary basis – ours is a 25-year period. If, for whatever reason, we run out of food, which is extraordinarily unlikely, we can pull it all up and restore it to agriculture.

“We make unequivocally more from our solar panels than from farming. There is a gut reaction people have to any sort of greenfield development and it is more of a reaction to people’s response to seeing solar parks – I don’t think it’s a real fear for food production.”

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Chelsea Manning: ‘I struggle with the so-called free world compared with life in prison’

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The dog that walks like a human – and other precocious pets: ‘We didn’t teach him, it was his idea’



Kentee Pasek and Dexter the dog near their home in Ouray, Colorado.
Photograph: David Clifford/The Guardian

Can you teach an old dog new tricks? Animal lovers describe what it's like to care for an extremely talented animal

Interviews by Sophie Haydock

Sat 22 Oct 2022 05.00 EDT

'I watched in amazement as he hopped up the stairs': Dexter, the dog that walks on two legs

We bought Dexter as a puppy. He was an adorable bundle of energy, a pure-breed Brittany spaniel. My husband, two children and I fell in love with him straight away. We'd lost an elderly dog the year before, and had rescued another, who we tragically had to put to sleep. It devastated us. So we poured our love into Dexter.

We live in a small mountain town, Ouray, in Colorado, so he quickly became part of the community. Children pass our yard on the way to school and stop to pet him. We named him after a local creek.

When Dexter was nearly a year old, in March 2016, he was involved in a terrible accident. He escaped from our yard – we think he caught the scent of a deer trail. He ran in front of a vehicle, about a mile from our home.

My husband, Tim, found him with his two front legs badly injured. Tim volunteers as a mountain rescue first responder, so wasn't too fazed. He called me to come quickly. I jumped in the car, and was horrified when I saw my baby. It was worse than I'd imagined, and Dexter was in a lot of pain. There was no doubt that we needed to get him to the vet, but there wasn't a moment to lose, as the closest one was an hour's drive away.

Dexter taking a two-legged walk around his home town of Ouray, Colorado

It was clear Dexter wanted to live. I sat with him in the back of the car and he rested his head on my lap, trying to comfort me. When we arrived, the vet was waiting, and on seeing Dexter, turned green. He said he needed to get the senior vet. At that point, we didn't know if Dexter had a brain injury or

internal bleeding. The vet acted quickly, and soon determined that we'd need to amputate his right front paw, but that the left could be saved, though it wouldn't be entirely functional. I knew we'd do everything possible to save Dexter.

After three days, Dexter came home. He'd had a lot of surgery, but the vet was confident he could enjoy a decent quality of life. It took him a long time to recover, and I worked hard on his rehabilitation – building muscle tone, working on his mobility. For a year, Dexter had to wear a cone, and we had a specially commissioned wheelchair made that fitted around his stomach, with wheels at the front, so he could get around on three legs. He was still a puppy, had so much energy and just exuded positivity.

Every morning, first thing, I'd carry him down the porch steps, without his wheelchair, to go out in the yard. One day, I left him at the bottom while I popped inside to get my coffee. When I returned a few seconds later, Dexter was at the top of the steps. I looked around, dumbfounded. How had he got there?



'He jumped up on his two back legs, and hopped up the steps, like he'd been doing it his whole life. I couldn't believe it,' says Kentee Pasek. Photograph: David Clifford/The Guardian

I put him at the bottom again, and waited. Within moments, he jumped up on his two back legs, and hopped up the steps, like he'd been doing it his whole life. I couldn't believe it. Since then, Dexter has not stopped [walking on two legs](#). He sometimes uses his front left leg for balance, sniffing around on three legs, but when he wants to go fast, he pops up on his two back legs to run.

I spoke to the vet, who was worried about the pressure on his hips. We encouraged him to keep using his wheelchair, but he'd just stand up with it still attached, which could have caused more damage. We never taught Dexter to walk this way, it was all his own idea. He now visits a chiropractor regularly, who says his back is strong and his hips are pure muscle.

Dexter is now seven. He has [rewritten the rules](#) of what it means to have a physical impairment. Nothing slows him down, and he's the most joyful dog – determined and tenacious. I'm so proud of him. I receive letters from around the world from people in tough situations, saying, "If Dexter can do it, so can I." He went viral after a clip of him, taken by a stranger, ended up on primetime television in the US. He's delighted with all the attention – and treats. But at the end of the day, he's still our family pet, a dog who loves chasing balls, fetching sticks and going for a run in the park. After the accident, the vet said he must have had a serious will to live, and Dexter definitely does.

Kentee Pasek

'He learned to get our attention by mimicking the Snapchat notification': Apollo, the super-intelligent parrot



Apollo with his owners Dalton Mason and Tori Lacey at home in Florida, US. Photograph: Zack Wittman/The Guardian

Apollo is on track to become the most intelligent English-speaking bird in the world. We bought him in December 2020 from a local pet store. He'd been surrendered by a previous owner, and was eight months old. They decided they didn't want him any more.

We named him Apollo after the space programme. Straightaway, he was full of inquisitiveness and curiosity. He loves learning and interacting with us. We've had birds in the past, so knew how to get the best out of him. We do everything we can to stimulate him, raising him as if he were a child learning a language.

We study the work of [Dr Irene Pepperberg](#), a scientist who specialises in animal cognition, particularly parrots. We were inspired by her work with Alex, an African grey, who has a huge vocabulary, but has been raised in a lab, so is limited in how much progress he can make. We expect Apollo to surpass Alex at some point in the future.

Apollo's first words were "hello" and "fresh water". We do have to interpret him: "fresh water" might be him asking for a drink, or a shower. We offer

him some and he'll either sip or hit the cup with his beak and say "pour water" for us to drizzle it over his head.

Before that, Apollo learned to get our attention by mimicking the sound of the Snapchat notification. He would notice us going to our phone when it went off. He's very clever, and has loads of toys and games to stimulate him. He likes anything shiny or that makes a sound.

Apollo chats with his owner Dalton Mason

One thing Apollo asks for a lot is "snacks". He knows he'll get them as a reward, so will say "earn a pistach" for a pistachio, or "want a snack" for walnuts.

It's not all been easy though. It's standard practice for the pet store to clip birds' wings, and for a long time Apollo experienced night terrors when we got him home. Several nights a week, he'd panic because he couldn't fly. Like calming a child after a nightmare, we'd bring him into our bed, put him under the blankets. He'd fall asleep, and that would reset him. It took Apollo about eight to 10 months for his wing feathers to grow back, and then the night terrors receded. We'd never clip him ourselves.

Now he wakes us up early. He has a snack, we hang out for an hour and he likes to practise his language skills. He gets lunch at noon, and will eat for an hour. Then he'll preen his feathers. We feed him pasteurised egg yolks, a lot of fresh vegetables. As soon as it's dark, he's fast asleep.

We're almost in uncharted territory with [Apollo's language skills](#). He's two and a half and has so much potential. An African grey parrot's average lifespan is 50 to 80 years. These formative years are most important – as with humans, that's when they absorb everything.



‘Teaching him is not cruel,’ say his owners. ‘Apollo is hard-wired to learn to communicate.’ Photograph: Zack Wittman

Apollo loves people. He wants to perform; he’s social, fearless. That really helps him interact with new people and pick up new skills. Recently, we’ve been working with a local university. Students come to interact with Apollo three days a week. The professor contacted us to suggest it as he’d watched the videos of Apollo performing and been impressed.

Of course, some people say that keeping a bird in our home is against nature. But Apollo was born in captivity and raised in captivity. He’d probably end up poached in his natural habitat. We support the desire to stop breeding parrots and capturing them from the wild.

But teaching him is not cruel. Apollo is hard-wired to learn to communicate; he wants to do that. He loves our sessions, learning new things. It’s a form of play and connection. He’s learning constantly by watching us interact. You can’t meet Apollo and not say he’s an emotional animal, worthy of a fulfilling life.

Having the responsibility for Apollo and contributing to his language development fulfils us and definitely outweighs any small annoyances. He’s hitting puberty. He’s got a bit of an attitude right now – out of nowhere, he

can get on your shoulder and split your ears with a shriek. But being responsible for something that you care about and are proud of makes you happy.

Dalton Mason and Tori Lacey

‘Skateboarding is one of her most impressive skills’: Didga, the skateboarding cat



As well as skateboarding, Didga does other tricks such as high-fives and sideways rolls. Photograph: Paul Bamford/The Guardian

Didga is exceptional. I have three other cats, and she is by far the most accomplished. Her name is short for “didgeridoo”. There’s no cat in the world that even comes close to what she can do in terms of skills.

I adopted her as a 12-week-old kitten and now she’s nearly 11. In that time, she has surpassed all my expectations and helped me teach other people how to get the best out of their cats, too.

In 2017, Didga performed a [record-breaking 24 different tricks](#) in under a minute, which got her into the Guinness World Records. Those included a high-five, a sideways roll and jumping over a bar while skateboarding. My

favourite trick, and hers, is to jump up on to my hands, and balance on them. Didga loves a challenge.

I've been in the animal-training business for 40 years. I used to live in the US, training police dogs in the military, then moved to Hollywood and worked with animal actors before I opened my own business in Malibu.

When I moved back to Australia, I thought about getting a cat – everyone said cats can't be trained, but I wanted to prove them wrong. I knew I could work magic with treats, positive reinforcement and clicker training. People would be amazed at how little time is required to teach your pet quite extraordinary things.

Didga shows off some of her best tricks

I started searching for potential kittens to adopt. I went to a shelter, and, as I was walking through, a kitten caused a ruckus behind me. We stopped and looked over. The lady said, "She's really trying to get your attention."

So I picked the kitten up. She was comfortable with other cats, and liked playing. I gave her a treat and she ate it right out of my hand. I put her on her back and she relaxed. I adopted her and never looked back.

Before long, Didga would go out with some dogs I trained and swim with them in the river. She did everything willingly. I never forced her – she walked on a leash, and got into the water herself. She wanted to be with the dogs, who were her friends.

Didga knows a handful of tricks that took over a year to learn. Training with cats is difficult – you have a very small window before they want their meals. As a trainer, I understand the preparation, the patience, how to break everything down into baby steps. Didga certainly enjoys learning.



Owner Robert Dollwet with Didga. Photograph: Paul Bamford/The Guardian

Skateboarding is one of her most impressive skills. She rides along with the motion of the board, jumping on and over objects. It's an incredible feeling when a cat does a trick I've been trying to teach for so long. With patience and encouragement, they pick it up eventually.

The psychology of training a cat is fascinating. Because I understand how animals think and learn, I can adjust to the cat's abilities. If Didga doesn't like it, I stop or go in a different direction.

I started a [YouTube channel](#) and other social accounts called Catmantoo to teach people to have a better relationship with their cats – it's all about having a process, being patient, not having expectations and letting things happen at the cat's pace. By working together, Didga and I have hopefully made other cats' lives better. Cats are family members, after all.

People are fascinated when they see the cat doing tricks. The attention we get is astounding. When people see a skateboarding cat, they say, "I've seen it all now." Very few are negative. You wouldn't be able to train a cat if they didn't want it, and I'd never push one beyond its comfort zone.

Didga has changed my life. She has taken me to levels I would never have dreamed of. The internet helped explode things. Everything came together – my background, my love for animals, then finding this very unique, special cat – really one in a million. I won the lotto, so to speak, finding a cat like Didga.

Robert Dollwet

‘My wife slipped the drum under him and he made the perfect rhythm’: Ben Afquack, the drumming duck



Ben Afquack with his owner, Derek Johnson. Photograph: Ackerman + Gruber/The Guardian

I am a recovering drug addict. Before I got treatment, I had another pet duck, who was my only buddy for a couple of years. He lived in my car with me, was right by my side in whatever random place I was crashing that night. It wasn’t a stable living situation for either of us.

When I went into recovery, I had to find a new home for that duck, and it messed me up to let him go. I made a promise to myself: someday, when I

get my life together, I'll get another duck, and do it right. I'll give him the very best life.

It was that thought that helped motivate me to get sober. I've been clean for nearly nine years now. When my life was firmly on the right track, my sister helped me research which duck breed makes the best pet, and found it was a pekin. We called a farm supplies store near our home in Minnesota and asked if they could let us know when they next had some available.

A few months later they called back to say some were about to hatch. We drove there the next day – it was about an hour and half away, and I felt excited, sure I was making the right decision and doing it responsibly. I was handed this tiny duckling, less than a day old. He was so cute – he looked like a tiny yellowish-brown fluff ball. He fitted in the palm of my hand, and I could close my fingers all around him. It was an instant connection.

Ben Afquack gets into the rhythm

The duck would have otherwise grown up on a farm. It's not technically a rescue, but I guess it would have been farmed to eat. We brainstormed names with friends, and when I suggested Ben Afquack, everyone laughed. It's his name now. I'm a fan of human names for pets. Our dogs are Doris, Lewis, Leonard and Frank. I've never met another pet called Ben.

We discovered Ben's skills by accident. I'm a drummer, so the kit is set up all around the house. I don't play much any more, but there happens to be a drum in our hallway. When I pick Ben up, he kicks his feet. It's fun for him. If he wants to get away, he lets me know and I'll always listen to him.

Then, one day in January 2020, while he was kicking, my wife slipped the drum underneath him and we realised Ben was making the perfect rhythm. The drum is soft and wouldn't hurt him at all – he's perfectly relaxed and happy. I posted a video of it on my Facebook and woke up the next day to discover it had half a million views overnight. I went to the gym before work and someone messaged me to say, "They're talking about you on the radio." Things got pretty crazy from there.



‘Ben and I do everything together,’ says owner Derek Johnson. ‘I take him to the park, or we might drive to a river for a swim.’ Photograph: Ackerman + Gruber/The Guardian

Ben and I do everything together. I take him to the park, or we might drive to a beautiful river for a swim. He’s started to put it together that if we’re in the car, we’re going somewhere cool, and will quack the whole way, like a dog on its way to the park. Then on the way home, he passes out, fast asleep.

He has an incredibly spacious duck house, with a heated floor. There’s no reason to ever want to get out of there, other than to hang out with us and the dogs – they are best buddies. He’s got a pool in there. And all his food. He’ll swim around all day. He’s living his best life.

Ben is three and a half now, and makes friends wherever he goes. I use his fame to help reduce the stigma of drug addiction. On [his Instagram](#), I share treatment or overdose prevention resources. I talk about my experience so it might help others.

I’ll have been clean for nine years in February. I own a recovery company now that helps others get clean. My life is completely different to what I might have imagined 10 years ago. We go to recovery events, meeting a lot of people who are in places I once was.

It's great to see how happy Ben makes people. He might be the difference between them using that day, or not. So a duck can change lives. He can bring a smile, motivation and inspiration to both myself and others.

Derek Johnson

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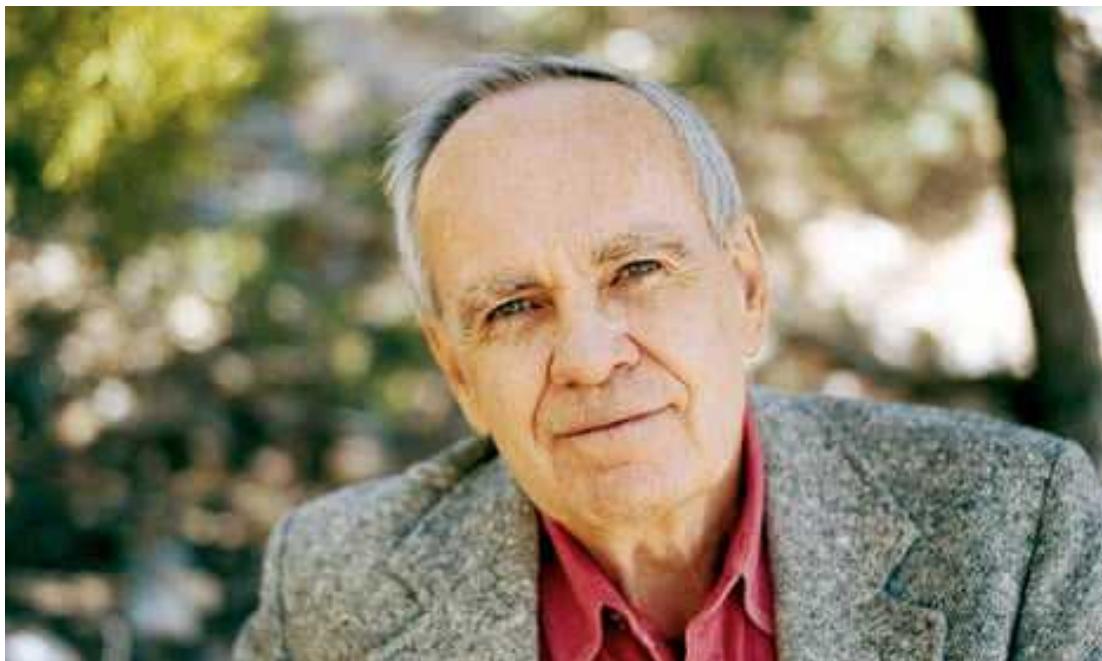
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[Books](#)

‘Whatever I was going to be I wanted to be really good’: Cormac McCarthy’s life in writing

Richard B Woodward, who has known McCarthy for 30 years, on the reclusive author’s love of scientific thinking, and why he will publish two novels in two months after a 16-year wait

[Read an exclusive extract from Cormac McCarthy’s *The Passenger*](#)



Maverick brainiac ... Cormac McCarthy. Photograph: Derek Shapton/AP

Richard B Woodward

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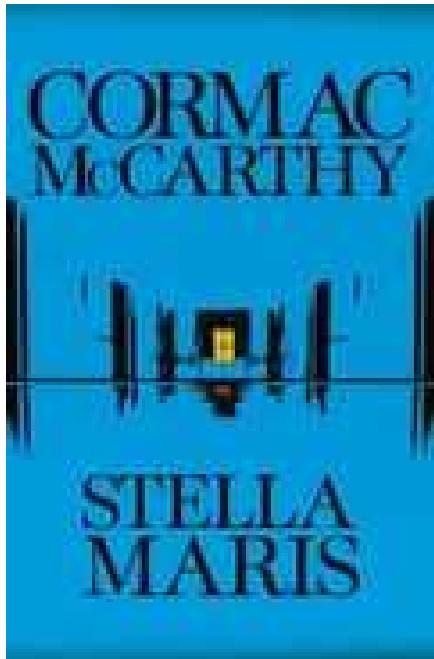
For the last 20 years or so, the most likely place to find the publicity-shy novelist-playwright-screenwriter [Cormac McCarthy](#) would be at the Santa Fe Institute in New Mexico. Co-founded in 1984 by Murray Gell-Mann, the 1969 recipient of the Nobel prize in physics, SFI is a thinktank for maverick

brainiacs, a flexible category that, in the judgment of the late polymath Gell-Mann, perfectly described McCarthy, his friend and MacArthur Foundation “genius” award winner.

Until recently on many weekdays, the writer could be heard at SFI, clattering away on his portable typewriter from behind his office door. An affable member of this elite community, with no specific tasks to perform, he would regularly emerge for afternoon tea or attend talks by SFI scholars and visiting academics on topics that interested him, such as complex systems theory or quantum computing.

I have known McCarthy since 1992 when I wrote [a profile of him](#) for the New York Times Magazine. I profiled him again in 2005 [for Vanity Fair](#). We’ve spoken on the phone many times and, being a car racing fan, he joined me on assignment at the Monaco Grand Prix and at the Indianapolis 500. He came to my wedding. I don’t remember him ever saying that something was off the record. His desire for privacy seemed to suggest that I should know.

Lying on his desk when I visited SFI in 2006, while writing about a Russian linguist there, was a copy of Frank Ramsey’s *The Foundations of Mathematics and Other Logical Essays*. How deeply McCarthy, a University of Tennessee dropout, was able to drink from Ramsey’s slim but forbiddingly dry 1931 volume – he was perhaps Wittgenstein’s most brilliant acolyte at Cambridge – is hard to say.

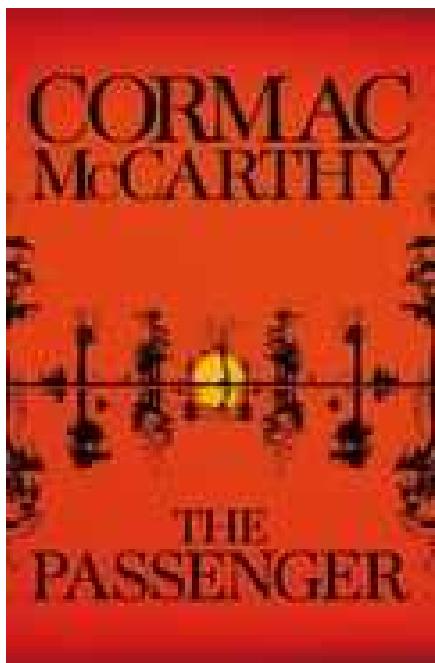


Heady reading matter is nonetheless what McCarthy has long preferred. A scan of his shelves at SFI would reveal, instead of novels by Booker prize winners, manuscripts by his many scientist friends, such as Lisa Randall, a theoretical physicist at Harvard, or Lawrence Krauss, a cosmologist from Arizona State University.

During the half dozen times I have seen McCarthy at SFI, I've often wondered what he was doing with all this arcane material he was greedily absorbing. Rarefied science hasn't figured in any of his writings, not even in work completed after he came to SFI, such as *No Country for Old Men* (2005), *The Road* (2006) or his screenplay for Ridley Scott's *The Counsellor* (2013).

The answer seems to be that he has been saving up what he's learned and has deposited a fair amount of it into *The Passenger* and *Stella Maris*, a pair of novels he is publishing this autumn, 15 years after his last novel *The Road* won the Pulitzer prize. (They can be read together or separately, and in any order.)

Stella Maris, out in December and more explicitly a product of his years at SFI, focuses on a former mathematics prodigy, Alicia Western, who has lost her place in academia as well as her tenuous grasp on reality.



A topologist once adept enough to have corresponded with the pre-eminent algebraic geometer of the 20th century, Alexander Grothendieck, Western is now a psychological shipwreck, beset with hallucinations and thoughts of suicide. The book is like a two-person play told in seven interviews between the recuperating Western and a psychiatrist, Dr Cohen. He practises at Stella Maris, a Catholic sanatorium in Wisconsin where she is being treated as a paranoid schizophrenic. It's her third stay.

The Q&A format gives McCarthy the chance to discourse, through Western, on any topic he chooses. As she retraces the trajectory of her life, for example, she tells Cohen that she has perfect pitch. She discovered music as a child – even before mathematics – and she has theories about both. “Music is not a language,” she declares. “It has no reference to anything but itself.” Her languid manner is a disguise for a stubborn resolve. More than one doctor has labeled her autistic and, being smarter than they are, she seems content to frustrate their attempts to figure her out.

Alicia grew up at Los Alamos, about 30 miles from Santa Fe, where her father was a physicist who worked on [the Manhattan Project](#) and afterwards felt lifelong guilt for helping to build the first atomic weapons. She learned to solve equations with him at an early age. “All I can tell you is that I like

numbers,” she says. “I like their shapes and their colors and their smells and the way they taste. And I don’t like to take people’s word for things.”

Her sole abiding relationship is with her brother Bobby, another haunted spirit, for whom she openly expresses incestuous feelings, perhaps the main source of her mental anguish – and his.

She is the first female intellectual in a McCarthy book and his first female protagonist since Rinthy in *Outer Dark*, his 1968 second novel. (That harrowing tale also revolved around incest: Rinthy searches the hills of Appalachia for her abandoned baby, born as a result of sex with her brother, Culla.)



Viggo Mortensen and Kodi Smit-Mcphee in the 2009 film adaptation of *The Road*. Photograph: Dimension Films\2929 Productions/Allstar

Alicia is also a major character in *The Passenger*, the autumn’s other McCarthy novel, published next week. The first scene sees her holed up in a skeevy Chicago rooming house, where she trades insults with her most aggressive hallucination, who functions chiefly to debase Alicia in crude and offensive terms. “Jesus, he said. This place really sucks. Did you see what just crossed the floor? What, are we completely out of Zyklon B?”

The novel has some of the chase and crime elements found in *No Country for Old Men*. A private plane has gone down near the city of Pass Christian, Louisiana. Bobby Western, who works as an itinerant salvage diver, is hired to recover the pilot's flight case, the black box, and a passenger. Ten people were booked on the flight but only nine bodies were recovered. While probing the waters of the Gulf of Mexico, Western discovers things that agents with ill intent and unknown allegiances (CIA? Hired guns for a syndicate?) want to take from him. As he flees across the country, they pursue.

The book is in some ways a departure for McCarthy, as Alicia and her hallucinations are woven in and out of the action. In other ways, though, *The Passenger* marks a return to the pre-SFI, pre-MacArthur winner McCarthy. It is set primarily in New Orleans, which was McCarthy's home in the 1960s. Much like McCarthy, Bobby Western is a taciturn autodidact. Through his father's tutoring, he is as informed about particle physics as his sister. Instead of befriending academics, though, he keeps company in the neighbourhood bars with a raffish crowd of opinionated drunks and ne'er-do-wells. He's the well-liked sounding board for their theories, homespun or cosmic. "You can't get a decent cheeseburger in a clean restaurant," claims his friend Oiler. "Once they start sweeping the floor and cleaning the dishes it's pretty much over."



Javier Bardem in the 2007 film adaptation of No Country for Old Men.
Photograph: Universal Pict.Int.Ger./Cinetext/Paramount Vantage/Allstar

These gatherings recall scenes from McCarthy's novel Suttree (1979). Much of his early fiction was set in or around Knoxville, Tennessee, McCarthy's home after a stint in the US air force and before he moved to the west in the 1980s.

He speaks fondly of his Knoxville years and once told me that all his friends "were carried off by drugs and drink, of course, but some of them very bright, quite well educated".

Bobby Western's checkered biography includes time spent in Knoxville. The city is about 30 miles from Oak Ridge, another of the sites where the atomic bomb was developed. In one scene he visits his grandmother's house near there. "Western fully understood that he owed his existence to Adolf Hitler."

McCarthy often seems to have worked on several projects at the same time. After he completed No Country for Old Men in 2005, he told his then-editor Gary Fisketjon that he was nearing the end of a novel about salvage divers in New Orleans. (Asked which one did he want first, Fisketjon replied that "it would be foolish to express a preference".)

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McCarthy is not a psychological writer in the traditional sense. His characters aren't usually given elaborate back stories explaining motives for their present behaviour. They act and react. He describes with precise

economy, as well as sometimes thunderous, witty or laconic oratory, what they do and say, the physical world they inhabit, the risks they face, and the often dire consequences of being alive.

The Passenger, by providing long family histories for Alicia and Bobby, is an exception. But the illicit passion that sister feels for brother in the two books is treated without moralising. You either accept it as an aspect of her character or not.

A story collector as well as a storyteller, McCarthy never tires of hearing about the mental gymnastics of great minds

McCarthy is not an optimist about his own luck with male-female relationships (he's been married three times) or about social progress. I've never asked him if he thinks the arc of the moral universe bends toward justice, because I think I know the answer.

"Evil has no alternative plan," says one of Bobby's Knoxville barroom pals in The Passenger. "It is simply incapable of accepting failure."

McCarthy has cheered himself up over the last 20 years by "being around some of the smartest people on the planet" at SFI. In 2009, in support of their mission and in gratitude for their welcoming him into their midst, he donated the proceeds [from an auction at Christie's](#) of his Olivetti Lettera 32 manual typewriter: \$254,500.

Winning the MacArthur Foundation fellowship in 1981, on the recommendation of Saul Bellow and others, changed McCarthy's fortunes. He has called it "the most profound experience of my life". Its annual reunions introduced him to scientists from a range of fields he had until then only read about. Several, including [whale biologist Roger Payne](#) and Gell-Mann, became lifelong friends. A story collector as well as a storyteller, McCarthy never tires of hearing about the habits and mental gymnastics of great minds, especially 20th-century physicists such as Robert Oppenheimer and Richard Feynman, both of them at Los Alamos.

Both Alicia and Bobby Western allude to Feynman, a colleague and rival of Gell-Mann's at the California Institute of Technology in the 1950s and 60s. McCarthy delighted in telling me at breakfast one day of the terror they would instil in other physicists. "They would sit on either side of the front row in the lecture hall, both often arriving late. Murray would read a newspaper. Fifteen minutes into a talk Feynman would call across in a stage whisper, 'Hey, Murray, is this guy smart?' And Murray would either nod yes or no."

McCarthy's years at SFI have inspired reflections on what might have been. "There were a lot of things I could have done," he once told me. "I certainly had a pretty good grasp of architecture. But truthfully I'm not a scientist. I don't really think like that. I could have been a physicist but not a world-class physicist. Whatever I was going to be I wanted to be really good."

McCarthy is 89 and these two novels will likely be his last. Death is not a subject he has ever shied away from, in his fiction or conversation. Indeed, he has measured other writers by how seriously they address it. Both books offer evidence that he has spent time thinking about his own eventual end.

"I don't think there is some way to prepare for death," says Alicia in *Stella Maris*. "There's no evolutionary advantage to being good at dying. Who would you leave it to? The thing you are dealing with – time – is immalleable. Except that the more you harbor it the less of it you have. The liquor of being is leaking out onto the ground. You need to hurry. But the haste itself is consuming what you wish to preserve. You can't deal with what you've been sent to deal with."

Gell-Mann's death in 2019 was a severe loss, though it may also have given McCarthy the impetus to finish books that he had left half-done for too long. Both these novels are chilling and bleak – his readers expect no less – and he seems to take perverse delight in imagining the worst that can befall his characters and describing their failings in his own sprightly prose music. The future extinction of the human race will in any case make individual deaths like his and Gell-Mann's irrelevant.

“When all trace of our existence is gone,” asks Alicia, “for whom then will this be a tragedy?”

Cormac McCarthy’s *The Passenger* is published by Picador on 25 October. *Stella Maris* is published on 6 December. To buy a copy go to [guardianbookshop.com](https://www.guardianbookshop.com).

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The Passenger by Cormac McCarthy – exclusive extract



‘Have you ever salvaged an aircraft?’ ... A diver swims towards a sunken aircraft. Illustration: Deena So Oteh/The Guardian

In the author’s first novel since *The Road*, a wrecked aircraft holds a mystery. Read this taster ahead of the book’s publication

'Whatever I was going to be I wanted to be really good': Cormac McCarthy's life in writing

Cormac McCarthy

Sat 22 Oct 2022 04.00 EDT Last modified on Sat 22 Oct 2022 05.23 EDT

He didnt know that he'd be asked so quickly. He walked back through the Quarter. Past Jackson Square. The Cabildo. The rich moss and cellar smell of the city thick on the night air. A cold and skullcolored moon driving through the skeins of cloud beyond the roofslates. The tiles and chimneypots. A ship's horn on the river. The streetlamps stood in globes of vapor and the buildings were dark and sweating. At times the city seemed older than Nineveh. He crossed the street and turned up past the Blacksmith Shop. He unlocked the gate and entered the patio.

There were two men standing outside his door. He stopped. If they could get inside the gate they could get inside his apartment. Then he realized that they had been inside his apartment.

Mr Western?

Yes.

I wonder if we could have a word with you?

Who are you?

They reached into their coat pockets and produced leather fobs with badges and put them away again. Maybe we could go in and talk for a minute.

Vault the gate. Run away.

Mr Western?

Sure. Okay.

He put the key in the lock and turned the deadbolt and pushed open the door and turned on the light. The apartment was a single room with a small

kitchen and a bath. The bed folded up into the wall but he always left it down. There was a sofa and an orange rug and a coffeetable piled with books. He held the door for them.

You didnt let my cat out did you?

Sir?

Come in.

They entered with a studied deference. He shut the door and then knelt and looked under the bed. The cat was crouched against the wall. It whined softly.

You hang on, Billy Ray. We'll eat in a minute.

He rose and gestured toward the sofa. Have a seat, he said.

I have to say that you dont seem particularly surprised to see us.

Should I be?

It's just an observation.

Of course. Would you like some tea?

No thank you.

Sit down. Let me just put the kettle on.

He went into the kitchen and lit the gas burner and filled the kettle from the tap and set it on the burner. When he came back they were sitting on the sofa one at either end. He sat on the bed and took off his shoes and dropped them over the side and pulled his legs up under him and sat looking at them.

Mr Western we'd like to ask you about the dive you were on this morning.

Go ahead.

Just a few questions.

Sure.

The other man leaned forward and put his hands on the edge of the coffeetable, one folded over the other. He patted the lower with the upper a few times and looked up. Actually we dont have a lot of questions. Just one pretty goodsized one.

All right.

There seems to be a passenger missing.

A passenger.

Yes.

Missing.

Yes.

They watched him. He'd no idea what they wanted. Do you have any identification? he said.

We showed you our identification.

Maybe I could see them again.

They looked at each other and then leaned and produced the badges and held them out.

You can write down the numbers if you like.

That's okay.

You can write them down. We dont mind.

I dont have to write them down.

They werent sure what he meant. They flipped the badges up and folded them away.

Mr Western?

Yes.

How many passengers were in the aircraft?

Seven.

Seven.

Yes.

You mean plus the pilot and copilot.

Yes.

Nine bodies.

Yes.

Well apparently there should have been eight passengers.

Somebody missed the flight.

We dont think so. There were eight passengers on the manifest.

What manifest is that?

The manifest for the flight.

Why would there be a manifest?

Why wouldnt there be?

It was a private aircraft.

It was a charter.

If it was a charter there would have been a stewardess.

They looked at each other.

Why is that, Mr Western?

FAA regulations require a stewardess on all commercial flights of more than seven passengers.

But there werent more than seven passengers.

You just said that there were eight.

They sat looking at him. The one with his hands on the table leaned back. How do you happen to know that? he said.

About the stewardess?

Yes.

I dont know. I read it somewhere.

Do you remember everything you read?

Pretty much. Excuse me. Let me get my tea.

He went into the kitchen and took down the tea cannister and spooned the dark chopped tea into a halflitre lab-beaker and poured in the hot water and set the kettle back on the stove and turned off the burner and came back and sat on the bed again. They didnt appear to have moved. The one who had been speaking nodded. All right, he said. Maybe manifest is not the right word. What we have is a list of the passengers from the corporation.

You may have a list. I dont think there's a corporation.

And why is that?

I dont think it was a corporate flight.

You seem to have a lot of opinions about the flight.

I dont think so. I have questions about the flight. The same as you.

Would you like to share them with us?

Or maybe I have just one pretty goodsized question.

Go ahead.

Could I see those badges one more time?

Excuse me?

I'm just pulling your chain. Sorry.

All right.

We thought that the aircraft had been in the water a while. And we didnt think it was called in by some fisherman. You couldnt even see it. And we think that there is a somewhat better than zero probability that somebody had been in the plane before us.

Some other diver.

Some other somebody.

Well it would have to be a diver wouldnt it?

Would it?

You thought someone had been in the plane before you.

That's what we thought.

Before you and your partner.

Yes.

Of course if you'd taken something from the plane it would make sense for you to claim that you were not the first people there.

How many salvage divers do you know?

They looked at each other.

Why do you ask?

Just curious. We dont take things from planes.

Maybe you could tell us a little about what you found when you reached the site.

Sure. The plane was sitting in about forty feet of water. It looked pretty much intact. When we put the divelight through the window we could see the passengers inside sitting in their seats. We just had the one tender and he was pretty new on the job so I went back up and left Oiler to get into the plane.

And how did he get into the plane?

He cut out the doorlatch with a torch.

The plane was intact.

Yes.

There was no breakup on impact.

We didnt see much sign of an impact. The plane was sitting on the floor of the bay. It didnt even look like there was anything much wrong with it.

There wasnt anything wrong with it.

Not that we could see. Other than the fact that it was in the water.

After your partner entered the plane, did you dive again?

Yes. We didnt spend a lot of time in the plane. We'd been dropped out there to see if there were any survivors. There werent.

Has anyone been in contact with you concerning this incident?

No. Are you sure you wont have some tea?

We're sure.

Is that a regulation?

Is what a regulation?

Nothing. I'll be right back.

He went into the kitchen and got out the icetray and filled a large green glass with icecubes and poured in the tea through a colander. Then he stood looking at the leaves in the colander. Who are you guys? he said. He went back and sat on the bed and took a drink of the cold tea and waited.

Have you ever salvaged an aircraft?

Yes. One time.

Where was this?

Off the coast of South Carolina.

Were there bodies in the aircraft?

No. I think there were four or five people aboard but the plane had broken up. They found a couple of bodies washed ashore a few days later. I dont think they ever found the others.

Do you fly Mr Western?

No. Not anymore.

When was this? The South Carolina thing.

Two years ago.

Are you familiar with the JetStar aircraft?

No. That's the first one I'd ever seen.

Nice aircraft.

Very nice aircraft.

Did you guys open the luggage bay?

Why would we do that?

I dont know. Did you?

No.

Do you know what a Jepp case is?

Yes. We dont have it.

But it was missing.

It was missing. Yes. That and the black box. The data box.

You didnt think that was worth mentioning?

I didnt think it worth mentioning something that you already knew. Why dont you tell me what your interest is in this, what you think has happened. What you know.

We're not at liberty to do that.

Of course.

But you didnt take anything from the aircraft.

No. We dont take things. Oiler said we should get out of the water and that's what we did. The water was full of dead bodies. We didnt know how long they'd been dead or what they'd died of. We didnt take the Jepp case. We didnt take the data box. We didnt take the luggage. And we damn sure didnt take any bodies.

Are you bonded, Mr Western?

Yes.

Is there anything else that you'd like to tell us?

We're salvage divers. We do what we're paid to do. Anyway, I'm sure you know more about this than I do.

All right. Thank you for your time.

They rose from the couch simultaneously. Like birds leaving a wire.

Western eased himself from the bed.

Maybe I really should look at those badges again.

You have a peculiar sense of humor, Mr Western.

I know. I get that a lot.

When they were gone he closed the door and knelt and reached one hand up under the bed and talked to the cat until he could get hold of it. He rose and stood with it in the crook of his arm stroking it. A solid black tomcat with teeth outside. Its tail twitched from side to side. He was well disposed toward cats. They to him. Where is your dish? He said. Where is your dish? He carried the cat to the door and stood in the doorway. The air was cool and damp. He stood there stroking the cat. Listening to the quiet. Under his sockfeet he could feel the dull hammer of the distant piledriver. The slow beat. The measure of it.

This is an extract from *The Passenger* by Cormac McCarthy (Picador, £20), published on 25 October. To buy a copy go to [guardianbookshop.com](https://www.guardianbookshop.com)

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Yotam Ottolenghi's recipes for autumn pies



Yotam Ottolenghi's spinach, celeriac and gouda pie. Photograph: Louise Hagger/The Guardian. Food styling: Emily Kydd. Prop styling: Jennifer Kay. Food assistant: Kristine Jakobsson.

Warm up with a sustaining spinach, celeriac and gouda filling for a suet crust, make time for a luscious lamb and feta borek, and wrap up with a sweet pretzel and pecan banana rum pie

[Yotam Ottolenghi](#)

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Sat 22 Oct 2022 05.00 EDT

Pies feel all kinds of right at this time of the year. Not only are they all wrapped up, so dressed perfectly for autumn, they're also the ideal weekend project for when you're hunkering down at home. So satisfying, so sustaining, so seasonal.

Spinach, celeriac and gouda pie (pictured top)

The suet makes this dough flaky and extra-special (I use vegetable suet to keep it vegetarian-friendly). If you like, make the dough up to two days ahead; wrap it tightly and refrigerate. This pie tastes even better the next day.

Prep 20 min

Chill 1 hr

Cook 1 hr 40 min

Serves 6-8

For the pastry

280g self-raising flour, plus extra for dusting

150g shredded vegetable suet (I use [Trex](#))

Fine sea salt and black pepper

1 egg yolk

1 tbsp double cream

For the filling

2 celeriac, peeled and cut into 1cm cubes (1kg net weight)

3 onions, peeled and thinly sliced

4 garlic cloves, peeled and roughly chopped

1½ tsp rosemary leaves, finely chopped
2¼ tsp cumin seeds
2¼ tsp caraway seeds
60ml olive oil, plus extra for brushing
600g spinach leaves
200g cavolo nero, stems discarded, leaves roughly shredded (120g)
20g chives, roughly chopped
20g dill, roughly chopped
2 eggs
150g soured cream
300ml double cream
⅓ whole nutmeg, finely grated
40g parmesan, finely grated
1 lemon, zest finely grated, to get 1½ tsp, then juiced, to get 1 tbsp
100g gouda, thinly sliced
90g cornichons, to serve

Put the flour, suet and a quarter-teaspoon of salt in a large bowl, make a well in the middle and pour in 170ml cold water. Mix in and knead to make a smooth dough. Wrap with a clean tea towel and refrigerate for an hour.

Heat the oven to 210C (190C fan)/410F/gas 6½. Put the celeriac, onions, garlic, rosemary, two teaspoons each of the cumin and caraway seeds, three tablespoons of oil and three-quarters of a teaspoon of salt in a large roasting tray. Toss to coat, then roast for 45 minutes, turning everything two or three times, until the celeriac is golden and cooked through and the onions translucent.

Meanwhile, put a large saucepan on a high heat. Add the remaining tablespoon of oil and the spinach and cook, stirring often, for 12 minutes, until wilted. Turn down the heat to medium, add the shredded cavolo nero and a quarter-teaspoon of salt and cook, stirring often so the greens don't catch, for five minutes more. Off the heat, stir in the chives and dill and leave to cool for 20 minutes. Once cool, stir into the roast celeriac tray.

In a medium bowl, whisk the eggs, both creams, nutmeg, parmesan, lemon zest and juice, half a teaspoon of salt and a good crack of pepper, then fold in the sliced gouda and stir into the cooled vegetable mixture.

Turn the oven to 200C (180C fan)/390F/gas 6 and grease a 24cm spring-form cake tin with the extra olive oil. Cut off one-third of the dough and lightly flour a work surface. Roll the larger piece of dough into a roughly 3mm-thick x 35cm-diameter circle. Use the rolling pin carefully to lift it into the tin, then press it into the bottom and sides – you should have about a 2cm overhang. Roll out the smaller piece of dough into a 26cm circle and make a 2cm-wide cut in the centre.

Spoon the filling mix in to the pastry case. Mix the egg yolk and tablespoon of cream in a small bowl, then use to brush the overhang. Lay the second dough circle on top of the filling and press and crimp all around the edges to seal. Brush with the remaining egg yolk mixture and sprinkle the remaining quarter-teaspoon each of cumin and caraway seeds on top.

Bake for 50 minutes, until golden brown, then remove and leave to rest for five minutes. Release from the tin, rest for another five minutes, then transfer to a platter and serve with the cornichons on the side.

