

# The Guardian

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2022.08.22 - 2022.08.28

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## Headlines saturday 27 august 2022

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[Nadhim Zahawi](#)

## People on £45,000 could struggle with bills, says chancellor

Nadhim Zahawi says energy price hike will be ‘really hard’ for middle-earners, as well as society’s most vulnerable



A protest against rising energy bills in London’s Canary Wharf. Photograph: James Manning/PA

*Guardian staff and agency*

Sat 27 Aug 2022 03.21 EDT Last modified on Sat 27 Aug 2022 06.45 EDT

People earning around £45,000 a year, as well as those on benefits, could need government help to pay their energy bills this winter, the chancellor has said.

Great Britain’s energy industry regulator, Ofgem, on Friday [confirmed an 80% rise](#) in the consumer price cap from October that will take a typical household’s gas and electricity bill from £1,971 to £3,549 a year.

In an interview with the Daily Telegraph, [Nadhim Zahawi](#) said things would be “really hard” for middle-earners, as well as society’s most vulnerable.

Every household in England, Scotland and Wales is due to receive a £400 rebate on energy bills in coming months, while those on universal credit and other benefits will receive £650.

Zahawi said: “My concern is there are those who aren’t on benefits. If you are a senior nurse or a senior teacher on £45,000 a year, you’re having your energy bills go up by 80% and will probably rise even higher in the new year – it’s really hard.

“If you’re a pensioner, it’s really hard. So universal credit is a really effective way of targeting, but I’m looking at what else we can do to make sure we help those who really need the help. We’re looking at all the options.”

### [Chart of energy price cap changes](#)

Charities have warned the rise could completely “wipe out” the incomes of poorer households, leaving millions with the threat of bills they cannot pay or the choice between heating and eating this winter.

Zahawi said on Friday that Britons should consider [cutting down on energy use](#) in light of the huge rise in bills they will face given the new energy price cap.

The Tory leadership contenders, Liz Truss and Rishi Sunak, have pledged support but neither have outlined details of how they plan to do this.

'There is war on our continent': chancellor says people should cut energy use – video

The foreign secretary, who is the frontrunner to be the next prime minister, has promised “decisive action” to deliver “immediate support” if she wins the keys to No 10.

However, she has so far been vague about what form this assistance might take besides slashing green levies on energy bills and reversing the controversial national insurance hike.

She has argued it is not “right” to announce her full plan before the contest is over or she has seen all the analysis being prepared in Whitehall.

Her rival, Sunak, has said he will provide additional support targeted at the most vulnerable.

### [Map of energy price ‘crisis hotspots’ in England and Wales](#)

Zahawi has declared he is working “flat out” to draw up options for a plan of action for the next PM so they can “hit the ground running” when they take office in September.

But he refused to rule out freezing the energy cap as suggested by Labour, insisting “nothing is off the table”.

He said: “My concern about it is that it is universal. You’re helping wealthier households, households like mine, where we can withstand the additional pressure of high energy costs, and that takes away from your ability to be resilient over the long term.

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“It would be about £100bn in about 18, 24 months. If I targeted that help, I’d be able to deliver more help to the most vulnerable.”

He also reportedly said he is weighing up potential action to help small firms including Covid-style cuts to VAT and business rates to support the hospitality and leisure sectors.

“If we don’t help those small and medium enterprises, my concern is the scarring effect, the longer-term scarring effect on the economy,” he said.

“So what we did on business rates, what we did on VAT for particular sectors like hospitality. So we’re working up all those options to look at those.

“And of course Liz Truss has talked about removing a moratorium on the green levies for a couple of years. We’re looking at that as well, which will help everyone with about £150.”

#### [Chart showing percentage of poorest to richest households paying for electricity and gas via prepayment meter](#)

Another option on the table is granting large loans to energy suppliers to help cut bills by up to £500 a year, the Daily Telegraph said.

Labour has argued that its own plan to freeze energy bills this winter would save someone on the minimum wage more than £40 a week.

However, the cost of its proposals have been called into question by fact-checkers, who claimed the party had not taken into account that people use more energy in the winter, causing it to underestimate the plan’s price tag by at least £5bn.

Labour sources disputed the charity Full Fact’s analysis and said the party had costed its plans based on consultation with Ofgem.

Ofgem’s chief executive, Jonathan Brearley, said the incoming prime minister and new cabinet should “provide an additional and urgent response to continued surging energy prices”.

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## Energy bills

# Rising energy bills put millions of UK households at risk of winter catastrophe

Experts say 80% price cap increase will plunge people into destitution and cause avoidable deaths



A protests against rising energy bills in London. Photograph: Vuk Valcic/ZUMA Press Wire/REX/Shutterstock

*[Richard Partington](#), [Rowena Mason](#) and [Alex Lawson](#)*

Fri 26 Aug 2022 19.07 EDTFirst published on Fri 26 Aug 2022 13.58 EDT

Millions of households are bracing for a winter catastrophe of rising energy bills that experts say will plunge people into destitution and cause an increase in avoidable deaths without urgent government support.

After Britain's energy industry regulator [confirmed an 80% rise](#) in the consumer price cap from October that will take a typical household's gas

and electricity bill to £3,549 a year, there were stark warnings about its potentially devastating effects.

Charities said the rise would completely “wipe out” the incomes of poorer households, leaving millions with the threat of bills they cannot pay or the choice between heating and eating this winter.

Highlighting the damage to whole sections of the population, analysts at the Joseph Rowntree Foundation said single parents would be forced to hand over almost two-thirds of their income after housing costs to pay energy bills.

The poorest single adults would, they said, see their finances wiped out by “stratospheric” energy bills representing 120% of their income after housing costs, leaving many destitute.

Lives will be lost this winter in energy crisis, says Martin Lewis – video

Condemning inaction by ministers, the consumer champion Martin Lewis [warned “lives will be lost this winter”](#).

The latest rise announced by Ofgem highlighted once again a power vacuum at the heart of government as ministers await the conclusion of the race to replace [Boris Johnson](#) as leader of the Conservative party.

The Conservatives [were in disarray over their response to the price cap on Friday](#), which will mean typical bills will have trebled from a year earlier.

Nadhim Zahawi, the chancellor, suggested people should think about reducing their energy use, but his likely successor, Kwasi Kwarteng, said he was opposed to giving such advice to consumers.

### [Graph of rising price cap](#)

Liz Truss, the frontrunner to be prime minister, also refused to spell out what she would do to help households beyond saying she would “ensure people got the support they needed”, even though Johnson told broadcasters that the next government [would “plainly” have to increase cash “handouts”](#).

The price cap was raised to £1,277 last October and now stands at just under £2,000 after increases this spring. The Russian invasion of Ukraine further added to a dramatic global increase in wholesale oil and gas prices.

Peter Matejic, a chief analyst at the Joseph Rowntree Foundation, said of the October increase: “In all my years as an analyst, I haven’t double-checked a piece of analysis as much as this one because it is so staggering, it feels incorrect.

“It is impossible to think a care worker or a shop assistant will have to scramble to find hundreds more pounds to pay for their heating or that the entirety of someone’s income for a whole year will be less than their energy bill.”

### Map of ‘crisis hotspots’

Criticising Truss for failing to come up with a plan to tackle “catastrophic” energy price rises, Lewis told BBC Radio 4’s Today programme: “If we do not get further government intervention, on top of what was [announced in May](#), then lives will be lost this winter.”

The announcement comes as households attempt to budget for a tough winter, with inflation already above 10% driven by the soaring cost of food in shops and record petrol prices. The Bank of England has forecast the latest rise in energy bills this winter will send inflation to a peak above 13%, while some economists forecast it [could climb to 18% from January](#).

The next cap will be introduced in January. The energy consultancy firm Cornwall Insight on Friday raised its forecasts for that announcement to £5,387, from a previous prediction of £4,650, and increased its estimate for the April cap to £6,616, up from £5,341.

Combined with forecasts for next January, the Resolution Foundation said bills were set to be about £2,277 higher than last year at £3,749 – extra money it said people cannot afford.

Torsten Bell, the chief executive of the thinktank, said: “Winter energy bills are set to average around £500 a month, while prepayment customers will

need to find over £700, more than half their disposable income, to keep the heating on in January alone. These costs pose a serious threat to families' physical and financial health."

### [prepayment meters graphic](#)

Ofgem said it would not give projections for the January measure because the market remains "too volatile" but warned prices "could get significantly worse through 2023". The new cap will affect 24m households – about 85% of the population.

That number includes about 4.5 million prepayment meter customers, who will pay on average an additional £59 a year.

Jonathan Brearley, the chief executive of Ofgem, told Channel 4 News on Friday night that the regulator had had to make "difficult trade-offs" in setting the new price cap. "[It] was designed to do one thing, and that was to make sure that unfair profits aren't charged by those companies that buy and sell energy. And, right now, those profits in that market are 0%," he said.

"What it can't do is it can't say given the cost of the energy that we can force companies to get from customers less than it costs to buy the energy that they need, because otherwise they simply can't buy the energy for those customers."

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**Liz Truss**

**Analysis**

## **Liz Truss taking risk by not announcing energy plan – if she has one**

**Rowena Mason** Deputy political editor

Tory MPs are jittery while Keir Starmer is gaining traction with his plan for a price freeze

- **Tories in disarray over energy crisis**



Liz Truss's leadership campaign has barely reacted to the news about the rising fuel price cap. Photograph: John Sibley/Reuters

Fri 26 Aug 2022 14.00 EDT Last modified on Sat 27 Aug 2022 05.41 EDT

It is the biggest energy crisis for decades, with experts warning that people may freeze to death this winter and many will turn off their heating altogether.

But Liz Truss's leadership campaign has barely reacted to the news that bills will have [almost tripled in a year](#), beyond the vague promise of help to come.

Her strategy seems to be holding her nerve until she gets into power, with aides arguing it would not be right to set out plans to help people without seeing the details.