Water borek with lamb and feta



Yotam Ottolenghi's water borek with lamb and feta.

This is admittedly not one to try when you are pushed for time, but don't let that put you off. If you want to get ahead, roll the pastry the day before and refrigerate it covered in parchment paper, ready to be cooked in its water bath.

Prep 45 min

Cook 1 hr 40 min

Serves 6

For the dough

250g plain flour, plus 100g extra for rolling

¼ tsp ground turmeric

Fine sea salt and black pepper

3 eggs

1 tbsp olive oil

1 tbsp apple cider vinegar

For the filling

3 tbsp olive oil

400g (20% fat) lamb mince

15g oregano leaves, plus extra to garnish

2 onions, peeled and finely chopped (400g net)

400g butternut squash, peeled, deseeded and cut into 1½ cm cubes

5 garlic cloves, peeled and crushed

1½ tsp ground allspice

½ tsp ground cinnamon

½ tsp chilli flakes

1 tbsp tomato paste

4 plum tomatoes, grated, skins discarded (450g)

400g feta, roughly crumbled

30g parsley, roughly chopped

For brushing

80g unsalted butter

2 tbsp olive oil

First make the dough. Put the flour, turmeric and a teaspoon of salt in the bowl of a stand mixer fitted with the dough hook. In a small bowl, whisk the

eggs, olive oil and cider vinegar. Turn on the mixer to medium-high, pour in the egg mixture and work for five minutes until you have a smooth but slightly sticky dough. Remove from the bowl, shape into a ball, cover with a damp cloth and set aside for 30 minutes.

Meanwhile, make the filling. Put a large saute pan on a medium-high heat, add the oil, mince, oregano and half a teaspoon of salt, and cook, stirring frequently, for 12 minutes, until lightly brown; use the spoon to break up the mince into roughly 1cm pieces. Tip the lamb mix into a sieve set over a medium bowl, return the pan to a medium heat and pour in any fat that's collected in the bowl.

Put the onions, squash, garlic, allspice, cinnamon, chilli flakes and tomato paste in the pan, add a half-teaspoon of salt and a good grind of black pepper, and cook, stirring regularly, for 20 minutes, until softened and lightly caramelised. Stir the lamb back into the pan, then take off the heat, stir in the grated tomatoes and set aside to cool. Once cool, stir in the crumbled feta and parsley.

Divide the pastry into five roughly 85g balls and cover with a damp cloth. Flour a work surface very generously and, working one ball at a time, roll each one into a roughly 2mm-thick 45cm x 30cm rectangle – use plenty of flour when rolling, and turn the dough and add more flour as necessary. Once shaped, generously flour the dough rectangle, fold it in half and set aside while you repeat with the remaining balls of dough.

Bring a large saucepan of lightly salted water to a boil. Pat any excess flour off the dough rectangles and lower the sheets one at a time into the water. Use a large slotted spoon to keep the dough submerged, cook for 30 seconds, then lift out of the water and plunge into a bowl of ice water until cool. Drain in a colander set over a bowl and repeat with the remaining dough.

Heat the oven to 200C (180C fan)/390F/gas 6. Put the butter and remaining two tablespoons of oil in a small saucepan, and put it on a medium heat until melted. Brush a 22cm x 30cm, high-sided, rectangular oven tray generously with the butter and lay one of the pastry sheets on top, making sure there is no overhang. Drizzle generously with the butter mixture and scatter over a third of the lamb filling. Repeat until all the filling has been used up and you

are left with two sheets of dough. Drizzle these with the remaining butter mixture and layer them on top.

Bake for 50 minutes, until golden and crisp, and serve hot.

Pretzel and pecan banana rum pie



Yotam Ottolenghi's pretzel and pecan banana rum pie. Photograph: Louise Hagger/The Guardian

Lime and passion fruit bring tropical flavours to this dreamy banana pie. If you want to get ahead, make the crust and caramel filling the day before.

Prep 40 min

Cook 45 min

Set 2 hr

Serves 6-8

For the pie crust

135g salted pretzels – I use Penn State's

135g pecans

¼ tsp flaked sea salt

1½ tsp demerara sugar

130g unsalted butter
30ml maple syrup
¾ tsp ground cinnamon

For the rum caramel

150g caster sugar
80ml double cream
50g unsalted butter
2 tbsp dark rum
½ tsp flaked sea salt

For the caramel bananas

100g caster sugar
40g unsalted butter
120ml dark rum
3 medium bananas (530g), peeled and cut in half lengthways
2 passion fruit, halved
1 lime, zest grated, then squeezed to get 1 tsp juice

For the cream

150ml double cream
150ml creme fraiche
2½ tbsp maple syrup
1½ tsp vanilla bean paste

Heat the oven to 200C (180C fan)/390F/gas 6, and line a 22cm-diameter x 3cm-high round cake tin with baking paper.

Put the pretzels, pecans and salt in a food processor and pulse five or six times, until they resemble breadcrumbs studded with small pieces of pretzel and nut. Tip into a bowl and stir in the demerara sugar.

Melt the butter, maple syrup and cinnamon in a small saucepan on a medium heat, then stir into the pretzel bowl. Press this crust mix firmly and evenly into the lined tin, put the tin on an oven tray and bake for 20 minutes, until golden. Remove from the oven and set aside while you make the caramel.

Put the sugar and two tablespoons of cold water in a medium saucepan on a medium heat. Cook for seven to eight minutes, resisting the urge to stir and instead swirling the mix around the pan to ensure it gets an even caramel colour. Take off the heat and carefully stir in the cream, butter, rum and salt – remember, the caramel will be *very* hot and may spit. Return to the heat and cook, swirling occasionally, for two minutes, until thickened, then pour over the pie crust and leave to cool for 15 minutes. Once cool, refrigerate for about an hour, to set.

To make the bananas, put the sugar, a tablespoon of cold water and a quarter-teaspoon of salt in a medium frying pan on a medium heat and cook, swirling the pan as necessary to combine, for seven to eight minutes, until the mix turns amber. Add the butter and rum, cook for another three or four minutes, until smooth and thickened, then carefully lay in the banana halves and cook them for a minute on each side. Take off the heat, then arrange the banana halves neatly on top the chilled pie, leaving as much caramel sauce as you can behind in the pan. Return the pie tin to the fridge and set the caramel pan aside.

Now make the cream. Put the cream, creme fraiche, maple syrup and vanilla in the bowl of a stand mixer fitted with the balloon attachment. Whip for three or four minutes on medium speed, until you get soft peaks, then spoon and swirl the cream artfully over the top of the pie. Carefully unmould the pie and slide it on to a large plate.

Put the banana caramel pan back on a medium heat for two to three minutes, until it's slightly thicker than maple syrup. Take off the heat, stir in the passion fruit juice and lime juice, and leave to cool for five minutes.

Drizzle one and a half tablespoons of the caramel over the top of the cream and pour the rest into a bowl or jug. Grate the lime zest over the pie, scatter over an eighth of a teaspoon of flaked salt and serve with the remaining caramel on the side.

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2022.10.22 - Opinion

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OpinionRail transport

Think Westminster's a mess? It's nothing compared to the north's mismanaged rail system

[Andy Burnham](#) and [Steve Rotheram](#)

Failed franchises are causing daily misery and costing local economies billions. If this was London, it would be a national scandal



‘The government needs to take immediate action with an urgent injection of funds into both ailing Northern franchises and the failing Avanti West Coast.’ Photograph: Nathan Stirk/Getty Images

Sat 22 Oct 2022 03.00 EDT Last modified on Sat 22 Oct 2022 10.52 EDT

If you want to truly understand the full extent of this country’s present dysfunction, forget about the chaos going on in Westminster and instead spend a day trying to travel across the north of England.

By now, if the 2019 Tory manifesto is to be believed, we were meant to be experiencing the joys of being levelled up. Instead, people's spirits are being downtrodden by a daily diet of rail chaos.

At its best, public transport does not just facilitate the movement of people, it drives social mobility too. Good transport not only connects people with each other, but with work, education and opportunity. But for far too long, towns and cities across the north have been held back by a [second-class service](#), forced to overpay for a network that is too complex, fragmented, mismanaged, and underfunded by government.

Delays. Cancellations. Overcrowding. Not just on one bad day: passengers here have faced months of sustained chaos. If this was happening in London or the south-east, it would be a national scandal and action would be swift.

Almost one in five TransPennine Express services on the route between [Manchester](#) and Scotland have been cancelled in the last fortnight, with less than 70% of services running on time. These statistics speak to a disjointed, mismanaged transport system that simply does not work for ordinary people – and it's not the first time we've been here.

In 2019, we successfully led the campaign to [strip Northern of its franchise](#) after years of poor performance. Three years on, though, little has changed. The daily reality facing people remains the same: urgent appointments missed, late arrival at work and school, cut off from vital public services, isolated from friends and families – and some people put in dangerous situations.

Only last week, a [young girl fainted](#) while travelling on a packed three-carriage Northern train between Liverpool and Manchester during the busy morning rush hour. If these problems are allowed to persist, we will be stuck with a car-led recovery that threatens irreversible damage to the north's net zero targets. At this crucial time for the health of our planet and local economies, rail is not pulling its weight.

But it would be unfair to lay all the fault solely at the door of rail operators – the government must bear some of the blame. That’s why we’re calling on whoever is transport secretary when this Tory game of musical chairs is over, to take immediate action with an urgent injection of funds into both ailing Northern franchises and [the failing Avanti West Coast](#).

If that call isn’t heard in the echo chambers of Downing Street, we are left with two options. Whether that is disbanding TransPennine Express and Northern and running them as one unified north-western operator, or allowing services within the region to be run as part of the successful Merseyrail concession, something needs to be done.

The loss of productivity caused by poor public transport is [costing our economies](#) billions of pounds. Instead of being a driver for growth, the railways are not only holding back our regions’ prosperity, but the rest of UK plc too.

And when you look at the financial investment we’ve received, it’s easy to see why our productivity lags behind other regions. In the north, transport spending is [£349 per person](#). In London, it’s £864. Across the past decade, that’s £86bn more pumped into the capital. We are not being critical of investment in the south, but concerned about the lack of investment in the north.

Securing our regions’ wider connectivity to the rest of the country is vital to our long-term economic success. One of the few promising announcements from Liz Truss’s short-lived tenure as prime minister was her [promise to deliver](#) Northern Powerhouse Rail in full – including a new twin-track line running from Liverpool to Hull. Whoever succeeds her must make good on that promise.

Good connectivity isn’t and shouldn’t be solely focused on building better links between the north and south. To rebalance the UK economy we need west to east connectivity, too. But before we get ahead of ourselves with talks of high-speed rail, the most pressing issue right now is that this essential network is barely moving.

We say enough is enough: the north deserves far more than this second-class service. It's time for action.

- Andy Burnham is mayor of Greater Manchester; Steve Rotheram is mayor of the Liverpool city region
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[**Opinion**](#)[**Boris Johnson**](#)

Johnson on the way back? Truss, Trump ... when politics is this crazy, only cartoons can do it justice

[Martin Rowson](#)



An exhibition of how cartoonists covered the Johnson era shows the power of our genre in holding leaders to account



Composite: The Guardian

Sat 22 Oct 2022 04.00 EDT Last modified on Sat 22 Oct 2022 14.52 EDT

The Cartoon Museum's new show of Boris Johnson cartoons, [This Exhibition Is A Work Event](#), chronicles Johnson's time as prime minister through the work of 50 different cartoonists (including a lot of regular Guardian contributors). But there is a question that, even now – as Liz Truss self-detonates and Tory members talk about the [possibility of bringing him back](#) – we must ask: were any of us actually delivering the coup de grace to Britain's Worst Ever Prime Minister (Up Until Then) by caricaturing his defining ridiculousness? Or did we merely frantically scramble to keep pace with the madness his premiership added in spades to the preexisting madness of the past six – or arguably 14, or even 5,000 – years?

Many US cartoonists faced the same dilemma with Donald Trump. You couldn't, as many of them have told me, make this shit up. What are you meant to do when the targets of your satire are the masters of their own absurdity?

I once described Trump and Johnson to an American audience as two cheeks of the same arse (and then took another 10 minutes explaining what I meant), because both successfully controlled the laughter agenda, more or less from the beginning. And I mean from when they could first walk and

fall over for comedy effect. Trump and Johnson are both sociopathic narcissists who feed, like vampires, on our horrified attention, using arsing about like any class clown. But herein also lies their achilles heel. Almost their whole purpose in life is to get us to laugh *with* and not *at* them.

To give him his due, Trump can crack fairly effective, if brutal, jokes, whereas Johnson is merely a Tory or newspaper editor's idea of funny and lands punchlines like the Hindenburg. Nonetheless, he has always understood the importance of the arsing about, hence the whole contrived "Boris" act. Twenty years ago, commissioned to produce a Spectator cover when Johnson was editor, and increasingly enraged by his failure to confirm the precise specs I needed, I phoned him and got the usual Johnsonian harrumphing noises. I told him, maybe intemperately, for once in his life to drop the PG Wodehouse bollocks, to which he replied: "What you call the PG Wodehouse bollocks has served me very well thus far." And yet a couple of years later, when he was by then London mayor and was leaving a party at the Spectator's offices, I encountered him standing on the pavement. "What's it like having responsibility finally thrust on your shoulders, eh, Boris?" I quipped, and his reply this time was abject. "All these awful people like you keep doing these terrible drawings of me," he whined, pouting.

Part of the car crash of Johnson's personality is that he's a terrible liar. Not just like that, but because you can see in his face the precise truth as to his mood at any time. On this occasion he wasn't joking, he was whingeing, seemingly incapable of understanding why everyone everywhere wasn't laughing gratefully at his hilarious antics. Similarly, seven years later he was due to open an exhibition of cartoons I'd drawn about London politics over a decade and a half. He pulled out of the event an hour before we opened, clearly unable to cope in real time, with TV cameras present, with the prospect of me pointing to a cartoon of him caricatured as a fatberg and be expected to take the joke in good part.

Ultimately, Johnson's fall was like Nicolae Ceaușescu's in reverse. The Romanian politburo knew the boss's days were numbered when the crowd at a rally started to laugh at him. We knew "Boris" was stuffed when, at the final PMQs before his defenestration, the Tory benches stopped laughing.

He'd finally completely lost control of the laughter agenda. Which, thank God, means it's back where it belongs, with the cartoonists.

Martin Rowson



Boris Johnson's resignation as Tory leader

I drew this when Johnson resigned to capture his defining entitled delusion. After his own side forced him out he carries on (as his Eton housemaster wrote of him) as if rules for everybody else don't apply to him. But behind the blustering bonhomie there remained a sullen, petulant, pouting manbaby, refusing to believe we'd all stopped applauding with joyous gratitude because he's so lovely. Various visions of "Boris" – Trump the populist, Churchill the heroic war leader and Pericles the great orator – buoy up an unpopular coward barely able to string together a coherent sentence. Them's the breaks.

Rebecca Hendin



Whitehall's revolving door

This cartoon was made on one of those beautiful days in the halcyon year of 2021 in which the endless stream of Boris sleaze coalesced with the endless stream of general Tory sleaze. In this case, the be-sleazed was David Cameron, who was at the time under fire for using his position of influence to lobby on behalf of causes close to his heart* (*wallet). Given the cyclical nature of sleaze among the party, a revolving door being used by the two PMs seemed apt: Boris coming and Cameron going, as fit the news that day. But let's be honest: on a different day it could have been Boris with another Tory from the recent crop, or yet another Tory with another. All hail the Tory sleaze cycle! Terrible for the country, but – far more importantly – easy fodder for cartoonists.

Steve Bell



Boris Johnson's coronavirus 'battle plan'

This was drawn at a time when the Covid-19 outbreak was very much in the news, but a couple of weeks before lockdown was actually declared. A photograph had appeared of [Boris Johnson](#) in a bright yellow coat bearing the logo of Public Health England, the first I had ever heard of such an organisation. This drawing apes the design of the cover of the 2019 Conservative party election manifesto showing Johnson giving the thumbs up beneath the slogan:

"Get Brexit Done

Release Britain's

Potential"

It was a simple step to replace this with an equivalent punchy slogan summing up what seemed to be the government's then (and subsequent) policy on Covid, public health and public services in general.

Ben Jennings



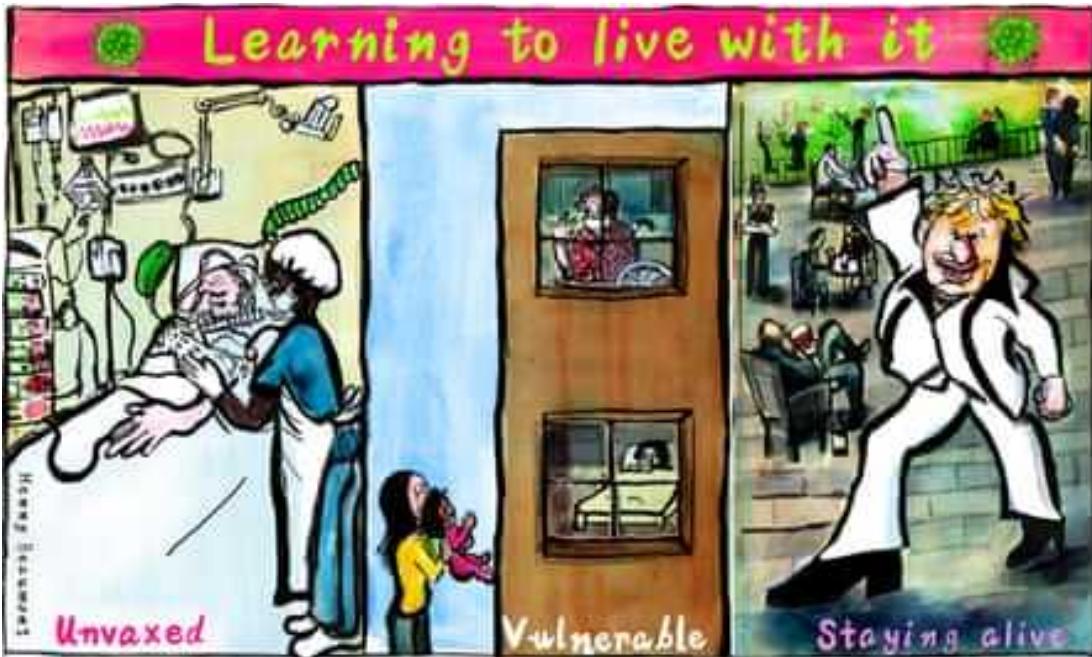
Boris Johnson drawing a line under things

This cartoon was produced when Boris Johnson was desperate to draw a line under the Partygate scandal that had plagued his government ever since revelations began to emerge that Downing Street had essentially become the only nightclub during the pandemic to stay in business. This was at a time when people were saying goodbye to dying loved ones on iPads or being told off by the police for sitting in parks due to the laws his government had enacted. It wasn't the issue that finished him in the end, but it had given him a mighty hangover that he could never quite shake off, and left his leadership mortally wounded.

Here we have him literally drawing that line in the sand, which is then revealed to be the sand within an hour glass where Boris is trapped as his time at the top fizzles away. This turned out to be quite accurate in the end as one month after the cartoon was published, he was gone.

My depiction of Johnson developed over the years as I continued to simplify the character into what eventually finished with the version we have here of a vision-impairing blond mop complete with big gob and a permanent, protruding Pinocchio nose that was a useful recurring prop in many cartoons.

Henny Beaumont



Partying at No 10 while others suffered

During lockdown my whole family had to shield my daughter, who has Down's syndrome and was vulnerable. Like so many other families we made considerable sacrifices; my husband's mother died without him able to visit her, my adult daughters were unable to work, let alone party, my teenage son missed out on two years of seeing friends, of normal socialising.

My fury at Boris was off the scale after hearing about his parties and Matt Hancock's pathetic behaviour (you can glimpse him in the right hand corner of the cartoon).

A lot of Boris cartoons exaggerate Boris's dumb bumbling affectation. I wanted to show his culpability and put a knowing evil glint in his eyes.

Nicola Jennings



Boris Johnson's food strategy for England

This cartoon was drawn the day the government released a white paper on its new food strategy that contained little to address the soaring cost of food and cost of living, and also backtracked on Boris Johnson's pet anti-obesity programme. "Let them eat birthday cake" alludes to Marie Antoinette's famous indifference to the plight of the poor which the new strategy reflected, and simultaneously to the Partygate scandals when Boris was "ambushed" by his own birthday cake. It also echoes his cakeism fantasy that Brexit would let Britain have its cake and eat it.

* *This Exhibition is a WORK EVENT! runs until Sunday, April 16, the Cartoon Museum, 63 Wells St, London W1W 8HJU*

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OpinionBBC

The BBC marks scenes from my life, as it must do for millions – aren't we lucky to have it?

[Ian Jack](#)



Listening to music with my mother, doing my homework, reporting from India: it has always been a comfort, it has always been there



Illustration: Nathalie Lees/The Guardian

Sat 22 Oct 2022 01.00 EDT Last modified on Sat 22 Oct 2022 10.43 EDT

Mondays are washdays. In the kitchen, steam rises from the sink and my mother squeezes sopping wet clothes through the mangle. On the radio a man sings [Oh, What a Beautiful Mornin'](#) from the musical Oklahoma. Later in my childhood other songs made their mark: [Anything You Can Do](#) (I Can Do Better), [Music, Music, Music, \(How Much Is\) That Doggie in the Window?](#). But the opening number in Oklahoma is the first music I can remember and put a name to: a memory preserved, possibly, via the song's association with sunshine and sunshine's importance to washdays.

Of course, I had no idea of the song's origins or how songs in general came about; no idea of [Rodgers and Hammerstein](#); wouldn't know corn ("as high as an elephant's eye" or otherwise) if I met it dancing in the street. Nor did I know what was old and what was new. Children, when they first encounter the world, imagine that what they hear and see has been there for ever. That was how, for many years, I thought of Oh, What a Beautiful Mornin' – as eternal – when in fact, first sung on Broadway in 1943, it was only a couple of years older than me.

Likewise, the organisation that brought it into our home: the BBC had been founded only 20-odd years before, in 1922, and was therefore much younger than my parents, who never referred to it by name (“Let’s listen to the BBC”) but always as an instrument (“Let’s listen to the wireless”). The two were synonymous. Other stations were marked on the dial – Luxembourg, Hilversum, [Athlone](#) – but apart from a flirtation with Lord Haw-Haw during the recent second world war my parents had ears only for the BBC Home Service and BBC Light Programme.

The BBC had a good war. “To inform, educate, and entertain” was the mission statement of its Presbyterian founder, [Lord Reith](#), but until 1939 none of these aims had been fulfilled in any great style. The days when it could see itself as the nation’s voice – its comforter, best expression and chief ornament – were some way off. Dance bands, symphony orchestras and plays were its big attractions. It relayed news to its audience fitfully and tactfully. Radios were banned in gentlemen’s clubs and the Palace of Westminster, and until 1938 nothing other than church services were broadcast on a Sunday morning. According to Edward Stourton’s history of the BBC, one broadcast began: “Good evening, today is Good Friday. [There is no news.](#)”

Even when news existed, the BBC felt it was better left to newspapers. By the mid-1930s, it had managed to set up a news department, but even so it employed no reporters, only text editors who fashioned news items from copy supplied by Reuters. Its first reporter, [Richard Dimbleby](#), was hired from a Southampton paper on the strength of his novel suggestion that some recruits to the news staff might be “held in readiness, just as are the evening paper men, to cover unexpected news of the day … a big fire, railway accidents, pit accidents, or any other major catastrophes in which the public, I fear, is deeply interested”.

War shook the [BBC](#) out of its social conservatism and massively expanded its operation. The need for entertainment, public information and propaganda increased staff numbers from 3,500 in 1937 to 9,000 by the summer of 1941. (Today it directly employs about 22,000.) News and foreign broadcasting were particularly expanded, and tensions arose between the BBC’s twin duties of keeping up morale and reporting the facts.

Winston Churchill, who [loathed the BBC](#), wanted the Ministry of Information to be the sole supplier of the wartime narrative. It was the job of the armed services, in his words, “to purvey to the ministry the raw meat and vegetables and for the ministry to cook and serve the dish to the public”. The BBC’s resistance modified this crude ambition, but truth was still a casualty. The retreat from France was turned into the plucky triumph of Dunkirk; the shocking casualty figures of the [Dieppe raid](#), a bloody debacle, were suppressed.

As the war went on, however, more care was taken to preserve the BBC’s credibility: one senior adviser wrote that lies were worth broadcasting only if they brought “considerable” military advantage. George Orwell, then a talk producer with the Eastern service, believed that by comparison with the enemy’s propaganda streams “our little corner” had been kept “fairly clean”. And we were, after all, trying to win.

The BBC I grew up with was born in those years, which were remembered by many people who experienced them less for their news bulletins than their escapism. At least, that was so at home. I heard so much from my parents and older brother about [It's That Man Again](#) that I began to believe I’d heard the comedy series myself. It ended with the death of its star, Tommy Handley, in 1949, but some of its catchphrases remained current into the 1960s: “Can I do you now, sir?” (Mrs Mopp); “After you, Cecil” (Claude); “No, after you, Claude” (Cecil). By then they had been joined by streams of other catchphrases from later radio shows – Much Binding in the Marsh, Take it From Here, Ray’s a Laugh, [Round the Horne](#) – so that conversations in the radio age, perhaps especially among schoolboys, became almost Freemasonic in their mysteries to anyone who had never heard “[He's fallen in the water](#)” on the Goon Show or “Stone me!” in Hancock’s Half Hour.

We got a television in 1961 and the BBC became visible to us for the first time – literally, through its typographical branding, its newsreaders, the glimpses of its studios, offices and transmitters. Before, it had simply existed as noises – music, speech, laughter, applause, sound effects, doors being knocked (“Can I do you now, sir?”), splashing (“He’s fallen in the water”). BBC [Television](#) has a list of formidable achievements; BBC Radio

flourishes in its shade. Together with their overseas services they still stand as one of the world's great cultural projects, despite the continual nagging of free-market ideologists and the cost-cutting of spiteful governments. It looks unlikely that Britain will ever again invent anything so admired and influential; we have been lucky to have it.

As it must do for millions of others, it marks scenes from my own life. As a reporter in a shabby Indian hotel room, trying to locate the World Service on a shortwave radio; as a son coming home late one night to find his father amazed and amused at the satire of That Was the Week That Was; as a schoolboy doing his Sunday-night homework to the genteel waltzes of Max Jaffa and his Palm Court Orchestra. And then the first moment: Mum with her mangle, damp clothes hung out to dry, oh what a beautiful morning. I am guessing Housewives' Choice, some time in 1948.

The BBC celebrated its centenary last Tuesday. Long may it last.

- Ian Jack is a Guardian columnist
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OpinionPolitics

The trauma of the Truss era will afflict British politics for years to come

[Martin Kettle](#)



This ‘never again’ moment will inform everything from fiscal policy to Brexit – most importantly, what about public trust?



Liz Truss, left, and the BBC's Laura Kuenssberg during the Tory leadership race on 4 September. Photograph: Jeff Overs/BBC/AFP/Getty Images

Fri 21 Oct 2022 13.00 EDT Last modified on Fri 21 Oct 2022 16.38 EDT

Traumatic events bequeath traumatised legacies. We know this in our personal lives. The same is also true for nations and their politics. The tragedy and farce of the past months are not over. There may be further convulsions, especially if [Boris Johnson returns](#). But even if he does not, these months will leave searing effects as British politics endures a form of post-traumatic stress disorder.

Many countries continue to live with much darker horrors in their collective psyches. Modern Germany is still shaped by an unbending rejection of the Nazi past. United States foreign policy remains indelibly marked by the disaster of Vietnam. In Russian history there was a period, lasting from 1598 until 1613, that is simply known as the “time of troubles”; Vladimir Putin constantly tries to bolster his authoritarian rule by warning that such a time must never come again.

In Britain, we too must see the wider civic damage of the Johnson and Liz Truss eras. We need to ask non-partisan questions about the longer-term effect of prime ministers toppling, ministers coming and going, and the

experience of watching an [economy on a knife-edge](#). This requires us to step back and think about how the events of 2022 may shape those who will govern for the rest of this decade and beyond.

One thing can be said with confidence. The Conservative governments' implosions will come to be seen as "never again" moments, and not just within the Tory party. The chaos of 2022 will join events from earlier times, such as the Iraq war, the 1981 budget and the 1956 Suez crisis, as crucial warning waymarks that shape the choices of succeeding administrations. This year of multiple prime ministers and chancellors will be a cautionary tale for a long time to come.

The scar tissue from all this will shape future politics, not merely the week ahead. Here are just five areas to consider where the impact is likely to be long, powerful – and perhaps unexpected. All are intertwined. Few offer easy hope that this Tory time of troubles will trigger anything approaching the Damascene conversion to evidence and reasoning in public policy that many of us would like to see.

The Conservative party

Although Jeremy Hunt still invokes compassionate and one-nation Conservatism, those traditions are fatally weakened. The Tory party has moved decisively to the right, channelling much of the worldview of Ukip. In spite of Liz Truss's fall, a possessive individualism deriving from the Thatcher era remains the default ideology of much of the party. Big financial interventions over Covid and energy prices, and the market attack on the mini-budget tax cuts, have done little to change this. Tories who argue that taxes should rise, such as the journalist [Daniel Finkelstein](#) this week, are vanishingly rare. Those who hope the party of Michael Heseltine will somehow re-emerge from the ashes of the Truss debacle will be disappointed. If Johnson recaptures the party next week, the prospect of the Tories splitting, as the Liberals did in 1918 and Labour in 1981, will increase, with lasting consequences.

Fiscal policy

The arguments around Kwasi Kwarteng's mini-budget have not been resolved. Logically, the batterings experienced by the Truss government's tax cuts should favour a return to orthodoxy in policymaking, rather than radicalism. Yet the Tory party (and the [Daily Mail](#)) are unconvinced. Indeed Labour may take the lesson to heart more seriously than the Tories. So the otherwise rational case for higher taxes and more spending at a time when needs are so large is still looking for a political home. Meanwhile libertarian Tories have become convinced that economic orthodoxy is always being weaponised to try to do Brexit Britain down. The trauma of 2022 will have long consequences, including perverse ones.

Brexit

You might think that the mini-budget trauma would now allow more pragmatic approaches to Brexit to emerge. As [Mark Carney pointed out](#) a few days ago, in 2016 the British economy was 90% the size of Germany's, but now it is less than 70%. Now that tax cuts and doubling down on inequality have bombed as a solution, there is fresh logic in forging better post-Brexit economic links with the EU. That, at least, is the view of the historian [Anthony Seldon](#), who told me this week that the mini-budget humiliation is "the end of the Brexiter view that everything can be blamed on what Lord Frost calls the 'hectoring classes' and on the 'blob' of stupid people who cannot see the truth". Intellectually, Seldon may be spot on. But don't hold your breath for a more pragmatic approach to Brexit.

Parliamentary democracy

The rapid churn of governments, ministers and policies in 2022 is unprecedented. It has its origins in the Brexit vote, but the volatility shows no sign of ending. The challenge this poses for unreformed parliamentary democracy cannot be overstated. The postwar era, in which Britain alternated almost seamlessly between liberal capitalist government under the Conservatives and social democratic government under Labour, but in which there were nevertheless important elements of continuity and respect for parliament and other institutions, has long gone. The historian [Peter Hennessy](#) told me this week: "If the shoutiness, coarseness and malice of the

Brexit era continues to be the normality of politics, the 2020s will be seen as a wasted decade and the pessimism will deepen.”

Public trust

The humbling of Truss may prove the humbling of the British political class more generally. It challenges the claim of ministers to lead wisely, explain clearly, and deliver competently. To borrow a chant often launched at referees from the football terraces, this year has been British government’s “You don’t know what you’re doing” moment. But it will shape confidence in future governments of all colours too, because trust is already so low. The expert on the Tory party [Tim Bale](#) says: “Along with the expenses scandal, these events will do a great deal of damage. The open question is whether the government mishandling of events will simply have a negative impact or whether it will encourage a more positive approach to reforms such as proportional representation.”

When events like these occur, it is tempting to think that the public and the politicians will have a lightbulb moment about the importance of government and the state in providing stability, security and fairness. Hennessy, who called his book on Britain after 1945 Never Again, is nervous about whether it will happen in 2024, although he thinks Keir Starmer is capable of leading the country. Such caution is glumly understandable. The biggest question after the implosion of the Truss government is whether the public is willing to trust any politician any more.

- Martin Kettle is a Guardian associate editor and columnist
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Xi Jinping: from ‘counter-revolutionary’ to absolute power

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[China](#)

Where are the women at the top of Chinese politics?

No woman has ever been a member of China's Politburo Standing Committee, the small group that runs the country

- [Communism party congress: everything you need to know](#)



Chinese President Xi Jinping is surrounded by men
Photograph: Kevin Frayer/Getty Images



[Emma Graham-Harrison](#) in Taipei

Fri 21 Oct 2022 20.00 EDT Last modified on Fri 21 Oct 2022 20.11 EDT

Across seven decades of turmoil and change, one thing about China's leadership has remained unchanged. It is all male.

Men led China into the famine of the Great Leap Forward, through the convulsions of the Cultural Revolution and during the economic opening of the 1980s and 90s. In Xi Jinping's "new era" of digital authoritarianism, men remain in charge of the country.

The Communist party has run China for 70 years, and in that time no woman has ever been a member of China's Politburo Standing Committee, the small group that runs the country, much less led the party or been made President or Premier.

This week at the opening of the [20th](#) Communist party Congress, which will extend Xi's rule for another five years, another line of male leaders filed on to the stage of the Great Hall of the People, to face an audience dominated once again by men.

There may have been more young women stewards, topping up teacups with hot water, than female delegates in the chairs listening to Xi.

“Chinese women have been excluded from the centre of political power at both local and central levels,” said Hsiu-hua Shen, Professor of Sociology at Taiwan’s National Tsing Hua university. “Without specific affirmative actions … it is very difficult for Chinese women to be able to enter political systems and shape policies.”

An uneasy relationship

The party was formed during a civil war, in a highly patriarchal society and has been based on “masculine violence” and power struggles since its establishment, Shen added.

The CCP has nearly 100 million members, but less than a third of the rank and file are women, and the numbers thin out, the higher up its ranks you climb.

“China’s patriarchal political structure limits women’s upward mobility,” said Pan Wang, senior lecturer in Chinese and Asian studies at the University of New South Wales.

“From the bottom to the top of the pyramid, women get fewer at each step of the hierarchy (from CCP members, to the party congress, central committee and the politburo). This can create biases in the nomination and selection process for leading positions in the party/state.”

Chinese women are held back by a variety of factors, Pan said. They include cultural expectations that women do more in the home, a career structure that forces them to retire earlier than men, just as they might be reaching their professional peak, and education and socialisation that discourages them from political ambitions.

The CCP has always had an uneasy relationship with feminists, in part because Communists claim to have liberated women themselves. Mao’s slogan “women hold up half the sky” became famous as half tribute, half promise to China’s women.

That makes any woman still fighting for her rights potentially subversive, particularly at a time when Xi is openly distrustful of any civil organising.

There have been repeated crackdowns on feminists, including arrests of women protesting issues that do not obviously challenge the political system, like sexual harassment. China's #MeToo movement has made little progress.



Tennis star Peng Shuai went missing for several weeks after publicly accusing a senior official of sexual assault last year. Photograph: Andy Brownbill/AP

Among the ranks of assembled dignitaries at the Party Congress was [Zhang Gaoli](#), the former Vice-Premier who tennis champion Peng Shuai publicly accused of sexual assault last year.

Peng went missing for weeks after making her accusations on social media. She was eventually seen in public after a high profile international campaign, organised under the hashtag #WhereIsPengShuai, but has kept a [very low profile since](#) and said her post was misunderstood, while he still commands the political stage.

“The CCP is still quite traditional when it comes to women at the very top. Recent crackdowns on feminist activists have further signalled a more

traditionalist and conservative line,” said Mary Gallagher, Professor of Democracy, Democratization, and Human Rights at the University of Michigan.

Communism made it easier for women to get an education and join the workforce, but as in many other countries they were still expected to do the majority of domestic work, a “double shift” that is tiring and limits career opportunities.

With a falling birthrate on the brink of tipping China’s already fast-ageing population into decline, there is increasing pressure on young people to have more children. Academics and campaigners fear that may further hobble women’s hopes of getting more political power in China.

“I fear that in the short term, China will follow other countries and restrict women’s access to abortion and contraception as a way to force women to have more children. Ultimately, these policies will backfire and fail, but they could increase repression and crackdowns on feminist politics,” Gallagher said.

‘One woman is OK’



Chinese Vice Premier Sun Chunlan, Shanghai Communist party Secretary Li Qiang and Yang Jiechi, director of the Office of the Central Commission for Foreign Affairs, attend the opening ceremony of the 20th National Congress of the Communist party of China Photograph: Thomas Peter/Reuters

The highest a woman has risen in China is the 25-member politburo, the next level of power down from the Standing Committee. At the moment it includes 24 men and one woman, Xi's Covid tsar Sun Chunlan. She is one of just three women who have made it near the top as political operators in their own right.

Only eight women have made it on to the politburo since 1949, among hundreds of men. Three of them were wives of top officials, including Mao Zedong and Zhou Enlai. Two others were "revolutionary heroes" during the Cultural Revolution whose role was more propaganda than power.

Sun retires this year, but is expected to be succeeded by another woman, possibly Guizhou party secretary Shen Yiqin. Since 2001 the CCP required at least one woman in senior leadership position at each level, although the requirement doesn't extend to the politburo.

"The party has addressed it but in a relatively vague manner, if you look at the party constitution, there is a line about promoting women party members in leadership," said Minglu Chen, Senior Lecturer in the Department of Government and International Relations at the University of Sydney.

Requiring a minimal role for female cadres has opened the door a crack, but not changed a misogynist political culture.

"This is a bit of a development ... (but) in reality this policy has often been interpreted as "one woman is OK", so there is only one woman. This obviously shows the quota system being adopted is effective, but more needs to be done."

And for nearly 700 million women who live in China, this is not just a matter of principle. "The one thing we could safely argue, with no woman in leadership, women's issues would be under-represented."

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Imran Khan

Ex-Pakistan PM Imran Khan barred from elections for five years

Election commission rules he misled officials about gifts received from foreign leaders while in office



Imran Khan speaks during a news conference in Islamabad in April.
Photograph: Rahmat Gul/AP

[Shah Meer Baloch](#) and agencies

Fri 21 Oct 2022 12.55 EDTFirst published on Fri 21 Oct 2022 07.33 EDT

The former prime minister of Pakistan [Imran Khan](#) has been disqualified from running for political office for five years, after the country's election commission ruled that he misled officials about gifts he received from foreign leaders while in power.

The decision announced on Friday is another twist in political wrangling that began even before Khan's ejection in April, and is one of several legal

battles being fought by the former international cricket star and his [Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf](#) (PTI) party.

“The ECP [Election Commission of Pakistan] has declared Imran Khan was involved in corrupt practices,” said Gohar Khan, one of his lawyers, adding that he had been disqualified for five years. “We are going to challenge it in the Islamabad high court right now.”

Pakistan’s courts are often used to tie up politicians in lengthy proceedings that rights monitors criticise for stifling political opposition, but the commission’s involvement in this case stems from the obligation of elected officials to declare all their assets.

The case centres on a government department known as Toshakhana, which during the Mughal era referred to the “treasure houses” kept by the subcontinent’s princely rulers to store and display gifts lavished on them.

Government officials must declare all gifts, but are allowed to keep those below a certain value.

More expensive items must go to Toshakhana, but in some cases the recipient can buy them back at about 50% of their value – a discount that Khan raised from 20% while in office.

Pakistani newspapers have for months carried stories alleging that Khan and his wife received lavish gifts worth millions during trips abroad. They included luxury watches, jewellery, designer handbags and perfumes.

Khan is accused of failing to declare some gifts, or the profit made from selling them.

The complaint to the election commission was first brought when Khan was still in office by the Pakistan Democratic Movement, a coalition whose members now make up the government.

At the time, Khan said he had not made public some gifts on national security grounds, but in a written submission admitted buying items worth

nearly 22m rupees (£90,000), and later selling them for more than twice that amount.

He says the valuation was done through proper channels.

This week, Khan won six of eight national assembly seats he stood for in a weekend byelection, a vote he called a referendum on his popularity.

Individuals can stand in multiple constituencies in Pakistan elections and choose which to forfeit if they win more than one, but it is rare for a candidate to contest as many as Khan.

The 70-year-old has attempted to disrupt Pakistan's political process since [being ousted in April](#), when he ordered all his MPs to give up their seats, leaving no PTI members in the national assembly.

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He has also vowed to announce the date of a “long march” of his supporters on the capital to pressure the government into announcing an earlier national election than that scheduled for October next year.

Khan’s supporters gathered on Friday in cities across the country, including Islamabad, to protest against the decision, and some clashed with police later in the day. Hospitals were put on high alert and security was stepped up, with paramilitary forces deployed in the capital.

Meanwhile, political parties from the government celebrated the decision. Their supporters distributed sweets in some towns after Khan’s

disqualification.

Ahmed Bilal Mehboob, president of the Pakistan Institute of Legislative Development and Transparency, said the ruling would undermine the anti-corruption platform Khan had tried to make his own. But he added that it was difficult to understand the basis for disqualification.

“Overall, on the basis of the limited information available, it seems to be a weak judgment. In this case, there are at least two chances to appeal against this order; at the high court and supreme court. I think if Khan gets a quick relief from the high court against this order, it will be quite embarrassing for the ECP, and Khan’s position may be further strengthened as a result,” said Mehboob.

Khan regularly holds rallies drawing tens of thousands across the country, giving fiery speeches criticising state institutions – including the powerful military – for allegedly conspiring to topple his government.

He rode to power in 2018 on a populist platform promising social reforms, religious conservatism and a fight against corruption, overturning decades of rule by two feuding political dynasties interspersed with military takeovers.

But under his tenure the economy stagnated and he lost the support of the army, which was accused of helping to get him elected.

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[**Paris**](#)

Parents of girl found in suitcase urge French politicians to stop exploiting death

Family speak out after photo of 12-year-old, identified only as ‘Lola’, was displayed at far-right rally



Tributes left in front of the Paris school where 12-year-old child was studying. Photograph: Chesnot/Getty Images

AFP in Paris

Fri 21 Oct 2022 14.05 EDTFirst published on Fri 21 Oct 2022 13.42 EDT

The parents of a French schoolgirl whose death stunned the country have urged rightwing politicians to stop using her photograph for political ends.

A 24-year-old woman from Algeria with a history of psychiatric disorders was last week [charged with the rape and murder](#) last week of the girl,

identified only as “Lola”.