But even some of Truss's supporters are getting nervous. "What more does she need to see?" says one MP backing her. "Ofgem has published the figures. We can see how bad it's going to be."

With Truss tight-lipped, it is obvious the current incumbents of No 10 and No 11 are itching to say more, despite having promised not to interfere and make policies in the interregnum.

The outgoing prime minister, Boris Johnson, said there would "plainly" have to be cash help for households.

'There is war on our continent': chancellor says people should cut energy use – video

And the outgoing chancellor, Nadhim Zahawi, popped up to say people should cut their energy use but without saying how or by how much.

In contrast, his probable replacement, Kwasi Kwarteng, does not think that is necessary or helpful.

Opposition leaders are always accusing governments [of being "missing in action"](#) but it felt unusually apt on Friday, as no minister or supporter of Truss was available on the early broadcast round to reassure people about how their families and businesses would be able to pay their energy bills.

The absence of a public, coordinated plan for the Conservatives to promote on the airwaves as a consensus response is [getting painful for the party's backbenchers](#), who are getting bombarded with anxious emails from constituents and businesses.

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Some have resorted to making their own policy demands, with one Tory MP, Ben Everitt, calling for direct support for businesses as happened during the pandemic.

All the while, Keir Starmer is gaining traction with his plan for a price freeze. Regardless of any [claims that it is underfunded](#), it is a coherent and understandable response to a problem that is causing deep worry for many people.

Truss and her advisers will have calculated that she will look more in control if she announces an energy plan from the steps of Downing Street. But jittery MPs in her party are beginning to worry that Truss cannot afford this delay in revealing her energy plan – if she has one yet.

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## Conservative leadership

# Tories in disarray over energy crisis as Truss urged to spell out plans to help

Some MPs backing leadership frontrunner showing signs of jitters over lack of response to soaring bills



Liz Truss said she would ‘ensure people get the support needed’ but offered no new suggestions on what would be provided. Photograph: John Sibley/Reuters

*[Rowena Mason](#) and [Aubrey Allegretti](#)*

Fri 26 Aug 2022 13.21 EDT Last modified on Sat 27 Aug 2022 05.44 EDT

The [Conservatives](#) were in disarray over their response to the energy crisis on Friday, with some Tory MPs backing Liz Truss showing signs of jitters over her refusal to spell out how she would help households.

The frontrunner to be prime minister in just over a week’s time said she would “ensure people get the support needed to get through these tough

times” but had no new suggestions about how much or who would get assistance, with the [average energy bill set to hit £3,549](#) from October.

One Conservative MP supporting Truss said they “wanted to see more” and hoped the Ofgem announcement would “sharpen thinking” in her camp, while expressing frustration that her campaign had not relentlessly focused on what to do about energy bills.

Another Tory MP who switched to Truss from another candidate said they felt “disappointed with the lack of focus on what matters to people” and acknowledged they had mostly backed her because she looked likely to win.

A third Truss supporter, Chris Skidmore, wrote an article saying the UK needed to be weaned off gas, despite his favoured candidate backing more North Sea gas and having called overnight for fracking to be exploited in the UK. “Anyone that suggests that our dependence on gas isn’t the problem, or that the solution is more gas, is gaslighting you,” he wrote for [PoliticsHome](#).

After Ofgem’s announcement that the price cap would rise by 80% from October, Truss sent out a statement saying help would be forthcoming but gave no further details and her spokesperson said there would be “nothing more” for the rest of the day.

'There is war on our continent': chancellor says people should cut energy use – video

With little new from the Truss team, Boris Johnson set out his view that his successor [would “plainly” have to act](#) without capping prices for the very richest, while Nadhim Zahawi, the chancellor, said the reality was that “we should all look at our energy consumption”.

The chancellor assured the public that “more help is on its way” and he was “doing the work to make sure that will be in place throughout next year”.

Zahawi’s comments on cutting consumption put him at odds with the official government position set out by Kwasi Kwarteng, the business secretary and Truss’s likely next chancellor, that there is no need for people to reduce their

energy use. No 10 has also said energy usage is a matter of “individual choice”.

Senior Tories are worried about the idea that asking people to use less energy could be viewed as a form of rationing, but officials have already drawn up plans for the next government to consider asking the public to voluntarily use less.

Despite the uncertainty over the plans of the next prime minister, Johnson told broadcasters on Friday that the cash “handouts” were “clearly going to be augmented, increased, by extra cash that the government is plainly going to be announcing in September”.

But he also said energy bills should not be subsidised for everyone. “What I don’t think we should be doing is capping things for absolutely everybody, the richest households in the country,” he said.

“This will go on for a few months and it will go on over the winter,” he added. “And it will be tough – and I’d be very clear about that – but in the end, we are also putting in the measures we need to ensure that we have the energy independence to get through this.”

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The government was accused of being “missing in action” by the Labour leader, Keir Starmer.

He said: “You’ve got a prime minister who insisted on staying in office, recognises there’s a problem with energy prices, shrugs his shoulders and

does nothing about it.

“You’ve got two leadership candidates who are fighting with each other about how appalling they have been in government, but neither has come up with any plan to deal with this problem. Unforgivable.”

Truss has repeatedly been [criticised by her leadership rival, Rishi Sunak](#), for economic plans he claimed would worsen the pain felt by those already living in fuel poverty and others who will be pushed into it.

The former chancellor said pensioners and the most vulnerable would be supported if he became prime minister. “I want them to have certainty that extra help is coming,” he said.

Truss’s plans, which he said amounted to borrowing tens of billions of pounds for unfunded tax cuts, “don’t actually do anything to help the people most in need, risk making inflation worse and put our nation’s finances at risk as well”, he added.

Truss has limited her announcements about support to tax cuts, including reversing the national insurance rise and temporarily suspending green levies on energy bills.

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## 2022.08.27 - Spotlight

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- 'I just wanted my life to end' The mystery of Agatha Christie's disappearance
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## **From rent strikes to free-speech walkouts – how did Durham University become a frontline of the UK's culture wars?**



Durham Castle and the River Wear. All photographs: Gary Calton/The Guardian

Durham has become the focus of anger from both sides of the political spectrum. Students and academics try to explain why its campus skirmishes keep spilling out into the tabloids



[Zoe Williams](#)

[@zoesqwilliams](#)

Sat 27 Aug 2022 05.00 EDT

It was 3 December 2021, and South College, Durham University, was having its Christmas formal. “Formals happen every week here,” says Miatta Pemberton (not her real name), who is in her second year at the college. “It’s a longstanding Durham thing. You put on a gown that cost £60, or, if you’re like me, you buy it off eBay for £20.” For a special occasion, it would be normal to have a speaker and announce them in advance. By 5pm, the speaker hadn’t been announced, and Pemberton found out who it was by chance from the college’s vice-principal, Lee Worden. She couldn’t immediately place the person; she just knew she’d heard the name “for all the wrong reasons”.

About 15 to 20 students more familiar with Rod Liddle’s work in the Spectator and the Sunday Times (sample headline on one of his columns from 2018: [“I’m identifying as a young, black, trans chihuahua”](#)), walked

out before he'd started speaking. As they did so, Tim Luckhurst, the college principal who had invited Liddle, shouted: "[At South College, we value freedom of speech,](#)" and "Pathetic!". So the mood wasn't great, but there were still upwards of 180 students in the hall as Liddle stood up to speak. He began by saying he was disappointed not to see any sex workers there, a reference to a controversy from the previous month, when the students' union was attacked for offering safety training to students involved in sex work. The story was picked up by the tabloid press, which mobilised the opinion wing of the Daily Mail, which then brought in the then further education minister, Michelle Donelan, who accused the union of "legitimising a dangerous industry which thrives on the exploitation of women". If you were a culture-war correspondent looking for the frontline, you'd go to Durham: it is where things kick off.



Students express their views. All photographs: Gary Calton/The Guardian

Liddle continued his speech: "A person with an X and a Y chromosome, that has a long, dangling penis, is scientifically a man, and that is pretty much, scientifically, the end of the story." "Which is objectively a weird thing to hear when you're trying to eat," says Pemberton. At this point a further 20 or so students walked out and missed the bit about colonialism not being "remotely the major cause of Africa's problems", and Liddle's contention that structural racism has nothing to do with educational underachievement

among British people of Caribbean descent. Speaking to me over the phone from his home in the Pennines, Liddle says his point was: “We’ve got not to be scared of other people’s opinions, no matter what they are. There are things I believe in, which you almost certainly won’t. We think the same thing – transgender people have a right to dignity and respect. We just disagree on whether they’re biologically a man.”

Luckhurst and Liddle have a friendship dating from the mid-80s, when they worked in adjoining rooms on the shadow cabinet corridor in Westminster, writing speeches for Labour MPs. “The left has always been our enemy,” says Liddle; and it’s true that long before “wokeness” existed, before cancellation was a culture, even before its ancestor “political correctness” was born, the party of the left has been at war over who was the right kind of left. Both men then worked for Radio 4’s Today programme, Luckhurst going on to become editor of news programmes at BBC Scotland, and later, briefly, editor of the Scotsman. When he became an academic in 2007, he had an august CV in both print and broadcast media, and quite a wonky, old-school passion for news values. Free-speech provocations don’t seem to be his primary interest, though his and Liddle’s self-fashioning as thorns in the side of pearl-clutching liberals is at the centre of their friendship.

A lot of people have been made to feel like feminist killjoys if they’re open about the issues in their college

The two men differed on something, though: Liddle had no problem with students walking out, nor with the fact that the ones who remained sat in silence when he finished. “Apparently they’re all meant to stand at the end, and they didn’t. I thought, frankly, who gives a fuck?” By contrast, Luckhurst was upset that they hadn’t listened respectfully. After the dinner, scenes ensued, culminating in Luckhurst telling a student (off-camera) that they shouldn’t be at university, and his wife, Dorothy, shouting: “Arse, arse, arse, arse, arse – you’re not allowed to say ‘arse’, apparently,” and asking students what they were so frightened of.

It was all a bit Animal Farm – looking from face to face, trying to recall which ones are the stoics and which the snowflakes. Which ones are the

grownups and which the kids? Who's trying to cancel who? And why is it such catnip to the rightwing press?

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The South College debacle, and the sex worker training “scandal” before it, along with the many headlines and thinkpieces they generated, were just a typical season in Durham’s culture-war calendar. From the university’s Bullingdon-style social clubs, the rightwing provocations are reliably eyebrow-raising: in 2017, the Trevelyan rugby club staged a [“Thatcher versus the miners” pub crawl](#), while five years earlier, St Cuthbert’s rugby club had an event where guests dressed as Jimmy Savile. In 2021 a Durham student posted a clip of a white man blacked up to dress as Kanye West (though an investigation found that he wasn’t a student at the university). Periodically, there’ll be a leak of WhatsApp or Facebook messages containing sometimes hair-raising misogyny (it was alleged that one informal group launched a competition in 2020 to see who could [“fuck the poorest fresher”](#)) or enough outright neo-nazism to see established groups – the Durham University Conservative Association (DUCA), along with its Free Market Association (DUFMA) – closed down, [as they were in 2020](#).



‘If you want anybody to talk to the issues that you care about, you have to rile them up,’ says Labour Club member Niall Hignett. ‘Loads of rich kids just don’t get it.’

On the left, the actions are those you'd recognise from any undergraduate arena: climate marches, usually small in scale; racial awareness training; pressure to decolonise the curriculum. In the case of the sex worker training, "loads of unis have it", says Niall Hignett, a leftwing campaigner at South College. "Students are doing it because of their financial situation. Giving them support and advice wasn't encouraging it – it was trying to make sure they were safe." In the topsy-turvy world with which we should now probably be familiar, it's this rather muted leftwing activism that generates most of the "wither intellectual freedom?" debate in the Spectator and among Conservative MPs and ministers; the Daily Mail will cover absolutely anything, left or right, so long as it happens in Durham. The academic William Davies, at Goldsmiths, has noted that this fascination stems from perhaps [the fundamental battle of the culture wars](#): who has the right to narrate British identity – newspapers or universities?

Durham University finds the coverage frustrating, and says it doesn't reflect the campus experience at all. Professors and post-grads describe an atmosphere very like the general student population: broadly progressive in stance. One member of the Durham People of Colour Association says, tellingly, that when they have been subject to abuse, it's been keyboard warriors coming at them "because of the Daily Mail misquoting things, or misrepresenting us in biased ways". But how does a university become a hotbed for these extreme political schisms? Is it all a media confection and, if it isn't, why does anyone go there?

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As soon as I step off the train for the first time, in April, I am hit by that very distinctive atmosphere of a place that can seem entirely its university – from the demographic (everyone seems to be 18 or 45), to the town planning, which drives you towards the colleges, to the lack of regular retail outlets and proliferation of tea shops. It even smells like students. Josh Freestone, 19, in his second year studying philosophy and politics, is in the Durham University Labour Club, and describes both his and its politics as to the "left of the Labour party – Corbynite". The Liddle event distilled for him a sense of disillusionment: "I very much believe the students are the beating heart of the university, but there's been very little attempt to centre us."

The university is informally divided into Hill (10 colleges outside the dead centre, either side of Elvet Hill, mostly built since the 1960s – South College was built in 2020); and Bailey (five colleges clustered around the cathedral, built in the 1800s or very early 1900s).



Josh Freestone describes his and the Labour Club's politics as Corbynite

The Bailey area is overwhelmed by signs saying “private”. Stand still for one second and some officious retiree will try to give you directions – one makes me wait while she tells a tourist about the cathedral, and I have to listen to her yawning on about St Cuthbert, when I never asked for directions in the first place. When you’re used to an urban environment, in which the baseline assumption is that space is public unless it’s somebody’s house, it’s hard to overstate how irritating this is, but it also must feel quite containing if you’re from a boarding school. The Hill area has nothing but colleges. Max Kendix, now 20 and in his final year, is the ex-editor of the student newspaper *Palatinate*, and at University College, known as “Castle”. He’s skinny, droll, serious-minded, incredibly nice: I’d first met him in the holidays in London, where he’s from. He says: “I lived on the main street in Bailey in my first year, and I’d be woken every Friday night by a crowd of people, a huge crowd, running down from the Hill shouting, ‘If you live on the Bailey you’re a cunt.’ But the irony is that we wouldn’t do the same. We’d never go to the Hill. There’s nothing there.” Apart from the freestyling

tour guides, there's very little sense of town versus gown, because there's almost nothing in either the centre or the Hill that isn't gown-related.

The university as a whole has the highest proportion of privately educated students in the country, at [nearly 40%](#), and the Bailey colleges, particularly Hatfield, have the most intense concentration of students from a small clutch of boarding schools. Sophie Corcoran, a Durham student and a maverick rightwinger with an already significant profile on GB News and talkRadio (I speak to her over the phone as she is still at home in Thurrock), says: “A lot of people who don’t necessarily know each other from school, know of one another from school.” Corcoran is extremely opinionated on social media (anti-immigrant, anti-benefit-claimant, anti-trans). A slip recently, where a separate account replied as if they were her, suggests that her online profile may be a group effort – not exactly a sockpuppet account, since she is definitely real; more of a sock chorus. There is no issue on which she cannot summon a callous view, but one-to-one she has a kind of studs-first life force. I wouldn’t be surprised if, one day, she flipped the other way politically, but maybe that’s wishful thinking.



Even maverick rightwinger Sophie Corcoran claims men in the rightwing societies only welcome women if they can sleep with them

Figures like Corcoran are marginal in student politics, as she readily admits: she gained no traction when she stood for election to the students' union – “I had more chance of winning North Korea than Durham students' union,” she says blithely – and has no foothold in its rightwing political scene, whose members, she says, “only like women there if they can sleep with them. If you have an opinion, they hate you.” Besides, she says, they're all on drugs. “If working-class people like us did drugs like they do, we'd be called crackheads. It's a completely different story with rich people.”

Much more influential than any nebulous cultural atmosphere is the lack of diversity, in the Bailey colleges particularly. Kendix describes one Hatfield tradition: “They were the last college to let women in, and when they were voting on it, the JCR [junior common room, which is the student body in a college] voted against. This was the ... 80s. The authorities at the college went ahead with it anyway, and as a form of protest the students started banging their spoons against the tables at the start of formals. That's now a tradition. Every formal starts with that – the girls do it, too.”

Can you draw a straight line from people banging spoons to mourn the decline of male supremacy to an alleged competition to see who could “fuck the poorest fresher”? It's hard to say, and I don't know that the behaviour reflects attitudes that are real; sometimes these Durham scandals feel manufactured as debate points for an insatiable media.

Katie Anne Tobin is a PhD student who became involved in activism around sexual violence when she was an undergraduate at Sussex. Durham is a mixed picture, she says: in the university as a whole, there are figures like Clarissa Humphreys and Graham Towl working tirelessly to root out sexual violence in higher education settings, having authored a [Good Practice Guide](#) that's well respected nationally. Yet Tobin says the collegiate system often thwarts the university's efforts: “The colleges create their own policy, they execute their own discipline, and they've got their own reputations to maintain. I know a lot of people who have been made to feel like feminist killjoys if they're open about the issues in their college. The whisper networks are insidious.”



PhD student Katie Anne Tobin Durham thinks the collegiate system thwarts the university's efforts to tackle sexual violence

Plus, the lack of diversity definitely tells in the student experience. In 2020, Lauren White compiled [A Report on Northern Student Experience at Durham University](#), after being relentlessly mocked for having grown up in Gateshead, 15 miles away. The report quotes one student as saying: “In the college dining hall I have been called a ‘dirty northerner’, and a ‘chav’ ... A fellow student asked me: ‘Are you going to take the spare food home to feed your family?’”

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According to Kendix: “You’re more likely to meet someone from the same London borough as you than you are to meet someone from a different county.” Pemberton says, “You won’t have someone hurling insults at you day to day. But you feel it. You walk into a room thinking: why do I feel so on edge? Oh, I’m the only brown person in a room full of 200 people.”

The university points to its efforts in this area – there’s a programme to support black-heritage students, a number of scholarships available to state school students, particularly in the north-east. In 2010/11, [79.9%](#) of Durham’s student intake was white. In 2020/21, it was [67.6%](#). Its efforts may have been hampered somewhat by the collegiate structure, since colleges make their own individual decisions about intake and convention.

One English professor, who I’ll call Sanders, says of the Liddle debacle: “This is the sort of thing that makes me unhappy. South College is our newest college. You can build a culture from the ground up, and he [Luckhurst] built a college with a high table and a Latin grace. When we’re not thinking on our feet, we fall into these old habits.” Sanders is speaking to me in their sprawling, book-messy faculty room, a David Lodge-style picture of the idealised academic life. They are in their early 50s, take seriously the decolonisation of the curriculum – “if anyone came out of my classes thinking the moral impact of the British empire was railways, I wouldn’t have done my job” – and only want to be anonymous for professional courtesy reasons, not because they see themselves as a besieged wokey. As for the culture as a whole, Durham does, Sanders says, “have some posh boys who behave really badly. We probably have a higher percentage than the University of Salford, say. Often the picture is not wrong, but it’s very partial.”

Part of this institution’s failure to dramatically improve diversity, Sanders speculates, is risk-aversion due to anxiety about keeping their Russell Group status: they were only admitted in 2012, it’s quite hard to cling on without a medical school, and that went to Newcastle when the two universities separated in 1963. “When I first arrived,” Sanders says, “the rhetoric was: ‘the group of large universities with medical schools who call themselves the Russell Group’. Once we got admitted, it was ‘the elite universities known as the Russell Group’.”