Investigators have learned that the woman had overstayed a student visa and in August had received notice to leave [France](#) within 30 days.

Conservative and far-right parties have accused President Emmanuel Macron’s government of failing to enforce immigration laws, saying strict application of deportation orders could have prevented the child’s death.

But Lola’s parents, who met Macron this week, have pleaded with politicians to stop exploiting their daughter’s death, after her photo was displayed at a far-right demonstration in [Paris](#) on Thursday.

They asked that “any use of the name and image of their child for political ends immediately cease and be removed” from the internet and in protests, their lawyers said.

The request was made so they could “honour the memory of their child in peace, respect and dignity”.

Speaking on the sidelines of a Brussels summit on Friday, Macron said the family needed “the nation’s respect and affection”.

Lola, 12, is to be buried in the northern French town of Lillers on Monday.

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Headlines

- [Live Russia-Ukraine war: at least one person killed after 28 Russian drones hit Kyiv, says mayor](#)
- [Full report Russia hits Kyiv with 'kamikaze' drones](#)
- [Analysis Russia targets energy grid as winter looms](#)
- [At a glance What we know on day 236 of the invasion](#)

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Fighter jet crashes in Russian city near Ukraine; Kyiv says 108 women freed in prisoner swap – as it happened

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[Ukraine](#)

‘Kamikaze’ drones hit Kyiv despite Putin’s claim of no further strikes

Pregnant woman and her partner killed in latest wave of drone strikes on Ukraine’s capital

- [Russia-Ukraine war – latest news updates](#)

Russia attacks Kyiv with 'kamikaze' drone strikes – video

Dan Sabbagh and Charlotte Higgins in Kyiv and Samantha Lock

Mon 17 Oct 2022 12.45 EDTFirst published on Mon 17 Oct 2022 01.27 EDT

Russia attacked Kyiv with nearly 30 “kamikaze” drones on Monday morning, killing four, including a pregnant woman and her partner, days after Vladimir Putin said there would be no more “massive strikes” on [Ukraine](#).

Victoria and Bohan, both 34, were found dead after a residential building was struck in the city’s central Shevchenkiv district, a Ukrainian official said. Victoria was six months pregnant, the capital’s mayor, Vitali Klitschko, added.

Videos showed Iranian Shahed drones, rebranded by Russia as Geran-2, with a distinctive triangle shape flying low over the city, [then crashing into the ground](#) and exploding, [prompting terrified onlookers to flee](#).

Five explosions were heard in the capital, the mayor said, after 28 drones were launched towards the city by Russia’s military. The others were shot down from the ground by small arms fire and other air defences.

Klitschko said four people were killed after the residential building was hit, while 18 residents were rescued, including two from under the rubble. A search and rescue operation on the site was continuing, he added.

Ukrainian politicians said the latest Russian attack showed the need for the west to provide additional military aid. Andriy Yermak, the head of the president's office, said: "We need more air defence systems and as soon as possible. We have no time for slow actions. More weapons to defend the sky and destroy the enemy."

Diagram: Shahed drone

Iran denies supplying the drones to Russia but Ukraine and western countries and experts say the design matches that originally from Tehran, prompting calls from leaders in Kyiv for fresh measures to be taken against the country.

The foreign minister, Dmytro Kuleba, said he had addressed EU foreign affairs ministers from a bomb shelter because of the attacks. He added that he had "called on EU to impose sanctions on Iran for providing Russia with drones" as well as a further package aimed directly at Russia.

The US warned it would take action against companies and nations working with Iran's drone program, describing the deepening alliance between Moscow and Tehran as "a profound threat."

"Anyone doing business with Iran that could have any link to UAVs or ballistic missile developments or the flow of arms from Iran to Russia should be very careful and do their due diligence – the US will not hesitate to use sanctions or take actions against perpetrators," said a State Department spokesman.

Russia has been making growing use of Shahed-136 drones and the smaller 131s supplied by Iran. The 136s have an operating range of 1,000km (620 miles) and crash into their targets – hence the kamikaze description – detonating deadly explosive charges.



A drone approaches for an attack in Kyiv on Monday. Photograph: Yasuyoshi Chiba/AFP/Getty Images

Moscow acquired 2,400 drones from Iran, Ukraine believes, and they were first used heavily against targets in the south before being redeployed to Belarus in the past week. Monday's strikes may be the first time they have been used against the Ukrainian capital.

Klitschko circulated a [picture of a destroyed drone](#) on Monday morning, while other media showed a fragment of a drone that had been [marked “for Belgorod”](#), an apparent retaliation for attacks on the Russian border city, from where multiple rocket attacks had been launched on Ukraine.

Уламок одного з дронів-каміадзе, які сьогодні зранку атакували Київ. pic.twitter.com/EV1Hy6GADL

— Віталій Кличко (@Vitaliy_Klychko) [October 17, 2022](#)

The attacks came exactly one week after Russia unleashed its heaviest aerial bombardment of Kyiv and other Ukrainian cities since the start of the war – also during morning rush hour – in response to the bombing of the bridge between Russia and Crimea.

Ukraine's president accused Russia of terrorism, but said his country's resolve remained firm. "All night and all morning, the enemy terrorises the civilian population," Volodymyr Zelenskiy said.

"Kamikaze drones and missiles are attacking all of Ukraine. A residential building was hit in Kyiv. The enemy can attack our cities, but it won't be able to break us. The occupiers will get only fair punishment and condemnation of future generations. And we will get victory."

Ukraine police appear to shoot down Russian drone – video

Local officials also reported that drones had struck two vast tanks of sunflower oil in the southern city of Mykolaiv. Video showed the oil [running through the streets](#), from a terminal that handles 17% of the world's supplies.

Strikes were also reported in Sumy province, in the country's north-east, where four more were reported killed, and in Dnipro, in the south-east, where a fire broke out at an energy facility after it was hit by a missile.

The Ukrainian prime minister, Denys Shmyhal, said "critical infrastructure" had been targeted in three regions, Kyiv, Sumy and Dnipro. Officials were "working on fixing the consequences of the shelling and restoring electricity supply" where it had been cut off.

In Kyiv, air raid sirens, an almost daily occurrence frequently ignored by citizens, sounded at 6.25am. This time, however, they were swiftly followed by a series of explosions between 6.35am and 6.58am (3.35am and 3.58am GMT). A second series of blasts was heard by Guardian correspondents at about 8.15am local time.



A police officer fires at a flying drone in Kyiv on Monday. Photograph: Yasuyoshi Chiba/AFP/Getty Images

The head of Ukraine's state railway, Alexander Kamyshin, said some drone strikes had hit near Kyiv's central station. Scores of people sheltered in an underpass at the station, at a time of day when the streets above would normally have been busy.

Currently waiting in an underpass at Kyiv station after multiple drone strikes nearby. One explosion after I first arrived, the look of fear on some peoples faces. What a way to start a day
pic.twitter.com/qg3TblYqmT

— Dan Sabbagh (@dansabbagh) [October 17, 2022](#)

⚡Drone attack on Kyiv continues.

Air defense at work.

All in Kyiv need to be in shelters. pic.twitter.com/M5j49WZzn8

— Anton Gerashchenko (@Gerashchenko_en) [October 17, 2022](#)

The attack came a week after Russian missile strikes on the Ukrainian capital and other centres. After the attack on 10 October, Putin said most designated targets of the strikes had been hit, adding that it was not his aim to destroy Ukraine.

Speaking to journalists after a summit with regional leaders in Kazakhstan's capital, Astana, the Russian leader said the recent strikes had destroyed 22 out of the 29 targets in Ukraine set by the military and that "they are getting" the remaining seven.

"There's no need for massive strikes. We now have other tasks," he said.

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/oct/17/kyiv-hit-by-a-series-of-explosions-from-drone-attack>

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Ukraine

Explainer

What are kamikaze drones and why is Russia using them in Ukraine?

Hitting civilian infrastructure seems to be only effective tactic for Putin's under-pressure forces

- [Russia-Ukraine war – latest updates](#)

Russia attacks Kyiv with 'kamikaze' drone strikes – video

Dan Sabbagh

Mon 17 Oct 2022 05.12 EDTFirst published on Mon 17 Oct 2022 01.00 EDT

Russia's growing use of Iranian Shahed-136 drones reflects both strength and weakness. Monday morning's [drone bombings in the centre of Kyiv](#), in two clusters at the time of the morning rush hour, show how the weapons can cause destruction and fear in a capital that until a week ago had not been attacked for months.

The Shahed-136s first appeared in the war in September, and although they are described as kamikaze drones, they are better thought of as small cruise missiles with a relatively limited destructive capacity given their 50kg payload. Ukraine's president, Volodymyr Zelenskiy, said Russia had bought 2,400 – a large-sounding number, but these are being depleted fast.

Justin Bronk, an airpower specialist at the Royal United Services Institute thinktank, says the drones "are difficult to consistently intercept" but their airspeed is slow relative to cruise missiles, meaning air defences will always have a chance. "Ultimately, they offer a way for [Russia](#) to cause more

civilian and military casualties in Ukraine, but will not turn the tide of the war,” he said.

It is the second major attack on Kyiv in a week. Last Monday, in response to the explosion at the Kerch strait bridge into Crimea, Russia unleashed a deadly hail of missile and drone strikes aimed at Kyiv and other major cities.

The bloody success of last week’s attack – an estimated 15 were killed that day alone – and the destruction of this Monday’s, reveals the limitations in Kyiv’s air defence. It is not clear why it has taken so long, but the US responded last week by saying it would expedite the delivery of the first two of eight promised Nasams air defence systems, which are deemed good enough to protect the Pentagon.

Graphic

But while attacks on Kyiv capture headlines around the world, the military utility is closer to nil and in isolation will have had no meaningful psychological effect on the country’s largely determined civilian population. The attacks provoke fear, but also anger, particularly after Vladimir Putin said there was “no need” for more massive strikes on Ukraine.

Their use also appears to demonstrate that Russia is running short of guided missiles. Western officials said on Friday they agreed broadly with a [Ukrainian assessment](#) that Moscow had used up about two-thirds of its stocks, and has only 124 out of 900 medium-range Iskanders left. “We think that’s about right,” one said, although such conclusions are impossible to verify.

There were [some suggestions on Monday morning](#) that Russia may have partly been trying to target an energy site in the capital, although full details are yet to be confirmed. Nevertheless, more broadly, there are growing signs Russia is trying to target Ukraine’s energy and other utility grids as the winter and the country’s “heating season” begins.

Russian attacks on Ukraine energy infrastructure

The point is not lost on the country's anxious defenders either, with calls for people to reduce electricity use between 5pm and 11pm in the evenings. In the last month power supplies to Kharkiv, Kyiv and Lviv have at times been affected by Russian strikes.

Drones such as the Shahed-136s are more effective against such static targets than they are against armies and, for Moscow, the disruptive impact on Ukraine may be greater. At the same time Russia will want badly to halt Ukraine's battlefield advances at least until heavy late-autumn rains are expected to prompt some sort of a pause.

Russia's call for the evacuation of civilians from Kherson oblast last week may have been billed as merely temporary [by one local official](#), but it is the next step in a gradual retreat from the west of the Dnieper, where its forces have been going backwards since the beginning of the month.

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Ukraine has been mounting a counteroffensive, pressing and pushing against the Russian lines since the beginning of September, but with little material success until the first part of October, when the invaders gave up a swathe of territory up to 30 miles deep north-west of Kherson city to a new front, north of the village of Mylove.

If that was an attempt to rationalise the frontlines, it clearly has not succeeded in the light of the evacuation announcement, and there has been speculation in some western quarters that Kherson itself could be recaptured as soon as next week, although that sort of talk is perhaps highly optimistic.

It may be the case that Russia is simply girding itself for an urban defence of the city, allowing its lines to contract and tie up Ukraine in a costly autumn battle. It will be easier to defend the city than the open country around it, creating a dilemma for Kyiv as to how far it is willing to blast its way to success.

But for the moment it is the frontline to watch in the nearly eight-month-long war, where Ukraine appears to hold the initiative on land. Russia also continues to come under pressure in the north-east part of the front too, where Ukraine is seeking to push towards Kreminna, after taking Lyman, and Svatove, a transport hub.

Nothing else is working for Moscow. Russia has been flinging mobilised conscripts from its half-a-million draft into the frontline, and [the first, depressing reports have emerged](#) of forced recruits dying in places such as Lysychansk after receiving minimal or non-existent training.

Ukraine's frontline progress is not rapid at present, but it is steady, and the concern has to remain that an under pressure Russia will resort to stepping up its targeting of civilians and civilian infrastructure because that is the only tactic that seems, from its point of view, to have any impact.

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

[**Explainer**](#)

Russia-Ukraine war latest: what we know on day 236 of the invasion

At least four people killed in drone strikes on capital Kyiv; Iran denies supplying weapons to Russia



A Ukrainian serviceman attempts to shoot down a drone during an attack in Kyiv. Photograph: Sergei Supinsky/AFP/Getty Images

[Helen Sullivan](#) and [Martin Belam](#)

Mon 17 Oct 2022 09.24 EDTFirst published on Sun 16 Oct 2022 19.02 EDT

- **At least four people have been killed and three others hospitalised after a series of “kamikaze” drone attacks on Ukraine’s capital, Kyiv.** Mayor Vitali Klitschko said a dead woman was recovered from the rubble of a house in Shevchenkiv district, where an explosion has occurred as a result of a drone attack. He identified two other victims as

“a young couple, a husband and wife who were expecting a child. The woman was six months pregnant”. Another person is under the rubble, he added. Search and rescue operations are ongoing. Earlier, Kitschko said 18 people had been rescued, and that there had been five explosions after 28 drones had been directed at the city.

- Ukraine’s prime minister, **Denys Shmyhal** said: “Today, Russia again attacked civilian and energy facilities in [Ukraine](#). Apartment building in Kyiv is among the terrorists’ targets. People are injured. The world’s response to these crimes must be clear: more support for Ukraine and more sanctions against the aggressor.”
- Ukrainian presidential adviser **Mykhailo Podolyak** said after the new wave of drone attacks that Russia should be expelled from the G20 group.
- **Iran said again on Monday that it had not provided Russia with drones to use in Ukraine.** “The published news about Iran providing Russia with drones has political ambitions and it is circulated by western sources. We have not provided weaponry to any side of the countries at war,” Iran’s foreign ministry spokesperson **Nasser Kanaani** said.
- EU’s foreign policy chief **Josep Borrell** said the bloc would look for “concrete evidence” about the participation of Iran in Russia’s war on Ukraine.

Russia attacks Kyiv with 'kamikaze' drone strikes – video

- **The European Union has agreed to create a mission to train 15,000 Ukrainian soldiers and will also provide a further €500m to help buy weapons for the war-torn country under Russian attack.** EU foreign ministers meeting on Monday approved the two-year training mission, which will involve different EU forces providing basic and specialist instruction to Ukrainian soldiers, in locations in Poland and Germany. Officials hope the mission, which is expected to cost €107m, will be up and running by mid November.

- **Pavlo Kyrylenko**, Ukraine's governor of **Donetsk**, has posted to Telegram to say that the night in the Ukrainian-controlled area of the region "passed relatively calmly". **Maksym Marchenko**, governor of **Odesa**, has said that overnight air defences in his region shot down six kamikaze drones.
- **Oleh Synyehubov**, governor of **Kharkiv**, has said that one person has died and two people have been wounded by Russia strikes on the region in the last 24 hours.
- The regional governor of the eastern region of **Sumy**, **Dmytro Zhyvytsky**, has said that three people were killed and nine more injured in a rocket attack this morning.
- Russian news agency Tass is reporting that buses are once again allowed to cross the **Crimea bridge**, which was damaged in an attack a few days ago.
- The **UK Ministry of Defence** says in its latest update that Russia is "likely" facing more acute logistical challenges as a result of the Kerch bridge bombing on 8 October. "A large queue of waiting cargo trucks remains backed up near the crossing," the ministry reports.
- **Denis Pushilin**, the self-styled leader of the **Donetsk People's Republic** (DPR) in occupied eastern Ukraine has announced a swap of 110 prisoners will take place on Monday.
- The mayor of **Moscow**, **Sergei Sobyanin**, has said the partial mobilisation will be completed in Russia's capital from 2pm on Monday.
- The operator of the **Zaporizhzhia nuclear power plant** (ZNPP) has said it has again been disconnected from external power supply as a result of Russian shelling.
- **Israeli officials have refused to comment on remarks from Dmitry Medvedev, Russia's former president, that Tel Aviv is preparing to supply military aid to Ukraine.** In a Telegram message on Monday,

Medvedev, currently deputy chair of Russia's security council, warned Israel against arming Kyiv, calling it a “reckless move” that would “destroy relations between our countries”. Despite numerous attempts from Kyiv to buy Israeli aerial defence systems since the war broke out, Israel has tried to maintain a neutral stance in the seven-month-old invasion, as it relies on Russia to facilitate its operations against Iranian-linked actors in [Syria](#).

- **Marina Ovsyannikova**, the former Russian state TV journalist who staged an on-air protest against the war in March, has [fled the country](#) according to her lawyer.
- Russia's invasion of Ukraine and its economic fallout have thrown 4 million children into poverty across eastern Europe and central Asia, the UN children's agency, **Unicef**, has said.
- **Ukraine's president, Volodymyr Zelenskiy, said on Sunday a “very severe” situation persists in the eastern Donetsk and Luhansk regions**, with the “most difficult” fighting near the town of Bakhmut. The attacks came as Russia's war in Ukraine nears the eight-month mark.
- **Pro-Kremlin officials on Sunday blamed Ukraine for a rocket attack that struck the mayor's office in Donetsk**, a city controlled by the separatists, while Ukrainian officials said Russian rocket strikes hit a town near the Zaporizhzhia nuclear power plant, among other targets.
- **More than 30 settlements across Ukraine have been hit by Russian strikes in the last day**, according to the Ukrainian military. Two schools in the southern Zaporizhzhia region were reportedly destroyed in the strikes, which targeted civilian areas.
- **The Ukrainian military said the estimated number of Russians killed since the start of the war has reached 65,000**. Sunday morning's update from the general staff of the Ukrainian armed forces said the death toll had risen by 300 over the last 24 hours.

- In Ukraine, 423 children have been killed since the start of the invasion the [office of the Ukrainian prosecutor general](#) said. It added that a further 810 children had been injured in the conflict and that the highest number of child casualties were in the regions of Donetsk, Kharkiv, and Kyiv.
 - Ukraine has succeeded in maintaining its energy stability after Russian attacks last week that targeted key parts of its infrastructure, Ukrainian prime minister Denys Shmyhal said. In a [post on Facebook](#), Shmyhal said that in the first three days of the week, Russia launched up to 130 missile and drone strikes against civilian and energy facilities, particularly in the capital, Kyiv.
 - Russia is “probably incapable of producing advanced munitions at the rate they are being expended”, according to the latest update from the UK Ministry of Defence. The ministry said attacks like those launched across [Ukraine](#) on 10 October, in which Russia fired over 80 cruise missiles, represent a “further degradation of Russia’s long-range missile stocks, which is likely to constrain their ability to strike the volume of targets they desire in future”.
 - US and allied security officials believe Iran has agreed to provide Russia with surface-to-surface missiles and attack drones intended for use in Ukraine. The topic is due to be discussed by EU foreign ministers in a meeting in Luxembourg on Monday. In a statement, the Iranian foreign minister, Hossein Amir-Abdollahian, “emphasised that the Islamic republic of Iran has not and will not provide any weapon to be used in the war in Ukraine”.
 - The Belarusian defence ministry has said just under 9,000 Russian troops will be stationed in Belarus as part of a “regional grouping” of forces to protect its borders. Last week, the Belarusian president, Alexander Lukashenko, said his troops would be deployed with Russian forces near the Ukrainian border as part of a “joint grouping”, citing what he said were threats from [Ukraine](#) and the west.
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2022.10.17 - Spotlight

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- A new start after 60 I retrained as a hospice nurse – and lost my fear of death
- 'From my cell I could see people being tortured' Sanaa Seif on fleeing Egypt – and fighting to free her brother
- 'A huge undertaking' Bristol zoo faces challenge of rehoming 25,000 animals
- Zoos Conflict with activists shows no sign of going away

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‘I’ve got a feeling I won’t be on stage again’: Derek Jacobi on age, ego, Igglepiggle and unrequited love

[Ryan Gilbey](#)



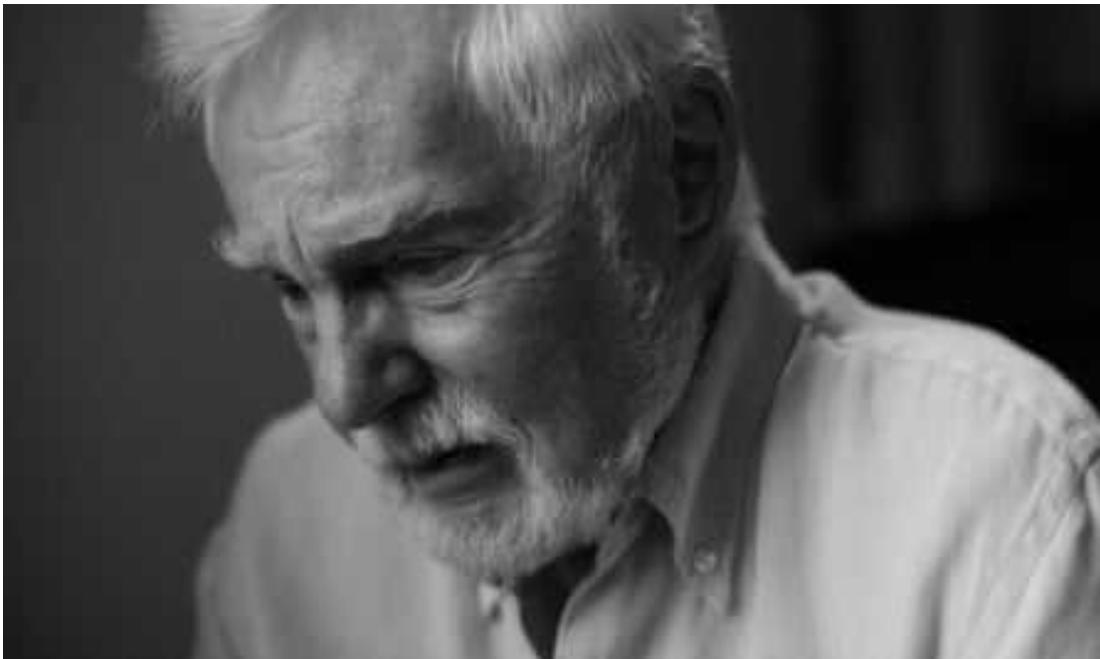
‘I was a bit odd – I liked dressing up’ ... Jacobi with his Irish terrier Daisy at his north London home. Photograph: Sarah Lee/The Guardian

Sixty-five years after his first rave reviews, the star of *I, Claudius* and *Last Tango in Halifax* is still drowning in work – and self-doubt. Can a man who won Ian McKellen’s heart really see himself as ‘bland and uninteresting’?

Mon 17 Oct 2022 01.00 EDT Last modified on Mon 17 Oct 2022 10.28 EDT

Derek Jacobi is having a bad hair day. “Oh, he butchered it,” wails the actor in mock despair. “It’s the worst haircut I’ve ever had.” Considering he is about to turn 84, there must be a fair few haircuts to choose from. The photographer and I reassure him that his snowy locks are rather dapper, and he seems instantly placated. “Do you think so? Oh, I take it all back then.” His voice is as soft and warm as butter melting on a crumpet, his manner sparkly and self-deprecating. When he is politely asked not to let his arm droop over the side of the chair while his picture is taken, he raises a hand in horror: “Was I being limp-wristed? We don’t want any of *that!*”

We are in the living room of the London home that Jacobi shares with his husband, the actor-director Richard Clifford, who has been his partner since the late 1970s. The paintings on the walls would make the house feel like a minor wing of the National Gallery were it not for the couple’s russet-coloured Irish terrier, Daisy, padding around the place. Jacobi, who is wearing a grey wool waistcoat, white shirt, blue jeans and navy running shoes, got back a few days earlier from his second home near Toulouse. “We watched the Queen’s funeral there,” he says. He still remembers his parents buying their first television specially for the coronation. He was 14. “We sat there with the curtains drawn, watching it in the dark.” It was only three years ago that he played the dying Duke of Windsor in *The Crown*. Art colliding with life, the past flooding in: no wonder the funeral hit him hard. “I cried the whole time. It was all done so well. Not a foot wrong, nothing out of place. Immaculate.” He could almost be reviewing a first night.



Jacobi in *A Bird Flew In*. Photograph: Chris Lopez/Goldfinch

Through the windows behind him lies the garden, and beyond that the home studio where he does his voiceover work, such as the audiobook of Captain Sir Tom Moore's autobiography, which he recorded during lockdown. Another job that came his way during that period was the British film [A Bird Flew In](#), which follows the scattered lives of assorted creative types whose work is halted by the pandemic. Jacobi plays a veteran performer resting at home in France – which is precisely what he was doing at the time. He turned the role down at first. “I said, ‘No, no, I’m on holiday.’ My agent said, ‘They’ll come to you.’”

Jacobi hasn’t yet seen *A Bird Flew In*, so we move on instead to the film version of Alan Bennett’s play [Allelujah](#), in which he stars as a patient in a geriatric hospital that is facing closure. Jennifer Saunders is the head nurse and Russell Tovey a go-getting management consultant, but it is Jacobi, as a former teacher, who supplies the pathos. “Ah, yes. Allelujah. That’s the hospital one, is it? I haven’t seen that either.” Still, he laughs when I remind him of one line from the film: “Even old people don’t like old people.” That’s very true, he says, though he keeps in mind a quote from Clint Eastwood, for whom Jacobi played himself briefly in the 2010 drama [Hereafter](#). “He was asked how he copes with age, and he replied: ‘I don’t let the old man in.’ Inevitably things drop off or seize up. Whenever you get a

pain here or an ache there, you think: Oh dear, this is it.” Jacobi should know, having come through prostate cancer. “But you don’t let the old man in.”



Derek Jacobi in Allelujah. Photograph: Rob Youngson/Pathé UK

Despite this pledge, he claims not to possess the stamina of his friend Ian McKellen, who last year [took on Hamlet, when he was 82](#). “Rather him than me! Full marks, though.” Of all the parts Jacobi has played, that is the only one he can still remember in full. “I quote it endlessly,” he says. Indeed, it was the springboard for his entire career. At 18, he played Hamlet at school in Leyton, east London. That production went on to the Edinburgh fringe, catching the attention of the theatre critic Kenneth Tynan, who singled out this “dashing, wounded sulky-looking boy” and called him “a fine recruit … for modern prose drama”.



Jacobi, left, with John Hurt and George Baker in *I, Claudius*. Photograph: Moviestore Collection Ltd/Alamy

Jacobi studied at Cambridge then joined Birmingham Rep, where he was spotted by Laurence Olivier and recruited for the new National Theatre. (He and Olivier later became the only actors to receive both British and Danish knighthoods.) The day Jacobi turned 25, in 1963, he was back in Hamlet again, this time as Laertes, opposite Peter O'Toole. Shirley Bassey sang Happy Birthday to him at the afterparty. It was all an awfully long way from helping at his dad's sweet shop in Chingford in east London. "Those were the days of rationing. I used to cut the coupons out. I wasn't very good. I'd stand behind the counter and as soon as someone came in I'd yell, 'Dad, you've got a customer,' and I'd run out the back."

When I appeared in Hamlet, my mother said, 'It was very nice but you ought to smile more in the curtain call'

His parents had cheered on his acting ever since his high-school Hamlet. "My mother said, 'It was very nice but you ought to smile more in the curtain call.' Three-and-a-half hours of Shakespeare and that was her only note. I wish all critics were like that!" There were never any expectations that he would follow in the family business. "I was a bit odd. I liked dressing

up, that sort of thing. As a child, I ran down the streets in my mother's wedding veil, and caught it on the privet." His mother thought acting was a phase, which was also her response when he told her at 21 that he was in love with a man. A different man was also in love with Jacobi around the same time: McKellen, his Cambridge chum, was harbouring an unspoken crush. "I had no idea at all," he says.



Jacobi with Ian McKellen as grand marshals at the New York City Pride march. Photograph: Eduardo Muñoz/Reuters

It is commonplace now to talk of pride in your sexuality; Jacobi and McKellen, who played a bitchy couple in the retro-styled 2013 sitcom [Vicious](#), even served as grand marshals of the New York City Pride march in 2015. "There we were, sitting up in the car all the way down Fifth Avenue, doing a lot of *this*," he says, twirling his hand in a royal wave. But pride wasn't what he felt when he was growing up. "It was just the card I'd been dealt. When I was young, I didn't know what 'gay' or 'homosexual' meant. I knew I was attracted to my own sex. That was a worry to start with: 'I'm not supposed to be like this.' Nothing to do with legality. It wasn't really until university that I fell in love with somebody." An upset with that boyfriend prompted him to come out to his mother. "Now she knew, and I didn't need to say it again. Life went on."

I always longed to be chiselled. I was fluffy and round. Totally bland and uninteresting

So, too, did acting. It was his performance as the stammering Roman emperor in *I, Claudius*, a runaway hit that was intelligent, savage and radical, that made him a star in 1976. What he remembers now is that it took an eternity to remove the makeup after the old-age scenes. “I’d submerge myself in a hot bath and gradually the entire thing would peel off. I had one of those wax faces in my cupboard for years.” There are whole trunks full of mementoes and memorabilia up in the attic. “One day, I’ll go through it all. My father saved a lot of newspaper cuttings and whatnot.” Perhaps there are toys, too, from [In the Night Garden](#); Jacobi provided the lulling, melodious narration for every episode of that beguilingly surreal CBeebies series, making it sound like Edward Lear or Lewis Carroll. Mention it now and he launches into a roll call right there in the living room: “Upsy Daisy, Igglepiggle … Oh, that was a lovely one to do.”



Playing Francis Bacon in Love Is the Devil. Photograph: Photo 12/Alamy

For an actor not associated with malevolence, it is striking how easily and economically Jacobi can invoke it. He has played Hitler and Pinochet, and even came within sniffing distance of Hannibal Lecter in *The Silence of the*

Lambs. (It was down to Jacobi, Daniel Day-Lewis and the eventual star, Anthony Hopkins.) He has never been more insidious, though, than as Francis Bacon in John Maybury's 1998 psycho-drama [Love Is the Devil](#). Jacobi had only recently played Alan Turing on television in *Breaking the Code*, a role he originated on stage in 1986, and the contrast between that and *Love Is the Devil* alone is testament to his versatility. His Turing is emphatic, single-minded, vivid with curiosity. As Bacon, he is a shark in human skin.

I had hoped we might discuss that performance but he is foggy on the details. "Remind me," he says. I mention his co-star, a pre-Bond Daniel Craig, and their sado-masochistic bedroom scenes with lit cigarettes. "Danny and I had great fun. But I don't remember too much about it. I'm sorry." He does recall attending a cabaret show by Anne Reid, his on-screen wife in Sally Wainwright's joyous BBC comedy-drama [Last Tango in Halifax](#). On stage, Reid referenced her sex scene with Craig in *The Mother*. Jacobi couldn't resist calling out: "I did a film with Daniel Craig, too. And I went to bed with him *twice!*"

I'm a shrinking violet. The only ego I've got is when I'm performing – then, I have the drive to succeed

He has always complained in the past about his looks, writing in his 2013 autobiography, *As Luck Would Have It*: "Mine isn't a face of which you think, 'Ah, he's suffered' or 'There's something violent about him.'" *Love Is the Devil* is the exception that proves the rule. "I always longed to be chiselled," he says now. "I was fluffy and round. Totally bland and uninteresting." When did he stop feeling that way? "I didn't."

You would grow old waiting for him to sing his own praises. "I think I lost out in the ego stakes. I'm a shrinking violet. The only ego I've got is when I'm performing. Then I have the drive to succeed and not to fall flat on my face." Michael Grandage, who [directed him as King Lear in 2010](#), expressed concern for the way Jacobi puts himself through the mill each night, rejecting any shortcut to emotional effects. "It's bloody tiring," Jacobi says. "You certainly earn your money." Then, a booming laugh: "Which, in the theatre, ain't much!"



Anne Reid and Derek Jacobi in *Last Tango In Halifax*. Photograph: Ben Blackall/BBC/Anthony and Cleopatra Series

When he was last on stage [in 2016, it was as Mercutio](#), with Richard Madden, 47 years his junior, as Romeo. The director, his friend Kenneth Branagh, convinced him that a long-in-the-tooth Mercutio could be a kind of Oscar Wilde figure, trading quips and crossing swords with the handsome young blades. “Toward the end, I would stand in the wings, terrified,” Jacobi admits. “Really frightened of going on. And that had been my life, you know? I suddenly got nervous. I wasn’t in control. And I thought: no. I can’t do my best like that, and an audience would pick up on it immediately.”

That part of his life now seems to be over. “I’ve got a feeling I won’t be on stage again,” he says faintly. “It’s not stage fright exactly. But I’m not comfortable like I used to be. And it’s far easier to do telly and films. They throw money at you for very little, and you get to do it until you do it right.” How does he feel, knowing he might never again set foot on stage? “Regretful. I do miss it. Whatever ‘it’ was, it’s faded.”



Jacobi at home. Photograph: Sarah Lee/The Guardian

No more theatre, then. But what memories. I tell him I wish I had seen his *Cyrano de Bergerac* in 1983. “I adored doing that,” he says, suddenly upbeat. “I resisted it at first. I said, ‘I’m no swashbuckler.’”

Earlier I had asked him whether he had a catty side, like his character in *Vicious*. “Oh, I can be as camp as Chloe if you want me to be,” he replied. Nasty with it? “Not really. I’m a Libra: balanced, even-tempered and gentle.” Rather wonderfully, he proves otherwise just as our time together is ending. As we finish chatting about his RSC days, the conversation turns to Prospero, whom he played the year before *Cyrano de Bergerac*. Also in that production of *The Tempest* was a young upstart named Mark Rylance as Ariel. I ask whether it’s true, as rumour has it, that he felt Rylance upstaged him. Jacobi gives a look that could maim, if not kill. “He tried to,” he sniffs. “The little cunt.”

No sooner has the word left his mouth than he is giggling away, tickled pink at his own naughtiness. So, he *does* have claws after all. Hidden they may be. But they are there just the same.

A Bird Flew In is released on digital rental on 7 November and DVD and digital download on 12 December. *Allelujah* is released next year.

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A new start after 60: I retrained as a hospice nurse – and lost my fear of death

A year after being widowed, Laura Horn began volunteering in a hospice, sitting with people who were about to die. She soon realised she could do more for them ...



‘I’ve had life experience’ ... Laura Horn. Photograph: Catherine Betts

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Mon 17 Oct 2022 02.00 EDT

Laura Horn has found what she calls her end-of-life career, “a vocation to last the rest of my life”. In her 60s she decided to train as a registered nurse, specialising in hospice care. “I’m a brand new nurse but that’s not what’s

important,” she says. “I’ve had life experience.” After Margaret, her wife of 20 years, died “suddenly and unexpectedly”, Horn understood she had to make a change. She had been thinking about volunteering in a hospice, after her mother and both parents-in-law were given palliative care. Following Margaret’s death in January 2017, Horn applied to the [Zen Hospice Project](#) in San Francisco, which trained volunteers to sit with the dying. They told her: “Wait a year. You can’t do it right away.”

Looking back, she says, they were right. “You can’t jump into something new until you have grieved appropriately.” She had “good therapy” and did what she calls “walking grief – I mean, I walked *everywhere*”. A year later, she reapplied. “They said, ‘Why do you want to do this?’ and my first sentence was, ‘I know loss.’”

As well as Margaret, she had outlived her parents, her parents-in-law and her brothers. They both “died of substance abuse, one of a heroin overdose, and the other of long-term substance abuse. That, I’m sure, was part of my motivation,” she says. “That kind of pain can also lead to openness and joy, and that’s what I’ve discovered.”

Volunteering was “a truly transformative” experience for her and Horn realised she wanted more. “I thought, I want to do the nursing part too.” As an undergraduate, she had studied biology, and her early work was in public health before she switched to education research. Most of her career was spent “trying to determine what helped students succeed in college and beyond. But I always had the sense that I would circle back to the world of health,” she says.

At 63, she enrolled at one of the very community colleges whose impact she had been researching, to take the prerequisite courses – anatomy, physiology, microbiology, pharmacology. From there, she applied to nursing school at 65, on an accelerated one-year programme for graduates.

The intensity was staggering. “I was devoting every waking hour to studying and my clinical work,” she says. The friends who had supported her after Margaret’s death, and lived nearby in Berkeley, California, cooked for her three nights a week. Horn would visit for an hour, then leave to study. “We

called it ‘catch and release’,” she says. Her two children with Margaret had left home but were supportive. When she graduated, one of her friends made a little sign out of brightly coloured paper – “It’s never too late” – and stuck it to the back of her mortarboard.

In some measure, Horn has put herself back at the heart of the storm, in a place of death and loss, which she occupies for three shifts a week at the hospice where she works in Oakland. How emotionally taxing is her new career?

“We are not part of the family so there is that distance,” she says. “We are here with you at this important time. We are here to normalise the experience and we teach family members what to look for, and not to be scared. It’s emotionally taxing but not overwhelming.”

Now 68, Horn has noticed her own attitude to death evolving. “I think I have relaxed around it,” she says. “After seeing all I have about death I’m not so scared of dying. I have a limited amount of time left on this Earth and I will try to make the most of it. And not be too terrified.”

Most of all, she has realised that palliative nursing care is “a reciprocal relationship with patients and families”. She hopes “to find real balance in that, to learn from them as they learn from me. If I’ve learned nothing else, we can’t live a full and meaningful life without deep relationships. And that’s what I’m hoping for.”

- [Tell us: has your life taken a new direction after the age of 60?](#)

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‘From my cell I could see people being tortured’: Sanaa Seif on fleeing Egypt – and fighting to free her brother

[Michael Segalov](#)



Sanaa Seif in London: ‘Something in the air gave people hope.’ Photograph: Alecsandra Raluca Drăgoi/The Guardian

Since becoming swept up in the revolution of 2011, the British-Egyptian dissident has been imprisoned three times. Now in London, she is campaigning for the release of her brother, Alaa Abd El-Fattah, one of the country’s most high-profile political prisoners



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The decision to leave Cairo wasn’t one Sanaa Seif made lightly, despite the long stretches in prison, vicious beatings and threats of worse to come from Abdel Fattah al-Sisi’s repressive regime. For the 28-year-old pro-democracy activist, going into exile didn’t only involve saying goodbye to home, friends and family. It meant leaving the country where her brother, Alaa Abd El-Fattah, is jailed and on hunger strike.

“It took a lot of contemplation,” she says, sitting at the kitchen table of her temporary London home and reflecting on her most recent time in prison. “I had time to think – this was my third stretch inside.” During exercise breaks, there was a tree in the courtyard under which she would sit and consider her options. Opposite were the cells where those facing a death sentence were detained. “I had to accept that could be my future,” says Seif. “That’s what

the authorities threatened. Maybe I'm naive not to have realised it earlier, but Cairo was never going to be safe again.”

Seif was barely 17 in January 2011, when the Egyptian revolution started. Raised in the north of the capital, she came from a well-known political family: her father, Ahmed Seif, was a respected human rights lawyer, while her British-born mother, Laila Soueif, was an academic and activist at the University of Cairo. “But I was the youngest child,” Seif says. “Nobody spoke about anything serious in front of me. I knew there was inequality, and that my father had issues with the authorities. But I was shielded from the details – a spoiled brat.”

History marks 25 January 2011 as the start of Egypt’s revolution. Of course, nobody knew then. “I’d heard there were protests happening that day,” Seif remembers. “Some of my friends were going. But I had a party that night which I didn’t want to miss.” Short on money for the evening ahead, Seif called her mother, asking for cash. The teen was given short shrift: “I don’t have time for this, there are campus protests, your mother is busy.” So Seif headed to the campus to track her down. At the gates, she was detained by police. “I called my mum, who collected me,” Seif says. “She wasn’t happy: ‘Sanaa, I told you this isn’t a good day.’”

Rising tensions became clear. As they walked through the university, Seif clung to her mother. “My family had been trying to change things in Egypt for decades,” she says. “Something in the air gave people hope, a feeling that this was finally possible.” With a few hours until her party, Seif stuck around.

“The marches grew larger,” she recalls. “Those who made it past police lines arrived at Tahrir Square, where teargas was thrown.” She watched from the sidelines, feeling like an outsider. “When the police started attacking protesters,” she says, “I assumed the crowds would disperse.” Much to her surprise, they refused. “People were beaten by officers then ran back into the protest. I’d never seen anything like it: their determination made me believe this could be huge.”

That evening, Seif remembers, the police temporarily retreated. Rumours spread they would return at midnight to forcibly clear the square. “Still, nobody left,” she says. “Instead, women and children were gathered, men formed human barricades. There was so much bravery and resilience.” Friends were calling: they were heading to the party; where was she? In the end, Seif never went – she couldn’t tear herself away. “From that moment I was in. I was part of the revolution – there was no looking back.”

Despite the 13 years between them, Seif and Alaa were always close. “Alaa wasn’t just an older brother to me,” she says. “He was a father figure. A mentor.” She checks her phone intermittently, anxiously awaiting news from her mother’s visit to Alaa’s prison in Cairo.

In the late 00s, as adolescence hit, Self’s school grades suffered. “I was this disengaged, bohemian teen,” she says. “And there was lots of drama at home.” Married and with his own place, Alaa took in his teenage sister. “He studied with me,” she says. “Supported me, gave me pocket money. It was his responsibility to make sure I passed school.” She stayed there for two years. By 2011, Alaa had relocated to South [Africa](#) for work.



Seif and her brother, Alaa Abd El-Fattah, hold hands after they were granted permission to attend the funeral of their father in 2014. Photograph: Hasan Mohamed/AFP/Getty Images

On the frontline in the early days of the Egyptian uprising, Seif knew little of the vital role her brother was already playing in the movement. With the internet in Egypt all but cut off, Alaa – from his home in Pretoria – was sharing news of what was happening with the rest of the world. Since the early 00s, he had been a vocal activist and campaigner; his 2006 involvement in peaceful protests saw him spend 45 days in jail.

Alaa returned to Cairo late on 2 February. Over the following months, the siblings began to see each other differently. “I realised the important role he played to these people,” she says. “Speaking to crowds, communicating and coordinating. And he was surprised, too, that his spoiled younger sister was on the frontlines at Tahrir.” The country too was in a state of transition. President Mubarak was forced to resign on the 18th day of demonstrations. The military dissolved the constitution, temporarily taking power.