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I meet Niall Hignett in the shared kitchen of his student halls at South College; the summer term is just beginning, and the windows across the campus are still studded with Post-it notes, reading “Bin Tim”, “Transphobes are not welcome here Tim”, “Eat the rich” and “Council college”. Hignett is a member of the Labour Club and the Working-Class Students’ Association, and president of Durham Against Rough Sleeping; he is relaxed, very funny, indefatigable. He comes from an estate in Cheshire – “new-build social housing, which is really tacky. So to me this felt like luxury” – and has been a bete noire of the rightwing press due to the protests he organised after that Christmas formal. He finds this amusing – showing me photos the Telegraph took of him, in which they try to make him look like an unsmiling, incredibly large-chinned trade unionist – and very useful.

For Hignett, the “purposefully provocative” culture war stuff is mainly driven by the myopia of privilege. “If you’ve only ever been a public school and been surrounded by people who are like you, you’ve never really experienced enough of the world to know that running around dressed as Jimmy Savile is … it’s not offensive, I don’t even know how to describe it. When you’re on the doorstep of mining communities who were ravaged by Thatcherism, and you’re dressing up as Thatcher – there’s micro-aggression and there’s aggression-aggression.” But he uses these flashpoints to his advantage: when he organised the protests against Liddle’s speech, it was reported by the Daily Mail, as well as the Times and on GB News, with an almost audible eyeball roll (“Now Durham students threaten a rent strike over Rod Liddle”). It was misleading, but it was also true: Hignett had devised, with open consultation, [a list of demands](#), one of which was a rent freeze. Many were about money rather than hate speech or inclusion. This was deliberate and strategic: it is quite hard to mobilise students who are mainly affluent on matters such as establishing a guarantor scheme (if your parents aren’t homeowners, you need to pay a large deposit to guarantee your private rental agreement; basically a tax on not being middle-class).

“If you want anybody to talk to the issues that you care about, you have to rile them up,” Hignett says. “Loads of rich kids just don’t get it, and the ones who aren’t rich are too ashamed to talk about it. But they understand trans rights. With cultural-issue protests, we just get more people.” There were also demands to proscribe hate speech on campus, and set up a hate-speech committee, and those were, Hignett admits, “bait for the rightwing press”;

when you're trying to pressurise an institution, the real battle is to make yourself impossible to ignore.



Max Kendix and Poppy Askham, ex-editors of Durham's student newspaper, Palatinate

While Hignett and I are talking, Tim Luckhurst is outside, doing a tour for what look like parents of prospective students. I mean, everything looks desultory in the rain, but there is a sad, slightly shifty atmosphere when I walk past, as Luckhurst describes the amenities and the tour group studiously avert their eyes from all the Post-it notes that want to bin him.

The protests, which ran throughout December 2021 and January 2022, drew an unusual, even unprecedented, number of students. "Durham is a lot less politically engaged than most universities," says Poppy Askham, another former editor of Palatinate. "If half the things that happen at Durham happened in Manchester, they'd be protesting all the time." Kendix remembers that the first protest at South College had "over 300 people". By contrast, "a climate change protest would have maybe 15 people". While it was reported as fact by the [Mail on Sunday](#) that the "silent majority" supported Luckhurst, a student pollster colleague of Kendix's at Palatinate found that 80% of students wanted him to leave.

But never mind “silent majority” – if there were any students at all on Luckhurst’s side, why were there no counterprotests, no “free speech” demos, no “Leave Liddle Alone” placards? It turns out that when DUCA and DUFMA were effectively disbanded in September 2020, and removed from the Durham students’ union group register, their funding was withdrawn and they were no longer allowed to use the university’s name in their title. It was a decision made by the students’ union, supported by the university. “It was all lumped together with ‘Durham cancelling Tories’,” says Kendix, who covered it for Palatinate. “But it doesn’t fit that narrative at all. We’re talking about neo-nazism, essentially.”

Interventions from Conservatives transform Durham’s rightwing outbursts from pranks into moments of real consequence

WhatsApp messages between key members of the groups had been leaked, and revealed a cesspit, sorry, “culture” where old-fashioned nazism met new, [4chan](#)-adjacent violent misogyny, Holocaust denial and [white replacement theory](#), to create a conversation too extreme for the student newspaper to print, and actually too extreme, mainly on racist and antisemitic grounds, for the Guardian to print, either. (A sidebar on the resilience, or perceived lack of it, in this generation: Kendix is Jewish, and had to wade through this swill. He laughs out loud when I ask him if he’d requested any pastoral support; life is actually quite tough at the free speech frontier, but students, in the main, are tougher.)

In the investigation that led to DUFMA and DUCA being shut down, one of the students involved was expelled for three years, which was reduced to one year on appeal, and then overturned altogether. The Conservative MP Richard Holden celebrated the exoneration as he addressed a reformed Conservative group, the Durham University Conservative Society, saying: “For too long we’ve seen free speech being eroded at our universities and colleges. I’ll always stand up for academic freedom and against those who want to impose … their unsubstantiated worldview as unquestionable fact.”



These interventions from Conservatives transform Durham's rightwing outbursts from attention-seeking pranks into moments of real consequence. Each fresh event is addressed by the government as an issue of free speech, which has become elided with "academic freedom"; as absurd as it sounds, it is now in defence of academe that former minister Michelle Donelan sought to enshrine in law the right of any staff member or visitor to voice "controversial or unpopular opinions without placing themselves at risk of being adversely affected". In April 2022, a motion was passed in the Commons to enable the [free speech bill](#) to pass over into the next session of parliament. Donelan – yes, the same person who objected to sex-work training – celebrated that, should the bill pass, "universities, including their student unions, will face fines for engaging with or supporting cancel culture". What this means is that there would be an actual financial penalty for walking out of a speech by Rod Liddle, a notion that even he, I feel sure, would find hilarious.

Since the publication of God and Man at Yale, the seminal 1951 work by US conservative commentator [William F Buckley](#) Jr, the right has had the stated intent of "depoliticising" tertiary education. It's not a realistic goal: you can't go to any country's epicentre of thought and reading and expect it not to take a view on politics. But underneath that is a more concrete agenda. Even in the 50s, but in a much more pronounced way now, the two factors

predicting progressive leanings are youth, and being educated to degree level. For the right, tertiary education has to be presented as a site of live conflict, a vivid fight between left and right, or the gig's up.

Tim Luckhurst was temporarily “barred from duties” after Rod Liddle’s speech while an investigation took place, and those findings were kept private. A statement from the acting vice-chancellor and provost, Antony Long, insisted that “the University does not intend, in any way, to exclude any speakers from our campus”. Yet he also said that “no member of our University community should be subjected to transphobia, homophobia, racism, classism and sexism”. The university has a pretty reflexive understanding of the difference between free speech and hate speech, but the battles, amplified on the national stage, picked apart in newspapers and crowbarred into legislation, have blowback. It’s salient that not one woman of colour would use her real name for this piece. Mal Lee, 25, studying for a postgraduate degree in biology, is president of the LGBT+ association and identifies as trans masculine. Lee describes a trans femme friend having projectiles and abuse hurled at her; Alisha (not her real name), 21, is biracial and was with a black friend when they were both chased down the street by men making monkey noises. Lee didn’t report it because “we just expect it”. Alisha didn’t because “to be honest, I’m quite exhausted”. Neither thinks their assailants were other students, just passing bigots, empowered to act by a wider narrative that has made university life in Durham its emblem.

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## ‘I just wanted my life to end’: the mystery of Agatha Christie’s disappearance



Illustration: Eleanor Shakespeare

In 1926 the world’s bestselling author vanished for 11 days. Did she really go into hiding to frame her husband for murder? Historian Lucy Worsley

reopens a case still shrouded in mystery

[Lucy Worsley](#)

Sat 27 Aug 2022 04.00 EDT Last modified on Sat 27 Aug 2022 05.54 EDT

Agatha Christie was sitting quietly on a train when she overheard a stranger saying her name. In the carriage, she said, were “two women discussing me, both with copies of my paperback editions on their knees”. They had no idea of the identity of their fellow passenger, and proceeded to discuss the most famous author in the world. “I hear,” said one of the ladies, “she drinks like a fish.”

I love this story because it sums up so much about [Agatha Christie’s](#) life. They both had her paperbacks. Of course they did. [Christie wrote](#) more than 80 books, outsold only by Shakespeare and the Bible, so the cliche runs. And she wasn’t just a novelist, either: she remains history’s most performed female playwright. She was so successful people think of her as an institution, not as a breaker of new ground. But she was both.

And then, in the railway carriage, there’s the watchful presence of Christie herself, unnoticed. Yes, she was easy to overlook, as is the case with nearly any woman past middle age. But she deliberately played on the fact that she seemed so ordinary. It was a public image she carefully crafted to conceal her real self.

If the women on the train had asked her profession, she’d have said she had none. When an official form required her to put down what she did, the woman who is estimated to have sold 2bn copies always wrote “housewife”. Despite her gigantic success, she retained her perspective as an outsider and onlooker. She sidestepped a world that tried to define her.

When I told people I was writing about Christie, their first questions were often about the 11 dramatic days in 1926 when she “disappeared” at the height of her writing career, causing a nationwide hunt for her corpse. It’s a mystery that has obsessed her fans ever since.

By this stage, Christie was already a celebrity. The Murder of Roger Ackroyd, her ingenious masterpiece, had just been published and her literary agent was pushing for a follow-up. There were photos of her in the Daily Mail, a new publishing contract with William Collins and a £500 advance for serial rights to The Man in the Brown Suit that paid for a Morris Cowley car.

Christie's husband confessed that he was in love with someone else – and he wanted a divorce

But by December 1926, her marriage to Archie Christie was in trouble. She herself, she later wrote, was “at the beginning of a nervous breakdown”. The couple had moved to a grand 12-bedroom house in Sunningdale, Berkshire, which they named Styles, but Archie was often absent and Agatha was increasingly unhappy there. The death of her beloved mother, and Archie’s unsympathetic response (he didn’t even go to the funeral), had strained their relationship almost to breaking point when Archie confessed that he was in love with someone else – a young woman called Nancy Neele – and wanted a divorce.

It has often been claimed that Christie went into hiding in order to frame her husband for her murder. Was this true? It’s also frequently said that Christie remained silent about this notorious incident for the rest of her life. But that’s incorrect, and I’ve pieced together the surprising number of statements she did in fact make about it.

What Christie said has the unfortunate effect of sounding like one of her novels, in which the “[loss of memory](#)” plot would feature time and time again. But her writings about her life have had this novelising tendency all along. It doesn’t mean she is lying.

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“I just wanted my life to end,” she explained. “All that night I drove aimlessly about ... In my mind there was the vague idea of ending everything. I drove automatically down roads I knew ... to Maidenhead, where I looked at the river. I thought about jumping in, but realised that I

could swim too well to drown ... then back to London again, and then on to Sunningdale. From there I went to Newlands Corner."

She was tired; she was in deep distress. At last, she put into action a vague plan that had occupied her thoughts for the previous 24 hours.

"When I reached a point in the road which I thought was near the quarry I had seen in the afternoon, I turned the car off the road down the hill towards it. I left the wheel and let the car run. The car struck something with a jerk and pulled up suddenly. I was flung against the steering wheel and my head hit something."

Christie's car was found lodged in a hedge, its front wheels "over the edge of the chalk pit". Had it not been for the hedge, "the car would have plunged over and been smashed to pieces". It seems that Christie shocked herself into realising that whatever happened, life was worth living.

And so, dazed, distressed, but alive, she got out of her car. With injuries from the impact to her head and chest, she walked through the wintry countryside in a dreamlike state. She was reborn. "Up to this moment I was Mrs Christie," she explains. Now, she had sloughed off the past like a dead skin. Only that way could she survive. She abandoned her car and walked away, out of her old life. This was the action that would leave her family, friends and the police absolutely flummoxed.

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For a long time, people investigating Christie's disappearance have tended towards one of two positions. One is that, in the days after the crash, she was experiencing the specific condition of dissociative fugue – a state brought on by trauma and stress, in which you literally forget who you are. The alternative position is that she was faking it, even trying to frame Archie for killing her. Only one thing can be said for certain: on Saturday 4 December 1926, and for some days thereafter, Christie experienced a distressing episode of mental illness, brought on by the trauma of the death of her mother and the breakdown of her marriage. She lost her way of life and her sense of self.

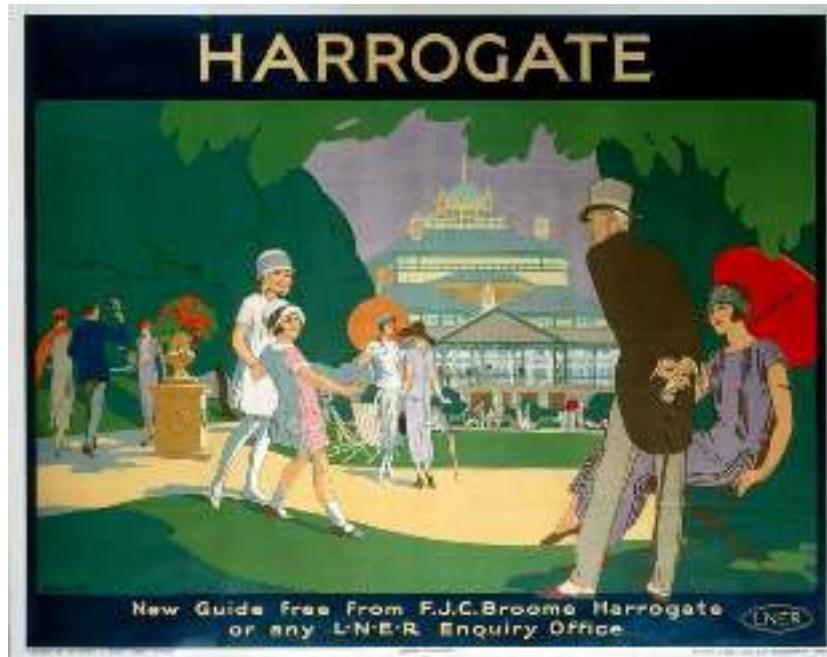
Christie reported that on the Saturday morning, while police were investigating her abandoned car, she had 'lost her memory'

So what should we believe? Christie reported that on that Saturday morning, while the police were investigating her abandoned car, she had “lost her memory”. With the help of a psychotherapist, she would later begin to put together a narrative of the movements she had blanked out. “I remember arriving at a big railway station,” she recalled, eventually, “and being surprised to learn it was Waterloo.”

“It is strange,” she said, that “the railway authorities there did not recall me, as I was covered with mud and I had smeared blood on my face from a cut on my hand.”

Christie’s mind began to protect itself from further pain by inventing a new identity. “I had now become in my mind Mrs Teresa Neele of South Africa,” she says. Someone who had the same surname as Archie’s lover, someone who came from a place where she and Archie had been happy. “You can’t write your fate,” Christie would say, years later, but “you can do what you like with the characters you create”. So she created a new character for herself, a character as which she could do what she wanted. What she wanted most of all was to escape from the unbearable life of Mrs Christie.

“Teresa Neele” went to King’s Cross and bought a ticket for the spa resort of Harrogate.



‘She changed her name, went to King’s Cross and bought a ticket to the spa resort of Harrogate.’ Photograph: Science & Society Picture Library/SSPL/Getty Images

The winter light must have faded by the time her train arrived. She took a taxi to a hotel, apparently picked at random, called the Hydropathic. She’d always liked the anonymity of hotels, where she’d often stayed, alone, writing.

Christie arrived with no suitcase, but explained she had recently come from South Africa and had left her luggage with friends. She gave her name as Mrs Teresa Neele, signing the register in her usual handwriting.

Mr W Taylor, the hotel’s manager, stated later that his guest took a “good room on the first floor, fitted with hot and cold water”. The price of seven guineas a week caused her no hesitation: “She seemed to have as much money as she wanted.”

Christie’s room was serviced by a young chambermaid named Rosie Asher, who seems to have kept a particularly close eye on her. Asher spotted that “Mrs Neele” had brought hardly anything with her. But she was desperate for her life to unfold in an orderly fashion. So she went down for dinner, and even took part in the evening’s dancing. The guests, who were also referred to as “patients”, embraced this single woman in their midst. “I danced with Mrs Christie the evening she arrived,” one of them said later. “She does the Charleston, but not very well.”

Christie seemed to enjoy her life in limbo. Her chambermaid noted that on Sunday, while police were searching the Surrey Downs for her, or her body, she “slept until 10am, had breakfast in bed and then went out”.

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On Monday morning, Asher noticed Christie had the “London newspaper taken up with breakfast in bed”. It would have been hard to avoid the story about Mrs Christie’s disappearance, but she somehow managed to set the knowledge aside. She began to equip herself with a new wardrobe. Later that day, after a visit to the shops, packages began to be delivered to her room: “new hat, coat, evening shoes, books and magazines, pencil and fruit, and various toilet requisites”.

People noticed that she usually had a book in her hand. She’d been to the WH Smith Library in Parliament Street, where the librarian “gathered from her selections that she had a taste for novels of sensation and mystery”.

Hotel staff would report that ‘she has made a number of friends’ – she played billiards and even sang aloud

That evening, Christie came down to dinner in a proper evening dress, with a new “fancy scarf”. Hotel staff would report that “she has made a number of friends”. She played billiards and even sang aloud. Miss Corbett, the hotel’s entertainment hostess, spotted that “Mrs Neele” still had the price – 75 shillings – pinned to her new shawl. “Is that all you are worth?” asked one of the guests. “I think I am worth more than that,” was her answer.

At the Hydro, people were beginning to suspect who “Mrs Neele” really was. After all, on Tuesday 7 December, a portrait had appeared on the Daily Express’s front page. The resemblance was unmissable. “When she had been here about four days,” recalled the hotel’s manager, “my wife said to me: ‘I believe that lady is Mrs Christie!’” Mr Taylor thought his wife was being “absurd”, but she wasn’t the only one to have worked it out.

The following day the Westminster Gazette reported that no fewer than 300 police officers and special constables had taken part in a search in Surrey. They were pretty certain they were hunting for a corpse.

But Christie was oblivious. Life was much better now. "As Mrs Neele," she said later, "I was very happy and contented."

"At Harrogate," she said, "I read every day about Mrs Christie's disappearance ... I regarded her as having acted stupidly." A fellow guest remembered her saying that "Mrs Christie is a very elusive person. I cannot be bothered with her." Also, according to this witness, Christie was beginning to show signs of mental distress. She "would press her hand to her forehead and say: 'It is my head. I cannot remember.'"

Meanwhile Archie, stressed and terrified that his infidelity would be revealed by the papers, had made an awful mistake. He had given an ill-advised interview to the Daily Mail. Perhaps hoping to divert attention away from Nancy Neele, he introduced the idea that maybe his wife had *deliberately* disappeared.



Christie in the news. Photograph: Hulton Archive/Getty Images

"My wife," he'd said to a reporter, "had discussed the possibility of disappearing at will ... engineering a disappearance had been running through her mind, probably for the purpose of her work. Personally, I feel that is what happened."

And he now defended himself against the charge that he'd been a bad husband: “

It is absolutely untrue to suggest that there was anything in the nature of a row or a tiff between my wife and myself on Friday morning ... I strongly deprecate introducing any tittle-tattle into this matter ... ”

Readers must have thought he protested far too much.

On the morning of Saturday 11 December, the Telegraph carried a big advert for a forthcoming serialisation of *The Murder on the Links*. It was trumpeted as the work of “Agatha Christie the Missing Novelist”. These were obviously the words of Christie’s publishers, not Christie herself. But readers could be forgiven for thinking the author was somehow cashing in on her new notoriety.