By late 2011, the revolution was in full swing. Despite new laws restricting demonstrations, clashes between protesters and the military were common. “We didn’t know it then,” Seif says, “but what we witnessed on the night of 9 October changed the direction of both the country and our family.” That Sunday, a group of Coptic Christians had gathered outside Cairo’s state television offices. “It was over something simple: the demolition of a church,” she says. “And the streets had opened up by then; people from all sections of society were protesting. Then the army drove tanks straight into the peaceful crowd.” This would become known as the Maspero massacre. Twenty-four people died and more than 200 were injured.

“Neither Alaa or I were there at the time,” Seif says. “I rushed there, my brother, too. When I arrived, the tanks had left. Some of the bodies were being carried away; others were surrounded by distraught families.” Seif realised she knew one of the men killed. “I was in a state of shock,” she recalls, unable to comprehend the devastation in front of her. “It shook me to my core, and changed my entire understanding of what the military was willing to do.”

Meanwhile, Egyptian state television was reporting that Christian protesters had in fact attacked the army. That fictitious version was initially picked up by the likes of the BBC and CNN. Seif is clear: “That was bullshit. The

military was trying to incite sectarian war, to create instability to tighten their grip on power and not let go. I, Alaa and others there could see.”

As people with sticks gathered to attack the grieving demonstrators, Alaa stepped in. “He organised human shields to surround the bodies and mourning families,” Saif says. “He was one of the most prominent voices – making interventions on TV, writing a newspaper article setting out the truth.” Ultimately, the authorities were forced to row back. “The plot failed,” Seif says. “And that was because of the efforts of people like my brother.”

That month, Alaa was arrested and brought to a military tribunal. “He was accused of commandeering a tank, and assaulting soldiers that day,” Seif says. “The state narrative changed from ‘Christians attack military’ to ‘Alaa was impersonating the military to damage their reputation’. At one protest during Alaa’s incarceration, Seif was arrested. “I was taken to the parliament building, and beaten badly. Soldiers kicked me with their boots, smacked the back of my head with guns and batons until I bled.”

After much public outcry, Alaa’s case was transferred to a civilian court, rather than one controlled by the military. No evidence against him was ever presented, and soon afterwards he was released. All the charges were eventually dropped.

At the time, the harshness of the response Alaa faced seemed inexplicable. But in retrospect, Seif sees a clear cause and effect. “It was one of the first times the military tried to create a conspiracy to destabilise the country, to not have a civilian ruler,” she says. “Alaa was one of those responsible for stopping them.” At the time Sisi – now Egypt’s unelected president – was head of military intelligence. “What they’re doing to Alaa now is revenge for when he scuppered the military council’s plans.”

Over the 11 years that have since passed, Alaa has mostly remained locked up – one of the country’s most high-profile political prisoners facing a barrage of spurious charges. In 2014, he was sentenced to five years, found guilty of a list of offences related to unauthorised protesting.

In 2019, he was arrested again, [this time for “spreading false news”](#). He was also charged with joining and funding a terrorist organisation. To date, not a

single piece of evidence has been produced; Amnesty International has labelled the terror charges “unfounded”. After two years of pretrial detention, last December he was sentenced to five years for the false news charge. Amnesty called the trial “grossly unfair”, stating that “prison and security officials have subjected him to [a catalogue of human rights violations including torture in reprisal for his role in the 2011 revolution](#)”.

“Alaa’s priorities had totally changed with fatherhood,” Seif says. (He became a father in 2011.) “He wasn’t a major figure in any other resistance. But the personal vendetta Sisi has against Alaa meant he was never left alone.” Senior figures in Egyptian society appealed directly to Sisi for Alaa’s release. “Politicians, journalists, cultural figures and celebrities all tried,” says Seif, “which was unprecedented. Each time, Sisi made it clear Alaa’s case was not up for discussion.”



Seif after being released in 2016. Photograph: AFP/Getty Images

At a 2014 protest demanding her brother’s release, Seif was again arrested. Alongside 22 other human rights activists, she was convicted of [breaching a law banning unauthorised demonstrations](#). A group of [UN special rapporteurs called for their immediate release](#). This marked the start of three periods of political imprisonment. At this stage, her family’s status still offered some protection. “From my cell I could hear and see people being

tortured,” Seif says. “Prisoners questioned, then cursed and beaten. I heard screams from electrocution, and did all I could to try and stop it.” Officers, frustrated they couldn’t physically harm Seif, found other ways to torment her. “They would purposely torture people where I could hear,” she says. “Officers would enter my cell with a woman prisoner and then beat her up in front of me. They did what they could within their means.”

She was transferred to Qanater prison, on the edge of Cairo. “It was dirty,” she says. “There was no privacy, including the toilets. You’re thrown in and forgotten about. Basics like medication and clothing have to be hard fought for.” This first period of imprisonment lasted 15 months.

Seif’s father died during that stretch. For 72 days, she was on hunger strike, only consuming water and rehydration sachets. “You become weak, but not hungry,” she says. “By day 60 I was fainting. While unconscious, I’d be put on drips, which I’d remove when I woke up.”

Seven months after her eventual release, Seif was rearrested. “I don’t even remember the stupid reason they gave for sending me to prison that time,” she says. (In fact, she was sentenced to six months for “insulting the judiciary”.) “In essence, it was to shut me up and scare me. They wanted me to stop making a fuss about Alaa.” At one stage, a quasi-government body offered to pay for Sanaa to study at the New York Film Academy. “But of course I didn’t take their money. I couldn’t leave Alaa locked away.”

Seif’s most recent arrest came in June 2020. It was the height of Covid. Not only had visits been stopped in Alaa’s prison, he wasn’t allowed to send letters to his family. “We had no idea if he was even alive,” Seif says. “So my mother, sister and I protested outside the prison. One night the police opened their barricades and women poured in to attack us. We were beaten with sticks and stones.” Seif was the violence’s primary focus. “My head was wounded; my body covered in bruises. When we went to the public prosecutor to put what happened on the record, I was arrested again, this time on terror charges.”

Seif was accused of spreading false news, misuse of social media and incitement to terrorist crimes (for which no evidence has ever been presented), then placed into pretrial detention. In March 2020, she was

convicted of spreading false news, misusing social media and insulting a police officer. At the time, Amnesty International said the “Egyptian authorities arbitrarily arrested Seif and have now imprisoned her on bogus charges stemming purely from her peaceful criticism”.

During this third and final term of imprisonment, Seif concluded that leaving Egypt was her only option. “The cell I’d been in the first time housed seven of us,” she says. “This time, we were 82 women in the same space.” Now charged as a terrorist, her treatment also changed. “I was interrogated for hours, with only light clothes on while the AC was on its coldest setting. Neither I nor my lawyer knew what I was being accused of. I was told that whatever happened, nobody would hear or believe me.” To this day, Seif has never been presented with any evidence of her supposed offence. “I couldn’t comprehend how Alaa was experiencing this for so long,” she says.

Most of all, though, Seif had to accept that inside Egypt she was unable to help her brother. “It’s not only that the personal price was too high for me,” she says. “It’s that there was little point. A year and a half in prison over protesting about letters?



Alaa Abdel Fattah and his mother, Laila Soueif, in Cairo in 2014, after Seif was sentenced to prison. Photograph: Mohamed El-Shahed/AFP/Getty Images

“My presence wasn’t even useful for my family,” she says. “My mum would get lost between the logistics of both of us being in prison. I had to go.” Seif’s mother was born in England, so the three siblings were able to acquire British passports. On completing her sentence, she was released last December. In March, she left for England.

Now the walls of her London kitchen are covered in lists of meetings and interviews that she must do, and people she needs to contact. She has just returned from Washington DC, where a third round of state department meetings yielded few tangible results.

With Egypt set to host Cop27 next month, Seif and her sister, Mona – also now based in the UK – have once again ramped up efforts for their brother, calling on the British government in particular to increase pressure to secure Alaa’s release. On Tuesday, Seif will start a sit-in at Whitehall outside the Foreign Office. “By sitting on their doorstep,” she says, “they won’t be able to shrug me off any longer. When the British government goes to Egypt next month for Cop, they must return with my brother.”

Under Boris Johnson’s premiership, the British government was engaging in diplomacy: the case was [raised in Johnson’s final call with the Egyptian president](#). In her final days as foreign secretary, Liz Truss wrote to the family, calling the situation a “high priority” and affirming a commitment to securing Alaa’s release. Despite this, Seif is adamant more can be done. “There are precedents for prisoners with dual nationality being transferred to their other country,” she says. “It has happened with Americans, Australians and French political prisoners. But for it to work, the British state needs to push hard.”

A government spokesperson wouldn’t comment on whether plans were in place regarding Alaa’s case and Cop, instead saying: “The government is working hard to secure Alaa Abd El-Fattah’s release, and we continue to raise his case at the highest levels of the Egyptian government. The foreign secretary most recently raised his case when he met Egyptian foreign minister Shoukry at the UN general assembly last month.”

Adjusting to life in London over the past seven months hasn’t been easy for Seif. “It’s more comfortable than prison here, yes, but in some ways it feels

like a continuation. It's lonely. All I can focus on is my mission to secure my brother's release. Only when he's here with us can we start to try and make this country home."

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Zoos

‘A huge undertaking’: Bristol zoo faces challenge of rehoming 25,000 animals

With the Clifton site closed, zoo staff are grappling with logistics of moving 300 species to new homes



Jock, the silverback lowland gorilla, will be the focus of his troop’s move to the Wild Place Project. Photograph: Adrian Sherratt/The Guardian

Linda Geddes

Mon 17 Oct 2022 01.00 EDT Last modified on Mon 17 Oct 2022 03.50 EDT

Moving house can strain the strongest of family relationships, and western lowland gorillas are no exception.

At times of uncertainty and stress, [Bristol](#) zoo’s troop of eight primates look to their silverback, Jock, for leadership and reassurance. But moving him at the same time as his harem of three females and their children – each weighing between 13.4kg and 184kg – is no straightforward task.

And this is only one small piece of a much larger logistical jigsaw that the zoo's keepers and curators are grappling with.

The [world's fifth oldest](#) zoo, Bristol Zoo Gardens, has occupied its current five-hectare (12-acre) site on the edge of Clifton Downs since 1836. But having permanently [closed its gates to the public on 3 September](#), its keepers are facing the ultimate relocation challenge: moving 300 species – approximately 25,000 animals in total – to zoos, aquariums and colleges in the UK and abroad.

Of these species, 76 – including gorillas and slender-snouted crocodiles – are being moved and acquired for the zoo's sister site, the Wild Place Project, in South Gloucestershire, which will become the new Bristol zoo. But only those that are threatened, and which Bristol Zoological Society, which operates the zoo, is actively involved in conservation or breeding programmes for, will be relocated there.



Bristol zoo's curator of reptiles, Tim Skelton (right), measures the giant Aldabra tortoises for their transport boxes with animal keeper Adam Davis. Photograph: Adrian Sherratt/The Guardian

Many other species, from meerkats to millipedes, penguins and three 1.2 metre-long paddlefish, are being relocated to zoos as far afield as the US and

Spain. “I don’t think anything on this scale has been attempted before,” says Nigel Simpson, head of animal collections at Bristol Zoological Society.

So how do you help a gorilla to move house, or even resettle a disestablishment of millipedes? For some animals, it’s relatively simple. For instance, the flamingoes were transported loose, inside the back of a padded van, to Flamingo Land Resort in Yorkshire. “They all go together as a colony and, as the van moves around the corner, all the flamingos move as one unit, and then they move back again,” Simpson says.

The zoo’s Aldabra giant tortoises – Twiggie, Biggie, Mike and Helen – will be ferried to Jersey’s Durrell zoo in wooden boxes, although every box must be custom-made to fit each tortoise, to ensure they do not injure themselves during transit.

However, even the simplest creatures can create surprises. “People often think of it being the larger animals that are the hardest to move, but sometimes it’s the most numerous,” says Laura Graham, an animal registrar who helps to plan each move from start to finish.

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“You might plan for a certain number of animals, but if it’s something that lives under the soil, like our red-legged millipedes … We thought we had about 2,000, but it turned out they’d been breeding so well that when [the keepers] filtered through the soil, they found we had 9,827, meaning we had to upgrade to our large zoo vehicle, to transport these massive vats of soil,

rather than just collecting them in a car. You've got to be very flexible and adaptable.”

Other species are technically challenging. American paddlefish, for instance, have long, spoon-like bills, which are so heavy that they could snap off when the fish are briefly lifted out of the water into their transportation tanks.

Rising to the challenge, aquarium team leader Tamara Canalejas is plotting an elaborate operation which will see several divers enter the water and lift the fish out on giant green stretchers, passing them to land-based assistants who will gently carry the fish to a large swimming pool. From here, the fish will be loaded on to a lorry and driven to their new home in Valencia, Spain, via the Eurotunnel.



Aquarium team leader Tamara Canalejas acclimatises the clown loach to the net that will be used during the transit. Photograph: Adrian Sherratt/The Guardian

Moving the gorillas will also be challenging, though for different reasons. “They are such an intelligent species, and they are also a social species,” says Sarah Gedman, the zoo’s mammal team leader. “Typically, when you export gorillas from a zoo it is one at a time, mimicking the natural

migration away from the group as [individuals] reach maturity. But we are in quite a unique situation where we are potentially moving a whole family at the same time.”

Although it is still a work in progress, Gedman’s plan is likely to centre around Jock. “For females and kids alike, their relationship focus is with the silverback,” she says. Ideally, this means persuading him into a crate, and then the other gorillas soon afterwards, “but the logistics of actually getting eight gorillas into crates, all at the same time, is a huge undertaking”.

It will mean building the crates and delivering them into the gorillas’ enclosure ahead of time, to allow them to get used to them. “I think a successful move, for us, will be getting everyone to voluntarily walk into their crate, or at least to be [tranquillised] at the same time, so that they can settle into their new home as a family, and in a way that is as positive and stress-free for them as it can be,” Gedman says. “We might start by feeding them in the crate, or giving them little bits of fruit as a reward for going into the crate or letting us shut the door behind them.”

It turns out, much like travelling with human children over long distances, giving them a bit of something sweet makes the journey much easier.



The now-closed Bristol zoo is gradually rehoming its animals. Photograph:
Adrian Sherratt/The Guardian

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Zoos

Conflict between activists and zoos shows no sign of going away

Peta says ‘conservation is a con’ but zoos point to their role as educators despite evidence children learn little from them



Zoos say they do valuable conservation work but their impact is limited as they are usually in temperate rather than tropical regions. Photograph: ZSL London Zoo/PA



[Amelia Hill](#)

[@byameliahill](#)

Mon 17 Oct 2022 01.00 EDT

A great treat for the kids with the gift of species conservation thrown in – or a wildlife prison? Trips to the zoo have become a far less simple day out than they used to be.

Animal rights activists have no doubt where the truth lies: “No one should ever support zoos,” said [Peta](#), the animal rights organisation.

Captivity is a stultifying, daily torment for animals meant to freely wander vast distances, activists argue. Animals are meant to make their own choices about what to eat, where to sleep and who mate with – decisions taken from them in zoos.

Deprived of stimulation, research has found that many animals are trapped in spaces that are all-too-often “living hells”: three-quarters of British zoos, aquariums and petting farms have been found to [regularly break minimum animal welfare standards](#).

Activists also point out that zoos abduct animals from their natural habitats under the guise of “species protection” and get rid of “surplus” animals either by killing them or by selling them to unethical exotic-animal dealers.

Zoos argue they do vital conservation work: they hold, research shows, nearly 15% of the global International Union for Conservation of Nature threatened species – although most zoos are concentrated in temperate regions, whereas most threatened species are tropical.

Activists argue that the vast majority of species kept in zoos are not endangered and nor do most zoos have any involvement with reintroduction programmes. “Conservation is a con,” said Peta.

Zoos argue that their role in educating the public is one their most important roles. A study of children between the ages of seven and 15 who visited London Zoo, however, found that for the majority of them – including those who took an educator-guided tour of the zoo – there were no positive educational outcomes. In many cases, the trip even had a negative impact on their understanding of animals and their habitats.

“And that makes sense,” said Peta. “We wouldn’t go to a prison to learn about typical human society, so why would we try to learn about animals by observing them in captivity?”

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2022.10.17 - Opinion

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- As prices rise, the cost of living crisis has reawakened the ‘thriftifarians’
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- People on TikTok keep boasting about what they do from 5am to 9am. I just lie in bed, if the dog will let me

[**Opinion**](#)[**Brexit**](#)

Economy in crisis, Tories in meltdown: how I have told the sad, strange story of Britain

[Stryker McGuire](#)



Brexit, Johnson, Truss's U-turns – I have tried to explain it all to a US audience. I've found it hard to take it all in myself

- Stryker McGuire is a former editor at Newsweek and Bloomberg



Illustration by Matt Kenyon

Mon 17 Oct 2022 01.00 EDT Last modified on Mon 17 Oct 2022 07.56 EDT

Since the 1990s I've been interpreting events in Britain for an American audience through my journalism. Sometimes it's easy: London's glorious renaissance, Tony Blair's rise. Sometimes it's less easy: the strangeness of a "special relationship" where one side cares too much and the other too little, the post-imperial hangover that courses through British life.

And sometimes it's hard: the puzzle of [Brexit](#), the precipitous downfall of the Conservative party. It helps that for Americans still living through the Donald Trump saga, nothing is outside the realm of possibility any more. It also helps when I explain to them that those two latest chapters of British history are connected.

I tell them that from the 2016 referendum onward, Brexit increasingly gave the Tories a focus. Never mind that Brexit was the most divisive event in postwar Britain; over time, the struggle to make it happen unified the party. Boris Johnson's "Get Brexit Done" 2019 election campaign cemented the transformation and, as far as Brexit went, silenced Labour.

Within six weeks, however, the Tory tide would turn. Once Britain formally left the EU, the Brexit-imposed discipline within the Conservative party began to unravel. Admittedly, the pandemic would have thrown any government off course, but Johnson's conduct in office didn't help the Tory brand or party unity. Swamped by scandal, he was out. Enter [Liz Truss](#).

As the US and the world looked on, Truss's first weeks in office did not exactly restore confidence in Downing Street. Suddenly, the new government was shredding the Tories' reputation for fiscal prudence and sound economic management. Friends of mine in the States could barely believe what they were witnessing. Even Americans who are ideologically opposed to the [Conservatives](#) were shocked to see the party of Churchill and Thatcher flying off the rails.



Liz Truss speaks after the sacking of Kwasi Kwarteng as chancellor, 14 October 2022. Photograph: Daniel Leal/AFP/Getty Images

The Truss-Kwasi Kwarteng "Growth Plan 2022" started out as a budget at war with itself, with vast emergency spending sitting alongside big unfunded tax cuts. It was also at war with Bank of England monetary policy. That was bad enough. Then came U-turns, the [defenestration of Kwarteng](#) and the naming of a new chancellor, Jeremy Hunt, hardly an ideological soulmate of the libertarian prime minister.

This story is far from over. From the outset, the reaction to the new government’s “fiscal event” abroad was awful. Former US Treasury secretary Larry Summers said the world’s fifth-largest economy was “behaving a bit like an emerging market”. President Biden himself said that Truss’s original plan was a “mistake”. The International Monetary Fund, which usually reserves its sermonising for developing economies, [said](#): “we do not recommend large and untargeted fiscal packages at this juncture, as it is important that fiscal policy does not work at cross purposes to monetary policy. Furthermore, the nature of the UK measures will likely increase inequality.”

Still, with all the opprobrium heaped on Truss, it’s easy to forget that the damage began long before she got hold of Britain’s finances. What’s happening today cannot be separated from what happened in the last decade, leading up to Brexit. To explain those days to non-Britons, you have to wade into the weeds of British politics. There, we come upon Nigel Farage, who though never elected to parliament had an extraordinary influence on Westminster politics. Had it not been for the threat Farage and Ukip posed to the Conservative party, David Cameron may never have decided to [call](#) for a referendum. But, fatefully, he did.

As a dual US-UK citizen who’s lived in London since 1996, the closest I could get to understanding a rationale behind Brexit was to see it in the context of what Blair once called “post-empire malaise” – a vague if deep-seated yearning to regain the confidence and sureness of identity that, at least in the imagination, went hand in hand with running an empire. “Take back control” was surely part of that, fuelled also by heightened economic insecurity in the wake of the 2007-08 financial crisis and a concomitant unease about immigration.

Setting that logic aside, I have to say that virtually all the economic arguments in favour of Brexit looked specious at best and cynically misleading at worst. In that sense, Brexit is a kind of original sin that sits at the heart of today’s UK economy. That should have been evident in the myriad dire economic forecasts blithely dismissed as “remoaner” scaremongering in the run-up to the 2016 referendum – forecasts that turned out to be mostly accurate. And it should have been obvious – as it was to the rest of the world – in the downward trajectory of the “Brexit pound”, which

fell from 1.50 to 1.33 to the dollar [overnight](#) after the 23 June 2016 vote and ultimately hit its lowest-ever recorded level of [1.03](#) on 26 September of this year.

Being “liberated” from the EU was never going to live up to the counterfeit [promises](#) made by the Vote Leave campaign before the referendum. Britain’s borders are no less porous than they were. The post-Brexit trade deals the UK has negotiated are insignificant compared with the loss of its largest trading partner. The jewel-in-the-crown deal with the US is not even on the agenda, as Truss [admitted](#) last month.

The pandemic, whose arrival coincided with Britain’s departure from Europe, camouflaged much of the toll Brexit was inflicting on the economy. But the harm is real. A year ago, the Office for Budget Responsibility was [estimating](#) that Brexit’s long-term impact on economic growth would be more than twice as damaging as that of Covid.

The effect on trade has been devastating. [Modelling](#) by the Centre for European Reform found that solely because of Brexit, British trade in goods was down during the first half of last year, ranging between 11 and 16% month to month. “There is evidence that businesses face new and significant real-world challenges in trading with the EU that cannot be attributed to the pandemic,” the House of Lords European affairs committee [reported](#) in December.

Ending the free movement of labour between Britain and the continent – a Brexit cornerstone – is hollowing out the workforce. According to the [Office for National Statistics](#), the number of job vacancies stood at 1,246,000 in the third quarter of this year, up from about 823,000 before Brexit and Covid-19 set in. These shortages afflict businesses large and small, from cafes and pubs to farms and manufacturing plants.

Meanwhile, the OBR [analysis](#) from May shows a number of economic indicators all going in the wrong direction: as a result of leaving the EU, long-term productivity will slump by 4%, both exports and imports will be around 15% lower in the long run, newly signed trade deals with non-EU countries “will not have a material impact”, and the government’s new post-

Brexit migration regime will reduce net inward migration at a time of critical labour shortages. It has been some story to tell.

There's a scene in the House Commons that keeps playing in my head. It's 2019 and Jacob Rees-Mogg, now Truss's business secretary, is speaking of the "broad, sunlit uplands that await us" thanks to Brexit. Then I contemplate where Britain is today: heading into a protracted recession under an enfeebled prime minister leading a wounded, fractious party. I hope I'm proved wrong, and those sunlit uplands are out there over the horizon. No sign as yet. But I'd be pleased to come back and tell everyone who has listened so far that I was mistaken.

- Stryker McGuire, who lives in London, is a former editor at Newsweek and Bloomberg
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[OpinionUK cost of living crisis](#)

As prices rise, the cost of living crisis has reawakened the ‘thriftifarians’

[Julian Baggini](#)



Haves posing as have nots is a distasteful phenomenon that papers over how unequal British society really is



‘They can afford to put the heating on. So why are they pretending otherwise?’ Photograph: Clive Sherlock/Alamy

Mon 17 Oct 2022 03.00 EDT Last modified on Mon 17 Oct 2022 09.54 EDT

In a typical British September, social media is littered with posts about people guiltily putting on their central heating. Now, well into October, people are talking about how much longer they can leave it off before it gets too cold for comfort.

You might think that this is one more sign of how hard the cost of living crisis is biting. Many of these posts are from anxious people who are genuinely struggling. But the very same expressions of restraint and concern are also coming from those with plenty of money to spend. You see them splashing the cash in restaurants, bars, theatres, cinemas and upmarket shops. Many haven’t seen their energy bills rise yet, and when they do it will be by about £3.50 a day; far less than the price of a pint of beer in most pubs. They can afford to put the heating on if they need to. So why are they pretending otherwise?

It’s uncomfortable even to ask this question. To publicly wonder whether the cost of living crisis is really as bad as it’s cracked up to be sounds privileged and insensitive. It’s obvious that millions of people are struggling to pay

their bills and are facing [appalling heat or eat choices](#). No one should doubt that. The question is why so many of those still comfortably off feel the need to talk as though they are on the edge too.

After the 2008 financial crisis, I came up with a name for a similar group of people: “[thriftifarians](#)”. These are middle- or upper-class people who take virtuous pleasure in the selective economies they don’t need to make, especially during times of recession. It seems the thriftifarian is back, only this time what matters most is signalling your fictitious need to economise, whether you actually do so or not.

Some thriftifarians are comically lacking in self-awareness. Even as they are getting out of their Nissan Leafs (from £28,940) they’re moaning about the unaffordability of organic pasta (from £1.20). There is also the unpleasant tendency the British upper class has to valorise its own supposed frugality in contrast to the wastefulness of the hoi polloi, as though anyone who was careful with money could afford a spacious detached house too.

But the thriftifarian pose is not just a vice of the most privileged. It is hard to tell exactly how many people can absorb rising prices, but it is more than a tiny elite. Consider that the [price “cap” on the average energy bill](#) has gone up from £1,254, as it was soon after it was introduced in 2019, to £2,500 now. That means an annual increase of £1,246. The average food bill is [set to rise by about £454](#), meaning households will have to find an additional £1,700 a year for their basics – just over £140 a month.

The most up-to-date figure we have for [median household disposable income](#) in the UK is £31,400: £1,700 is a good chunk of this, so anyone living at the limits of their means would be in trouble. But for those with small or no mortgages and no major debts, the increases in the cost of living can be managed. And given this is the median income, [half the country has more](#). The top 10% take home on average £127k and the next decile £62k.

It is understandable that no one wants to callously flaunt the fact that they’re all right. But there’s also something distasteful about pretending to suffer when you’re not. And the done thing this autumn seems to be for everyone, irrespective of their ability to ride out inflation, to talk as though times are tough.

The most honourable motivation is that it is a means of expressing solidarity, to signal that we're all in it together. But the point is that we're not. What the cost of living crisis is revealing is how very divided we are. For the haves to admit this, to themselves or to others, would be too uncomfortable. Who wants to be identified as a winner when the losers are really suffering?

Thriftifarianism is a way of avoiding accepting that you are not a victim of the problem, you're a part of it: a fortunate member of a grossly unequal society. The pretence of privation papers over the social divide and helps assuage feelings of guilt.

But it also means avoiding uncomfortable realities. Our excessive inequality can't be fixed entirely by levelling up. There will have to be some redistribution. Higher-than-average earners and mortgage-free homeowners are going to be in the frontline if and when this happens, and they know it. No wonder they would prefer to feign hardship than admit their privilege, and the need to reduce it.

- Julian Baggini is a writer and philosopher; his latest book is *How the World Thinks: A Global History of Philosophy*
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[Opinion](#)[Menopause](#)

It's the menopause, stupid – why Britain can't afford to ignore women's health

[Kate Muir](#)

Failing to properly support women through the menopause is disastrous for the UK economy. That's why we're calling for change



A woman applies an oestrogen patch to help relieve the effects of menopause. Photograph: Phanie/Alamy

Mon 17 Oct 2022 05.40 EDT Last modified on Mon 17 Oct 2022 16.51 EDT

We're about to hit peak menopause. A huge rally is being planned at Parliament Square [on Tuesday](#) – with a host of celebrities, from [Mariella Frostrup](#) to [Davina McCall](#) and [Rod Stewart](#), shining a spotlight on to the issue. Labour's Carolyn Harris is [leading the charge](#) in parliament, with cross-party support for her calls for better care and free prescriptions for hormone replacement therapy.

But I'd like to stop the focus on the suffering for a second, and make an economic argument instead. Simple maths shows us that the criminal neglect of the menopause in our health sector is costing the UK economy £10bn, as women walk out of their jobs at this time in their lives, according to analysis by the menopause support app Balance, using data from the Office of National Statistics and the Fawcett Society. One in 10 women surveyed for [Channel 4](#) who worked during the menopause said they had quit their jobs due to symptoms, while 14% had reduced their hours and 14% had gone part-time. Imagine if these women had got the help they had needed – perhaps by being given the new, safer, body-identical hormone replacement therapy, and stayed in work? That's a massive recruitment and training saving for workplaces.

Let's apply this specifically to the NHS (where Liz Truss says she wants to make savings). Around [half](#) of the NHS workforce is aged 45 or above, and 77% of it is female – which is a significant proportion of women at perimenopausal or menopausal age. There are presently 40,000 nursing vacancies alone. Using the Balance formula and analysing data on the cost of training and recruiting NHS staff, I estimate that if one in 10 menopausal women in the NHS leave their jobs – as is the case in the wider population – then if those women were instead retained, it would save the health service around £700m. Are you listening, prime minister?

In the wake of the [documentary](#) I produced a year ago, Davina McCall: Sex, Myths and the Menopause, demand for HRT drugs surged by 30% in the month after broadcast, and has continued to grow. There are now [half a million prescriptions for HRT](#) in England each month – double the figure from five years ago. But one senior NHS executive I spoke to recently said that GPs are already too overwhelmed to cope. “They’re inundated already and they don’t have time to deal with this extra demand.” A small investment at the early stages of menopause can reap huge rewards. Once a woman is happy on HRT – which may take a couple of visits – the wider health impacts of long-term hormonal deficiency (joint pain, type 2 diabetes, cardiovascular disease, colon cancer, osteoporosis and dementia, to name a few) are lessened. Which is potentially a lot of future GP appointments saved.

The NHS's Quality Outcomes Framework pays GP surgeries for diagnosing depression, diabetes and osteoporosis, among other problems – but not menopause. One of Harris's proposed changes is to include menopause in that framework, to encourage GPs to spot menopausal symptoms – which in turn could make huge cost savings.

Why? Because menopause is a long-term hormonal deficiency, and when oestrogen disappears, on average at the age of 51, women's bone density decreases. According to the [Royal Osteoporosis Society](#), half of women over 50 break a bone due to osteoporosis, far more than men. Weight-bearing exercise might help a bit, but what actually helps the disintegrating of bones is usually HRT – which, used early enough, can help to reverse osteoporosis. Using transdermal oestrogen raised bone density in the lumbar spine by more than 3% in two years, according to a [2017 study](#).

Consider this rough calculation. An HRT prescription costs the NHS around £120 per patient per year, according to NHS data. A hip replacement [costs the NHS on average](#) around £12,000.

The sums are encouraging. But there may, understandably, be many people who do not know the good news about the new body-identical HRT, and still associate it with causing breast cancer. Indeed, if you search “HRT” on the NHS website, you still get this: “Find out about hormone replacement therapy (HRT) … and what the main risks and side effects are – including how it can raise your risk of breast cancer.”

It's true there's a small increased risk of breast cancer for women who take the old combined HRT, which contained synthetic progestins. But the new HRT extracted from soy has molecules of progesterone and oestrogen that are exact copies of your own hormones. An [observational study](#) of almost half a million women in the UK Clinical Practice Datalink showed that those using body-identical oestrogen and/or progesterone had no increased risk of breast cancer.

Even more encouraging is the 20,000 GPs and other healthcare professionals who have taken the Menopause Charity/FourteenFish “Confidence in the Menopause” online [course](#) in their spare time. As that NHS executive said to me recently: “It's time we caught up with women's knowledge.”

I've been talking to businesses and banks recently about the menopause, and the men in the boardroom are keen to be allies, but it's when they hear the economic argument that their eyes light up. Perhaps they will be the agents of change. I remember covering the 1992 Clinton/Bush US presidential election campaign years ago, when Clinton's spin doctors came up with the simple slogan, "It's the economy, stupid" and won. Perhaps our slogan should be: "It's the menopausal economy, stupid."

- Kate Muir is the author of [Everything You Need to Know About the Menopause \(But Were Too Afraid to Ask\)](#)
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Opinion**Time management**

People on TikTok keep boasting about what they do from 5am to 9am. I just lie in bed, if the dog will let me

[Emma Beddington](#)



I watch people preparing food, working out and doing laundry. But what if I don't want to 'maximise my potential'?



‘Every second of time must be used well as we tick towards death’ (posed by model). Photograph: Boris Jovanovic/Getty Images/iStockphoto

Mon 17 Oct 2022 02.00 EDT Last modified on Mon 17 Oct 2022 02.13 EDT

You will not be surprised to hear that there’s another [TikTok](#) microtrend to feel bad about. It’s called #my5to9 (4.6m views) and it’s a two-headed beast, covering what people do in the 5am to 9am slot before work and their 5pm to 9pm post-work schedules. It’s a wholesome if exhausting-looking sequence of workouts, food prep and domestic drudgery. I watched one user cook, prep the next day’s breakfast and lunch, do laundry, plump pillows, bathe, exfoliate and moisturise. Then I needed a lie-down to recover.

Given that sleep has already been hacked to death with everything from [smart rings to ice baths](#), we are reaching a full 24-hour timetable of aspirational activity: there is no room for drooling or vacant downtime. It’s the logical conclusion of what essayist Jia Tolentino called the “[always be optimising](#)” mindset. Every second of time must be used well as we tick towards death. Why are you wasting yours reading this? At least listen to it on triple speed on the treadmill, loser.

My five to nines – both ends – are formless tranches of failure to optimise. The early shift is shivering by the back door as the geriatric dog takes his

leisurely 5am stagger around the garden, or, if I've won the canine lottery, stuck in bed as if pinned there by the winner of this year's Fat Bear Week ([Bear Force One, 1,400lb](#)), talking myself out of showering. The post-work shift is blank staring and crisps. "Crunching has replaced all my emotions," I messaged my best friend recently. "Crunching is an emotion," she replied.

The salvation of TikTok is that any emerging trend gets sharp, near-instantaneous pushback. One #my5to9 video is just a woman face-down on her bed; another denounces the genre as "[performing productivity](#)". TikTok Marxist-feminist [@c.a.i.t.l.y.n](#) has recorded an elegant two-part [structural critique of #my5to9](#) as merely "maximising your potential as both a worker and a consumer under capitalism".

The next time I feel guilty, I'll tell myself I'm pushing back against the expansion of the capitalist economy outside my paid hours, one crisp at a time.

Emma Beddington is a Guardian columnist

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2022.10.17 - Around the world

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US midterm elections 2022

Bernie Sanders: Democrats should not court far-right ‘racist, sexist’ voters

Senator says nonetheless Democrats should appeal to ‘millions of ... working-class people’ who can’t afford healthcare or tuition



Senator Bernie Sanders. Photograph: Alex Wong/Getty Images

[Ramon Antonio Vargas](#)

Mon 17 Oct 2022 09.36 EDTFirst published on Mon 17 Oct 2022 01.00 EDT

Democrats should give up trying to appeal to racist, sexist or homophobic voters on the far right even as their party tries to preserve thin majorities in both congressional chambers, the progressive US senator [Bernie Sanders](#) said on Sunday.

Sanders' remarks came during an appearance on NBC's Meet the Press after host Chuck Todd asked a question about attempting to woo over supporters

of Donald Trump, which include white nationalists who helped stage the deadly January 6 Capitol attack on the day that Congress certified the former Republican president's defeat to Joe Biden in the 2020 election.

Todd said Sanders "made a big deal about wanting to court Trump voters" in both the 2016 election that Trump won as well as the 2020 race that he lost and wondered if the Vermont senator still felt they were worth that.

"There are some extreme rightwing voters who are racists, who are sexists, who are homophobes – xenophobes," Sanders said. "No, I don't think you're ever going to get them."

Sanders nonetheless said Democrats should sympathize with "millions of ... working-class people" who can't afford healthcare, college tuition for their children or their prescription drugs. And he said one way to appeal to undecided voters is to have the political resolve to punish corporate greed from insurance firms, drug companies and Wall Street traders.

"Some of those people – I'm not saying all – will say, 'You know what, I'm going to stand with the Democratic party because on these economic issues, they're far preferable to right-wing Republicans,'" Sanders told Todd.

Sanders is an independent but votes in line with the Democrats' agenda on Capitol Hill.

He recently wrote an opinion piece in the Guardian that warned Democrats should not only focus on protecting abortion rights in the closing phases of this [midterm](#) election cycle but also needed to communicate a plan for the economic woes facing Americans that Republicans as a party purport to care more about.

Sanders said his voting record starkly illustrates his opposition to the US supreme court's decision in June to eliminate federal protections for abortion, which a majority of [voters](#) believe should be legal in most cases, according to some polling.

The supreme court's ruling overturning the nationwide abortion rights established by the 1973 Roe v Wade case has led to fears that the justices

could also target the elimination of same-sex marriage.

But Sanders said his party should also be concerned about how six in 10 Americans live paycheck to paycheck. And he has said Democrats should be more vocal about how they have better ideas than Republicans on rectifying that reality, including through methods such as ending tax breaks, raising the federal minimum wage and even providing universal healthcare.

The Democrats go into the midterms with an eight-seat advantage in the House. The Senate is split evenly but Biden's Democratic vice-president Kamala Harris currently gives their party a tiebreaker.

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US midterm elections 2022

Democrats and Republicans fight to make inroads with Latinos ahead of midterms

Hispanic voters could tip the scales next month in a number of battleground states



Democrats and Republicans are now locked in a tight – and expensive – political battle for Hispanic voters. Composite: Guardian Design/Reuters

[Lauren Gambino](#) in Washington

[@laurenegambino](#)

Mon 17 Oct 2022 02.00 EDT Last modified on Mon 17 Oct 2022 02.20 EDT

Arizona's Democratic senator Mark Kelly frequently consults his "Latino kitchen cabinet". In south Texas, the Democratic House candidate Michelle Vallejo [hosted](#) a neighbourhood quinceañera. And in Georgia, Democratic gubernatorial candidate Stacey Abrams [appeared](#) on stage at La Raza's

Fiesta Mexicana. Across battleground states this midterm cycle, Democrats are urgently working to engage and mobilize Hispanic voters.

Their push comes two years after Donald Trump made surprising but substantial inroads with Latinos despite his defeat to Joe Biden in the 2020 presidential race. Democrats started to fear their party was losing its hold on a historically reliable cohort, while [Republicans](#) became hopeful.

Now [Democrats](#) and Republicans are engaged anew in a pitched – and expensive – political battle for Hispanic voters, an electorate both parties see as critical not only to their chances this November but also to their electoral hopes in the future.

Latino voters are a significant part of the electorate in battleground states likely to decide control of the US Senate, including Arizona, Nevada and even Georgia. They also form a powerful cohort in districts with highly competitive House races across California, Texas and Florida.

“Latinos get to decide the future of these states, which means they get to decide the future of our entire country with their vote,” said Cristina Tzintzún Ramirez, president of the progressive youth voting group, NextGen America.

That wasn’t always the case. In 1970, just 5% of the US population was Hispanic. But now, they represent nearly one in five Americans. In the last decade, Latinos accounted for 52% of the nation’s population growth.

They also make up one of the largest and fastest-growing parts of the electorate. Latino voters [cast](#) roughly 16m votes in 2020, accounting for more than 10% of the total vote share.

Most Hispanic voters – 56% – say they plan to vote for Democrats in November, compared with 32% for Republicans, [a New York Times/Siena College poll found](#). But the survey showed Democrats’ support was weaker than in previous years, primarily over economic concerns.

Similarly, [a recent Washington Post/Ipsos poll](#) found Democratic support among Latino voters lagged behind the 2018 level.

The economy and rising cost of living is by far the top issue for Latinos this year, yet the Times/Siena poll indicated that they are evenly split over which party they agree more with. And after the US supreme court's decision to overturn Roe v Wade, several surveys – including the Post/Ipsos poll – have found that abortion rights are now also among the top voting issue for Latinos.

“What we’re seeing here is Latino voters very much concerned about their quality of life as they consider who they’re going to vote for and how they’re going to vote,” said Arturo Vargas, executive director of National Association of Latino Elected and Appointed Officials Educational Fund ([Naleo](#)), which has commissioned a tracking poll of Latino voters this cycle.

‘Win enough’

Like the rest of the country, Latinos are dissatisfied with the direction of the country and divided over Joe Biden’s handling of the economy. Republicans see that as an opening to peel away disaffected Latino voters.

“Republicans are not going to win the Hispanic vote but they don’t need to,” said Mike Madrid, a veteran Republican strategist who co-hosts the Latino Vote podcast. “They’re just trying to win enough at the margins to win statewide contests.”

Madrid says neither party has an obvious grip on the future of the Latino electorate. He argues that Latinos’ preference for Democrats in the past has been driven by their opposition to Republicans’ embrace of hardline anti-immigrant policies – not loyalty to the Democratic party.

The party that can capture the loyalty of a multi-ethnic working class will be the dominant party of the next generation

Mike Madrid, veteran Republican strategist

Younger voters tend to be more ambivalent about party politics. And Latino voters are young, and they are getting younger. It is estimated that each year 1 million US-born Latinos turn 18 and become eligible to vote.

“The party that is able to capture the hearts and minds and loyalty of a multi-ethnic working class will be the dominant party of the next generation,” Madrid said.

Hoping to capitalize on the gains they made in 2020, Republicans have ramped up their outreach to Latino voters. They celebrated victories by Republican Latinas like Mayra Flores in Texas. And in battleground states across the country, the Republican National Committee has invested millions in community outreach centers targeting Latinos, along with Black voters and Asian Americans.

Those efforts are bolstered by the work of groups like the Libre Initiative. For the past decade, Libre – an arm of the Koch family’s Americans for Prosperity – has worked to build support for conservative economic principles in Hispanic communities.

The Libre Initiative’s president, Daniel Garza, said they are playing a long game, investing in states where the Latino population is still relatively small but growing: Georgia, Virginia, Wisconsin, even Arkansas. The organization has helped Latinos learn English, get driving licences and even attain high-school equivalency degrees.

“The end game is not electing politicians,” Garza said. “It’s not even policy. The idea is for Latinos to become the ‘vanguard of the kinds of free market policies that allow waves of poor immigrants to achieve the American dream.’”

A historic underinvestment

For years, Latino Democratic leaders and strategists have warned the party that it needs to invest more money in outreach, hire Latino staff and engage voters on issues beyond immigration.

Democrats have [indeed spent more than \\$54m](#) in elections ads on Spanish-language TV and radio stations since the beginning of 2021 as compared to \$19m from Republicans, according to the ad-tracking service AdImpact. Yet advocates argue that more can be done.