The author herself had had enough of reading the papers. At the Hydro, on the Sunday morning, no newspaper was taken up to the bedroom.

On the Tuesday, the Daily Mail ran an editorial. If Christie were alive, its writer argued, “she must be ready to inflict intense anxiety on her relatives and heavy expenditure on the public” in “a heartless practical joke”.



In the spotlight ... Agatha Christie became a new kind of media celebrity.  
Photograph: Granger Historical Picture Archive/Alamy

Unfortunately for Christie's lasting reputation, many of her biographers, notably her male ones, have been as heavily invested in this narrative as the male police officers and journalists who made it into such a sensation at the time. "She set out deliberately – the facts shout it – to throw murder suspicion upon her husband," says one of these writers.

From there, the idea has spread into films and novels. The milder have her down as a woman wronged, with an understandable desire for revenge. The more extreme – notably the feature film *Agatha*, made in 1979 – present her as the would-be murderer of Nancy Neele. And so the injustice has been perpetuated.

It's time to do something radical: to listen to what Christie says, to understand she had a range of experiences unhelpfully labelled as "loss of memory", and, perhaps most importantly, when she says she was suffering, to believe her.

Unbeknown to the police and public who were looking for her in Surrey, matters in Yorkshire were moving swiftly towards a denouement. That Sunday evening, two men went to Harrogate police station to report their suspicion that Mrs Christie was staying in the hotel where they worked.

Christie's "disappearance" had the impact it did because of the 1920s context that saw a new kind of media celebrity being created. She wasn't alone in becoming an author-as-celebrity. It may have been accidental, and deeply unpleasant, but it would also become a central plank of her massive success.

Agatha Christie: A Very Elusive Woman by Lucy Worsley is published by Hodder & Stoughton. To support the Guardian and Observer, order your copy at [guardianbookshop.com](https://guardianbookshop.com). Delivery charges may apply.

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## **Adrian Dunbar: ‘My biggest disappointment is not coming from a class that understands how the world works’**

[Rosanna Greenstreet](#)



Adrian Dunbar: ‘One day the Tories will not be in power.’ Photograph: Karen Robinson/The Guardian

The Line of Duty star on being impetuous, his red-faced moment in a swimming pool and why he’d like to be Davina McCall

Sat 27 Aug 2022 04.30 EDT

Born in Northern Ireland, [Adrian Dunbar](#), 64, studied at the Guildhall School of Music & Drama. His early films include My Left Foot (1989) and The Crying Game (1992). He co-wrote and starred in Hear My Song, which was Bafta-nominated for best screenplay and won best comedy film at the 1992 British Comedy awards. In 2012 he was cast as Superintendent Ted Hastings in Jed Mercurio’s BBC drama Line of Duty which has run for six seasons. He stars in ITV’s new detective series Ridley. Married with a daughter and stepson, he lives in London.

**When were you happiest?**

My first year of drama school: a sense of freedom, doing something I wanted to do and being with lovely people.

**What is your greatest fear?**

Drowning.

**What is the trait you most deplore in yourself?**

Being a bit mean now and again, too impetuous, snappy, bit of a temper.

**What is the trait you most deplore in others?**

Needless aggression and bullying.

**What was your most embarrassing moment?**

When I was 10, I dived off the high board in the local swimming pool and my trunks came off on the way down.

**What has been your biggest disappointment?**

Not having come from a class that understands how the world works.

**Describe yourself in three words**

Tenacious, energetic, empathetic.

**What did you want to be when you were growing up?**

A grownup.

**What makes you unhappy?**

Meanness and bullying.

**What do you most dislike about your appearance?**

I'm not very happy with my beer belly.

**What is your most unappealing habit?**

Overconfidence and bringing too much to the party.

**What scares you about getting older?**

Death.

**Who is your celebrity crush?**

Carol Vorderman.

**What is the worst thing anyone's said to you?**

You've had so many chances.

**Would you choose fame or anonymity?**

Anonymity.

**What was the last lie you told?**

I've forgotten – so I am not a good liar.

**What is your guiltiest pleasure?**

Drink.

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**What does love feel like?**

Custard.

**Have you ever said ‘I love you’ without meaning it?**

Absolutely.

**Which words/phrases do you overuse?**

Sound.

**What is the worst job you’ve done?**

Working in an abattoir.

**If not yourself, who would you most like to be?**

I’d really like to be Davina McCall. She’s admirable and she stays so fit.

**How often do you have sex?**

Not as often as I used to.

**What single thing would improve the quality of your life?**

If I was 40 again.

**What has been your closest brush with the law?**

Line of Duty.

**Would you rather have more sex, money or fame?**

Money.

**Tell us a secret**

One day the Tories will not be in power.

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Zeal's duck-billed silicone toast tongs. All photographs: Dan Matthews for the Guardian

Ducky toast tongs, candle sharpeners and an apple tree ... our writers name one gadget, gizmo or thing they didn't know they couldn't live without

Sat 27 Aug 2022 02.00 EDT Last modified on Sat 27 Aug 2022 06.31 EDT

## The roll-up sun visor

“Have nothing in your houses that you do not know to be useful, or believe to be beautiful,” William Morris said. I’m fussier. Have nothing in your wardrobe that you do not know to be useful and believe to be beautiful.

Case in point: a wide-brim straw visor, which will usefully protect you from the sun and make you look cool. A classic straw hat will do this, if you are Grace Kelly in To Catch a Thief or Jean Seberg in Moment to Moment. But if you are anything like me, a hat will make you hot and flatten your hair and so you will take it off (thus forfeiting the sun protection), Then you will leave it somewhere and it will be lost for ever.

A visor won’t make you hot, won’t make your hair sweaty, and has an enjoyably sport-adjacent Williams-sister-on-Centre-Court vibe. The [roll-up kind](#) comes in pliable straw, and when you unfasten the Velcro or ribbon, it swiss-rolls into a size small enough to keep in your handbag. It’s an invention of wondrous simplicity, and the best thing to happen to holiday packing since [Bernard Sadow](#) had the ingenious idea of putting wheels on his suitcase.

**Jess Cartner-Morley**

## Magnetic key holder



I am a person who always loses things. Well, misplaces things: the object I've lost always turns up, usually 30 minutes after I have finally, grudgingly bought a replacement at annoying expense. I have wasted a cumulative 400 hours of my life searching for things before I leave the house, subjecting my family to increasingly enraged self-talk: "Where's your bag? What did you do with it? *Why are you like this?*".

I tried expensive solutions to this problem, such as Bluetooth-tracker tiles that attach to key rings and wallets and remotes, but they never seem to work when you need them. But the thing that made a significant difference was a cheap, [magnetic key holder](#) that looks like a cloud. I bought it on a whim in the middle of the night: it sticks to the wall and looks cute, and when you chuck your keys at it, it just snatches them up with its fascinatingly strong magnet. I kind of look forward to using it, which is ridiculous, but it *does* mean that I rarely lose my keys any more (or leave the house without them, as it's on the wall right next to the front door). I now have four of them, and am considering attaching metal strips to everything I own so I can fully transition to cloud storage.

**Keza MacDonald**

**Young apple tree**

This spring we woke each morning to a robin sitting on its tallest branch and singing his heart out as the blossom unfurled and the bees buzzed. In summer, it has cooled our front room and given us privacy. In autumn, it will offer a steady supply of fresh apples, and by winter its grey skeleton will let the much-needed sun back in.

A whip is a young tree, usually only a few years old, that has had no training. It's also the cheapest way to buy a tree. Our beloved tree was a pencil-thick whip that barely reached my shoulders when we bought it about 10 years ago for less than £20; now you can see it from the end of the road. It's easily paid us back in apples, it's prolific. My apple tree is a lovely old English variety called the [Blenheim Orange](#), or in some circles Kempster's Pippin, a delicious, nutty-flavoured apple that improves in flavour as it ages and works as well cooked as it does raw. But more importantly, it defines the house, it cools the air and shades the car, and it feeds not just us, but the bees and the birds who love the rotting apples.

It's no longer the only apple tree on the street, and I hope neighbours see the practical and beautifying benefits. With any luck, more will follow. This is one of the few I've bought that will (hopefully) outlive me. That's a rare pleasure in a purchase.

**Alys Fowler**

## The head torch



A head torch is for outdoorsy, adventurous kinds of activities, you think? True, I did get mine – or my first, there has been a series – for something like that. I used to do a bit of climbing, the sort that sometimes involved starting before dawn, or finishing after sundown, or just being out and about at night.

I don't do so much climbing these days, through changing circumstances (shrinking cojones mainly), but I use my head torch more than ever. Changed my life? That may be pushing it, but it has certainly made it better, and more visible.

Hel-LO, you say. You've got a phone. Have you not found the torch feature on yours? To which I reply: Hel-LO! Have you tried holding your iPhone in your mouth, face out, so that the torch points forward. Go on, try. You can't, right? Edge in first, like a biscuit, no problem, if you want to uplight your nose, or downlight your chest. But if you want the light shining forwards (which, let's face it, is where you're most likely to want it), then you have to hold it in your hand. Meaning you only have one hand left to do whatever it is you want to do.

That is the beauty of the head torch: it frees up two hands as well as illuminating the area towards which you're looking. So you can pick your

padlock, put the bins out late, turn the page of your page turner, or indeed scale the north face of the Eiger.

I use mine for reading – while camping, or at home if someone else wants the lights off. I use it as an extra bike light. If I had a dog I'd walk the dog with it – I know people who do. I take it to festivals, mainly as a fashion accessory, to be honest, a bit of glow-worm/lighthouse chic, while remaining free to throw some shapes, but also for tent assemblage, or just tent-locating.

When the switches in the fuse box trip, I know exactly where [my head torch](#) is. Come Armageddon, or when Putin switches off the lights for good, I'm going to know exactly where my head torch is. You're going to need one too: because the world will be quickly divided into those who have them, and those who don't. Trust me.

In the meantime, I'm wondering what to do with this pair of sad, neglected crampons. Aerate the lawn maybe? Actually that's not a bad idea ...

**Sam Wollaston**

## The cat litter locker

When I first got my kitten, I knew it would be many months until I could introduce her to the garden, and that meanwhile, she'd be using a litter tray. But I had no idea that a) many methods of cat-mess disposal are environmentally destructive, and b) a kitten is a furry pooping machine.

Some people scoop the poop and chuck it down the toilet, but that can lead to clogged pipes (and even parasites entering the waterways). The Environment Agency recommends [wrapping it and disposing](#) in the household waste – but even if I was using biodegradable bags instead of terrible plastic, that would still mean *a lot* of bags used (and a lot of trips down to the communal bin).

Enter the [litter locker](#) – essentially an airtight chamber (making it smell-free) that you store poop in until it's full, therefore disposing of one massive bag of poop instead of lots of little ones. Fewer bags used, without stinking up the gaff. I kept mine by the tray itself for what may be the quickest poop-removal option out there. My kitten has now grown into an outdoor cat, but

if she ever needs to be kept in again, poop will not be a problem.  
**Coco Khan**

## Perennial kale



A big green plant changed my life. The Taunton Deane perennial kale wasn't big when I bought it (from [Incredible Vegetables](#), a tiny business specialising in unusual perennials which happens to share an allotment with my dad), but it rapidly grew, fell over, and kept growing.

It's better than a magic bean. We began picking leaves from it, and it grew some more. Ever since, we've had a year-round supply of fresh, organic greens from just outside the back door. Best of all, my children actually like them (lightly steamed; I also chop and fry them or add them to pasta dishes).

Perennial vegetables, as George Monbiot points out in [Regenesis](#), are a crucial, low-carbon future food. And these magic kales make annual greens that require copious watering, get devoured by "pests" and can only be eaten once (if we're lucky) seem a ridiculous faff.

OK, so perennial kale leaves don't taste so succulent all year round (they are nicest in winter and early spring), but they seem impervious to cabbage

white butterflies. Pigeons, it seems, are partial to kale, but my simple solution to pigeon-munching is to fill the vegetable patch with more perennial kales than the birds can eat.

I've now branched out into Daubenton's kale, a much smaller perennial with an even better, slightly nutty taste, and the 1.5m-high Purple Tree collard cross called 'Keeper'. Once you've got a few plants, you can propagate more from cuttings. Then all your friends can turn over a new leaf, too.

*Perennial kale, Taunton Deane and Purple Tree collard, £5.99 per cutting*

**Patrick Barkham**

## Egg-boiling machine

I laughed when my then boyfriend bought an [egg-boiling machine](#) when we moved in together. Who needs help boiling an egg? Well, me as it happens. Because two kids later (reader, I married him, namely for his egg-boiling machine) and living in constant fear of toddler meltdowns triggered by their boiled eggs being the wrong consistency, it is the most-used item in our kitchen. It is the precursor to the [much-hyped egg cooker](#) that recently went viral, but being ancient, ours can only do boiled eggs (not scrambled, poached or omelette-style like the latest Gen Z versions).

Simply pierce the egg and add the appropriate amount of cold water according to the number of eggs and consistency that you require (as directed by the measuring cup) and switch it on.

That's it. You don't have to think about it all – meaning you can get entirely distracted by the 17 other things that demand your attention, like a baby crawling up your leg or mopping up an inevitable spillage, without compromising your eggs. When it beeps, breakfast is ready and sanity is preserved – for now.

**Abigail Radnor**

## Dog-poo bag dispenser

Only fellow dog owners will recognise the power of a flimsy compostable bag to make or break your morning. Before a kind (or potentially

embarrassed) friend gave me a [poo-bag dispenser](#) for Christmas, I was forever pulling the things out of pockets at inappropriate moments, like the wedding when I got emotional, reached down for what I thought was a handkerchief and blew my nose on something very non-absorbent (which ended as badly as you might imagine), or the many occasions I failed to locate one at the vital moment because I'd gone out in the wrong coat.

This simple little dispenser is now clipped on my dog lead, so when he's out, the poo bags are too ... as long as I remember to refill it, obviously.

**Felicity Cloake**

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**24 more things that could change your life**



**Binoculars** All budding bird watchers should own a pair of good binoculars. The sharpness of the [Hawke Nature-Treks](#) is truly astonishing, revealing usually hidden nature at her best.

**Handheld mandoline** Forget regular mandolines, which have to be assembled and then put back in their box after every use, and so rarely see the light of day. The [Joseph Joseph handheld mandoline](#) is perfect for quick salads and vegetable dishes, and its grip/finger protector thing works well at preventing an unwanted dressing of fresh blood going into the mix. Kohlrabi remoulade anyone?



**Herb scissors** A pair of [herb scissors](#) are indispensable – they save so much time on the fiddly chopping of basil, parsley and coriander. Every kitchen should have a pair.

**Mobile-phone bike mount** A handy [mobile phone mount](#), which screws into the centre of the handlebar stem, means cyclists can finally be shouted at by the Google Maps lady – just like everyone else.



**Trainers** The [Adidas ZX Torsion](#) trainers are incredibly shock-absorbent, allowing marching around city streets without that feeling that your spine is being destroyed by endless concrete.

**Digital luggage scales** Handheld [digital scales](#) really take the sting out of that nerve-racking wait of having your bags weighed at the check-in desk. Gone are the embarrassing days of having to unpack overstuffed bags in front of queues of people.

**Candle sharpener** A [clever little gadget](#), like a pencil sharpener that shaves down the wax, as vintage candlesticks are often too narrow for modern candles. Better than attacking the candles with a penknife, which feels a bit unsafe!



**Pillow spray** It can be a struggle to calm the mind and drift off when you're stressed or anxious about something. The [Sleep Plus pillow spray](#) really does work wonders – a couple of spritzes on the pillow and off you go. It's a gamechanger.

**Digital photo frame** They have a slightly naff image but don't write off the [digital photo frame](#) – you can load it up with hundreds of photos, meaning you get to see pictures that would otherwise languish on your phone and

never see the light of day. Best of all, family can also upload photos on to it from their phones. The only downside is, they're really distracting ...



**Portable speaker** Dance like nobody's watching, they say. Well, if you want to dance when nobody's watching, carry a speaker with you around the house. It's also great for the garden when you have people over; listening to podcasts in the bath (try John Lewis's [beautiful waterproof design](#)); and the radio while washing up.

**Heated clothes dryer** A more energy-efficient and cheaper alternative to a tumble dryer – particularly if you have no outdoor space for hanging out the washing – the heated clothes airer is your traditional airer on steroids. They will dry a load overnight, so even if you have to put it up in the living room or home office, you can clear it all away again by morning.



**Mini spatula** These are perfect for getting that last frustrating scraping of peanut butter, jam or mayonnaise out of the jar, and also good for making small amounts of sauce and scrambling just one or two eggs. John Lewis's [set of mini silicone baking utensils](#) may look like they were designed for kids, but they're very useful in grown up kitchens.

**In-sink organiser** A great way to have all your washing-up tools at your fingertips, the [in-sink organiser](#) not only creates a "clear workspace" in your kitchen, it also means any drippage goes straight down the plughole. If only it had space for the washing-up liquid too.



**Frozen beer glass** Keep a beer (or wine, cocktail or shot) glass in the freezer, so you can pour yourself an instantly chilled tipple. Perfect for when you're so desperate for a drink you can't even wait 10 minutes for it to chill.

**Toast grabber** Not only do such gadgets eliminate the risk of burning fingers and electrocution when trying to extract toast from the toaster with a kitchen utensil, [Zeal's duck-billed silicone toast tongs](#) will bring endless cheer each morning.

**Pet-hair remover** Long-haired cats can shed masses of silky, clingy fur that defy the best vacuum cleaner. A [pet hair remover](#) neatly scrapes it all off with little effort.



**Fabric shaver** All hail the [battery-operated de-bobbler](#), which “shaves” old coats and jumpers and brings them back to life. A comb or a sticky roller don’t work half as well.

**Non-slip jumper hangers** Hanging up jumpers, rather than folding them, means you can see them more clearly, but they often slide off wooden hangers. You don’t want to use those pinch handles as they leave marks, so [non-slip rubbery ones](#) are perfect.

**Jar opener** There are a few gadgets to help you open jars, like flat rubber ones, but those [akin to beer-bottle openers](#) are by far the easiest to use. You sit it on the lid and it grips under the rim, then you lift it to break the vacuum seal. You can then loosen the lid easily, even doing it with one hand.



**Eye mask** OK, they take a bit of getting used to, but it's so worth it to not be woken by the morning sun. Available nearly everywhere these days – including sleeper train and aeroplane freebies – but to channel Carrie Bradshaw try [the Pure Silk Floral eye mask](#) from M&S.



**Handheld vacuum** When the job is small, you need not risk getting a slipped disc by lugging Henry Hoover around the house: [handheld vacuums](#)

are ideal for targeting emergency incidents (smashed glass), post-DIY clear ups, crumb-trails, or those mysterious balls of dust that appear in every corner of the house moments before guests arrive. If you have a child, consider it your new daily accessory.

**Nutcracker/bottle opener** This is extremely cool as it does two jobs in one: cracks nuts and removes corks from wine/champagne bottles. Yes you can do the latter with your hands, but this saves a lot of huffing and puffing. It will get a lot of love over Christmas.

**Coffee filter** Cafetières are murder to clean. Coffee grains invariably end up going down the sink and block it. A plastic filter and filter papers are gamechangers. The [filter paper](#) catches all the coffee when you pour the water in, and at the end the paper just gets chucked in the bin. End result? The coffee is pure and grain-free, the cafetière is simple to clean, and the sink is happily unblocked. Job's a good 'un.