“The fact is that we need a lot more resources, coming in early so that we can do the appropriate work needed to reach out to the Latino community, and especially young voters,” said Lizet Ocampo, executive director of Voto Latino, an online voter registration organization.

Ocampo said there have been improvements this cycle, but more money is needed to be in constant contact with these voters.

“We know that consistent engagement around the year is better at getting folks out, especially young people,” she added. “They do not like when people parachute in at the last minute and ask for their vote.”

And what worries leaders like Ocampo is not that Latinos may vote for Republicans. It’s that Latinos may not vote at all.

Ramirez, whose group, NextGen, works to mobilise young voters, says both parties are guilty of a “historic underinvestment in the Latino community”. But she argues that Democrats have the better economic message: lowering the cost of prescription drugs, raising the minimum wage and guaranteeing parental leave are popular policies.

“The solutions and economic policies of the Democratic party speak to the greatest number of Latinos’ pain, but that’s not enough to make sure that they come out and vote for Democrats,” she said. “If Democrats want their vote, they need to spend more money and time speaking to the Latino community, especially younger Latinos.”

Mahmoud Abbas

Palestinian ‘Game of Thrones’? What happens when Mahmoud Abbas leaves office?

Now in the twilight of a controversial reign as president, what comes next is a vexed question



Mahmoud Abbas, commonly referred to by his *kunya*, Abu Mazen, is now 87 and in failing health. Photograph: Nasser Shiyoukhi/AP



Bethan McKernan in Ramallah, West Bank

Mon 17 Oct 2022 03.54 EDT Last modified on Mon 17 Oct 2022 17.19 EDT

In January 2005, Mahmoud Abbas, then 70, had just launched his campaign for [Palestinian Authority](#) president. Arriving on a grey, mild day in the occupied West Bank city of Jenin, he was lifted on to the shoulders of an ecstatic crowd numbering about 10,000 people. While nowhere near as charismatic as his predecessor, [Yasser Arafat](#), who had died two months before, Abbas was nonetheless welcomed as a reformer and a man of peace.

Abbas, commonly referred to by his *kunya*, Abu Mazen, won the presidency by a significant majority a few weeks later. A major architect of the Oslo peace process, his win delighted the Israelis and the Americans: unlike Arafat, Abu Mazen had vociferously denounced the violence of what was by then the ebbing second *intifada*, or Palestinian uprising.

His future, and that of Palestine in general, held much promise. But just a year later, because of Fatah party infighting over candidate lists, the Islamist movement Hamas won the parliamentary elections, leading to a brief civil war in which the Palestinian Authority (PA) lost control of the [Gaza Strip](#). The rest of Abbas's long tenure has resembled that of a stereotypical regional autocrat, determined to cling on to power.

Nearly two decades later, the Oslo accords no longer address the political reality on the ground; Abu Mazen's Fatah party and the umbrella Palestinian Liberation Organisation (PLO), riddled with corruption, have little support among younger generations; and the authority he oversees [works with Israel to oppress its own people](#).

Palestinian Authority forces have been sent after union leaders, activists, journalists and even ordinary citizens who dare to write critical social media posts, while over the years Abbas has steadily consolidated control over institutional bodies and sidelined the defunct Palestinian parliament. Its legislative powers were officially transferred in 2018, making it easier to appoint allies to top PLO positions.

The president is now 87, and in failing health. A long-term smoker, he was admitted to hospital twice this summer, and every now and then the internet circulates rumours of his death. The last surviving member of the Palestinian national movement's founding generation, as his [biographers put it](#), Abu Mazen has "lived his people's history"; his passing will mark a significant moment in the Palestinian story.

What comes next, however, is a vexed question. There has not been a Palestinian election for 16 years, and Abbas has never appointed an official successor. Few have faith in an agreement brokered in Algeria last week to hold legislative and presidential elections within one year, and the president's office did not respond to several requests for an interview.

Now, in the twilight of a disappointing reign, it is still not clear what will happen in the days and weeks after his death. Several scenarios – some of them violent – could play out, putting the Palestinian statehood he struggled for as a younger man further out of reach than ever.



Then Palestinian president Yasser Arafat, centre, waves good-bye to Egyptian intelligence chief Omar Suleiman with premier-designate Mahmoud Abbas, left, in Ramallah in 2003. Photograph: REUTERS/Alamy

“The thing about Abu Mazen is, he’s a man of extreme emotion. He loves intensely and he hates intensely. It’s his most important feature, it’s what defines him,” said Nasser al-Qidwa, who was expelled from Fatah’s central committee last year after challenging Abbas in the [cancelled 2021 elections](#).

“He was in Arafat’s shadow for 15, 20 years. When he was gone it was his time to shine, and to take revenge.”

Abu Mazen was born in 1935 in the Galilee to a lower middle-class family who fled to the Syrian capital of Damascus in 1948 after Israel’s creation. He studied law and worked as a teacher before moving in the 1950s for a civil service job in Qatar, where he met Arafat and became involved with his fledgling secular Fatah party and the PLO.

He later earned a doctorate in Moscow, writing a much-debunked thesis claiming that Zionists collaborated with the Nazis during the Holocaust. Allegedly a KGB agent in the 1980s, his style of leadership today clearly borrows from the Soviet system.

A diplomat rather than a warrior, Abbas lived in Damascus with his wife and three sons for decades, fundraising and fostering the PLO's international relationships. He was an early advocate for negotiation with the Israelis, as well as a two-state solution to the conflict, but was largely pushed off the political stage after the creation of the authority in 1994.

At the behest of Washington, Arafat begrudgingly made him prime minister in 2003. After the "Old Man's" death the following year, Abu Mazen was well placed to run for the authority's leadership.

Today, Abbas's rule is a mesh of contradictions. He is a master of palace intrigue, playing allies and underlings within his Fatah, PLO and authority circles against each other. He also generally enjoys the respect of international counterparts, who still praise his pivotal role in peace accords in the 1990s.

In Palestinian society, however, he is ridiculed as inept and incoherent. In Israel, the PA president is no longer seen as a partner for peace, but since he is a bulwark against the likes of [Hamas](#) and Palestinian Islamic Jihad, he is not viewed as an enemy, either.

"Our regime is not a platonic model, but there are multiple reasons for that," said Jibril Rajoub, the secretary general of Fatah's central committee and a close ally of the president. "Abu Mazen is the only Palestinian leader with elected legitimacy and a mandate. He is the only one who can and should lead. His critics are free from the constraints he operates under."

Simultaneously vigorous and ossified, razor sharp and bluntly ineffective, the president embodies the current chapter of the Palestinian struggle. That does not augur well for the future.

In the event of Abu Mazen's resignation or death in office, under Palestinian law, the speaker of parliament is supposed to become provisional president and issue an election decree within 60 days. The 2006 Fatah-Hamas split, however, means this is near impossible, and there are no clear institutional mechanisms to otherwise manage the transition.

Instead, it is widely expected that the Abbas supporter [Hussein al-Sheikh](#), who in May was appointed secretary general of the Palestinian Authority's executive committee, will take over as both authority and PLO president. Formerly in charge of coordination with Israel, and accused of corruption and sexual assault – allegations he has denied – the 60-year-old is deeply unpopular.

In interviews, he has said the next Palestinian leader should be elected, but only if Israel allowed people in occupied East Jerusalem to vote, which is unlikely. He has also emphasised the importance of the authority's relationship with Israel, and a visit to Washington earlier this month has been interpreted as White House backing for Sheikh as Abu Mazen's successor.

Several other contenders exist for the top job within the highly factionalised Fatah, including the Abbas loyalist Majed al-Faraj, the head of the general intelligence service, and Mahmoud Aloul, Fatah's deputy chair.

One bitter rival, Marwan Barghouti, serving five life sentences in an Israeli prison, remains extremely popular on the Palestinian street, and declared he would run for the presidency from his cell in 2021's cancelled elections. Mohammed Dahlan, another enemy living in self-imposed exile in Abu Dhabi, has become an [extremely influential](#) regional player and is believed to maintain links to armed groups in both the West Bank and Gaza.

Power struggles within the party could inflame the [wave of violence engulfing the West Bank](#), in which newly formed Palestinian militias are taking on both Israeli and authority forces. Another civil war with Hamas, an Arab spring-style uprising against the authority, or a third intifada against Israel, are all possibilities in the event of a major power vacuum.

Israel is prepared for all of the above scenarios, although reportedly no military drills have been held since 2018. According to the Israeli newspaper Yedioth Ahronoth, an Israel Defence Forces (IDF) plan codenamed "Sunset" deals with the immediate aftermath following Abbas's death, including major troop deployment across the West Bank and potential operations for rescuing [illegal Israeli settlers](#).

A second plan, being referred to as “Game of Thrones”, is designed for a situation in which rival Palestinian militant groups and political factions attempt to seize control in different areas of the West Bank.



Palestinian members of the Fatah movement chant pro-Mahmoud Abbas slogans during a rally in the Gaza Strip in 2004. Photograph: REUTERS/Alamy

Dr Hanan Ashrawi, who resigned from the PLO executive committee in 2020 on the grounds that the political system needed “renewal and reinvigoration”, argues that focusing on what will happen “the day after Abu Mazen” obscures the fact that his political project has already failed.

“The situation is an ongoing, slippery slope. It’s not entirely Abbas’s fault: we live under a deliberately cruel occupation, and everything was done to make the PA fail and present them as subcontractors for Israeli security,” she said.

“The weaker the system, the more it closes in on itself and the more oppressive it becomes. I don’t know what shape the future will take … It could be peaceful. But the longer it takes to see real change, violence becomes more probable. If you don’t allow for peaceful democratic ways of transferring power, people will find other means to express themselves.”

Even if the transition to a post-Abu-Mazen era is smooth, even if free and fair elections are held in a timely fashion, in which reform-minded Fatah factions or new political parties triumph, the next administration will still face major problems. Deepening divides in Palestinian politics, and the nature of the authority's relationship with Israel, are issues that will remain.

Abbas could claim the inheritance of the Palestinian national project when he was elected in 2005; whoever replaces him will be a partisan candidate who will struggle to reunite the West Bank and the Gaza Strip. And as long as [Israeli politics continues its march rightwards](#), resumption of the peace process is a distant dream.

Al sabr wa al samud, patience and steadfastness, has often served as Abu Mazen's political mantra. His squandered legacy is proof enough it is no longer fit for purpose.

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Saudi Arabia

Senator raises alarm Saudis could share US defense technology with Russia

Richard Blumenthal to seek reassurances from Pentagon that ‘they are on top of’ risk of sharing information with Gulf state



Senator Blumenthal: ‘This action – siding with the Russians in this manner – is so dramatic. I think it calls for a response.’ Photograph: Chip Somodevilla/Getty Images

*[Stephanie Kirchgaessner](#) in Washington
@skirchy*

Mon 17 Oct 2022 03.00 EDT Last modified on Mon 17 Oct 2022 06.00 EDT

A senior Democratic lawmaker has raised alarms about the possibility that sensitive US defense technology could be shared with Russia by Saudi Arabia in the wake of the kingdom’s recent decision [to side with Moscow](#) over the interests of the US.

Richard Blumenthal, a member of the Senate armed services committee who has proposed [a one-year freeze on weapons sales](#) to Saudi following Opec+'s decision to cut oil production, said he would "dig deeper into the risk" in discussions with the Pentagon.

"I want some reassurances that they are on top of it and if there are risks, I want to determine what can be done to mitigate those risks immediately," Blumenthal said in an interview with the Guardian.

The comments show the depth of the rift that has emerged between the Saudi monarchy and [Democrats](#) in Washington, who have reacted with fury against a recent decision by the Opec oil cartel to begin cutting oil production next month by 2m barrels a day.

The decision was seen in the US capital as a sign of Riyadh siding with Russia in its war with Ukraine, and as a possible attempt to hurt [Joe Biden](#) and Democrats ahead of next month's critical midterm election by raising the price of petrol at the pump.

Both Biden and his Democratic allies in Congress have expressed frustration with the move and called for a realignment in the Saudi relationship, with the US president warning that Saudi would face "consequences" for the move.

On Sunday, the White House national security adviser, Jake Sullivan, said President Biden will act "methodically" in re-evaluating the relationship, but options include changes to security assistance to the major oil producer.

While Republicans on Capitol Hill have been far less vocal about the Opec+ move, Blumenthal said his discussions with colleagues indicated there would be [bipartisan support for measures to curb weapons sales](#), which is an issue likely to be taken up formally next month.

Blumenthal has also suggested that one of his primary areas of concern was making sure that Russia would not benefit from the sensitive technology that has been shared with US partners in Riyadh.

“We are going to be consulting with the Pentagon, speaking to them very frankly about their assessment of the risk in the transfer of technology in advanced weapons systems made already,” he said. “I am not leaping to any conclusions but it needs to be a consideration that is heightened.”

The senator also said he supported proposals to shift weapons that are currently in [Saudi Arabia](#), and those en route, to allies in Ukraine.

Some analysts have noted that the transfer of weapons to Ukraine would be complicated by the fact that they require US personnel to operate the systems, which would represent an untenable escalation. Blumenthal emphasised that he was not suggesting that any US personnel would train Ukraine forces in Ukraine, but that it was possible to do so outside the country.

Jeffrey Sonnenfeld, a professor at Yale School of Management who has studied arms sales to Saudi and is sharing his research with Senate Democrats, said he has found that the last five years have seen an “unparalleled outsourcing” of the most sensitive US weapons to the kingdom.

“We have no allies including Canada, UK, Israel and Australia with such a unique security partnership as the Saudis, providing them with ownership and local manufacturing capability of our most sensitive strategic weapons,” he said, adding that the arrangements began in 2017, under the Trump administration.

“There has been no public discussion of the impact of this alarming weaponry handoff to the Saudis for self-sufficiency with no US control in the near future,” he said.

Jeff Abramson, a senior fellow at the Arms Control Association, said Saudi Arabia had been a major purchaser of US military equipment, including some of its most sophisticated weapons systems, for decades.

“It is plausible that the Saudis have information about those weapons that the United States would not want shared with Russia,” he said. “The truth is that the United States supplies weapons to many undemocratic regimes

around the globe, with potential sharing of defense information just one of many concerns about how those relationships may harm, rather than help, national and global peace and security.”



Saudi crown prince Mohammed bin Salman bumps fists with US President Joe Biden in July 2022. Photograph: Bandar Al-Jaloud/Saudi Royal Palace/AFP/Getty Images

It is not clear whether Democrats’ rhetoric will lead to action. Biden entered the White House after having promised to treat Saudi crown prince like a “pariah”, but later traveled to Jeddah and gave the Saudi heir a fist bump.

Asked about Democrats’ intentions, Blumenthal said: “You know the old saying ‘the straw that broke the camel’s back?’”

“Feelings have reached a different point. Saudis brought the president to Saudi Arabia to talk about the whole relationship and we need to rebalance the entire diplomatic and military relationship because it has been so one-sided. This action – siding with the Russians in this manner – is so dramatic. I think it calls for a response,” he said.

“The human rights violations inside Saudi Arabia, the fostering of civil war in Yemen, the disrespect for 9/11 families seeking justice, there’s a parade of

insults and injuries here [and] now in some ways Saudi Arabia has crossed a line,” he added.

On Sunday, Saudi Arabia’s defense minister, Prince Khalid bin Salman, said on Twitter that the decision by OPEC+ to cut oil output was made unanimously for “purely” economic reasons.

The statement echoed a position from last week in which the Saudi foreign ministry rejected criticism of its Opec+ decision and insisted the cartel had acted with unanimity and in its own economic interest. It also rejected any assumption that it could be forced into a policy U-turn.

The Pentagon did not respond to a request for comment.

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Liz Truss refuses to commit to triple lock on pensions despite backing it two weeks ago – as it happened

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Liz Truss

Jeremy Hunt shreds Truss's economic plans in astounding U-turn on tax

New chancellor tells Commons there will be tax rises and spending cuts, as PM dodges urgent question

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

'Nothing is off the table': Jeremy Hunt refuses to rule out windfall tax – video

[Jessica Elgot](#), [Larry Elliott](#) and [Aubrey Allegretti](#)

Mon 17 Oct 2022 17.01 EDTFirst published on Mon 17 Oct 2022 14.57 EDT

Jeremy Hunt has [shredded Liz Truss's economic plans](#) in one of the most astonishing U-turns in modern political history, including slashing the energy price freeze which the prime minister had repeatedly championed.

The new chancellor dismantled almost all of the platform that Truss's leadership victory had been built on, including the majority of her tax cuts, and hinted a new windfall tax was in his sights – a move the PM had previously said she would not countenance.

Hunt also refused to rule out cuts to totemic Conservative pledges, including defence spending and the pensions triple lock.

Truss declined to appear at the dispatch box in parliament on Monday despite calls from Labour, leading one cabinet minister to clarify she was not "hiding under a desk". In an interview with the BBC on Monday night, she said she wanted to "accept responsibility and say sorry for the mistakes that have been made".

“I wanted to act to help people with their energy bills and to deal with the issue of high taxes, but we went too far and too fast,” she said.

With her premiership in grave doubt, Downing Street sources told the Guardian that Truss met Sir Graham Brady, the powerful chair of the 1922 Committee, where they discussed the scale of MPs’ anger.

A new poll from Redfield & Wilton gave [Labour](#) a 36-point lead, the largest for any political party from any polling company since October 1997.

In a statement on Monday morning, Hunt said the 20p basic tax rate would remain indefinitely and reversed a swathe of other tax measures, including changes to dividend taxes, a VAT-free shopping scheme and a freeze on some alcohol duties.

But the biggest shock came when the chancellor said he would no longer guarantee energy prices for the next two winters and that more targeted measures would replace the universal guarantee from next spring after a Treasury review.

It means the average annual energy bill will rise to more than £4,000 from April, according to the sector’s leading forecaster, and analysts said it could lead to a rise of almost five percentage points in the annual inflation rate.

[Inflation currently stands at 9.9%](#) and is expected to rise slightly when the figure for September is announced on Tuesday.

The Institute for Fiscal Studies said the £32bn tax increases – the biggest since 1993 – would not be enough on their own to undo the damage caused by the “debacle of the past few weeks”.

Paul Johnson, the thinktank’s director, said the chancellor’s decision to scrap most of the tax cuts announced last month was welcome but would not be enough “to plug the gap in the government’s fiscal plans”.

Hunt will use his next fiscal statement – due on 31 October – to outline how the government intends to reduce public sector debt as a share of national

income over time. Estimates of what it would take to achieve this range between £60bn and £72bn.

'The PM is not under a desk': Penny Mordaunt forced to defend Liz Truss's absence – video

The only key tax announcements to survive were the cancellation of the national insurance rise and stamp duty changes, both already subject to new legislation.

Flanked by ashen-faced Tory backbenchers, Hunt said there would be tax rises and spending cuts, which he called decisions of “eye-watering difficulty”.

He refused to rule out changes to the pensions triple lock and said a new windfall tax on energy profits was on the table. “I am not against the principle of taxing profits that are genuine windfalls,” he told the Commons.

Few in Westminster believe Truss’s premiership is secure even with the significant reversals.

One member of the 1922 executive said the group could take action this week, either by changing the rules or sending Brady to tell Truss it was over. “When the herd moves, the herd moves,” they said.

Truss began a new round of party diplomacy on Monday night, including a drinks reception for the cabinet and a meeting with the One Nation caucus of MPs on the party’s centrist wing who had mostly backed Rishi Sunak.

Behind closed doors, Truss apologised for the turmoil and MPs said she had asked them to give her until 2024 to deliver on people’s priorities.

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In her BBC interview, Truss said she intended to stay on as prime minister. “I do think it is the mark of an honest politician who does say, ‘Yes, I’ve made a mistake.’ I’ve addressed that mistake. And now we need to deliver for people what we’ve said we’ll deliver.

“I’m sticking around because I was elected to deliver for this country. And that is what I am determined to do. I will lead the [Conservatives](#) into the next general election … We simply cannot afford to spend our time talking about the Conservative party, rather than what we need to deliver. That is my message to my colleagues.”

But five MPs have now openly called on the PM to resign, after two more spoke out on Monday – the veteran backbencher Sir Charles Walker and the former parliamentary aide Angela Richardson.

Another MP, who has not publicly called for the prime minister to go, said they believed it was now “majority opinion” in the party that Truss should resign.

With MPs openly calling Hunt the “de facto prime minister”, another former leadership contender – Penny Mordaunt – answered the urgent question in place of Truss.

Mordaunt said the prime minister was not in hiding. Instead, Truss had been “detained on urgent business”, Mordaunt told the Commons, later revealed to be the meeting with Brady.

Mordaunt put clear water between herself and the prime minister, apologising for the market turmoil – something Truss had declined to do.

Starmer accuses Truss of 'hiding away' from questions on Kwarteng sacking – video

Number 10 had earlier sent a WhatsApp message to Conservative MPs which made no excuse or apology, but said the government had to “adjust our programme” because of global economic conditions.

In his statement to MPs, Hunt admitted questions had been raised about whether the country could fund spending promises and pay its debts, and laid out plans to scrap tax cuts worth £32bn.

However, the sum is only half of the fiscal black hole – estimated to be about £70bn – caused by last month’s mini-budget, and Hunt alluded to needing to take “difficult decisions” to regain trust “in our national finances”.

“That means decisions of eye-watering difficulty,” he said. “Every single one of those decisions – whether reductions in spending or increases in tax – will be shaped through core, compassionate Conservative values that will prioritise the needs of the most vulnerable.”

Hunt’s decision to bring forward tax increases had an immediate impact on the financial markets.

The pound rose by 2% against the dollar – its biggest one-day increase since March 2020 – to stand at \$1.14, while the interest rate on government debt fell sharply. The yield on 30-year gilts fell by 0.4 percentage points to 4.37%, reversing some of the increase since Kwasi Kwarteng announced [£45bn of tax cuts in his 23 September mini-budget](#).

In an effort to further gain the confidence of the City, Hunt said he was setting up a new economic advisory council, with at least four leading economists lined up to join it, including Rupert Harrison, George Osborne’s former chief of staff, and a JP Morgan executive.

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Defence policy

Ben Wallace prepared to quit if PM drops pledge on defence spending

Defence secretary would hold Truss to pledges, says source, as he flies off for security talks in Washington

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Ben Wallace at a Nato council meeting of defence ministers in Brussels, Belgium, last week. Photograph: Stéphanie Lecocq/EPA

[Dan Sabbagh](#) and [Jessica Elgot](#)

Tue 18 Oct 2022 07.06 EDTFirst published on Tue 18 Oct 2022 04.07 EDT

The UK defence secretary, Ben Wallace, and one of his deputies, [James Heappey](#), have indicated they are prepared to quit their jobs if Liz Truss

does not honour her campaign pledge to spend 3% of GDP on defence by 2030.

The beleaguered prime minister's commitment has appeared under threat following the surprise appointment of Jeremy Hunt as chancellor on Friday. Since then, Hunt has said no department would be immune from spending cuts.

But on Tuesday morning a defence source insisted that Wallace, one of the most highly regarded ministers in the government, "will hold the prime minister to the pledges made", prompting fresh speculation he may quit if the pledge is not met.

The source, referring to the crisis in [Ukraine](#), added that "current world events, and allies commitments show that defence is not a 'discretionary' spend but a priority".

Wallace is working on the basis of the revised spending plans, in which budgets will increase from 2.1% of GDP to 2.5% by 2026 and 3% by the end of the decade to total an estimated £100bn a year.

It reflects a promise "the prime minister made clear in her leadership campaign" the source added, and, it is understood, further undertakings given by Truss in a letter of appointment setting out her priorities for Wallace on 29 September.

Earlier, Heappey, the armed forces minister, had said he would also resign if the 3% commitment was dropped. When asked on LBC by presenter Nick Ferrari "would you quit?" in those circumstances, Heappey replied: "Yeah, but no one said, Nick, that 3% is not going to happen by 2030."

Wallace is on an hastily arranged trip to Washington, where he will meet his US counterpart, Lloyd Austin, and other senior White House figures to discuss the crisis in Ukraine and other "shared security concerns".

The cabinet minister had been due to give evidence to the defence committee on Tuesday afternoon, but the hearing was called off at short notice, prompting speculation about the nature of the trip.

Heappey had said, cryptically, that Wallace's discussions were significant. Wallace was going "to have the sort of conversations that ... [it's] beyond belief really, the fact we are at a time when these sort of conversations are necessary," he told Sky News.

Previously Hunt had said the full [reversal of Liz Truss's economic plans](#) would mean "decisions of eye-watering difficulty", and suggested nothing was off the table, including defence and health spending and the pensions triple-lock.

On the 3% pledge, Heappey also told Sky News: "The commitment the prime minister made is 3% by 2030 and to be clear like the secretary of state [for defence, Ben Wallace] that's something that I believe must be delivered given the need to keep our nation safe given increasingly uncertain times."

But he conceded there may need to be some short-term budget adjustments, saying: "If in the very immediate term there is a requirement to look at what we can do to help the Treasury out that's a discussion for the chancellor to have with the secretary of state."

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With Truss's future in grave doubt over the scale of her errors that fuelled market turmoil, Heappey said there was no candidate who could replace her who could unite the Conservative party.

"I think the vast majority of colleagues recognise that a mistake was made. The prime minister has owned that and apologised for it. And is the alternative to rowing in behind the prime minister and making success of her

government is to throw ourselves into another period of great rancour?" he told the BBC Radio 4's Today programme.

Asked by Sky News how many more errors Truss could make, he said: "I suspect given how skittish our politics are at the moment, not very many." Pressed how many, he said: "I don't think there's the opportunity to make any more mistakes."

The shadow chancellor, Rachel Reeves, told the Today programme that the government was embarking on a programme of austerity that had never been part of the Tory mandate.

"The latest chancellor, the fourth in four months, was a key architect in austerity season one, and he's now saying that what we need is austerity season two," she said.

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Kwasi Kwarteng

‘No one would do that’: estate agents deny making rude gesture to Kwarteng

Agents in former chancellor’s constituency are glad to see him go after his effect on property market



Kwasi Kwarteng’s previously safe seat is now looking precarious.

Photograph: Henry Nicholls/Reuters

[Rupert Neate](#)

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Tue 18 Oct 2022 02.00 EDT Last modified on Tue 18 Oct 2022 04.07 EDT

It was one of the more startling claims made over the weekend, in the wake of the sacking of [Kwasi Kwarteng](#). Someone in an estate agent in the then chancellor’s constituency reportedly made an “obscene gesture” at him through the window, in apparent disgust at the way his mini-budget had tanked the economy.

None of three estate agents on Shepperton High Street in Surrey will admit that someone in their office was responsible for the alleged gesture towards their local MP when he toured local businesses shortly before he was sacked last week.

But all of them say they are glad he was removed as chancellor on Friday after his mini-budget sent interest rates soaring, raised mortgage costs for prospective buyers and threw the housing market – and wider economy – into turmoil.

“He obviously made a right mess of it,” Mike Bazely, the director of Bazely & Co estate agents he founded in 2006, says. “Personally, I am glad he’s out – I just don’t think he was up to it.”

[Kwarteng](#), 47, has been MP for Spelthorne, which stretches from the perimeter of Heathrow airport in the north to the edge of Walton-on-Thames in the south, since 2010. At the last general election in 2019 he had a majority of more than 18,000.



Michael Bazely of Bazely & Co estate agents in Shepperton says Kwarteng ‘made a right mess of it’. Photograph: Sean Smith/The Guardian

That previously safe seat is now looking precarious, with an opinion poll over the weekend suggesting that Kwarteng's seat is now on a knife-edge, with 37% support for the Conservatives compared with 36% for Labour.

On Friday, after only 38 days, Kwarteng's tenure as chancellor came to an abrupt halt when he was replaced by the former foreign secretary Jeremy Hunt. On Monday Hunt scrapped virtually all the tax cuts that Kwarteng had announced only three weeks earlier in his mini-budget, soothing markets, easing pressure on the Bank of England to raise interest rates as aggressively and burying what remained of his predecessor's reputation.

Days before his dash back and forth across the Atlantic last week for the annual meeting of the International Monetary Fund, Kwarteng's staff had taken him on a walk about of Shepperton's high street to meet local businesses.

The reception was far from universally popular. Crowds are said to have formed, shouting questions at Kwarteng outside a BP petrol station and then later near a popular bakery, Jamz Cafe. The tone lowered further when Kwarteng waved at people through an estate agent's window, with an occupant in one said to have responded with a “rude gesture”, according to sources in Kwarteng's constituency office.

While Bazely is glad that Kwarteng was on Friday replaced as chancellor by Hunt he is adamant that none of his staff were responsible for the alleged gesture.

“I wasn’t in the office, and I can assure you no one here would do that,” Bazely says. “I wouldn’t say people are that angry; we’re just so disappointed. It was great news for the area when he was appointed chancellor but obviously it hasn’t worked out.

Bazely’s colleague Laura Grace was in the office and says she saw Kwarteng surrounded by “a big group of security guards as people tried to ask him questions”.

The ripples from Kwarteng’s disastrous mini-budget have been felt across the housing market, including in this leafy Surrey suburb. Lenders withdrew

about 1,000 deals in the wake of his 23 September package of unfunded tax cuts, only to return with rates several percentage points higher, adding hundreds of pounds to monthly mortgage bills and sending a deep chill through the housing market.



Polling in Kwarteng's Shepperton constituency suggests he may not be an MP much longer. Photograph: Sean Smith/The Guardian

Bazely said inquiries from new buyers have slowed as they reassess their financial situation but those with mortgage deals agreed before interest rates rose were continuing to press ahead with purchases.

"Some people think prices are going to start falling as people can't afford the mortgages they could before," he says. "But Shepperton is a small place, and our problem has been there is not enough stock for buyers."

Further up the street, at the fellow independent estate agent Curchods, Caitlin Orsman says she was unaware that Kwarteng had visited and that while rising interest rates had already hit sales "some people are still buying".

Orsman says she does not really have an opinion on Kwarteng but she is glad that Hunt has taken charge. She adds: "You're missing most of the

opinionated people not being in the office today – I know they would say a lot more.”

When her boss returns she is outraged to hear the allegation that anyone in the village would swear at Kwarteng. “He’s our MP, no one deserves to be treated like that. If you don’t like him don’t vote for him but there is no need for that.”

He may not be their member of parliament much longer, if polling is to be believed. An Opinium poll, using the MRP method to estimate constituency-level results, projected a 1997-style landslide for Labour, with the party winning 411 seats.

At the final estate agent office on the high street, a branch of the Haart chain, the employees say they have been told not to speak to the media. However, one employee can’t help himself : “I can’t tell you how glad I am that he has finally gone.

“It has been a disaster for the country, and a disaster for us. Interest rates are soaring, mortgages are being pulled, people aren’t going to buy houses. People are too scared.”

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Batgirl axed, The Flash floundering – can Black Adam turn things round for DC's troubled superheroes?



'I didn't want to make a one-off' ... Dwayne 'the Rock' Johnson as Black Adam. Photograph: Warner Bros

Any company with characters like Batman and Wonder Woman should be laughing all the way to the bank. So why are DC and its owner Warner Bros struggling with so many projects?



[Steve Rose](#)
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Tue 18 Oct 2022 01.00 EDT Last modified on Tue 18 Oct 2022 03.59 EDT

If you're unfamiliar with the concept of a "funeral screening", so were the cast and crew members who gathered for secret showings of the new Batgirl movie this August. They were in all likelihood the last people ever to see the movie. The week before, Warner Bros had announced that [Batgirl would never be released](#) but would instead be destroyed, buried, perhaps read its last rites and cremated in a little bat-shaped coffin.

Seldom, if ever, has a studio spent \$90m (£79m) on a movie only to scrap it before it ever saw the light of day. Especially not one that was widely anticipated (it was a superhero movie with "bat" in its title), and which was set to be a standard-bearer for inclusion. [Batgirl](#) herself was played by Dominican-American actor Leslie Grace – who would have become one of the first Latino screen superheroes. And Batgirl's best friend, Alyria Yeoh, was played by Ivory Aquino. Both the character and the Filipina-American actor are trans women – another first.

For good measure, Batgirl's directors were Moroccan-Belgian duo Adil El Arbi and Bilall Fallah. El Arbi was on his honeymoon in Morocco when he received the news. "They said they're gonna kill the movie, and when I heard that I was shocked because I didn't even realise that was a possibility," he said on Instagram. Fallah added: "It was painful, I was emotional, it was shocking, especially for our crew and cast."



Leslie Grace as Batgirl in the cancelled DC film. Photograph: DC Films

The news was also met with alarm throughout Hollywood. "It's viewed very negatively in the industry," says one insider who worked on Batgirl (and did not wish to be named). "Almost everyone that I've talked to – from producers to executives, agents, artists, designers, writers, directors – they've all said that's the most fucked-up thing they've ever heard. To me it's a sign that Warners haven't really learned a damn thing."

The Batgirl fiasco is yet another indicator that all is not well with the DC franchise. To be honest, it rarely has been. DC is one of the best known brands on the planet – home to household-name characters like Superman, Batman and [Wonder Woman](#). DC invented both the superhero (with Superman's comic-book debut in 1938), and, arguably, the superhero movie (with 1978's Christopher Reeve-led Superman). And yet Warner Bros, which has wholly owned DC since 1990, has consistently struggled to

capitalise on it. While arch-rival Marvel has translated its back catalogue into a succession of interconnected, well-received and incredibly lucrative movies and small-screen series over the past 15 years, DC has been one step behind – and all over the place.

At present, the DC extended universe (DCEU) seems to be expanding in all directions at once. Last year's The Batman, led by Robert Pattinson, was a big hit, taking more than \$770m globally. But Pattinson's Batman has no connection with the core DCEU, which is inhabited by familiar characters such as Gal Gadot's Wonder Woman and [Jason Momoa's Aquaman](#). In that universe, last time anyone checked, [Ben Affleck was Batman](#) – and possibly still is.



Jared Leto as the Joker in The Suicide Squad. Photograph: Warner Bros

It's a similar story with Batman's nemesis, the Joker. In the DCEU, he was played by Jared Leto. In Pattinson's Batman, there were hints of a new Joker, played by Barry Keoghan (who featured in a deleted scene). On top of these we have [Joaquin Phoenix's Oscar-winning Joker](#), which has no connection to any of the above. Where Marvel's superheroes all exist in the same well-ordered universe, DC fans must increasingly resort to a cork board and a ball of red string to figure out who's who, where, and when.

Other recent DC movies have been decidedly hit and miss. [Wonder Woman](#), [Aquaman](#) and [Shazam!](#) were all hits; [Birds of Prey](#) and [The Suicide Squad](#), both of which introduced whole new teams of superheroes, were misses. Sequel [Wonder Woman 1984](#) also bombed in 2021, and now sequels to Shazam! and Aquaman have been pushed back – the former to March 2023 and the latter to December 2023.

DC fans have grown accustomed to this level of chaos. Since the high point of Christopher Nolan's Dark Knight trilogy (with Christian Bale as Batman), the brand has regularly announced grand plans and projects, only to abandon them and change course. A decade ago, for example, inspired by the success of Marvel's Avengers saga, DC set out to build its own interconnected movie series, largely under the stewardship of director Zack Snyder. But after rebooting Superman (with Henry Cavill) in 2013's [Man of Steel](#), Snyder's 2016 superhero smackdown Batman Vs Superman: Dawn of Justice (with Affleck as Batman) was criticised for being glum, murky and hypermasculine. "About as diverting as having a porcelain sink broken over your head," complained the New York Times.

Then DC's big team-up movie, [Justice League](#), was abruptly taken out of Snyder's hands by Warners mid-production and passed on to Joss Whedon, director of Marvel's Avengers movies. The result was another critical and commercial disappointment, which left the grand, unified vision in tatters.

"It's been a challenge for DC to maintain momentum and put together a consistent string of critical hits and box office successes, and this has created frustration for fans," observes Paul Dergarabedian, senior analyst at media analytics firm Comscore. "A wildly diverse selection of characters showcased in movies that vary greatly in tone, point of view and audience appeal have rendered the box office results uneven and difficult to predict."

The upheaval and inconsistency are becoming a turn-off, says Grace Randolph of YouTube channel Beyond the Trailer. "DC fans are like: 'How am I going to get invested in something that I don't know if it's going to even continue? Fans only have so much bandwidth for any kind of comic-book project, and [Marvel](#) takes up a lot of bandwidth these days.'"

The movie Warners was banking on to straighten out this plate of franchise spaghetti is The Flash, centred on Ezra Miller's super-speedy teenager. Currently scheduled for release in June 2023, The Flash is already five years behind schedule, with a budget rumoured to have spiralled beyond \$300m – but the movie has run into even deeper problems.



Ezra Miller, seen in a police booking photo after their arrest for second-degree assault last April. Photograph: Hawai'i Police Dept/Getty Images

In the past year, Miller has been involved in a string of concerning incidents, including allegedly burgling a house in Vermont, arrests for assault, harassment and disorderly conduct, and [accusations](#) of having groomed an 18-year-old Native American woman over several years, using a mix of “violence, intimidation, threat of violence, fear, paranoia, delusions, and drugs”.

These are not the kind of headlines any movie would want its star to be associated with, least of all one on which the fortunes of a multibillion-dollar franchise hang. The decision to stick with The Flash makes the optics of the Batgirl cancellation look even worse. As one insider puts it: “You’ve got this borderline criminal headlining The Flash and you cancel the movie with the Latina woman and the trans co-star?”

So why was Batgirl cancelled? A key factor is the recent shake-up at [Warner Bros](#). In April, the company merged with Discovery group to form a new media conglomerate, Warner Bros Discovery, with a new boss: former Discovery CEO David Zaslav. Confronted with a \$55bn mountain of corporate debt, Zaslav promised to make \$3bn of initial savings. In cancelling Batgirl, he turned the project into a \$90m tax write-off. From a financial standpoint, the film is worth more dead than alive.

Warners' stated reason for Batgirl's cancellation, though, was "a strategic shift as it relates to the DC universe and HBO Max". What this means is that Zaslav is effectively turning the ship 180 degrees. "For the past three to four years, Warner Bros has been 'all in' on streaming," explains Matthew Belloni, founder of [Puck newsletter](#) and former editor of the Hollywood Reporter.

Outflanked by rivals like Netflix and Disney+ during the pandemic, Warners concentrated on building up its own streaming platform, HBO Max. The studio even began releasing new movies on HBO Max at the same time as in cinemas – much to the ire of film-makers such as Christopher Nolan (who has since defected to Universal to make his new movie, Oppenheimer). But now Zaslav has decided Warners and DC should be making movies for the big screen, not the small screen.

"Now the priority is making money, not necessarily building up subscribers," says Belloni. "So if they can make a few hundred million dollars in theatres, they're going to do that, and then the movie will go to streaming." Batgirl was always intended as a direct-to-streaming movie for HBO Max, and was therefore deemed expendable.



Warners president and CEO David Zaslav. Photograph: Kevin Dietsch/Getty Images

Belloni has met Zaslav a few times, he says. “He’s very forceful, very confident in his beliefs. He is a corporate manager, he is not a creative person – he will be the first to tell you that.” But Zaslav has been conducting a listening tour of Hollywood over recent months. “So he’s making all the right moves for someone to come in and run a company like this, but he is an outsider.” Another anonymous Hollywood figure put it less generously: “Zaslav doesn’t know what he doesn’t know.”

There is another figure who looms large over the DC franchise’s woes: Kevin Feige – the producer who has so successfully stewarded Marvel’s superhero universe on to the screen. To many, Warners’ real problem is that it has never found its own Feige. They tried to put Snyder in the role, but that didn’t work out.

Their nearest equivalent is Walter Hamada, head of Warners’ DC films division, but Hamada has neither the creative latitude nor the deep comic-book knowledge that Feige enjoys, says one creative who has worked on both Marvel and DC movies. “The people that work at Marvel know their universe by heart – they live it,” they say. “People like Kevin Feige, they

came from below. Their baseline is, they're fans. I do not feel like Walter Hamada and the people running DC were fans of the material."

According to one insider, Batgirl directors Fallah and El Arbi repeatedly pushed to change the script to include more action scenes, but Hamada refused. "It was the opposite of Marvel, which was open to ideas and changing things." Furthermore, where Marvel share assets, such as virtual props and sets, across movies, no such cooperation exists in the DC universe. So while the makers of [The Batman](#) constructed an atmospheric Gotham City, this was not shared with the Batgirl team, who had to build their own Gotham from scratch.

They're at a crossroads. Either let Dwayne Johnson take over, if Black Adam is a hit, or go forward from [The Batman](#)

In August, Zaslav announced a "reset" for the DC franchise, and said it would be building "a team with a 10-year plan", very similar to the structure that Disney put together for Marvel. Hamada is expected to leave, but Warners is struggling to find a replacement. The role is being described as "[the best job in Hollywood that nobody wants](#)".

In the meantime, DC takes another roll of the dice this month with the release of its latest superhero extravaganza, Black Adam. Again, the character – an ancient Egyptian antihero with powers to rival Superman's – is practically unknown, but he is, at least, played by megastar Dwayne Johnson, who has big plans for him. "I just didn't want to make a one-off," said Johnson at San Diego's Comic-Con in July. "We wanted to create a Black Adam movie that became not only the bedrock but it also became the platform to launch other characters off of."

There is talk of a follow-up movie, in which Black Adam would face off against DCEU core characters such as Batman, Wonder Woman and Superman (Cavill is rumoured to pop up in Black Adam). So don't put away the red string just yet. As usual, nobody has any idea how the DC universe is going to pan out.

“Right now, they’re at a crossroads,” says Randolph. “There are two choices: either let Dwayne Johnson take over if Black Adam is a big hit. Or, I recommend that they completely scrap everything else and just go forward from [Pattinson’s] The Batman and build off of that universe.”



Ezra Miller (the Flash), Ben Affleck (Batman) and Gal Gadot (Wonder Woman) in Justice League. Photograph: Warner Bros/Allstar

Funeral screenings notwithstanding, a resurrection for the DC franchise is entirely possible. In mid-August, Miller reportedly met with Warners to engineer a “[course correction](#)” and salvage The Flash. Miller (who uses they/them pronouns) issued a public apology for their behaviour and said they were seeking treatment for “complex mental health issues”.

Warner Bros also signed an exclusive deal with The Batman’s director, [Matt Reeves](#), reaffirming its commitment to creatives and all but guaranteeing a sequel. A Joker sequel is also in the works, with Lady Gaga cast alongside Joaquin Phoenix. It is rumoured to be a musical.

Arch-rival Marvel, meanwhile, is in danger of losing fans with its endless sequels and spin-offs – most of which conform to Disney’s family-friendly ethos. DC was always the darker, edgier, more grownup label. And as Joker and The Batman have shown, there is a sizeable non-fan audience out there

who just want to go and see a standalone movie without feeling they need to have watched 20 other movies first.

The disjointedness of the DC universe could yet prove to be an asset, says Belloni. “It’s a limitation but it’s also a freedom to a certain extent. Disney could not make an R-rated Joker movie. That’s not part of the Marvel brand. Warners has the ability to go there with its key characters. Could DC be more successful? Sure. DC is not in a horrible place here. It’s doing fine. They just want it to be better.”

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[Rape and sexual assault](#)

In 2017 Daria Aspen told police her stepfather had raped her. Why did it take five years to even charge him?



Daria Aspen: ‘The chance that he was out there doing it to others was worse than anything I risked by coming forward.’ Photograph: Anna Gordon/The Guardian

Aspen hoped she could protect others from the man who had abused her as a child. She didn't realise how slowly the case would move, or how many intrusive questions she would have to answer

Anna Moore

Tue 18 Oct 2022 05.00 EDT Last modified on Fri 21 Oct 2022 13.36 EDT

Sometimes when Daria Aspen looks back at her nine-year-old self – the age she was when her stepfather began to sexually abuse her – she pictures the scene from *The Matrix* when Keanu Reeves's mouth seals up and disappears.

Her stepfather had warned her that if she told anyone what was happening, her mother would kill herself. He promised her he would never go to jail – and she believed him. Ashamed and frightened, she thought her silence was buying her family's safety. "Looking back, there were many things I could have done to get out of the situation, but I just felt I couldn't," says Aspen. "I felt physically incapable of speaking it. It was stuck behind my teeth."

Years later, aged 26, Aspen was finally ready to walk into Limehouse police station in east London and say that her stepfather, Wojtek Marian Nowicki, had raped her when she was nine, and continued to do this for five years. By then, Aspen hadn't seen or heard from him for almost a decade, but she still had recurring nightmares, as well as panic attacks when she saw someone who looked even vaguely like him. She had much to lose by reporting him. Many possible outcomes were also her worse imaginable fears – the fear of not being believed, of facing him in court, of bringing him back into her life. "Reporting him was the most terrifying thought in the world," she says, "but I finally decided that the chance that he was out there potentially doing it to others was worse than anything I risked by coming forward."



Daria, aged around eight and a half.

She was not prepared for what followed. Recently, there has been some focus on court delays, and the fact that sex offence cases are taking longer to reach trial than ever before. In one [harrowing BBC interview](#), a father described the impact of a possible three-year court delay on his daughter, who was raped at the age of 13. For Aspen, though, the wait was even longer. For five years, her case passed back and forth between the police and the CPS with not even a charging decision. Her allegations could hardly be more serious, yet they languished, Aspen's life in limbo and her stepfather at liberty. "I thought the investigation would take a year, maybe two max. I had so little understanding of what I was walking into," says Aspen, 31, who works as a user experience researcher for a tech company. Although she has a right to anonymity as a survivor of a sexual offence, she is waiving it because she is determined to make others understand how the system is failing, and how urgently it needs to be fixed.

Aspen's stepfather came into her life when she was around three. Her mother was travelling from Poland in search of a new life and met Nowicki on the coach. For a young single mother who had had her daughter at 19, Nowicki, who was 20 years older, offered stability and protection. Aspen remembers strongly disliking him from the start – she cried hard on the

morning he married her mother. “He was always shouting at me or telling me off and I was afraid of him. I instinctively distrusted him.”

When she was around seven, his behaviour towards her changed – she got more cuddles, she was asked to sit on his lap. When she was nine, Aspen remembers him putting her to bed and telling her he had fallen in love with her – “but not like a daughter”. Shortly after this, the sexual abuse began in the evenings, when her mother was at the library; she had a full-time job but was also studying for a degree.

Aspen can’t remember any joy in her life after that. “My life was so cut down by him,” she says. “He was such a controlling person, a suffocating force in the house. I wasn’t allowed friends round, I couldn’t stay at people’s houses. Part of his manipulation tactic was to make out that all the danger was external and we had to be protected from so many things. He always made my mum call him before she left the library in the evenings so he could wait at the door for her. Obviously, he didn’t want to get caught in the act.”

The sexual abuse stopped when Aspen was in her early teens. She believes that he was seeing her develop close friendships and recognising the risk that she might confide in someone. One morning, when Aspen was 17, she sat down with her mother at breakfast – her stepfather still in bed – and told her everything. “It was the point where I was able to see things a little more clearly. My mum wailed so loud, he must have heard,” says Aspen. Her mother wrote a note that said: “I know everything. Get your stuff and get out”, and Aspen and her mother left the house, staying out all day. By the time they returned, Aspen’s stepfather had gone, leaving only a suicide note, which he didn’t act on. They never saw or heard from him again.

By the time Aspen walked into the police station to report him, she felt more settled. She had had a little therapy – the 10 sessions available on the NHS – and was studying for a master’s at the Royal College of Art. In January 2017, she gave her first video interview with a specialist unit, which lasted about four hours. All the officers seemed patient and kind; they listened well. Her stepfather was arrested and his hard drive seized – according to police, he had more than 1m indecent images of children in his possession – then he was out on bail and the wait began.

One of the hardest parts was having no understanding of where you are or what comes next

“I agreed to only receive updates when there was a development,” says Aspen. “It made sense to keep disruption to a minimum. A trial could be on the horizon, so the whole time I was managing my wellbeing in anticipation of that.” But she had not realised how few developments there would be. Six months passed with only silence. She had no paperwork – not a single email or letter or official document – to show that anything was even on the system. “One of the hardest parts was having no understanding of where you are or what comes next. You feel like you’re in a black box with no idea what’s going on.”

For five years, the only developments Aspen was aware of were “further requests” from the police or the CPS. They wanted her medical records. “That meant everything – things like therapy notes,” says Aspen. “You sort of feel like you don’t have a choice.” (Groups such as Rape Crisis are campaigning to have therapy notes excluded from criminal trials, as they are in Australia.) Then came a request for her phone. “My whole life was on my phone; it was my most private possession, like it is for any young adult,” she says. “It has all your photos, all your messages, it’s like being asked to give your diary to someone. That was traumatising. It felt really invasive.” It also seemed unjustified. “I was nine when this happened,” she says. “I didn’t have a phone. Even in my teens, the phone I had was a different number.” At first, she refused; many months would pass then she would be asked again. That happened four times. Eventually, they reached a compromise where Aspen agreed to go to a police station and wait while someone scrolled through it.

On top of this were the numerous “clarifications” needed, with Aspen being called back to the police station to give more detail about things that were, she says, “blatantly obvious to my eyes”. This could be around the naming of body parts (“penis” and “vulva” were two examples) or specific sex acts. Another time, she was asked to supply more detail about the sexual abuse that had happened during holidays – even though the police had said that they would be focusing only on events in the UK. “That question came towards the very end – when they had had the case for almost five years,”

she says. “By then, it really felt like the CPS were being deliberately obstructive. There should be a limit to the number of times you can ask for more unless there’s new information.” Further delay was caused by a long wait at the police lab for the enormous volume of her stepfather’s digital images to be viewed, assessed and graded. (This year, Channel 4 News found that police forces have more than 20,000 digital devices waiting to be examined.)

Life moved forward. Aspen’s reporting police officer changed three times, and each time Aspen had to rebuild the relationship and establish trust. One of her signed interviews was lost, so she was called in to do it again. Meanwhile, she finished her master’s, built a career, met her partner, planned a wedding and thought about starting a family. “Every decision I made was with this hanging over me,” she says. “I couldn’t imagine getting married or having a baby if it coincided with a court case. I had to tell three different employers. I was so envious of my friends who could just live their lives.”

I had to tell three employers about the case. I was so envious of my friends who could just live their lives

She is also aware of the pressure such a wait must have on defendants. “I know my stepfather was guilty, so having this hanging over him was a small price to pay,” she says. “But if he was innocent, that wait would have been unacceptable. It fails everyone. I never once got any recognition that this was a horrifically long wait. They only pushed forward after I campaigned on my own behalf.”

At the end of 2021, Aspen contacted the Centre for Women’s Justice, which took on her case, and she also contacted the London mayor’s victims’ commissioner, Claire Waxman, who personally raised it with the CPS. Aspen also gave [an anonymous interview to the Guardian](#). Shortly afterwards, on 22 March this year, Nowicki was charged with 12 sexual offences against Aspen, including four of rape. Three months later, he was also charged with possession of indecent images of children. Although Aspen had warned police that he was a suicide risk, and her police officer had warned the judge, he was not held on remand. He killed himself on 27

July. Aspen was travelling to Poland with her fiance for her wedding when she learned the news.

For Aspen, it was the worst possible outcome. “He’d always promised he’d never go to jail for what he did,” she says. “With each passing year, his words rang louder and it turned out to be true. I might not be mourning the loss of his life, but the fact is it’s another thing on your conscience. I’m firm that the blame doesn’t sit with me, but with the institutions that failed me – and failed him, too.” She’s choosing to go public with her experience because she wants change: far more support and information for survivors and investigations completed in a reasonable time frame.

Although the CPS declined an interview for this article, it did issue a statement: “Although this was a very serious and complex case, the delays before charge were clearly unacceptable. We are now working jointly with police to improve every aspect of how rape prosecutions are managed to help avoid such delay. This means building a strong case from the outset which can pass swiftly and efficiently through the system. We have a joint ambition to make sure our service is consistent and compassionate for all.” The Metropolitan police also acknowledged that “there is clearly learning to be had from this case” and pointed to its recent £11m investment in digital forensic capability, as well as an increase of resources and funding into its rape and serious sexual offence investigation teams.

Although Aspen is determined to campaign for improvements, she doesn’t regret her decision to report her stepfather. “It was the right thing, and it’s still worth doing,” she says. “I couldn’t not prosecute. I’d never have lived with myself if he’d continued to hurt someone else. You have to try and go through the process.” It has also brought her one other ray of light: she has found her voice again. “For years, as much as I wanted to, I couldn’t speak it,” she says. “That’s why I’m now taking any chance I can to say what happened. He wanted it to stay silent and for years it did. Letting it out feels a kind of victory.”

[Rape Crisis](#) offers support for rape and sexual abuse on 0808 802 9999 in England and Wales, 0808 801 0302 in [Scotland](#) or 0800 0246 991 in [Northern Ireland](#). In the US, [Rainn](#) offers support on 800-656-4673. In

Australia, support is available at [1800Respect](https://1800respect.org.au/) (1800 737 732). Other international helplines can be found at ibiblio.org/rcip/internl.html

In the UK and Ireland, Samaritans can be contacted on 116 123, or email jo@samaritans.org or jo@samaritans.ie. In the US, the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline is [1-800-273-8255](tel:1-800-273-8255). In Australia, the crisis support service Lifeline is 13 11 14. Other international helplines can be found at befrienders.org

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[Devon](#)

Hardship and heartbreak as Devon families lose homes to Airbnb lets

From key workers to bar staff, parts of county increasingly off limits as landlords and investors cash in

- [Alarm over sharp rise in Airbnb listings in coastal areas of England and Wales](#)



According to North Devon council's figures, 47% of places in the Mortehoe parish, which includes Woolacombe, are second homes or holiday lets.
Photograph: Jim Wileman/The Guardian



[Steven Morris](#)

[@stevenmorris20](#)

Tue 18 Oct 2022 01.00 EDT Last modified on Tue 18 Oct 2022 01.02 EDT

Some of those who have been evicted are living in camper vans, caravans, even on boats. There are families who have been booted out of their homes crammed together in holiday park chalets or single rooms while others have had no choice but to give up and leave the area completely.

The dramatic rise of short-term holiday lets in Woolacombe and neighbouring villages and towns in north [Devon](#) is causing hardship, heartache and anger as landlords and investors cash in and local people are squeezed out.

“It’s really dire,” said Emma Hookway, a founder of the North Devon and Torridge [Housing](#) Crisis campaign group. “I constantly come across people in tears after they have been kicked out of rented accommodation because landlords want to turn places into holiday lets.”

Hookway, a 43-year-old cleaner, began the group after she and her young son were forced to leave their rented house. They eventually found a flat above a working men’s club. “It felt soul-destroying moving back into a

small flat in my 40s. But I had to suck it up and now I realise that, actually, we are the lucky ones.



Emma Hookway began a housing crisis campaign group after her and her young son were forced to leave their rented house. Photograph: Jim Wileman/The Guardian

“Tourism here has boomed, especially since Covid. Landlords who were making £1,000 a month renting to a tenant can make that in a week now and investors are snapping up properties to make money out of them. It’s easy money for them.”

Renting out through [Airbnb](#) in the area is lucrative. Two-bedroom flats in the modern Oceanpoint and Narracott developments in Woolacombe will cost about £1,200 a week this autumn. A small studio above the Tides Inn is almost £100 a night.



A modern development in Woolacombe, north Devon. Photograph: Jim Wileman/The Guardian

But there is, undoubtedly, a price to pay for the community.

Another member of the campaign group, Graham Bell, who works at a local hospital, said key workers were being forced out. “We lose nurses and teachers who grew up here because they can’t find anywhere to live. They move to Exeter, Bristol or further afield. Families are being pushed into holiday parks, hotels, B&Bs. Children are having to sit their exams while living in caravan parks. Education and life chances are being affected.”



‘It feels like a downward spiral for the area,’ says one emergency worker, who was evicted along with his partner from a flat in Woolacombe.
Photograph: Jim Wileman/The Guardian

One emergency worker in his 30s, who asked not to be named, described how he and his partner were evicted from their flat in Woolacombe and now lived in a van on a campsite. “We’re making that work for now but it’s not ideal. It’s not what we want long term. It feels like a downward spiral for the area. How are they going to find people to staff the hospitals, the fire station, the shops if nothing is done?”

A woman with a small child who is being compelled to move out of her Woolacombe home this winter after almost a decade summed up her feelings as “heartbroken, scared and helpless”. Another parent who has been given notice to leave said she was “genuinely terrified” at the prospect of becoming homeless.

Dan Stokes, 40, who works as a chef in Woolacombe, has struggled to find stable accommodation. “There are dozens of applications for every rented place.” It means there are acute staff shortages in hospitality. “Probably most businesses have 60 or 70% of the staff they need because there’s nowhere for them to live.”



Dan Stokes, a chef in Woolacombe, says the situation means there are acute staff shortages in hospitality. Photograph: Jim Wileman/The Guardian

Stokes said he knew of a hospitality worker who lived in a camper van in Woolacombe and a family of three – two parents and a grownup son – who shared one room. “Something has got to be done.”

The feel of the place is changing. Locals say they cannot afford the “London prices” charged in many pubs, bars and restaurants and there are frequently complaints about the behaviour of short-let visitors – loud music, excessive drinking, antisocial behaviour (often when hot tubs are involved).

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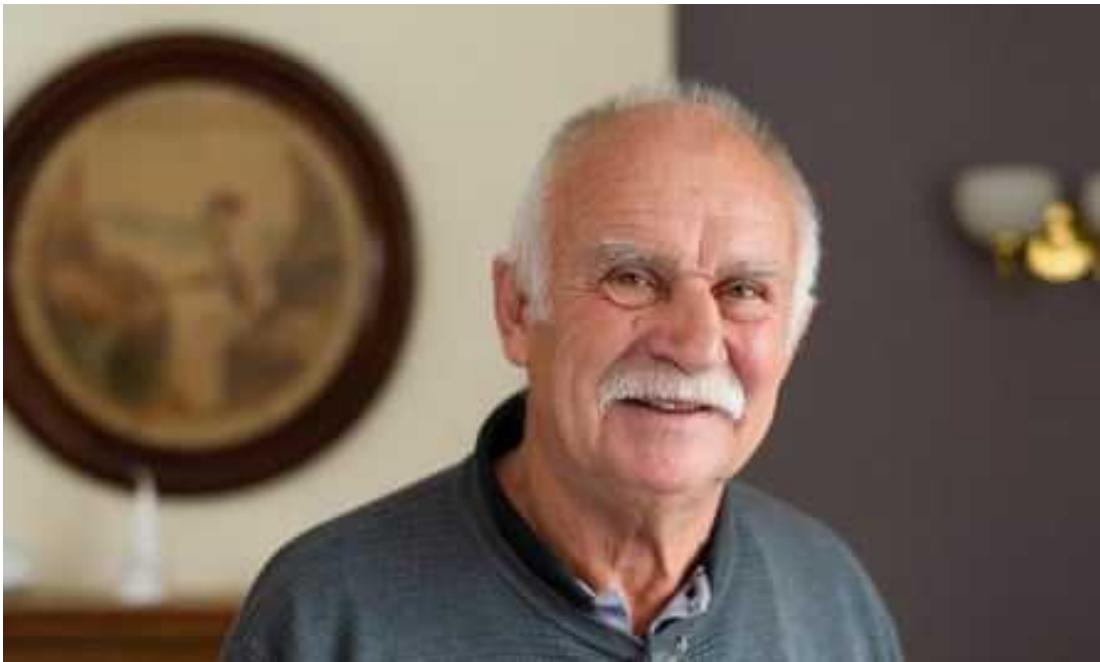
According to North Devon council's figures, 47% of places in the Mortehoe parish, which includes Woolacombe, are second homes or holiday lets. The figure for the nearby village of Georgeham is 45%. In 2020-21, the number of section 21 eviction notices issued by landlords to tenants in north Devon was 39; in 2021-22 it was 103.

The council's chief executive, Ken Miles, has been busy drafting a report in response to [the UK government's call for evidence on holiday lets](#). The draft report says the council is "particularly concerned about community cohesion in areas where there is a high intensity of short-term holiday lets".

Examples Miles cites include a primary school struggling to maintain enough pupil numbers to remain viable and he points out a road in Georgeham where only one dwelling is occupied in the winter. "Communities cannot be sustained with that level of holiday use," the draft report says.

It goes on to highlight the case of a senior college worker in north Devon who has to live 40 miles away and an employee of a local care home who had to give up her job when she was evicted.

The report says that in recent years "the nature of the tourist accommodation offer has changed with the rise in prominence of sites such as Airbnb". It suggests consideration of a licensing scheme for holiday lets and perhaps the requirement to apply for planning consent for change of use where residential premises are converted to holiday lets to allow more control.



Malcolm Wilkinson, a councillor, says he hopes the formation of a community land trust may help tackle the housing crisis. Photograph: Jim Wileman/The Guardian

Malcolm Wilkinson, the council's lead member for coastal communities and a resident of Woolacombe for half a century, said there was some good news. A community land trust has been formed to build 21 affordable homes for local people next to the village hall. "We hope that will help a little," he said.

Tensions are surfacing. One second-home owner, who rents her place out when she and her partner are not there, said a guest recently left early because they did not feel welcome by local people. "They were told that tourists weren't wanted," she said.

The owner, who asked not to be named, said she did not make huge profits and employed a local cleaner and used local companies for laundry and building work.

She argued that Woolacombe had long been a tourist destination. "Our guests use local attractions, cafes, restaurants and shops. I don't know what would happen to the place if there weren't any visitors."

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2022/oct/18/hardship-heartbreak-devon-families-lose-homes-airbnb-lets>

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OpinionRussia

The world has a choice: act decisively now or face a larger conflict with Russia

[Vladyslav Vlasiuk](#)

Ukraine needs more support for our military and tougher measures to stop Putin evading sanctions. This can and must be agreed this week

- Vladyslav Vlasiuk is a sanctions expert working in the Ukrainian presidential office



Volunteers for the Ukrainian army receiving training in Kyiv last week.
Photograph: Anadolu Agency/Getty Images

Tue 18 Oct 2022 01.00 EDT Last modified on Tue 18 Oct 2022 04.09 EDT

Last week saw the latest grim act in Russia's war crimes epic.

Missiles rained down indiscriminately on civilian areas across [Ukraine](#) two days after a massive explosion at a symbolic bridge built to link the annexed Crimean peninsula to Russia.

In Zaporizhzhia in the south-east, 12 Russian rockets [partially destroyed a nine-storey tower](#), and levelled five other residential buildings. Kateryna Ivanova and her family were forced to run to the bathroom as their apartment filled with smoke. After managing to escape to the street, Kateryna said she was met by a neighbour who screamed that her husband was dead.

Another resident, Lyudmyla, told how she rushed to wake her children and move them to safety after a blast completely destroyed the door to her home. Kateryna and Lyudmyla are the lucky ones. Dozens of innocent civilians were killed in the missile strikes that ranged from Lviv in the west to Kharkiv in the east.

The Russians thought nothing of shelling a [children's playground in Shevchenko park](#), central Kyiv. One exploding missile left a gaping hole in the ground. Bits of twisted metal were left scattered just a few feet from the brightly painted climbing frame and roundabout.

War crimes are happening on a daily basis in Ukraine. Our allies must ensure that these gross violations of human rights and international law do not go unpunished.

Since the illegal invasion in February, the world's most powerful democracies have come together to inflict severe damage on the Russian economy with the use of targeted sanctions.

But the impact has not been decisive. We need to do more. We can either defeat Russia now with full-scale sanctions and stepped-up military support to Ukraine, or prepare to defeat them in a larger war later – at far greater cost to the global economy and democracies worldwide.

One potential response would be to exclude Russia from the Financial Action Task Force (on Money Laundering) (FATF), an intergovernmental

organisation that acts as the global money laundering and terrorist financing watchdog. Today, all the FATF members and observer organisations – including the International Monetary Fund, the [United Nations](#), the World Bank, Interpol and the Egmont Group of Financial Intelligence Units – will gather for a plenary meeting in Paris. Ukraine is calling on the FATF to recognise that Russia has committed wholesale breaches of its standards, and should be excluded from the organisation.

Such a decision would have real-world consequences and put pressure on the Kremlin to halt its senseless war.

Russia's exclusion from the FATF would send a clear signal to companies and financial institutions around the world that Russia is no longer considered as a reliable financial centre where their funds will be protected. Blacklisting Russia would also limit its ability to evade sanctions, as Russian companies have been structuring transactions through Russian banks that have not been sanctioned. Once Russia is excluded, this option will fall away.

Russia's trade with the rest of the world would also be affected as it would be more difficult to receive export and import payments. After Iran was blacklisted by FATF in 2020, its exports of goods and services fell by about 30%.

We are not asking the FATF to go out on a limb here. A number of international institutions have expelled Russia as a result of the invasion of Ukraine, including the Council of [Europe](#). Its membership of the UN Human Rights Council has also been suspended.

The Russian Federation has committed crimes of aggression, crimes against humanity, war crimes and, potentially, genocide. The financing of these activities are carried out at the expense of its state budgets. Russia is spending US\$900m a day on the war with Ukraine.

Given the central role of the FATF in tackling international financial crime, it should take a more proactive stance on Russia's flagrant violations of international law in order to cement its global credibility.

Even the UN general assembly – much criticised in recent years for a lack of global influence – voted [overwhelmingly last week](#) to condemn Russia’s “attempted illegal annexation” of four provinces in Ukraine, and declare that Moscow’s territorial claims “have no validity under international law”. Only Russia and four other countries – Syria, Nicaragua, North Korea and Belarus – voted against the resolution, while 143 countries voted yes.

The FATF should realise that Russian leadership only understands power. The more aggressive and comprehensive the response, the quicker this war will end.

And to be clear, it is Russia that needs to end this war. Over the past few weeks, Ukraine has noted certain interests making increasing calls for peace. Ukraine seeks peace. Ukraine longs for peace. But Ukraine will never succumb to peace by coercion.

If you need evidence of this, look no further than the children’s playground in Kyiv destroyed by Russian missiles last week. It is named after Ukraine’s national poet, [Taras Shevchenko](#), a former serf who fought against Tsarist Russian subjugation in the 19th century. His works of resistance are now being sung in queues and scrawled on public buildings across Ukraine, including this line from “The Testament”: “Oh bury me, then rise ye up; And break your heavy chains; And water with the tyrants’ blood; The freedom you have gained.”

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

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[**OpinionCycling**](#)

How do you know I'm an idiot? Take a look at my right calf

[**Zoe Williams**](#)



My bike has left me covered in grease – or, as the old hands call it, a ‘Cat 5 tattoo’



Telltale sign ... a chainring imprint indicates a novice. Photograph: Will & Deni McIntyre/Getty Images

Tue 18 Oct 2022 02.00 EDT Last modified on Tue 18 Oct 2022 02.31 EDT

For about six weeks, I had been cycling at a very stately Miss Marple pace because my brakes weren't working. I assumed the brake pads were worn and meant to replace them, but in the interim found my left foot worked just as well, as long as I wasn't on a hill. Until, one day, inevitably, I was. Hair-raised, I took the bike into a shop, where they said nothing was working *at all*. The cables had perished. Then they fixed them, which is hands-down the most my life has ever been saved by a shop. I should swear an oath of fealty to them, like a knight.

Anyway, it's good, because now I can pick up speed, which is exactly what you want when you are glad to be alive. That is how I got my "Cat 5 tattoo" – a greasy chainring imprint on the inside of your right calf. My brother-in-law introduced me to it gleefully because it's meant as an insult. If you were a proper racer, in categories three or four, your chainring would be clean. If you were a better racer still (in categories one or two), your calf wouldn't be anywhere near your chainring. But, because you are a novice and an idiot, you have grease all over yourself in an attractively symmetrical pattern. It's also called a "noob tag" because why have one piece of jargon when you could have two?

It's apparently de rigueur to get this pattern as an actual tattoo, which, as identity-building body-art, is baffling. What is the message? "Cycling is so much part of me that I want to memorialise being slightly inept at it?" You can't be too literal with other people's tattoos. I met a girl with a true-to-scale cafetière on her thigh once and blew our chances of deeper acquaintanceship by asking why, if she liked coffee so much, she didn't just drink coffee?

Inevitably, once it had a name, and then two names, and a whole sub-culture, I grew to love the Cat 5 tat. And maybe that's who I am now: a person who arrived really late to the conclusion that they want a tattoo. It may not be necessary, because I've washed a load of times and the grease version isn't going anywhere.

Zoe Williams is a columnist for the Guardian

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2022/oct/18/how-do-you-know-im-an-idiot-take-a-look-at-my-right-calf>

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OpinionConservatives

Who will succeed Liz Truss? It doesn't matter: each Tory MP is as guilty as the last

[Owen Jones](#)



The party has a knack for reinvention – but we can't let them pin it all on one unpopular leader and then carry on yet again



‘Rishi Sunak isn’t a grownup in the room; he’s another of the establishment’s guilty men.’ Photograph: Phil Noble/Reuters

Tue 18 Oct 2022 03.00 EDT Last modified on Tue 18 Oct 2022 07.18 EDT

No one can deny that Liz Truss was a dire front person for her own economic policies, offering a demeanour that had all the reassurance of a random stranger plucked off the street to become your local school’s headteacher. Having turned her own citizens into lab rats for an experiment brewed in the boardrooms of [opaquely funded rightwing thinktanks](#), she has now been barred from the lab itself. Buried by the very “markets” she once fetishised, the prime minister is terminally wounded, [fronting policies](#) that, just days ago, she would have savaged as coming from the “anti-growth coalition”. Demanding the removal of Truss is something of an abstract question because, in any meaningful sense, she is no longer in power.

But beware what happens in the coming days and weeks. We must not let the Conservative party blame this all on Truss, anoint her successor, and then regroup and reset, as if everything is back to normal.

The rehabilitation of monsters – or, at least, the lack of accountability for villains – is one of the reasons our country is in its present disarray. The Tory knack for reinvention depends on it, which is why they’ve so far

survived overseeing what is, by many measures, the most ruinous time in office of any government in living memory. Let's not forget what happened to Theresa May, who – after carelessly disposing of the Tories' parliamentary majority – was condemned to remain in office by her own party, in the hope she'd absorb the political mortar fire otherwise directed at the [Conservatives](#) as a whole. When that purpose had been served, May could be safely discarded, with Boris Johnson heralded as the leader of a fresh new government that was innocent of the sins of his predecessor.

You can also see it as George Osborne is interviewed on Channel 4's [flagship political programme](#) in the capacity of witness, rather than an accused in the dock. No single politician is more guilty for the burning skip that British society has become: his ideologically charged austerity is at the root of the [longest squeeze in wages](#) of modern times, fuelling the discontent that [proved pivotal](#) in the triumph of leave in the 2016 referendum. He tuts now at economic policies recklessly defying market rules, as though it wasn't under his economic stewardship that Britain's [AAA-rated debt status](#) wasn't stripped away.

But more consequentially, observe our new de facto prime minister, Jeremy Hunt. One political commentator declared that “listening to Hunt in interviews this morning [was] like reaching calm blue sea after weeks in a force 10 storm”. It is difficult not to conclude that for many self-described moderates, politics is all about vibe, not about substance: a politician's record matters less than the reassurance offered by their presentation skills. Hunt himself conceded that, as health secretary, [he was too slow](#) to boost the NHS workforce: a euphemistic revision of how he [ignored severe NHS staff shortages](#), which left us underprepared for the pandemic. Given he agitated for corporation tax [to be slashed](#) to an even lower level than Truss had dreamed of, how can he credibly argue he will offer a meaningful alternative to Trussonomics? His new “[economic advisory council](#)” is comprised of fund managers and bankers – two of the few groups in society who can claim to have profited from the last dismal few years.



‘Given Jeremy Hunt agitated for corporation tax to be slashed to an even lower level than Truss had dreamed of, how can he argue he will offer a meaningful alternative to Trussonomics?’ Photograph: Simon Walker/HM Treasury

This is a man ideologically committed to austerity, who, in 2019, praised “the [genius of David Cameron and George Osborne](#)” for how they “persuaded the country to accept the most challenging cuts to public spending in our peacetime history without poll tax riots”. This is why he will have no compunction in imposing another round of cuts, which will [strangle growth](#) and exacerbate the cost of living crisis.

Then there’s Rishi Sunak, now widely presented as a vindicated prophet because of his early opposition to Trussonomics. Observing that a driver loudly intending to accelerate a car over a cliff will result in carnage does not make you a soothsayer. This is a man who [boasted about raiding money](#) from poor urban communities in favour of rich Tory districts, who called for those who “vilify” the UK to be treated as extremists, the sort of unhinged authoritarianism you might expect from Viktor Orbán. As chancellor, he successfully [championed lockdown sceptics](#) and ensured that restrictions were delayed in autumn 2020, only for them to be imposed more harshly and for longer than might have otherwise been the case when infections spiralled

out of control. Sunak isn't a grownup in the room; he's another of the establishment's guilty men.

Penny Mordaunt and Ben Wallace – the two others now touted as prime ministerial successors – may be presented as “cleanskins”, but they too backed the slash-and-burn economics that has left Britain poorer in the midst of a productivity crisis, with creaking infrastructure and flailing public services. And this is why we can't let Truss be painted as some kind of anomaly or abomination. This was no spasm, no ideological flight of fancy, but the logical endpoint of 12 calumnious years. This was a team effort, brought to you by Conservative party productions, by Cameroons and Eurosceptics, by Spartans and Johnsonites, from One Nation Conservatives to the European Research Group. To coin a phrase, they were all in this together. And there is no hope until all of them – every single one – are removed from office, and the Tory party is rendered unelectable for a generation to come.

- Owen Jones is a Guardian columnist
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OpinionHistory

To change our future, we should change how we teach history to children

[Yuval Noah Harari](#)

We adults may not be able to unlearn the damaging stories we were told, but we can halt their march through the generations



‘A good reason to teach history is to help liberate kids from at least some of their fears, illusions, and miseries.’ Photograph: Andrew Fox/Alamy

Tue 18 Oct 2022 05.00 EDT Last modified on Tue 18 Oct 2022 05.30 EDT

We cannot shield children from history. In Ukraine, millions of families have lost their homes to Vladimir Putin’s war. In Delhi, record shattering temperatures of 50C saw kids locked inside this summer, unable to study or play. Global food prices are soaring, causing children all over the world to go hungry. So, surely it is inevitable that the next generation want to confront the big questions: why are there wars? What is our place in nature? What is money and why is it so important?

Often, children take these questions far more seriously than grownups. They question things that adults take for granted. Adults might find it annoying when a child replies “why?” to our every answer. But typically, the child is just trying to get to the bottom of things in a way that adults have long stopped doing.

Another thing we cannot shield children from is exposure to false historical narrative. From a very early age, the young are bombarded with myths and disinformation, not just about current events, but also about the basic storyline of humanity itself – who we are, where we come from and how we got here.

In my home country of Israel, for example, even secular schoolchildren typically learn about the Garden of Eden and see colourful images of Noah’s Ark long before they hear about Neanderthals or see the [cave art of Lascaux](#) and [Sulawesi](#). This has an impact. It’s possible to trace a direct line from the Genesis decree of “fill the earth and subdue it” to the Industrial Revolution and today’s ecological crisis. Another direct line of influence can be drawn from the historical narratives Russian children learn in school, to Putin’s invasion of Ukraine and the ensuing global food crisis.

If we abandon children to myths, unlearning these ideas later in life is a difficult, sometimes impossible, task. It’s vital we talk with kids openly about the big issues in a responsible, scientific way based on evidence, rather than dogmatic faith. This is a challenge I myself have wrestled with recently when writing the history of the world for children.

What I’ve learned from this project is that addressing the big issues for children is a delicate job. Some subjects are fun, like exploring the daily lives of stone age hunter-gatherers, when people lived in the wild and kids spent their days learning to climb trees, track animals and make fire. But other subjects are more challenging. Examining what happened when ancient Sapiens met Neanderthals, for example, leads us to discuss what life might have been like for a child with a Sapiens mother and a Neanderthal father, bringing up subjects such as racism, war, genocide and extinction.

It's crucial to talk about the dark side of history, but how do we avoid paralysing children with fear? One guiding principle is that we should wait to share explicit descriptions of horrors until the listener is mature enough to handle them. Instead, when dealing with calamities and injustices, it is best to emphasise agency: no matter how terrible things are, people can usually make a change for the better. That's not wishful thinking, but the very essence of history. After all, history is not the study of the past, or simply a list of wars and disasters and dead kings who ruled thousands of years ago. History is the study of how things change.

If we think the world has always been the same, and that how we live now is the only way for humans to live, then it's natural to feel that change is impossible and that the problems we face are unsolvable. Even if things are very unfair, what can we do? That's just how the world is, we tell ourselves. But by studying history we learn that humans didn't always live like we do, and that the world is changing all the time. People made the world what it is – and people can therefore change it. Of course, that's no easy task, but it's been done many times before.

That's why history is so powerful. It is the key to changing the world. So much so that, in many places, governments are afraid of history. Leaders seldom ban people from learning mathematics or physics. But many governments forbid people – and especially young people – from learning at least certain parts of history. It all goes back to those dead kings who ruled thousands of years ago, their icy hands reaching out from beyond the grave to grasp our minds and freeze change.

After all, it was those long-dead kings who invented and spread various stories about gods, nations, money and love that so many people today still believe and adhere to. To gain some freedom from these narratives and behave differently we need to understand how they were created and spread in the first place. Otherwise, we will never see them for what they are: just stories. Children asking "why?" are a powerful force that can rock these old tales to their foundations.

But in addition to avoiding terror, we should also be careful to avoid burdening the young with our own responsibilities. The oldest sin in the grownup's playbook is to expect kids to take on our projects, and in

particular, to solve the problems we want solved – but haven't figured out how. When talking with children about big issues, we should, every now and then, ask ourselves why we are really doing it.

Every person in the world carries a heavy burden. When we teach history to young people, we sometimes do it in order to shift some of our burden on to the shoulders of the next generation. We want the young to keep carrying the beliefs, the memories, the identities and the conflicts that have weighed on us throughout our lives. "Here, kid, I carried these things up to this point – now it's your turn!"

That's unfair. A far better reason to teach history is to help liberate kids from at least some of their fears, illusions and hatreds. "See these things, kid? I got stuck with them for years, and they made me miserable. Be careful! You don't have to pick them up, too!"

I hope history becomes a tool to free people rather than bind them. A tool to forge new concords rather than perpetuate old conflicts. After all, the point of learning history is not to remember the past, but to be liberated from it.

- Unstoppable Us: How Humans Took Over the World by Yuval Noah Harari is published on 20 October
- *Do you have an opinion on the issues raised in this article? If you would like to submit a response of up to 300 words by email to be considered for publication in our [letters](#) section, please [click here](#).*

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2022.10.18 - Around the world

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- [Taiwan China’s takeover plans moving ‘much faster’ under Xi, says Blinken](#)
- [China UK to issue ‘threat alert’ over hiring of RAF pilots to teach their secrets](#)
- [Afghanistan Gay student murdered by Taliban as violence against LGBTQ+ community rises](#)

[**Chad**](#)

Unity ‘the only way forward’ says Chad PM as anti-junta anger rises

In interview from capital, Saleh Kebzabo says he wants powerful rebels to join transitional government



Saleh Kebzabo was appointed prime minister by Chad’s president, Mahamat Idriss Déby, last week. Photograph: Denis Sassou Gueipeur/AFP/Getty Images

[**Zeinab Mohammed Salih**](#)

Tue 18 Oct 2022 04.00 EDT Last modified on Tue 18 Oct 2022 04.43 EDT

Chad’s new prime minister has said that uniting the population “is the only way forward” for the chronically unstable African country after its president, Mahamat Idriss Déby, appointed him to head an interim national unity administration.

Saleh Kebzabo, 75, a former opposition figure and journalist, has been tasked with leading the country towards the first free and fair elections in its political history.

Several former rebels were appointed to ministerial posts in the government, which was formed last Friday, and will lead [Chad](#) until its next elections in two years.

“My aim is to unite the Chadian people,” Kebzabo said in an interview from the capital, N’Djamena. “It’s a very big challenge, but the only way forward in this country, which has been witnessing rebellion since independence [from France in 1960].”

Kebzabo ran four times for the presidency against [Déby’s father, Idriss Déby Itno](#), who ruled with an iron fist for three decades before being killed during an operation against rebels in April 2021.

The younger Déby took over with a promise his junta would restore civilian rule after 18 months in power, and that he would not take part in the elections that would follow. But as the 18-month deadline neared, a nationwide forum staged by Déby reset the clock.

In early October the forum approved a two-year timeframe for holding elections, named Déby “transitional president” for the interim and declared he could be a candidate in the poll.

In a sign of regional opposition to the broken promises, just one foreign head of state – the Nigerian president, Muhammadu Buhari – attended Déby’s swearing-in ceremony last week.

In August, more than 30 rebel and opposition factions signed a pact with Chad’s transitional authorities and agreed to join broader talks after years of turmoil, though the most powerful insurgent group, Front for Change and Concord in Chad (FACT), refused to take part.

Kebzabo said he was inviting FACT rebels to join the transitional process and suggested that some should get ministerial positions. A key FACT

demand – that people taken prisoner during the attack that killed Idriss Déby Itno be released – would “take time”, Kebzabo added.

He also said that Chad needed to go through a process of disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration. “Can you believe that there are 500 generals in our army who do nothing but take money from the state,” he said. “They are exhausting the economy of Chad, it’s a tribal army.”

Mahamat Mahdi Ali, the head of FACT, said by phone from a location in Libya that his group’s conditions for entering dialogue remained “free and fair elections” with no military involvement.

Arafa Saleh, a 29-year-old N’djamena resident, said he was concerned about Déby remaining in charge. “We had him for 18 months without any tangible change,” he said. “Killing outside the law is still going on, stealing of the public money continues. I don’t see how there will be any difference in the future, there’s no hope.”

Many Chadians blame the former colonial power France for keeping the Déby regime in power.

Abdulsalam Cherief, a former Kebzabo ally who coordinates an opposition group in Chad, said the new prime minister “has always changed his skin depending on where his interests lie”.

“What he’s been saying – that he would change the situation – is just part of the propaganda,” said Cherief. “Chad is being controlled by regional powers who are only interested in the security of the Sahel [region] … nobody cares about the plight of the Chadian people, so Kebzabo cannot change anything, especially the army.”

Hyacinthe Ndolenodji, a Chadian working with civil society organisations, said Déby was protecting the interests of other countries. “After so many decades of autocratic rules and conflicts, we deserve to live in democracy, peace and prosperity, like all the nations,” she said.

As well as political instability, the vast Central African country has been beset by flooding in recent weeks. A prolonged drought was followed by the

heaviest rainy season in more than 30 years, leaving large areas, including parts N'Djamena, navigable only by boat. Thousands have fled their homes. Farmland and pastures are under water, leaving herders with little grazing land.

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[Taiwan](#)

China's plans to annex Taiwan moving 'much faster' under Xi, says Blinken

Comments by US secretary of state come after Xi told Communist party Congress Taiwan is core to plans for China's 'rejuvenation'

- [China's party Congress: everything you need to know](#)



Taiwan holds military drills in July. US secretary of state Antony Blinken said China is pursuing its plans to annex Taiwan on a 'much faster timeline' under president Xi Jinping. Photograph: Annabelle Chih/Getty Images

*Helen Davidson in Taipei
@heldavidson*

Tue 18 Oct 2022 01.11 EDT Last modified on Tue 18 Oct 2022 01.12 EDT

China's government is pursuing its plans to annex [Taiwan](#) on a "much faster timeline" under Xi Jinping, the US secretary of state has said, reiterating

warnings of global economic disruption if Taiwan was taken over.

The comments by Antony Blinken come as China's ruling Communist party meet for their twice-a-decade congress, the most important meeting of its political cycle. In a major speech opening the conclaves on Sunday, Xi made clear that his plans for Taiwan remain core to his plans of China's "rejuvenation".

In conversation with former secretary of state Condoleezza Rice at Stanford University on Monday, Blinken said peace and stability between China and Taiwan had been successfully maintained for decades, but Beijing had changed its approach.

"Instead of sticking with the status quo that was established in a positive way, [Beijing has made] a fundamental decision that the status quo is no longer acceptable, and Beijing is determined to pursue reunification on a much faster timeline," Blinken said.

"If peaceful means didn't work then would employ coercive means, and possibly if coercive means don't work then maybe forceful means to achieve its objective. That is what is profoundly disrupting the status quo and creating tremendous tensions."

In recent years the CCP and its military, the People's Liberation Army, have intensified acts of intimidation and harassment towards Taiwan, including near daily sorties into its air defence identification zone and other grey zone actions. In purported response to a visit by US speaker Nancy Pelosi, the PLA staged major military drills around Taiwan's main island in August, and have since significantly increased of military crossings over the median line.

While Beijing has made clear it intends to take Taiwan, the timeline for such a scenario varies greatly. Senior US and Taiwanese military figures have warned the PLA will have the capability within a few years, while analysts point to Xi's goal of national rejuvenation by 2049 – the centenary of the People's Republic of China – as a potential deadline.

“It is possible that Secretary Blinken is concerned about the pace and scope of China’s military modernization, which clearly is focused on Taiwan, but China’s military capability alone does not indicate intent to use force in the near term,” Drew Thompson, a scholar with the Lee Kuan Yew School of Public Policy and former US state department official, said.

“That said, Xi Jinping’s intent could change in an instant, where as capability takes years to develop, as does building up Taiwan and US defences against PLA power projection. The considerable time it takes to build defences is a strong rationale for expressing a sense of urgency.”

China expert, Bill Bishop, noted there was nothing in public documents or Xi’s speech to indicate an accelerated timeline on the part of Beijing.

“So is the US in possession of some intel that indicates a shift?” he queried on Twitter.

US intelligence on China is believed to be minimal compared to its intelligence on Russia, for example. In 2010, Chinese authorities were reported to have dismantled a US spy ring inside the country, killing or imprisoning up to 20 CIA sources.

Thompson said he didn’t see any indication in Blinken’s remarks that he was responding to “exquisite intelligence or an alternative assessment that differs from China analysts relying on open source indicators”.

Analysts are parsing Xi’s Sunday speech and longer “work report” which lays out Xi’s vision for the next term, looking for signs of his plans for Taiwan. Some noted that the early appearance of Taiwan in the speech was a sign of its increased prioritisation. Others suggested the language showed Xi had neither escalated or dialled back his rhetoric on the island itself, but demonstrated increasing frustration with “foreign interference” in what he considers a domestic matter.



China's president Xi Jinping at the opening the 20th National Congress of the Communist party. Photograph: Thomas Peter/Reuters

The question on Taiwan was put to Blinken in the final minutes of an hour long conversation. He warned that destabilisation of the Taiwan Strait was of “profound concern to countries around the world”.

“The amount of commercial traffic that goes through the Straits every day and has an impact on economies around the world is enormous,” he said. “If that was to be disrupted as a result of a crisis, countries around the world would suffer. [On] semiconductors – if Taiwanese production were disrupted as a result of the crisis, you would have an economic crisis around the world.”

Speaking to reporters after the event, Blinken pointed to a global crisis beyond China, saying the Ukraine war had brought the “post Cold War-era to an end”, and technology is what would come to define competition between world powers.

“We are at an inflection point,” he said. “Technology will in many ways retool our economies. It will reform our militaries. It will reshape the lives of people across the planet. And so it’s profoundly a source of national strength.”

The US this month introduced restrictions on Chinese technology export, which has begun to have major impact on the country's ability to increase its domestic chip-making.

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[Royal Air Force](#)

UK to issue ‘threat alert’ over China’s attempts to recruit RAF pilots

Former and serving pilots told not to disclose sensitive information, in attempt to ‘mitigate risk’ of schemes



About 30 former RAF pilots are already believed to have taken advantage of ‘very generous’ recruitment packages offered by China. Photograph: MoD Crown Copyright/Getty Images

[Dan Sabbagh](#) Defence and security editor

Mon 17 Oct 2022 19.01 EDT Last modified on Mon 17 Oct 2022 19.26 EDT

British defence intelligence is to issue a rare “threat alert”, warning that China’s military is trying to recruit serving and former RAF jet pilots to help train its own air force with generous recruitment packages.

Officials expressed “concern and disapproval” of these schemes because they posed “a threat to UK and western interests”. Although they are not

explicitly banning pilots from providing training, they aim to take steps to “manage the risk”.

About 30 former pilots are already believed to have taken advantage of “very generous” recruitment packages offered by China to work for the country’s air force through third parties, including, in particular, a flying academy based in South Africa.

But the warning, or threat guidance, will remind British pilots not to disclose any sensitive information to the Chinese military and ask those approached to tell the [Ministry of Defence](#) what is going on so that it can be monitored.

So far there is no evidence that any former RAF pilot has broken the Official Secrets Act in providing training to China, but western officials said they were “taking steps to mitigate this risk” by issuing the guidance.

China is keen to modernise its military and emulate Nato standards and has a particular interest in fast-jet tactics, techniques and procedures. There were also signs it wanted to recruit helicopter personnel as trainers, a western official said.

A US assessment released last year concluded that China’s president, Xi Jinping, wanted to complete the modernisation of the People’s Liberation Army by 2035 and transform it into a “world-class” military by 2049.

Beijing’s leadership continues to insist Taiwan should be reintegrated with the mainland China, forcibly if necessary, despite growing tension with the US over the issue. “We will continue to strive for peaceful reunification with the greatest sincerity and utmost effort, but we will never promise to renounce the use of force,” Xi told the 20th Chinese Communist party congress on Sunday.

Headhunters began approaching serving and former pilots in 2019, but the effort is believed to have stepped up since the end of pandemic restrictions, and those targeted are not just from the UK but from other western countries.

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An MoD spokesperson said: “We are taking decisive steps to stop Chinese recruitment schemes attempting to headhunt serving and former UK armed forces pilots to train People’s Liberation Army personnel in the People’s Republic of China.”

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[**Rights and freedom**](#)[**LGBTQ+ rights**](#)

Gay Afghan student ‘murdered by Taliban’ as anti-LGBTQ+ violence rises

Death of Hamed Sabouri is latest in wave of attacks, with rights groups warning thousands are in hiding or trying to flee country



A Taliban patrol in Kabul. Hamed Sabouri’s family and partner says he was detained at a checkpoint in the city in August, tortured for three days and then shot. Photograph: EPA

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[Deepa Parent](#)

Tue 18 Oct 2022 13.24 EDTFirst published on Tue 18 Oct 2022 02.00 EDT

The abduction, torture and murder of a gay aspiring medical student, who was stopped at a traffic checkpoint by Taliban gunmen, is the latest victim of a string of violence against Afghanistan's LGBTQ+ community, human rights groups warn.

Hamed Sabouri's family and partner says he was detained at a checkpoint in Kabul in August and tortured for three days before being shot. Video of his execution was then sent to his family, who have now left Afghanistan for their own safety.

“The [Taliban](#) murdered Hamed and sent the video to his family and me,” said Bahar, Sabouri’s partner. “Hamed’s family have fled and I have been in hiding. We were like any other couple around the world in love but the Taliban treat us like criminals. They’ve killed the love of my life and I don’t know how I’ll live without him.

“I have been receiving threats from the Taliban again and I am now on the run. I have many friends from the LGBTQ+ community here in Afghanistan

who have also been kidnapped and tortured. I was arrested by the Taliban in August 2021 and again in May and June this year and was raped, beaten and tortured with electric shocks.”

LGBTQ+ rights organisations in Afghanistan say the mounting violence led many in the LGBTQ+ community to attempt to leave the country and forced thousands of others into hiding.

“The biggest fear that every LGBTQ+ person in Afghanistan has right now is that they will become the next Hamed Sabouri,” said Nemat Sadat, founder of LGBTQ+ rights group Roshaniya.

“This has been their predicament ever since the Taliban returned to power. The news of Hamed’s brutal death continues to put our community on edge but we won’t let Hamed’s life go in vain. We will continue to fight for the rights of LGBTQ+ Afghans to escape execution and live a long, and happy life in a free country.”

In an email Haseeb Sabouri, Hamed’s brother, confirmed that the family sold their two homes in Afghanistan and travelled to Turkey. “We fled from Afghanistan due to threats and murder of Hamed,” he said. “We fled because the Taliban came to our home every day to harass and threaten us.”

The main image on this article was replaced on 18 October 2022.

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- [Economy UK government borrowing jumps to £20bn in September](#)
- [Exclusive Labour to step up efforts to stop ‘reckless’ Northern Ireland protocol bill in Lords](#)
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Business liveBusiness

Pound slides, cost of government borrowing rises ahead of Tory leadership race – as it happened

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Government borrowing

Pound falls and UK borrowing costs rise despite Jeremy Hunt debt promise

Chancellor says he will do ‘whatever is necessary’ to bring down national debt

- [Business live updates: Jeremy Hunt vows to bring down debt](#)



The chancellor, Jeremy Hunt, said: ‘Strong public finances are the foundation of a strong economy.’ Photograph: Henry Nicholls/Reuters

[Angela Monaghan](#) and [Phillip Inman](#)

Fri 21 Oct 2022 10.39 EDTFirst published on Fri 21 Oct 2022 03.18 EDT

The pound fell and government borrowing costs rose on Friday despite a promise from [Jeremy Hunt](#) that he would do “whatever necessary” to bring down national debt.

With financial markets weighing the potential for a continued instability inside the Conservative party after the election of a new leader, the chancellor said getting the public finances on a stable footing was essential.

Government borrowing reached £20bn in September, £2.2bn more than last September, and £3bn more than economists expected, sending debt interest payments to a record high.

Higher borrowing pushed debt interest payments to £7.7bn last month, according to the Office for National Statistics, £2.5bn more than in September 2021 and the highest September figure since monthly records began in April 1997.

Hunt said: “Strong public finances are the foundation of a strong economy. To stabilise markets, I’ve been clear that protecting our public finances means difficult decisions lie ahead.

“We will do whatever is necessary to get drive down debt in the medium term and to ensure that taxpayers’ money is well spent, putting the public finances on a sustainable path as we grow the economy.”

Market fears over a number of tax-cutting measures announced by the former chancellor Kwasi Kwarteng in his mini-budget – and swiftly undone by Hunt – ultimately resulted in the resignation of Liz Truss as prime minister on Thursday, and underlined the scale of the challenge facing her successor.

Government borrowing costs edged higher on Friday, with the interest rate on 10-year and 30-year government bonds climbing above 4%. The pound was down a cent against the dollar, at \$1.1121, before recovering some ground to be down 0.3% at \$1.1205.

Public sector debt chart

Analysts at ING, who had previously said 10-year UK government bonds would struggle to stay below 4%, warned Hunt that a budget “delivered a

matter of days into a new prime minister's tenure, with a set of measures that have been crafted without their input" could further spook markets.

"There's a chance that the plan gets pushed back a week or two – albeit at the expense of occurring after the Bank of England's meeting on 3 November," they said.

The Institute for Fiscal Studies said the steep rise in government borrowing during the summer meant the total for the financial year could reach £200bn, more than double a forecast made by the [Office for Budget Responsibility](#) (OBR) in March.

Officials at the OBR, which provides the Treasury with independent forecasts for tax revenues and economic growth, estimated the government's borrowing would hit £99.1bn in the year to the end of March 2023.

The then chancellor, Rishi Sunak, warned the deficit could rise as the impact of the war in Ukraine was felt in rising energy bills, wiping out the government's scope to fuel growth with higher spending.

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Carl Emmerson, an IFS deputy director, said the [budget planned for 31 October](#) should be delayed until the political situation had settled down, leaving the chancellor to reconfigure the public finances to take account of inflation and rising debt payments.

He said the most recent figures gave "little guide to how much borrowing will be over the whole of this financial year, as the huge cost of government

support for household and business energy use only began in earnest this month.

“We need a credible plan to ensure that government debt can be expected to fall over the medium-term. Given the timeline for determining the next prime minister, the degree of economic uncertainty, and the importance of getting this right, there is a strong case for taking a bit longer to make good decisions which have more chance of standing the test of time rather than going ahead with a major fiscal event only a few days into the new PM’s tenure.”

James Smith, a research director at the Resolution Foundation, said higher borrowing added £5bn to the bill compared with the OBR’s March forecast, which was “a reminder that amid the current political turmoil, the tough task facing the government of demonstrating its fiscal credibility lies immediately ahead rather than behind”.

The government’s total debt pile, excluding public sector banks, climbed to £2.45tn, or about 98% of gross domestic product (GDP). Compared with September 2021, this was an increase of £213bn or 2.5 percentage points of GDP.

Figures from Eurostat, the EU’s statistics agency, showed the average debt to GDP ratio across its 27 member states declined to 94.2% in the second quarter of the year from the previous three months.

The ratio of debt to GDP rose in France to 113.1%, and 108.3% in Belgium, while Germany’s remained stable at 67.8%.

Italy’s debt pile decreased almost 2% to 150.2% on the previous quarter and from 164% before the coronavirus pandemic. Ireland, Greece and Cyprus were among other countries to cut their debts as a percentage of GDP.

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[Brexit](#)

Labour to step up efforts to stop ‘reckless’ Northern Ireland protocol bill in Lords

Exclusive: peers to table more than 20 changes to proposed legislation when committee stage begins



Jenny Chapman, the shadow cabinet minister in the Lords, said the bill undermined Britain’s ‘hard-won reputation as a responsible, trustworthy partner’. Photograph: Xinhua/REX/Shutterstock

Lisa O'Carroll Brexit correspondent
[@lisaocarroll](https://twitter.com/lisaocarroll)

Fri 21 Oct 2022 01.00 EDT Last modified on Fri 21 Oct 2022 02.16 EDT

Labour peers are to step up their campaign to stop the “reckless” [Northern Ireland](#) protocol bill being passed with demands for more than 20 changes.

Jenny Chapman, the shadow cabinet minister in the Lords, told the Guardian the bill was “an abomination, undermining the UK’s hard-won reputation as a responsible, trustworthy partner” and called on the government to “scrap this reckless legislation”.

When the committee stage begins in the Lords on Tuesday, [Labour](#) peers will put the government on notice that the bill will not proceed to the next stage until a variety of conditions are met. These include a promise that diplomatic efforts to end the row over the protocol are given a chance to work before any legislation is passed. The bill is one of Liz Truss’s flagship policies.

In a [motion of regret](#), Labour will also ask the government to prepare and publish “an impact assessment outlining the likely consequences of the use of powers in this bill on the Northern Ireland business community”. The party wants the government to publish “indicative regulations, which may be laid using the powers in this bill”, as well.

The bill as it stands gives ministers powers to introduce new laws to undo [Brexit](#) arrangements with little scrutiny, something that has fuelled sharp criticism both in the Commons and the Lords.

The proposed legislation has also been criticised on the grounds it would breach the international treaty signed by the EU and the UK agreeing to the protocol as a means of preventing a trade border with customs posts and checks between Northern Ireland and the Republic.

Lady Chapman said: “The government must not squander the opportunity of its negotiations with the EU. With hard work and compromise on all sides, a deal is achievable to end this damaging, self-inflicted standoff, and scrap this reckless legislation.”

Labour will table 22 “probing amendments” including several that would set strict conditions under which any laws could be used.

The party is suggesting the proposed legislation should make it “a statutory requirement for the government to seek a negotiated outcome with the EU

and to exhaust legal routes under the EU withdrawal agreement before availing itself of the powers in this bill”.

Several amendments address fears raised by legal experts of the extraordinary powers the bill confers on ministers to create new laws. The government has claimed these powers are designed to undo EU rules on VAT and state aid but experts have said they would set a precedent that is dangerous in a democracy.

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The controversial bill was tabled by Truss earlier this summer when she was foreign secretary, but when she became prime minister she agreed to give negotiations another chance.

In the last two weeks there has been a flurry of diplomatic activity involving talks between the foreign secretary, James Cleverly, and European commissioner and vice-president Maroš Šefčovič.

The Northern Ireland secretary, Chris Heaton-Harris, has also said he hoped for a diplomatic solution that would make the need for the legislation “redundant”.

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2022.10.21 - Spotlight

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[Taylor Swift](#)

Taylor Swift: *Midnights* review – small-hours pop rich with self-loathing and stereotype-smashing



‘An appealing confidence’ ... Taylor Swift. Photograph: Beth Garrabrant

(Republic Records)

With its confident songwriting and understated synth-pop, Swift's sophisticated 10th album indicates that she no longer feels she has to compete with her peers



Alexis Petridis

Fri 21 Oct 2022 00.00 EDT Last modified on Fri 21 Oct 2022 10.15 EDT

It's one of the weirder aspects of 21st century pop that every major new album feels like a puzzle to be solved. Nothing is ever just announced, promoted, then released. Instead, breadcrumbs of mysterious hints and visual clues are very gradually dropped via the artist's social media channels. Fans pore over them and formulate excitable theories as to what's about to happen. Articles are written collating said fans' theories and weighing up their potential veracity. Sometimes, it goes on longer than the actual album's stay in the charts. It has certainly happened with [Taylor Swift](#)'s 10th studio album, *Midnights*. Everything has been [pored over for potential information](#) about its contents, up to and including the kind of eye shadow she wears on the album cover. Conspiracy theories have abounded. Space precludes exploring them here, as does concern for your welfare: reading about them makes one's head hurt a bit.

Still, perhaps it's inevitable that people are intrigued as to Swift's next move. There has been a lot of talk in recent years about the willingness of big stars to service their fans with [more of the same](#): building an immediately recognisable brand in a world where tens of thousands of new tracks are added to streaming services every day. It's an approach that *Midnights*' one marquee-name guest, [Lana Del Rey](#), knows a lot about, but not one to which Swift has adhered. Instead, she has continually pivoted: from Nashville to New York, pedal steel guitars to fizzing synthesisers, Springsteen-like heartland rock to dubstep-infused pop. Last time she broke cover with new material, she released [Folklore](#) and [Evermore](#), two pandemic-fuelled albums of tasteful folk-rock produced by the National's Aaron Dessner. But that's no guarantee of her future direction.

Taylor Swift's *Midnights* single Anti-Hero – video

In fact, *Midnights* delivers her firmly from what she called the “folklorian woods” of her last two albums back to electronic pop. There are filtered synth tones, swoops of dubstep-influenced bass, trap and house-inspired beats and effects that warp her voice to a point of androgyny on *Midnight Rain* and *Labyrinth*, the latter a leading choice given the preponderance of lyrics that protest gender stereotyping, or “that 1950s shit they want from me”, as *Lavender Haze* puts it. Equally, something of *Folklore* and *Evermore*'s understated nature hangs around *Midnights*. It's an album that steadfastly declines to deal in the kind of neon-hued bangers that pop stars usually return with, music brash enough to cut through the hubbub. The sound is misty, atmospheric and tastefully subdued.

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On the superb Maroon, Swift's voice is backed by ambient electronics and droning shoegazey guitars: it's one of several songs that you feel could suddenly surge into an epic chorus or coda, but never does. The Del Rey collaboration Snow on the Beach is beautifully done – a perfect gene-splice between their two musical styles with a gorgeous melody – but it's a long way from a grandstanding summit between two pop icons: there's a striking lightness of touch about it, a restrained melding of their voices. Meanwhile, Anti-Hero offers a litany of small-hours self-loathing set to music that feels not unlike the glossy 80s rock found on Swift's [1989](#), but with the brightness turned down. There's an appealing confidence about this approach, a sense that Swift no longer feels she has to compete on the same terms as her peers.

Elsewhere, if the Swift you love is Swift in vengeful mode, settling scores with a side-order of You're So Vain-esque who's-this-about? intrigue, you're advised to fast-forward to Vigilante Shit and Karma: the former features verses that could be directed at her old foes Kanye West or Scooter Braun; the latter excoriates someone referred to as "spiderboy" and notes how they "weave your little webs of opacity, my pennies made your crown". But Vigilante Shit's sound is minimal and unflappable – a beat with thin slivers of bass and electronic tones sliding in and out of the mix, not too distant from something Billie Eilish might have devised on her debut album, while Karma is kaleidoscopically tuneful, another track that harks back to 1989: there's none of the distorted electronic fury that characterised 2017's supremely pissed-off [Reputation](#). The effect makes Swift's anger feel less brittle, lending it a dish-served-cold poise.

That confidence is the thing that binds Midnights together. There's a sure-footedness about Swift's songwriting, filled with subtle, brilliant touches: the moment on Question...?, where, as they describe a drunken conversation, the lyrics simultaneously speed up their rhythm and stop rhyming; You're on Your Own, Kid's fantastic description of a now-famous Swift returning to her home town and feeling like a prom queen, albeit a very specific prom queen: "I looked around in a blood-soaked gown," she sings, invoking the image of Sissy Spacek about to go postal in Carrie. It's an album that's cool, collected and mature. It's also packed with fantastic songs and at a slight remove from everything else currently happening in

pop's upper echelons. As ever, you wouldn't like to predict what [Taylor Swift](#) will do next, but what she's doing at the moment is very good indeed.

This week Alexis listened to

Robert Forster – She's a Fighter

Former Go-Between convenes family band – including son Louis, from the Goon Sax – during wife's cancer treatment: fabulously taut, drumless angularity ensues.

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Book of the dayAutobiography and memoir

A Heart That Works by Rob Delaney review – a father's raw sorrow and wit

Comedian Rob Delaney writes with searing honesty about the death of his young son



People don't appreciate just how addictively wonderful it is to help someone you love ... Rob Delaney. Photograph: Linda Nylind/The Guardian



Rory Kinnear

Fri 21 Oct 2022 02.30 EDT Last modified on Fri 21 Oct 2022 04.29 EDT

The first homework our English teacher set us at secondary school was to write a short essay jauntily entitled “The Day That Changed My Life”. Among various 12-year-olds’ accounts of finding medieval coins on a beach and performing a clarinet solo on a skiing holiday, I wrote five pages on the death of my father two years previously. I hadn’t written about it before, hadn’t really spoken much about it, and was a little disappointed when, in his comments at the end of the piece, my teacher explained that he had demurred from giving it a mark. It felt wrong, he wrote, to be examining such a topic with too critical an eye.

I didn’t agree. It had felt fantastic to write it, to see the most significant event of my young life given shape, structure, even story, however inelegantly. I had wanted to know how it made other people feel. Maybe it would spark a dialogue with my new classmates. Instead it felt like my teacher had turned away from the messiness of it all, leaving me further stranded in that remote emotional cottage-in-the-woods where all young bereaved people find themselves. I also knew, though, that he was trying to be kind. And that if he *had* put a red pen through my description of my family’s howls of pain by the sitting room windows and scribbled “Get to

the point!” in the margin, I might have asked to change schools. That’s the problem with people in grief. Can’t do right for doing wrong.

All of which is to ask the question: is it possible to write a critical review of someone who is bearing witness, in writing, to the incalculable pain and emotional chaos suffered on the death of their young child? Does the weight of its emotional punch do away with the need for an anaemic assessment of a writer’s craft? Or is the very act of writing something so transgressively raw and open, a cry for these experiences to be normalised – and therefore a request for it to be treated like any other book? I don’t know. I’m pretty sure I wouldn’t be mean if it were awful, at least publicly. Which makes me worry that I’ll sound disingenuous when I say that it gives me great pleasure, and no pleasure at all, to write that Rob Delaney’s new book is both overwhelmingly moving and, in any other way you might assess a book, excellent.

Much as I wish he hadn’t had to write it, I am glad he did, because such deaths do happen, but largely in private

It is about Delaney’s son, Henry. It tells of Henry’s birth: Delaney and his wife Leah had just moved to London with their two older sons to begin filming the first series of [Catastrophe](#), the show that was to make his name in the UK. It tells of Henry’s illness: before his first birthday, he is diagnosed with a brain tumour after some weeks of vomiting and subsequent misdiagnoses. It tells of the attempts to cure Henry: he is operated on at Great Ormond Street hospital for children and is largely there, or at the Whittington hospital, for the next year of his life. And it describes Henry’s death – from his parents’ decision to not torture him with more treatment when his cancer returns, to his removal from their room, cold, in a body bag. It is unbearable, in the sense that the situation Delaney and his family find themselves in – the pain he describes wittily, unflinchingly, confrontationally – is greater than most of us have yet to bear, and try not to allow ourselves to contemplate.

And yet it is, as one might imagine, vital and very, very funny. When his father-in-law hugs them, post Henry’s diagnosis, and wishes that he could be

ill instead, Delaney doesn't hesitate: "We do too, Richard." The image of the Delaney family dressed as skeletons on Halloween in the Great Ormond Street paediatric oncology ward suggests a family united in an appreciation for the curative effects of the darkest kind of humour, just as Delaney now finds great peace, even delight, in art that horrifies or depresses others – the songs of Elliott Smith, the film *Midsommar*. And he is self-aware about just how unreasonable grief has made him. He's furious when a man tries to comfort him with the fact that his grandfather had survived a brain tumour: "Grandfathers are supposed to get tumours and die! That's their job!" Perhaps because Henry died on his father's birthday, having only had two himself, Delaney now can't believe adults are so needy as to still celebrate them. If he hears co-workers are surprising a colleague with cake at 4pm, he "will go take a shit at 3.57".

Most moving, though, are Delaney's descriptions of the privilege of care. People don't appreciate just how addictively wonderful it is to help someone you love, however exhausting, however devastating. Almost unbelievably, Delaney's much-loved brother-in-law took his own life the year after Henry was diagnosed, following a period of depression. The bonding effect of his and his sister's mutual agonies, the way their families responded with support, childcare, travel, listening, presence – these are the small actions, you feel, that make Delaney's heart still "work". His and Leah's relationship also deepens, strengthens and blossoms in extremis. When events fracture us, it is the love of others that binds us together again, however imperfectly. Those practical and physical expressions of love – the relatives who learn to clean Henry's tracheostomy or the calluses that develop on Delaney's fingers from operating his son's suctioning machine – are some of the most moving images of the book. [My disabled sister](#), who died in 2020, also required regular suctioning; it is amazing how profoundly one misses the mind-numbingly tedious aspects of care. It's difficult for love to find similar active expression once that person is gone.

For Delaney that practical activity was replaced, I imagine, by writing this book. And as much as I wish he hadn't had to write it, I am glad he did. Because such deaths do happen. And they largely happen in private. The reality of medical care, especially social and palliative care, is often shrouded in silence. Those engulfed in it, from workers to "clients", are often too tired, physically and emotionally, to shine a light on its strengths or

its fault lines (although Delaney, an American, is full of praise and wonder at the very existence of the NHS). Those who don't need it don't like to hear about it. Indeed, the more severe the pain, the more desperate the need of others to avoid it – they don't want to intrude or don't know how to help, scared of confronting their own and their children's mortality. And those suffering stay in their cottages in the woods. So as much as Delaney is writing to offer succour and companionship to people who have experienced something similar, he is also rallying those who haven't to understand and listen, and to chisel away at the stigma of pain. That he is able to do so with such guiltless, funny and disarming honesty is testament to the profound effect of Henry's short but meaningful life.

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[Doctor Who](#)

How the first female Time Lord changed Doctor Who forever



Jodie Whittaker as the Doctor. Photograph: Sarah Weal/BBC Studios

As Jodie Whittaker hands the baton to Ncuti Gatwa, we reflect on how embracing diversity has led to some of the show's most unflinching and affirming tales

Doctor Who quiz: can you tell your Sontarans from your Skithra?

Beth Axford

Fri 21 Oct 2022 05.00 EDT Last modified on Fri 21 Oct 2022 09.11 EDT

In 2018, a blond-haired, two-hearted woman crashed through the roof of a Sheffield train and on to our screens, propelling [Doctor Who](#) into a new era. Reinvention has been key to the success of the show, which first aired almost 60 years ago. Despite being long overdue, having a woman in the role was not a radical idea – it had been considered multiple times.

Tom Baker thought a woman could take over from him after his tenure as the Time Lord ended in 1981. The show's creator, Sydney Newman, suggested in the 80s that, if the show were to continue, the Doctor should change gender. Joanna Lumley even portrayed a female incarnation of the Doctor in a 1999 Comic Relief sketch. But it took more than 50 years before the famous character was finally played by a woman full-time. This week, Jodie Whittaker will regenerate, leaving 31 episodes and a new generation of Who fans in her wake, and the sonic screwdriver will pass to Ncuti Gatwa, the first full-time black Doctor.

Joanna Lumley plays the Doctor in this Comic Relief sketch from 1999, written by Steven Moffat.

After 12 male actors, it was a huge deal when Whittaker became the Doctor. There was, inevitably, a backlash. Change can be scary for those who are used to seeing something that has always embodied their own lives. But the negativity doesn't compare with the positives that have come from diversification.

“As much as I have loved Doctor Who my whole life,” says the writer Juno Dawson, “there was a subliminal message running across the first 50 years: men are the central character and women are the ‘assistant’, ‘companion’. As such, having a woman as the Doctor was a huge cultural moment. Little girls can see that women are heroic, they’re important, and they’re fearless. Women’s stories must get the same capital as those about men.”



Ncuti Gatwa, who is to take over from Jodie Whittaker, will be the first black man to play the Time Lord full-time in Doctor Who. Photograph: Sarah Lee/The Guardian

Dawson went on to write for the 13th Doctor in [Doctor Who: Redacted](#), a female-led spin-off series featuring trans and queer characters. “When I wrote for the 13th Doctor, I never once considered her gender. Fundamentally, she is everything her predecessors were and that’s what makes her such a bold character,” she says.

Evidence suggests that casting people from diverse backgrounds can improve our mental health. According to the psychologist Dr Sophie Mort, whose work focuses on how our society shapes mental health, not seeing yourself represented on-screen affects how you think about yourself and your aspirations. “We learn about our identity, and how that identity is seen in the world, partly through the way people who share our identities are portrayed in the media. Historically, representation of women, black people, people of colour, LGBTQ+ people and people with disabilities has been less prolific, and people have often found themselves in stereotyped, supporting roles.”

So what does it mean when shows such as Doctor Who increase diversity in front of and behind the camera? Mort says increased on-screen diversity will improve the self-esteem of those represented, and having behind-the-camera talent from communities being portrayed on-screen will ensure the authenticity of these narratives. “This way, diverse narratives can be told, not just stereotyped,” says Mort.

In 2018, for the first time in 35 years, Doctor Who featured an episode written and directed by women

It is not just Whittaker’s casting that marked big changes for the show. Mandip Gill became the Doctor’s first full-time Asian companion, whose character Yaz was revealed to be in love with the Doctor during this year’s New Year special, Eve of the Daleks – the first queer relationship between the Doctor and a companion. This resonated with fans all over the world. Helena Emmanuel, a Doctor Who fan based in the US, says: “When Yaz described that she hadn’t admitted her feelings towards the Doctor even to herself, it resonated with me. I had that exact moment with myself when I was first coming out, not too far from Yaz’s age, and hadn’t ever seen a coming out on TV that felt so similar to my own.”

In 2020, Sacha Dhawan became the first British South Asian incarnation of the Doctor’s long-time enemy, the Master. That year also saw the introduction of the “Fugitive” Doctor, a secret regeneration from the Doctor’s past played by Jo Martin, the first black woman to take on the role of the Time Lord.



In love with the Doctor ... Mandip Gill as Yasmin Khan in Doctor Who: Eve of the Daleks. Photograph: James Pardon/BBC

In 2018, for the first time in 35 years, Doctor Who featured an episode, *The Witchfinders*, written and directed by women, Joy Wilkinson and Sallie Aprahamian respectively. Until that point, this had only happened once in the show's history, in 1983. Over the course of the 13th Doctor's era, just over half the show's writers and directors have been women. This has meant we have seen incredible moments showing how the male and female incarnations of the Doctor are treated, with the Doctor now on the receiving end of sexism across space and time. She is the centre of each victory, rather than supporting from the sidelines.

Whittaker's debut series also marked the first time the show had black or Asian writers. Malorie Blackman tackled the story of Rosa Parks, and Vinay Patel penned an episode about the partition of India. Mark Tonderai became Doctor Who's first black director. Recent outings have introduced audiences to the lesser told stories of the real-life figures Mary Seacole and Noor Inayat Khan.

The journalist David Chipakupaku feels proud of Doctor Who for finally taking steps to tell diverse stories. "It shocked me when I realised that Doctor Who had never hired a non-white writer until Malorie Blackman.

Even then, I had worries that there would be an attempt to sanitise Rosa Parks' story. But when, less than five minutes in, companion Ryan (who is a young black man) was assaulted for daring to speak to a white woman, I knew nothing was off the table.”

Doctor Who is on Sunday at 7.30pm.

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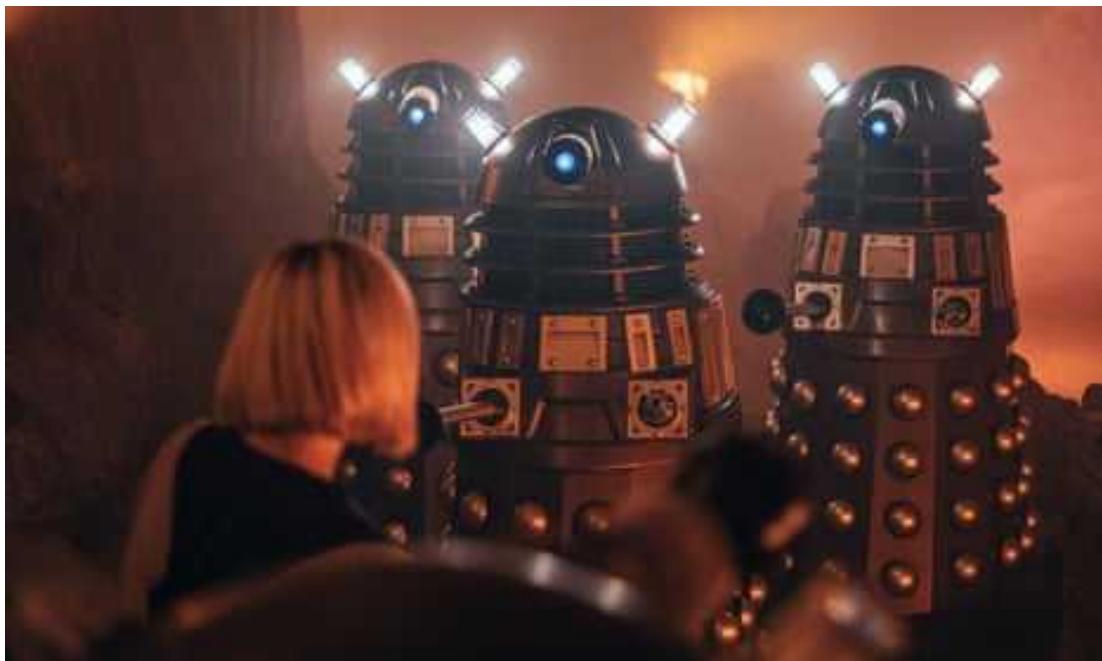
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Doctor Who quiz: can you tell your Sontarans from your Skithra?



Examineate ... examineate ... Jodie Whittaker faces her questioners.
Photograph: James Pardon/BBC Studios

Test your knowledge of Jodie Whittaker's era as the Time Lord with our interstellar quiz

How the first female Time Lord changed Doctor Who forever

Beth Axford and [Martin Belam](#)

Fri 21 Oct 2022 05.00 EDT Last modified on Fri 21 Oct 2022 05.02 EDT

The end is near for Jodie Whittaker's 13th Doctor, as she faces massed ranks of intergalactic foes and meets some old friends in her final episode as the BBC's legendary Time Lord in The Power of the Doctor, which broadcasts on 23 October at 7.30pm in the UK. But how much attention have you been paying during her stint in the Tardis? Test yourself with our 13th Doctor quiz

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The Guardian's 13th Doctor quiz

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1.Jodie Whittaker was cast as the 13th Doctor when Chris Chibnall became showrunner. Which award-winning show had they previously worked together on?



Silent Witness
Life on Mars
Broadchurch
Dalziel and Pascoe

2.The Tardis interior that debuted alongside the 13th Doctor featured a biscuit dispenser. Which biscuit did it most commonly provide to the Doctor and her "fam"?



- Digestives
- Custard creams
- Oreos
- Jammie Dodgers

3.Award-winning episode Rosa was co-written by Malorie Blackman, and featured the story of Rosa Parks. But which other US civil rights leader did Ryan Sinclair (Tosin Cole) meet during the adventure?

- Martin Luther King Jr
- Malcolm X
- John R Lewis
- Daisy Bates

4.The finale of Whittaker's first season was almost as hard to spell as the planet Raxacoricofallapatorius. What was it called?

- The Battle of Roonskar An Kalas
- The Battle of Skoorbar Ak Rolos
- The Battle of Ranskoor Av Kolos
- The Battle of Kanspoor Ad Lokos

5.The 13th Doctor faced off against many creatures large and small during her tenure. Which tiny but hungry alien did she encounter aboard the Tsuranga ship during 2018's The Tsuranga Conundrum?

Beep the Meep

The Adipose

The Slitheen

The Pting

6.Which comedian was one of the main guest stars in New Year special Eve of the Daleks, where she could be found as the character Sarah, running a storage facility that got ensnared in a time loop?



Aisling Bea

Rose Matafeo

Roisin Conaty

Jessica Knappett

7.What condition did Ryan have that applied extra pressure to him when he and the Tardis fam were in tight situations?



- Synaesthesia
- Dyscalculia
- Dyslexia
- Dyspraxia

8.During Whittaker's era, Jo Martin plays an incarnation of the Doctor from somewhere in the Time Lord's past. She first appeared during Series 12 in 2020. What name was given to identify her Doctor?



- The Frugal Doctor
- The Prisoner Doctor
- The Fugitive Doctor
- The Lost Doctor

9.Which football team did Graham (Bradley Walsh) support. He wore a pin badge of their crest on his jacket?



Aston Villa

West Ham United

Sheffield United

Liverpool

10.Which fictional police force did Yasmin Khan (Mandip Gill) work for when we first met her?



West Ecclesfield
Hallamshire
Stannington
Fulwood

11.The episode Demons of the Punjab was set during the partition of India by the British, and featured the backstory of Yaz's grandmother. But when was the partition of India?

1947
1948
1949
1950

12.Although Whittaker was the first woman to take on the role full-time, which female actor had played the part of the Doctor in Comic Relief spoof The Curse of Fatal Death?

Jennifer Saunders
Joanna Lumley
Dawn French
Julia Sawalha

13.Sacha Dhawan made his debut as the Doctor's nemesis, the Master, in 2020 two part story Spyfall - but who did the actor play in the 2013 docudrama An Adventure in Space and Time?



Waris Hussein

Sydney Newman

Earl Cameron

Roy Stewart

14. Which episode marked the exit of two of the 13th Doctor's companions, Graham O'Brien and Ryan Sinclair?

Resolution

Revelation of the Daleks

Eve of the Daleks

Revolution of the Daleks

15. What was the name of the explosive mentioned by the 13th Doctor when she and Yaz were trapped on a gravity bar at the start of The Halloween Apocalypse, a weapon that had also featured in Doctor Who in the 1980s wielded by companion Ace alongside the seventh Doctor?



Nitro-9

Nitro-11

Nitro-13

Nitro-19

16. During which episode did the Doctor and her friends tackle the Queen of the Skithra, played by returning Whoniverse actor Anjli Mohindra, who had been sidekick Rani Chandra in the Sarah Jane Adventures?

Nikola Tesla and the Alien Queen

Nikola Tesla's Nightmare

Nikola Tesla's Night of Terror

Nikola Tesla's Night of Pleasure

17.The Sontarans invaded Earth history and even rode horses into battle in the Crimea war during the 2021 story Flux. But which kitchen instrument did companion and pirate cosplayer Dan (John Bishop) use to knock them out?



A spatula

A whisk

A wok

A potato peeler

18.He was species bonded for life to protect Dan – but what was the species of the walking talking space dog with the floppy ears played by Craige Els?

Vulpix

Karvanista

Killoran

Lupari

19. Reptiles, fish-people, or fishy-reptile-people, wherever you place them on the planet's evolutionary tree, the Sea Devils returned to Doctor Who to cause havoc this year. How many years had it been since their last major appearance in the show?



- 50 years
- 38 years
- 29 years
- 14 years

20. And finally, the moment has been prepared for. Who has been announced as the replacement for Jodie Whittaker, with incoming showrunner Russell T Davies saying "The future is here and its..."



Nabhaan Rizwan

Richard Ayoade

Ncuti Gatwa

Zawe Ashton

- *The Doctor Who Quiz Book by Beth Axford is published by John Blake. Martin Belam writes [the Thursday quiz](#) for the Guardian every week. The Power of the Doctor is on BBC One on 23 October at 7.30pm*

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Food banks

Donate tins, treats and toiletries: how to help a food bank

Give basics (and tin openers), food that doesn't need cooking and add some snacks. Here's what charities need to meet the demand for emergency food parcels



Check what your local food bank actually needs first: Many are within the [Trussell Trust network](#), or the [Independent Food Aid Network](#). Photograph: FilippoBacci/Getty Images



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Fri 21 Oct 2022 03.00 EDT Last modified on Fri 21 Oct 2022 06.34 EDT

Donate staples

“Some people, in the run-up to Christmas, think ‘oh, there’s a fancy packet of biscuits, that would be nice’ but we need basic things,” says Kathleen Neilly, who runs [West Lothian food bank](#). Currently, that includes tinned meat and tinned vegetables, as well as personal care items such as shampoo and shower gel. She has enough pasta to last around a year. Other food banks report ongoing shortages of long-life juice and milk. Check your local food bank’s latest shopping lists. Many are within the [Trussell Trust network](#), or can be found through the [Independent Food Aid Network](#) (IFAN), and many have their own social media accounts.

But also treats



Snacks bring cheer for kids and parents. Photograph: Gordon Scammell/Alamy

They can make a big difference, says Mike Beckett, chief officer of [Colchester food bank](#), especially children's treats. "You can explain to an adult about eating healthy, but it's more difficult to explain it to a child who is upset, and a chocolate bar might cheer them up. In a crisis, [a treat] can give respite to parents." He recommends a multi-packet bag of sweets, biscuits or crisps "as long as they're individually wrapped inside. We can open them up and put some in each parcel."

Give tin openers

Tins with ring pulls are always welcomed but tend to come from the more expensive supermarkets. "We give people all these tins and they don't have a tin opener," says Neilly.

Consider more expensive items

"Corned beef wasn't that expensive and lots of people donated it, but we've seen that drop off massively because of the price," says Jen Coleman, CEO of [Black Country food bank](#). Billy McGranaghan, founder and chief

executive of [Dad's House](#), a support organisation and food bank in London, says it buys tins of tuna and sardines every week to keep stocks up.

Go for food that can be eaten cold



Tinned tuna is useful for ‘no-cook’ food parcels. Photograph: artemisphoto/Getty Images/iStockphoto

Most food banks report clients are increasingly asking for food that requires no cooking. For some, it’s about saving energy, but some don’t have access to cooking facilities or even a kettle. Pots of instant noodles or porridge that just need hot water are useful. Rajesh Makwana, director of [Sufra](#), a poverty action group and food bank in north London, says his team give out “no-cook” parcels. “They’re limited in terms of nutrition,” he says. “Things like breads and biscuits. No pasta, no rice. We’d give some tuna, so you can just open that, stick it on some bread and eat it. It’s really minimal stuff.” Neilly keeps a stock of tinned sweetcorn, which can be eaten cold.

Or that requires minimal cooking

Tinned potatoes are versatile and can be microwaved, and tinned meals such as curries or stews are popular. Neilly isn’t a fan of canned pies “mainly because they take half an hour in the oven”. But other food banks might

welcome them: “A couple of them for a family, with some veg, is great,” says Coleman.

Avoid anything with alcohol

You might think a Christmas pudding with brandy is a treat, but, says Neilly: “We don’t do any alcohol at all. We don’t know what the background of our client is.”

Don’t forget personal care items

All the essentials – toothbrushes and toothpaste, deodorant, shower gel, shampoo, sanitary products, nappies. McGranaghan says shaving foam is often overlooked. Some food banks give out cleaning products, but others don’t, so check.

Check best-before dates

It’s about dignity. “When someone’s feeling low and they come to a food bank, the last thing they want is out-of-date food. It’s soul-destroying,” says McGranaghan.

Avoid heavy items

A big bag of rice or pasta might seem like good value, but in a carrier bag with tins, it can become too heavy when you have to walk or rely on public transport. Multipacks are fine – they’re separated before they’re given out.

Get to know what your local food bank needs

Alexandra McMillan, founder of [Legendary Community Club](#), a food justice group in south London, says people have asked for food for their pets, particularly cat and dog food. For Colchester’s Beckett, donations of plastic bags – clean and sturdy – are welcome, and his warehouse manager “loves it when people either drop donations off there, or get an online order delivered [straight] to our warehouse”. Follow your local food bank on social media to

get information about fundraising – anything from larger events to donating raffle prizes.

Donate money

Increasingly, this is more helpful for food banks than food. It allows them to plan, buy what they need – often in bulk and at better prices than you can get in the supermarket, as well as get fresh fruit and vegetables – and best serves their clients' specific needs. Money also covers overheads such as rent, fuel costs for vans and energy bills, and means some food banks can choose to give out vouchers, rather than food. Donations of pre-packed bags of food means people “don’t get the autonomy to make their own decisions,” says McMillan. “[Cash has a positive psychological impact.](#)”

Billy McGranaghan estimates he has lost “90% of financial donations in the last three or four months”. He says Dad’s House welcomes food donations – “we can use everything: we’ve got vegetarians, vegans, people who eat halal, people with intolerances” – but having money means they are able to help clients top up their pre-paid energy meters. “They are really key in keeping families warm, and being able to cook the food we can give them.”

Help out in other ways

Ask your local food bank what else they need. It might be skills, says Makwana: “They may need to set up a website, or some admin work, fundraising.”

Could you help in big ways? “A lot of food banks might say yes if they were offered use of a warehouse or given a building,” says Beckett. “At the moment, we’ve got a building that is rent-free, but that’s going to run out and we’re going to have to move.”

Write to your MP

Finally, question why food banks are needed in the first place. “We’d ask anyone wanting to donate to a food bank also to write to their local MP calling for urgent action to tackle the growing poverty behind food bank

use,” says Sabine Goodwin, coordinator of IFAN – there is [a template on their site](#). “Food parcels clearly don’t solve poverty: it’s vital there are collective calls to MPs about the need to reverse the normalisation of food banks in the UK.”

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2022.10.21 - Opinion

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- I was supposed to grow up to be a 'good Indian woman'. I chose freedom instead
- At peace with herself, Librium Liz re-embraces her own mediocrity
- What kind of society fails to protect children? British society. Here's the proof

[Opinion](#)[Social housing](#)

We can build enough homes for everyone in England. So why don't we?

[John Boughton](#)

As a country, we have produced sufficient affordable housing at pace and scale in the past when the political will was there



‘Local authorities have led in creating sustainable homes. Norwich city council’s Goldsmith Street scheme is the obvious example.’ Photograph: Graeme Robertson/The Guardian

Fri 21 Oct 2022 01.00 EDT Last modified on Fri 21 Oct 2022 05.21 EDT

Whichever new prime minister emerges, current Conservative politics makes it unlikely we’ll see a significant new expansion of social rented housing any time soon. But not so long ago another Conservative prime minister, Theresa May, talked of the need for “a new generation of council homes to [help fix our broken housing market](#)”. Opposition parties and the UK’s devolved governments remain committed to a large increase in public housing.

Meanwhile, there are still an estimated 1.6m households in England with unmet housing needs best provided by social renting. As we plan for the future, now is a good time to ask what we can learn from past social housing schemes.

The most important lesson is simply that we can build social housing at scale when the political will exists. Between 1945 and 1979, the country built an average of 126,000 council homes annually. The largest number built in a single year, 219,000, was achieved by a Conservative government in 1953. At times, that pace and scale could be problematic. Financial constraints frequently limited the best of what might have been achieved. There were perhaps too many poorly constructed high-rise dwellings, too many large and anonymous suburbs, but the overriding goal – when, even in 1948, 54% of British households lacked their own bathroom – was to house all our people decently and clear the slums.

Nor was this colossal building programme executed without considering its impact on personal and social wellbeing. The arts and crafts-influenced cottage suburbs built before the first world war echoed the high idealism of Ebenezer Howard's garden city movement in their desire to meld country and town. A plainer and cheaper neo-Georgian style dominated interwar housing but these solid family homes provided previously undreamt of amenities for many millions.

After the second world war, attention turned to the smaller households that council housing had previously neglected. "Mixed development" allowed a greater variety of housing types that countered the uniformity of the earlier, monolithic suburbs. Multistorey blocks, initially intended for single people or couples, spread but pressures to build higher grew as concerns over urban sprawl combined with green-belt restrictions to impel greater density.

Meanwhile, architects and planners tried hard to create good homes and decent environments for new residents. Denys Lasdun, before conceiving the National Theatre, designed council flats in Bethnal Green in east London and talked to those who would move in: "People who came from little terraced houses ... I used to lunch with them and try and understand a bit more about what mattered to them." (He provided maisonettes as an echo of

the two-storey homes they knew.) Ernő Goldfinger and his wife, Ursula, lived for several weeks in the Balfron Tower block he designed. Ursula reported the residents “all said the flats were lovely”; one said of her new home that she “wouldn’t change it for Buckingham Palace”.



‘One resident said of her new home that she wouldn’t change it for Buckingham Palace.’ Balfron Tower, London Photograph: Sam Mellish/In Pictures/Getty Images

Some low-rise schemes – with Radburn layouts (named after the New Jersey town that provided their prototype) – were deployed that set housing within green open space and confined vehicles to rear service roads. Aerial walkways on larger, multistorey estates were another common means of separating people and traffic. The “streets in the sky” were seen as a way to recreate the community some felt lost in that migration from the cleared slum terraces.

Balfron Tower eventually fell on hard times before being sold off to the private sector. Radburn estates were criticised for their lack of “legibility”. Walkways and decks came to be seen as rat runs and escape routes for antisocial elements with far from communal intentions. Formerly showpiece estates were judged failing. However, the difficulties of these estates did not lie in some original sin of design – many were successful and well liked in

their earlier years – but rather in changing circumstances, particularly the decline of traditional working-class employment. The lesson here is humility: an awareness that times may change and that even the best of designs are tested by adverse circumstance.

Prefabrication (or what are now misleadingly described as “modern methods of construction”) is touted as a new solution to the housing crisis. But such non-traditional construction was trialled after both world wars with mixed success. It reached its peak in the shoddily executed system-building boom of the 1960s and, symbolically, in the collapse of the Ronan Point tower block in east London in May 1968.

Chastened by some of these more obvious failures of the 1960s housing drive, the 1970s witnessed a swansong of high-quality public housing in the low-rise, high-density schemes built most notably by the London boroughs of Camden and Lambeth. These generously financed, architect-designed schemes remain a model as we look to the future.

But just as we should hope to build more and build better, we must also build greener. Local authorities have led in creating the sustainable homes needed to address the longer-term climate emergency and the current energy crisis. Norwich city council’s [Goldsmith Street scheme](#) is the obvious example, but tower blocks retrofitted to the same rigorously energy-efficient Passivhaus standards in Portsmouth and Glasgow illustrate the wider possibilities as we seek to adapt Britain’s ageing housing stock to meet contemporary challenges.

The history of public housing is one of changing fashion and continual innovation. As such, it defies the glib characterisations offered by more critical commentators. Above all, it represents a shared ambition to improve lives, individually and collectively. That social purpose remains vital; the protection of our planet adds breadth and urgency to its mission.

- John Boughton is a social historian and blogger. His new book, *A History of Council Housing* in 100 Estates, is published by RIBA Books in November

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Why I quitWomen

I was supposed to grow up to be a ‘good Indian woman’. I chose freedom instead

[Sangeeta Pillai](#)

I was told to listen to my parents, find a husband and ignore my own needs. But I decided to take my own path



Sangeeta Pillai as a young woman. Photograph: Sangeeta Pillai

Fri 21 Oct 2022 05.00 EDT Last modified on Fri 21 Oct 2022 09.50 EDT

As a young girl growing up in a very traditional Mumbai family, I knew I was expected to grow up to be a certain sort of woman.

Here's what I was taught. A good Indian woman is obedient and lives the life her parents and society tell her to live. A good Indian woman gets “married off” early and becomes a mother quickly because that is her primary purpose. A good Indian woman doesn't reveal any part of her body or her sexual desires. A good Indian woman ignores her own needs and lives

her life serving others. My mother, my grandmother and many women before them had lived exactly this life.

I was pressured to marry the first man who was interested, an “arranged marriage” where I knew next to nothing about my “future husband”. I was taught to cook all the traditional dishes, because, in my mum’s words: “What will your mother-in-law say if you can’t cook well?” I was told I should never reveal my legs or upper arms, to cover up and not tempt the gaze or hands of men around me.

I tried to become the woman my family wanted. I studied hard in school, received good grades. I was a quiet girl, eyes downcast, too shy to speak to boys. I didn’t go to any parties, wasn’t allowed to stay out after 7pm.

But I was born with a fire in my belly. With a voice in my head that questioned everything I was being taught by society and family.

That voice in my head soon turned into a loud voice that came out of my mouth. I said things to my family like: “Why should I always be quiet?” Or: “Why are men allowed to do such and such and not women?” Obviously this didn’t go down very well. I had multiple aunties and uncles warning my close family that “this girl will ruin you”.

But that didn’t silence my voice. Because I saw how badly women in my culture were treated. It was always the women cooking, cleaning and serving others from dawn until dusk. It was always the women told to “adjust” to everything, from a husband who beat you up, to a mother-in-law who treated you badly, to being groped by men every time you left the house. Women were told that this was their lot and they just had to shut up and put up with it. I didn’t want to shut up and put up.

There was no single moment when I decided that I was going to give up on being the “good Indian woman”. Instead, a series of moments and days and years led to me giving up on conforming to that traditional ideal.

I suspect seeing how unhappy my own mother’s life was (a woman who had a literature degree but now spent her days endlessly cooking and cleaning)

had a lot to do with it. I remember when I was 18, I decided to get my hair cut very short, right under my ears. This was unforgivable in my mother's eyes, because an Indian woman's beauty is her long, dark tresses. I also remember going to college in a short skirt that exposed my legs, and my mother's thunderous face as I left our home.

I realised that giving up on being the “good Indian woman” meant I could finally become the woman I was meant to be.

That was the beginning of a long journey, of many battles. I found myself a job in Bengaluru, about an hour’s flight away. And I remember stepping into my new rented flat, relishing being alone for the first time in my life. I recall vividly pouring myself a small glass of Baileys (my drink of choice then) and sitting in my shorts (something I was never allowed to wear at home), and feeling as if I had won the lottery. And from that day, I went on to make so many changes in my life, eventually moving to the UK in 2005. The sweet taste of Baileys always reminds me of my first taste of freedom.

When I look back at that young woman today, I’m so proud that she had the courage to give up on that idea of Indian womanhood. That she could stand alone in a world that told her she was going to ruin her life and bring shame on her family – and still have the courage to do what felt right to her.

So here’s the crux of it. Giving up on the idea of being a “good Indian woman” transformed me into a “fulfilled independent Indian woman”. The sort of woman who went on to create the award-winning Masala Podcast and the platform [Soul Sutras](#), tackling cultural taboos and challenging traditional norms. The sort of woman who stands up in front of audiences all over the world, talking about south Asian women owning our voices, our bodies, our sexual pleasure. The sort of woman who inspires thousands of other women – they write to me almost every day to thank me for helping them to change their lives.

I’m so grateful to have had the courage to give up on the “good Indian woman” ideal. Because now, I’m exactly the sort of woman I couldn’t have ever imagined I would be. The best sort of woman: a fierce feminist fighting for my fellow south Asian women.

- Sangeeta Pillai is a south Asian feminist activist and the creator of [Masala Podcast](#)
 - *Do you have an opinion on the issues raised in this article? If you would like to submit a response of up to 300 words by email to be considered for publication in our [letters](#) section, please [click here](#).*
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The politics sketchLiz Truss

At peace with herself, Librium Liz re-embraces her own mediocrity

[John Crace](#)



Suddenly, the rejects and the Convict have another shot. Give it time till someone suggests Liz again



Doomed to be forgotten: Liz Truss speaking in Downing Street. Photograph: Kirsty O'Connor/PA

Thu 20 Oct 2022 13.13 EDT Last modified on Fri 21 Oct 2022 00.28 EDT

The agony was finally over. The week-long battle between Liz Truss and the Daily Star lettuce had been won. The [lettuce had romped home at a canter](#) with only a few leaves showing any sign of wilting. In the end, it hadn't really been much of a contest.

Shortly after 1.30pm, Truss emerged from the front door of No 10, closely followed by her husband. She walked to the lectern and started speaking in her familiar, disconnected monotone. She had come into office at a time of great political and economic instability. Weirdly, she forgot to mention her part in adding to the instability. But the country will be paying for it in increased mortgages and borrowing for years to come.

Truss went on. She had delivered some fantastic achievements for the country. An energy package that literally any other prime minister would have introduced. And the reduction in national insurance contributions that Labour had first proposed. Amnesia prevented her from mentioning her U-turns. But her achievements had been so remarkable that it was best she went out on a high. The record for [shortest-serving prime minister](#) was hers.

Though she would hang on for another week while the Tory party hastily scrabbled around for a new leader.

Her statement lasted barely a couple of minutes. Yet by the time she had finished she looked almost relieved. At peace with herself. No more trying to conceal her shame. Her humiliation. The shame and humiliation that had become the country's own shame and humiliation. A lightning rod of despair.

The pretence of trying to appear competent could be abandoned. No further series of time-slip adventures in which she could enter parallel universes where she was a successful prime minister would be called for. She could re-embrace her own mediocrity. The authentic voice of those guaranteed to get most things wrong. Doomed to be forgotten. A footnote in the country's history. A question in a pub quiz.

It had been quite the 24 hours. At prime minister's questions on Wednesday, Librium Liz had insisted she was a "fighter not a quitter". So what changed? Mostly, she allowed reality to finally intrude. It had been obvious to the rest of us for weeks that she was hopelessly out of her depth and that the Tory party and the country was falling apart around her.

Indeed, she had really been leader in name only since Colonel Jeremy Hunt had assumed control of the country last week. From then on she had in effect been a hostage inside No 10, with various captors having to give regular updates to an incurious nation about her wellbeing. "Liz has had a very productive day, sleeping under her desk." "Liz has been allowed out to sack Suella Braverman." Truss had tried to send messages by blinking desperately in morse code, but her pleas for help had gone unnoticed.

Lino Liz might still have been cooped up in her Downing Street gilded cage, had not Thérèse Coffey – Dr Feelgood – rushed down to the voting lobbies on Wednesday night with a bag stuffed full of mood-altering drugs. Tory MPs had surrounded her and Jacob Rees-Mogg and everyone had bundled one another through the no lobby during the fracking vote.

Everyone was so wired that no one had a clear recollection of anything. No 10 couldn't even be sure if Liz had remembered to vote for herself in a

confidence motion. Or indeed if it had been a confidence motion. It would be the most on-brand thing Truss had ever done, to vote for her own removal. There again, she wasn't entirely clear if the chief whip had resigned or not. This was the tipping point for Tory MPs. Truss had to go. Blame the drugs.

With Liz out of the picture, the new regime rapidly unravelled. So much for a smooth takeover. Col Hunt tried to steady the ship by saying he would remain as chancellor and wouldn't be standing for leader again. Probably just as well. He came eighth out of eight just a few months ago with the backing of just 18 MPs. His key policy had been to reduce corporation tax to 15%. In yet another space-time continuum shift of which the Tory party is increasingly fond, the new Hunt 2.0 had reinstated corporation tax at 25%. The wonders of quantum physics.

Next up came the chair of the 1922 Committee, Graham Brady, who had called a press conference to say that he didn't really have much to say. Other than that the Tory party would try to stitch up the election process by the end of next week. He couldn't provide any details as yet, as it wasn't yet clear what rules would need to be bent. But there would be two candidates going through to the members' ballot. Unless, that is, there turned out to be only one candidate. Then all bets were off.

We can see which way this one is going. The new regime going to its default position of a failed state. Yet another prime minister with no general election. No mandate. We used to laugh at Italy. Now the joke's on us. The UK is far more chaotic, far more corrupt, than anything the Italians could dare dream of. Just 350 Tory MPs more concerned about holding on to their jobs for another two years than doing the right thing for the country. O brave new world ...

To have such people in it. People such as Braverman, Rishi Sunak and Penny Mordaunt. MPs who had tried and failed to become Tory leader only months ago. Wannabes who had been rejected either by their own MPs or by the Tory gerontocracy. Suddenly now fighting each other for another shot.

People such as Boris Johnson. A dozen or so Tories, led by the deranged Nadine Dorries, thought it was time to give the Convict another shot. To

forget that he had been disgraced for his criminal behaviour. That [more than 50 ministers had resigned from his administration](#) just months ago because he was unfit for office. Now they wanted him back. The venality. The desperation. The neediness. All just nauseating.

This was a Tory party treating the country with contempt. It was only a matter of time before someone suggested Lino Liz had another go. After all, she'd been out of office for a few hours. Surely that was long enough? Theresa May called for a candidate to unify the party. Some hope. Has she seen the state of it? Everyone hates each other. The only thing holding them together is the fear of being in opposition.

But maybe there is a saviour. Someone who has the unwavering support of himself. Step forward [Rehman Chishti](#). Your time has come.

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[OpinionUK child abuse inquiry](#)

What kind of society fails to protect children? British society. Here's the proof

[Zoe Williams](#)



For seven years, a UK inquiry has examined child sexual abuse and heard from victims. The results should shame us into action



'Prof Alexis Jay's analysis insists that, even though abuse may be better understood, systems to prevent it are still failing.' Photograph: Veryan Dale/Alamy

Thu 20 Oct 2022 12.27 EDT Last modified on Fri 21 Oct 2022 08.27 EDT

As the report of the independent inquiry into child sexual abuse (IICSA) delivers its findings, [seven years](#) in the making, the numbers alone are incredibly hard to confront: 79% of the thousands of victims and survivors who gave testimony were under 11 when the sexual abuse started. Children with disabilities and those who were already neglected were exploited disproportionately – a chilling insight into predatory behaviour: how it takes the very quality of vulnerability that should engender empathy and protection, and opportunistically exploits it instead.

Yet it is in [hearing the voices](#) of these victims and survivors that you begin to understand the vast and pressing duty this inquiry creates, a duty of root and branch change in how children are perceived, cared for and protected, and alongside that a duty of collective as well as institutional atonement.

The depths of cruelty described are fathomless: children passing out in pain, humiliated, violated, uncomprehending, suffocating under the weight of an abuser, frozen silent in fear. Testimonials to the [Truth Project](#) come from

every generation, the oldest participants are in their 80s. What they said, and what they said they wanted now, spoke volumes. For 9% of them, this was the first time they'd spoken about their abuse, and they gave their reasons for this bravery very clearly. More than half said they wanted to prevent abuse happening to others; a fifth wanted to be heard. "These monsters have taken enough from me," one man said. "Today," he said, he was "going to speak".

Twenty-one per cent of the Truth Project participants said they sought the opportunity to tell someone in authority about their experiences; 15% just wanted their account to be believed. For some, this was because they had previously not been listened to or taken seriously when they disclosed that they had been sexually abused. Barbara said, "I want my voice heard, I want it on record ... I am not the child in the police station." Another survivor recalled, "There's so many moments where I was genuinely crying out to people and there was nothing, no one to listen to me."

These crimes didn't stop at the perpetrators, but were cloaked and underpinned by surrounding agencies and institutions who dressed up their cowardice as incredulousness. The analogies people use are heartrending. Phoebe, forced at gunpoint into sex work, was "like a little fish in a shark tank"; Adrienne felt "like a ghost – you are the last thing anyone thinks of".

Prof Alexis Jay, the [chair of the inquiry](#), touches starkly and soberly on the changing attitudes to abuse over the decades: from the 1950s, when people still had a notion of the "seductive child"; through the 1960s and 70s, when allegations would be stonewalled simply because the accused was by definition more powerful than the accuser; the 1980s, when it was yet to be resolved whether a child could or could not consent to sex; the 1990s, when alarm bells were written off as "over-zealous" and "moral panic"; and into this century, when even as the approach became more child-focused the terrain has still been marked by observable "differences in the treatment of wealthy and well-connected individuals, as opposed to those who were poorer, more deprived and without access to networks of influence".

Certainly, our understanding of child sexual abuse has changed, in the sense that it is an unmitigated moral wrong, none would defend it; and this has tracked our better understanding of trauma, the near limitless harm it can

wreak across a lifetime. Yet Jay's analysis insists that, even though abuse may be better understood, systems to prevent it are still failing.

Of the [20 recommendations](#), three form the centrepiece: the first, a statutory requirement of [mandatory reporting](#), which could ultimately make it a criminal offence not to report allegations. This is seismic: consider, for instance, last year's [report by Lambeth council](#) into 40 years of failure of the children in its care. By 2020, the council was aware of 705 children's home residents making complaints of sexual abuse. "Nobody in relevant positions of authority during that time could truthfully have said they did not know about the abuse of children," it concludes. The second is a scheme for national monetary redress for victims. The third is the creation of a child protection authority, one in England, one in Wales, with the powers to inspect any institution associated with children.

Half of the victims and survivors were abused by family members, the rest in institutions ranging from the Catholic church to boarding schools, from young offender institutions to children's homes. This careful, granular study reveals so much about the nature of predatory behaviour, and the culpability of the organisations that surround it. Abusers don't just need their organisations to cover up their behaviour after an allegation, they need the structure of a church or boarding school or children's home to legitimise their place in a child's life to begin with. This creates in those bodies with loco parentis responsibility an overwhelming duty not to wait for an allegation and investigate it fairly, but to be constantly vigilant. This duty has often been ignored, and for decades, with effects that will continue to be felt for many more decades still.

This inquiry was always opposed by the Conservatives, Boris Johnson saying that police money spent investigating historic cases of child sexual abuse was being "[spaffed up a wall](#)", in what sounded just like a characteristically vulgar lack of empathy. Perhaps, though, the government foresaw that this would have political implications that would have to be acted upon.

While child sexual abuse knows no class barriers, and can [happen at Ampleforth](#), one of the world's foremost Catholic boarding schools, as

readily as in a children's home, money still matters. When children are placed in care hundreds of miles from their homes, because private providers have found cheaper rents in Rochdale; when London and the south-east have precisely no secure children's homes that accept criminal justice children, despite safeguarding being far better in a secure children's home than in a young offender institution: these decisions create the ideal conditions for abuse to flourish.

The state cannot hold itself above responsibility when all actors, state and non-state, are called upon to regain the trust of the children who were failed and failed so comprehensively. So many are still having, as adults, to live with those failures.

- 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 response of up to 300 words by email to be considered for publication in our [letters](#) section, please [click here](#).*

This article was amended on 21 October 2022. An earlier version said that London and the south-east have no secure children's homes. This has been corrected to say that London and the south-east have no secure children's homes that accept criminal justice children.

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2022/oct/20/british-society-fails-to-protect-children-proof-abuse-inquiry>.

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Australian women sue Qatar Airways over forced examinations at Doha airport

Five women are seeking damages for ‘unlawful physical contact’ and mental health impacts over October 2020 incident

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Five Australian women are seeking damages from Qatar Airways and aviation authorities after they were forcibly removed from planes at gunpoint and some intimately examined. Photograph: Urbanandsport/NurPhoto/Rex/Shutterstock

*[Ben Doherty](#)
[@bendohertycorro](#)*

Fri 21 Oct 2022 03.53 EDT Last modified on Fri 21 Oct 2022 03.59 EDT

Five Australian women are suing [Qatar](#) Airways in the New South Wales supreme court over a 2020 incident in which they were forcibly removed from aeroplanes at gunpoint in Doha, and some intimately examined without explanation or their consent.

The women are seeking damages from both Qatar Airways and the Qatar Civil Aviation Authority – owned by the Qatari government – over the “unlawful physical contact” and mental health impacts, including depression and post-traumatic stress disorder.

On 2 October 2020, women on planes on the ground at Doha, including 13 Australians, were subjected to the examinations as authorities searched for the mother of a newborn baby found abandoned in a plastic bag in the departures lounge at Hamad international airport.

Women on 10 flights, including five Australians who were on a Sydney-bound Qatar Airways flight, were removed from planes at gunpoint and taken into ambulances on the tarmac.

Some were instructed to remove their underwear and some were forced to submit to invasive gynaecological examinations for evidence they had recently given birth.

Women who were examined said they were given no information by officials on why they were being forcibly examined, and did not have an opportunity to provide informed consent.

The infant survived.

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According to the statement of claim filed in the NSW supreme court, three of the five women were subjected to “unlawful physical contact”.

“Each of the applications has suffered … from anxiety, depression, post-traumatic stress disorders and other psychological effects.”

The women have incurred medical expenses, and some have suffered economic loss “as a result of needing to take medical leave from work due to the effects of the events on … mental health”.

Papers were served on Qatar Airways at the airline’s Melbourne offices on Thursday. The airline has not responded to requests for comment from the Guardian.

Damian Sturzaker, partner at Marque Lawyers, told the Guardian he was “proud to stand with this group of brave women who have been forced to take on the Qatar government after it gravely breached their human rights”.

Qatar is an ultra-conservative Muslim monarchy, where sex and childbirth outside marriage are punishable by jail. The mother of the child has since been identified. She is not a Qatari national.

Ahead of the football World Cup next month, the country has struggled to reassure critics its promises to protect women’s rights are credible.

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Facing potentially devastating commercial and reputational damage after the incident, Qatar vowed to guarantee the future “safety and security” of passengers, without further details.

The Qatari prime minister, Sheikh Khalid bin Khalifa Al Thani, conceded standard security protocols had been violated, and expressed his “sincerest apology for what some female travellers went through”.

“We regret the unacceptable treatment of the female passengers,” he said.

An airport security official was charged and prosecuted, and received a suspended prison sentence.

But the Qatari government and Qatar Airways have failed to respond to entreaties from the Australian women to “provide a meaningful apology for the hurt and distress caused” as well as “provide assurances to both the complainants and the international community that this kind of conduct will never happen again”.

Marque Lawyers has filed a complaint on behalf of the women with the Australian government’s National Contact Point, under the OECD Guidelines for Multinational Enterprises. An initial assessment heard the airline’s “lack of response” was a further breach of their rights.

The legal action brought this week against Qatar Airways, and the state-run aviation authority, has been lodged in the NSW supreme court.

Under the 1999 Montreal Convention, which governs airline liability around the world and to which Australia and Qatar are both parties, an action for damages can be brought before the courts at the place of destination of the aircraft or in the territory where a passenger lives.

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2022/oct/21/australian-women-sue-qatar-airways-over-forced-examinations-at-doha-airport>

[**Canada**](#)

Ontario mayor faces lone challenger – the brother he doesn't speak to

Charles Steele runs against estranged brother Bill in Port Colborne mayoral race – but siblings keep mum on source of conflict



Charles Steele, left, and Bill Steele, right. '[My brother] thinks he's entitled to become mayor. And his arrogance was bothering me,' said Charles Steele, the challenger. Photograph: Supplied

[Leyland Cecco in Toronto](#)

Fri 21 Oct 2022 05.40 EDT Last modified on Sat 22 Oct 2022 17.04 EDT

When Charles Steele stepped on to a debate stage last week, it was the first time since the election campaign began that he'd confronted his lone opponent in a bitterly contested race to become mayor of a small Canadian town.

The encounter also marked the first time he'd spoken to his brother Bill – the incumbent mayor – in more than 30 years.

"I was quite nervous. I never debated or anything like that in front of a crowd," Charles told the Guardian. "And I got a little mad a few times. But [my brother] thinks he's entitled to become mayor. And his arrogance was bothering me."

The showdown between the estranged brothers has catapulted Port Colborne, a town of just under 20,000 on the shores of Lake Erie, into the limelight, making it one of the more closely watched races in elections across Ontario this Monday.

Bill Steele was poised to run unopposed for his second term as mayor of Port Colborne, a town of nearly 20,000 on the shores of Lake Erie.

The day before candidate registration closed in late August, however, Charles submitted his own name in the mayoral race.

"I'm [doing this] because of democracy. If I didn't, my brother would have been acclaimed because nobody else is running. It's just the two of us," said Charles, adding that less than half of residents voted in the last election – an "abysmal" showing.

The brothers have been vague about the source of their prolonged estrangement.

"[Bill's] politics are quite different from mine. He's pretty rightwing. I'm for the little guy," said Charles. "I'd like to see the citizens take back our future and not hand to the the powerful elite."

Mayor Bill Steele, who previously served as a city councillor for 17 years, did not respond to an interview request. He previously told local media he "doesn't talk about" his opponents.

Charles has run a grassroots campaign, largely focused on addressing homelessness and taxation. But he's also taken shots at his brother, who he accuses of being part of an "old boys' club" of powerful figures.

“I moved to Toronto when I was 18 and became a mailman. Now I’m on a pension – so I know what it’s like to live on a fixed income. And [my brother] doesn’t seem to get that,” said Charles. “He just doesn’t seem to get that people can’t afford more taxes and water rates are skyrocketing.”

The race has become constant fodder on the [town’s unofficial Facebook page](#), where some residents have relished the feud, while others complain the rivalry has turned Port Colborne into a “laughing stock”.

Whoever wins, the bare-knuckle nature of municipal politics means there is little chance of any reconciliation between the brothers.

“Oh, it’s definitely made things worse,” said Charles. “I just don’t think he was taking me seriously. But obviously he is taking me very seriously now. Win or lose, it’s got my message across about issues that matter for the average person.”

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/oct/21/canada-ontario-port-colborne-mayor-steele-brothers>

US prisons

Abortion bans create ‘insurmountable barriers’ for incarcerated women in US

Supreme court’s overturning of Roe will make reproductive healthcare in prisons a lot worse than it already is, experts warn



Las Colinas women's detention facility in Santee, California. Photograph: Sandy Huffaker/AFP/Getty Images

[Maya Yang](#)

Fri 21 Oct 2022 04.00 EDT Last modified on Fri 21 Oct 2022 04.12 EDT

When the [US supreme court](#) decided to strip away constitutional abortion protections in June, it effectively made the situation for many pregnant incarcerated women who are seeking abortions a lot worse.

Conditions for reproductive healthcare in many US prison facilities are already often abysmal. With many pregnant inmates regularly facing dire circumstances including being denied abortions or being forced to give birth

while shackled, experts warn that the overturn of Roe v Wade will now result in even more severe consequences for an already marginalized community.

From 1980 to 2020, the number of incarcerated women across the country increased by over 475%, [according to](#) the Sentencing Project. In 2020, Idaho led the nation in the highest female state imprisonment rate at 110 per 100,000 female residents, followed by Oklahoma, South Dakota, Arizona, Wyoming, Kentucky and Montana. As of two years ago, the [imprisonment rate](#) for Black women was 1.7 times the rate of the imprisonment for white women. Meanwhile, Latinx women were imprisoned at 1.3 times the rate of white women.

The Prison Policy Initiative [found](#) that an average of 58,000 people are pregnant each year when they enter local jails or prisons. In many of the states that already have the highest female state imprisonment rates, they also now have strict abortion laws ban the procedure almost entirely.

As a result, the overturn of Roe v Wade is expected to make the lives of pregnant incarcerated people who are seeking abortions increasingly difficult.

“People experiencing incarceration and pregnancy in states where abortion has been severely restricted or outlawed altogether, will likely face new barriers as jails and prisons seek to hide behind the supreme court’s decision to avoid their constitutional obligation to provide healthcare (including abortion) to people in custody,” Alexa Kolbi-Molinis, deputy director of the Reproductive Freedom Project at the American Civil Liberties Union told the Guardian.

“Even where correctional staff and officials do not deliberately block access to care, the reduced availability of services and need to travel even greater distances to access legal abortion, and the greater demand for services in states where abortion is still legal, will only exacerbate all the financial and logistical obstacles that already existed,” she added.

A [study](#) led by Carolyn Sufrin, the director of the Advocacy and Research on Reproductive Wellness of Incarcerated People program at Johns Hopkins University, surveyed incarcerated people's abortion access across 22 state prison systems and six county jail systems.

The study, which collected policy data for 12 months in 2016 to 2017 and was eventually published in 2021, found that there were already a myriad of obstacles such as self-payment requirements that can prevent a pregnant inmate from obtaining the care. Out of the 19 states that then permitted abortions, two-thirds required the pregnant inmate to pay.

Only 11 of the 816 pregnancies in state and federal prisons that ended during the study time period were abortions, or 1.3%. 33 out of 224 pregnancies that ended at study jails were abortions, with over half of those happening during the first trimester.

"There were already few abortions in prison settings...so will [the overturn of Roe] impact abortion access for an incarcerated individual? Absolutely," Sufrin told the Guardian.

For a lot of incarcerated women across the country, many remain behind bars because they are unable to afford bail. As a result, self-payment requirements for those seeking abortions are often times very difficult to fulfill.

"State prison systems or jails sometimes would force pregnant people to pay for the procedure, sometimes including even the cost of transport or the time to have prison guards with them, which is problematic because normally if an incarcerated person is going off site for any other medical procedure, they wouldn't be charged for the cost of transport or the time for the guards," Corene Kendrick, deputy director of the ACLU's National Prison Project, told the Guardian.

"Trying to expect those people in jails to come up with the money for transport to an offsite abortion procedure when they can't even come up with the money to make bail, to go home to their families, really creates an insurmountable barrier."

In 2017, Kei'Choura Cathey, a former inmate who discovered she was pregnant in August 2015 while awaiting trial, sued the Maury county sheriff in Tennessee, [claiming](#) that he denied her the right to an abortion because her pregnancy was not a threat to her health nor the result of rape or incest.

Cathey's only option at the time was to post bail so she could leave jail to receive the abortion. However, her bail was set at a staggering \$1m. Eventually, her bond was lowered to \$8,000. However, according to the [lawsuit](#), by the time Cathey was able to post bond, she was already more than six months into her pregnancy, thus making her abortion illegal.

For a lot of pregnant incarcerated women seeking abortions in a post-Roe reality, experts fear that they are likely going to face similar circumstances like Cathey.

"Prisons or jails will argue...that's an elective procedure so we are not going to cover it," said Kendrick, which in turn will potentially force many incarcerated pregnant women who are unable to cover the procedure to carry their pregnancies to term.

For a lot of pregnant inmates, birthing conditions in prison facilities are already dire. Numerous reports in recent years have emerged of inmates either being forced to deliver while [shackled](#) to their beds or having to deliver their babies [on their own](#).

While some states – and in effect, prison facilities – are seeing outright bans in abortions as a result of the supreme court's ruling in June, others have not overhauled abortion protections just yet.

In [Wyoming](#), for example, abortion is currently legal but remains restricted as it is only allowed to be performed until fetal "viability".

In a statement to the Guardian, Wyoming's department of corrections said that the supreme court ruling on Roe in June has not affected its policies on abortion related issues.

"The WDOC has not had any change in policy or care for abortion related issues in the WDOC for inmates or offenders. The WDOC does on occasion

have female inmates that are pregnant during incarnation and they are cared for at the Wyoming Medium Correctional Institute in Torrington, WY. We rely upon the expertise of expert medical advice in all decisions related to the health and wellness of our inmates.”

Ultimately, according to Sufrin, “There’s tremendous variability in what healthcare service deliveries look like on the ground and systems are not really set up to provide the full scope of comprehensive pregnancy and postpartum care for people.”

For pregnant incarcerated people who are sent off-site for abortions, another issue that has emerged since Roe’s overturn is the hesitancy or even outright refusal from external healthcare providers to perform the abortions.

“We’ve already seen instances of local hospitals turning people away and not providing medically necessary care because of ambiguities in the law, [such as] there might still be a heartbeat, those sorts of things. Then the carceral facility is left to manage dangerous bleeding or an ectopic pregnancy and they’re just very much ill-equipped to do that and don’t want to and should not,” explained Sufrin.

“Even in the best of circumstances, there’s still a lot of constraints and a lot of trauma that pregnant folks experience. So now after the Dobb’s decision, we anticipate... that we’re going to have more pregnant people in our country and fewer people with access abortion. And I believe that we will see that in incarcerated settings as well,” she said.

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2022/oct/21/us-abortion-bans-insurmountable-barriers-incarcerated-women>

Global development

More bodies, thought to be of Ethiopian migrants, found in mass grave in Malawi

Bodies of four men, believed to be en route to South Africa, found less than a mile from where 25 bodies were exhumed in Mzimba



The mass grave in Mtangatanga Forest Reserve in the northern district of Mzimba. Photograph: Courtesy of Capital Radio Malawi

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[Charles Pensulo](#) in Lilongwe

Fri 21 Oct 2022 01.00 EDT Last modified on Fri 21 Oct 2022 02.11 EDT

Authorities in Malawi have discovered four bodies in a forest close to where dozens more [were found in a mass grave](#) on Wednesday.

Police say the bodies were found yesterday morning, less than a mile from where 25 others were exhumed in Mtangatanga Forest Reserve in the northern district of Mzimba.

A police search of the area around the grave is still being carried out, according to Malawi's minister for homeland security, Jean Sendeza, who visited the site. She said the discoveries were shocking and saddening to the country.

It is believed that the victims were Ethiopian migrants who suffocated as they were being smuggled to the capital, Lilongwe, 150 miles south.

Peter Kalaya, a spokesperson for the Malawi Police Service, said: "Evidence collected at the scene shows that the victims are Ethiopian nationals. Malawi Police Service is currently waiting for a postmortem report from pathologists, which will state the actual cause of death."

He added: “All the victims are male and aged between 25 and 40. Between January and September this year, police intercepted 221 illegal migrants, of which 186 were from Ethiopia. Malawi Police Service urges the public to quickly report to authorities any suspected illegal migrants.”

Pasqually Zulu, a spokesperson for the Department of Immigration and Citizenship Services said the deaths were “heartbreaking and very sad”.

“We’re engaging all partners, including the police, intelligence and medical personnel, to ascertain who they are and what is happening,” he said.

“The reports we’re getting is that some IDs show that those people are from Ethiopia. I can’t shed more light until the investigation is done and we will update the general public after that.”

He said his department had been working to stop people trafficking migrants into Malawi and once those involved were discovered, “the law will take its full course”.

Zulu said criminals were taking advantage of people’s desperation to make fast money. Since August, more than 190 men have been repatriated to Ethiopia.

Earlier this year, one of Malawi’s political parties, United Transformation Movement, suspended its regional secretary after it was alleged she used a party vehicle to transport illegal migrants into the country.

In June this year, more than 500 Ethiopian migrants reported being stranded in the country and pleaded to return home, according to a verification exercise conducted by the Ethiopian authorities with support from the International Organization for Migration (IOM).

Malawi is a transit country for migrants travelling overland to South Africa, known as the “southern route”, which is mainly used by “irregular migrants” from Ethiopia and Somalia looking for economic opportunities.

A study released by IOM in May this year found the route fraught with danger due to the long distance travelled, the multiple border crossings, the

reliance on brokers and the switching of intermediaries along the way.

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[Iran](#)

Iran protests: democracies have ‘moral obligation’ to help, Canada foreign minister says

Mélanie Joly tells meeting of female foreign ministers that they must help ‘amplify the voices of women in Iran’



Iranians protest on 1 October over the death of a 22-year-old woman, Mahsa Amini. Canada’s foreign minister said democracies must help the ‘brave’ protesters. Photograph: AP

[Patrick Wintour](#), diplomatic editor and [Leyland Cecco](#) in Toronto

Thu 20 Oct 2022 21.08 EDT Last modified on Thu 20 Oct 2022 21.09 EDT

Canada’s foreign minister has said democracies have a “moral obligation” to help the “incredibly brave” women taking to the streets of Iran in protest, as she met other female foreign ministers to condemn the ongoing violence that has rocked the country for weeks.

“As women foreign ministers we have a responsibility to help amplify the voices of women in [Iran](#),” Mélanie Joly told a gathering of 14 of her female counterparts, according to a readout of the event provided to the Guardian. “As women leaders from around the world, we can make a powerful statement of support for women’s rights in Iran, and by extension, women’s rights everywhere.”

“Young women, in particular, are challenging Iran’s repression and structural gender inequality. They’re doing so at great risk. The women of Iran are speaking clearly,” said Joly. “No longer will they tolerate the regime’s vision of the role of women in society or how women should dress and behave.”

Canada hosted the meeting to show its solidarity with Iranian women fighting inside the country to rid it of the compulsory hijab and demanding a change to the Iranian regime. [Protests were ignited by the death of Mahsa Amini](#), a young woman who was detained by morality police for “improper” use of the hijab.

Canada, which has a large Iranian diaspora, has sanctioned former foreign minister Javad Zarif and every major Iranian government body, as well as Saeed Mortazavi, the prosecutor who ordered the torture of Zahra Kazemi an Iranian Canadian journalist who died in custody in 2003.

In her remarks, Joly said her government would continue to impose new sanctions against individuals and entities that have participated in, or enabled, human rights abuses.

“We will not stand idly by,” she said.

The meeting also heard from Shirin Ebadi, a lawyer and Nobel laureate, Homa Hoodfar, a Concordia professor emerita once imprisoned in Iran’s Evin prison, and Asa Regner, the UN assistant secretary general.

Ebadi said this week: “For 43 years, people have bottled up all this anger. For 43 years, the regime has turned a deaf ear to the demands of the people, and anyone who said anything against the regime has either ended up in prison or killed or has fled the country.”

Amini, who hailed from Iran's Kurdistan region, died on 16 September after being detained three days earlier by morality police in Tehran for her "inappropriate attire".

Represented at the virtual meeting were the German foreign minister, Annalena Baerbock, as well as 14 foreign ministers from as far apart as Iceland, Libya, Chile and Norway. Catherine Colonna, the French foreign minister, is on a visit to the US and was due to send an official.

One of the calls is for Iran to be thrown off the UN women's committee.

Joly and Baerbock have been two of the foreign ministers trying to craft a feminists foreign policy. The movement suffered a blow this week when the new Swedish coalition government said it was dropping support for the policy that had been closely associated with the now-deposed Ann Linde, the social democrat foreign minister.

Joly was speaking on the day that both the EU and the UK slapped further sanctions on a group of Iranian military said to be instrumental in providing drones for use by Russia in Ukraine.

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