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[\*\*Opinion\*\*](#)[\*\*Donald Trump\*\*](#)

## The FBI's Mar-a-Lago affidavit paints an unsettling portrait of Trump

[\*\*Lloyd Green\*\*](#)

According to the affidavit, the government previously found in Trump's possession 184 documents marked 'classified', 67 marked 'confidential', 92 marked 'secret', and 25 'top secret'



'Prison times under the statutes cited in the affidavit run the gamut from three to 20 years, depending on the specific offense.' Photograph: Jon Elswick/AP

Fri 26 Aug 2022 16.39 EDT Last modified on Fri 26 Aug 2022 16.53 EDT

Donald Trump is a life-long teetotaler. But at this moment, he may want to re-consider his commitment to sobriety.

Early on Friday afternoon, a heavily redacted version of the much-vaunted [FBI](#) affidavit went public. It did not paint a flattering portrait of the 45th

president or his environs.

“[P]robable cause exists to believe that evidence, contraband, fruits of crime, or other items illegally possessed … will be found at the premises,” it read. Prison times under the statutes cited in the affidavit run the gamut from three to 20 years, depending on the specific offense.

Section 793 addresses defense information and section 1519 is directed at the “destruction, alteration, or falsification of records in Federal investigations and bankruptcy.” Section 2071 speaks to the “concealment, removal, or mutilation” of documents.

For Trump, a candidate and incumbent who made “lock her up” a rallying cry, the latest developments make him look ridiculous. And that is being generous.

These developments also place an unwelcome millstone around the neck of the [Republicans](#) – who pride themselves on law, order and national security – as the US careens toward its midterm elections.

Despite being heavily redacted, the affidavit says plenty. [Mar-a-Lago](#) had become a storage facility for documents that Trump should never have transported when he exited the White House. Unfortunately, he believed the mantra of Louis XIV, France’s Sun King: “L’état, c’est moi.”

In May 2022, according to the affidavit, the government found in Trump’s possession 184 documents marked “classified”; 67 marked “confidential”; 92 marked “secret”; and 25 marked “top secret.” But Trump’s nightmare doesn’t end there.

FBI agents “observed markings reflecting” human intelligence sources and other highly sensitive intelligence categories, the affidavit says. Trump, an ex-reality show host, makes Hillary Clinton look almost fastidious.

Or as Trump framed things on social media, “WE GAVE THEM MUCH.” To be sure, he did not say, “WE GAVE THEM ALL.” Here, it is a distinction with real world significance.

As the affidavit hit the docket, [reports emerged](#) of a woman posing as a member of the Rothschild family playing golf with Trump and Lindsey Graham while ingratiating herself with Trump's supporters. Talk about synchronicity.

The incidents are under active investigation in the US and Canada. Her alleged real identity is Inna Yashchyshyn, a Russian-speaking immigrant from Ukraine.

This latest episode stands as a cross between Maria Butina and Inventing Anna. Life imitates life. History can be repetitive. One thing is clear, security is not a primary concern for Trump.

Meanwhile, the clock ticks down for Merrick Garland, the attorney general, and Trump. Under justice department practice, politically sensitive prosecutions cannot be launched within 60 days of an election.

As a result, Labor Day in early September marks a cut-off for indicting Trump until after November's congressional contests. Two related questions are "if and when" Trump declares his candidacy for the 2024 Republican presidential nomination.

One way or another, the former guy will appear on this fall's ballot. Beyond that, the release of the redacted affidavit raises the issue of disclosure of a non-redacted version by the Biden administration to the senior members of Congress, the so-called Gang of Eight.

By law, the Speaker of the House, the House minority leader, the Senate's majority and minority leaders, together with the chairs and ranking minority members of the intelligence committees of both houses of Congress are entitled to be briefed on covert actions.

They have reportedly [requested relevant information](#).

To be sure, the FBI frowns on briefing Congress on open investigations. Here, however, the barn door is wide open. The horse has bolted. Indeed, it was Trump who publicized the court-approved search.

The Guardian's Hugo Lowell [has reported](#) that the "[s]ourcing and information the FBI would've needed to pinpoint those locations with such confidence, suggests [that] there are people close to the former president potentially cooperating with this investigation".

Can you say, "GoodFellas and Henry Hill"? In other words, the walls around Trump may be closing. A man with few friends, he may need someone he can talk to without furthering a conspiracy or paying \$1,000 an hour.

Signs are not encouraging. Earlier this week, Jared Kushner, whose own father received a Trump pardon, scrambled to distance himself from Ivanka's dad.

Asked by Fox News about Trump's handling of classified material, Kushner demurred. "Like I said, I'm not familiar with what was in the boxes," he answered. "But I think President Trump, he, uh, he governed in a very peculiar way and when he had his documents, I'm assuming he did what he thought was appropriate."

And if Trump can't count on his son-in-law to deliver something other than a potpourri of word salad, who can he trust?

- Lloyd Green served in the Department of Justice from 1990 to 1992
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Opinion**Liz Truss**

# Ground control to Major Truss – what planet are you on? Does it have a price cap?

[Marina Hyde](#)



Our likely next PM's surreal 'solutions' to the UK's omnicrisis feel like they've been beamed in from a galaxy far away



‘The suspicion with Truss is that she is – above all – keen to be *seen* as a particular type of person. This is a vanity we cannot afford.’ Photograph: Joe Giddens/PA

Fri 26 Aug 2022 06.19 EDT Last modified on Fri 26 Aug 2022 11.50 EDT

“Cost of living” is an expression now used so frequently, including by those in positions of power, that it’s possible to end up forgetting how incredibly bleak those words are as a concept. (See also: “human resources”.) Maybe we should revitalise the cliche by calling it the “price of existing” crisis. It is, after all, a perfectly matter-of-fact way of suggesting that there is a point at which many may simply find it too expensive to endure. People generally make too much fuss about cliches, but – in one of the very richest countries in the world – this one does feel worth urgently denormalising.

So who’s going to do it? Liz Truss?! The light from even the stars we can see without telescopes can take years to reach us – sometimes thousands of years. On Tuesday Truss was in the West Midlands, with the public able to look at [an emanation from her](#) that read: “I will support businesses to get our economy firing on all cylinders – delivering growth and opportunity in the West Midlands and beyond.” How many years ago were these words beamed out? This morning the [energy price cap hit £3,549](#). You sense West Midlands businesses – to whom the price cap doesn’t even apply – would

like to know how on earth they're supposed to afford to switch on the cylinders at all.

Back on planet Earth, Whitehall has drawn up plans for energy-intensive firms to [power down this winter](#). The single swinging lightbulb in Liz Truss's head seems to have flickered on overnight, resulting in an article for the Daily Mail in which she explains: "My immediate priority will be to put more money back in people's pockets [by cutting taxes](#)." The latest forecasts hazard that [inflation will hit 18%](#) in early 2023. The price cap prediction for April is currently at £6,823. Which would certainly change a lot of things, among them the working definition of the word "cap". The political reality is that a Truss administration would have had to make a number of era-defining interventions by that point – and the no-handouts posturing will seem like a relic of a distant time.

Yet realities are unfashionable. Realities have not been discussed in front of the public, either by Truss or Nadhim Zahawi, the otherwise invisible supporter of hers who has just happened to be [chancellor of the exchequer](#) for the entire summer. Maybe this is the logical political end of a culture that polices spoilers more effectively than burglary or sexual assault. The government simply doesn't wish to ruin people's panic attacks for them.

Truss has instead preferred to spend weeks banging on about small government, which is obviously partly a function of being technically still in a race. But the suspicion with Truss is that she is – above all – keen to be *seen* as a particular type of person. This is a vanity we cannot afford. Boris Johnson's need to be seen as a certain type of person was behind all of his fatal pandemic dithering and mistakes – and, ultimately, behind the partygate culture that did for him in the end. This week, one of Truss's [campaign advisers chirped](#) to the Financial Times: "We have to end this idea that Britain is broken, and tangibly improve people's lives. If we can show people that the government is on their side, everyone will be in a better place come the new year." Is this the new year when inflation could be running at 18%? Righto. See you there!

The UK needs a titanic figure; it feels like it's getting a Titanic one. Truss is the relentlessly perky crew member trying to disguise the rush for the

lifeboats as proof the cruise firm's shore excursions are extremely popular. Appearing unable to engage realistically with the various crises simply emphasises her smallness.

Take one campaign aide's revelation this week that "she will focus on doing fewer things and doing them better". In which universe? In a truly ideal world, governments would be able to get out of people's lives, things being so well arranged that they were not much required. But these are not ideal times, and won't be for the foreseeable, so wasting the entire contest on positioning feels a pointless indulgence, and proof her party membership's tiny electorate are [the wrong people](#) to have everyone else's future in their hands.

Wherever you stand on the ideal size of government, the first principle of why governments exist is for people's safety and security. The next government – by all forecasts, Truss's government – is going to have to get right inside people's lives. Her entire leadership pitch puts me in mind of another cautionary cliche: life is what happens while you're busy making other plans. Don't forget that barely a year ago we were being informed that we were about to embark on a [roaring 20s](#). Then again, two years ago we were hearing how Covid would usher in a new social contract.

As for the next wildly overoptimistic promise to be broken, who can say? On that note, we'll play out with another Truss word-signal being received on Earth on Wednesday: "If elected prime minister, I will turbocharge the economies of places like Norwich, Great Yarmouth and across East Anglia, by unleashing the private sector with tax cuts and better regulation ..." Reading this, I was reminded of the notion that the stars whose light is reaching us now are actually already dead. That may be a [scientific myth](#) – but it contains much political truth.

- Marina Hyde is a Guardian columnist
- What Just Happened?! by Marina Hyde (Guardian Faber, £18.99). To support the Guardian and Observer, order your copy at the [Guardian](#)

## [Bookshop](#)

- Marina Hyde will be in conversation with Richard Osman at a Guardian Live event in London on 11 October. Join them in person or via the livestream – book tickets via the [Guardian Live website](#)
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## Opinion**Energy bills**

# I'm eating cold rice pudding so as not to use the microwave. But will it make a dent in the bills?

[Sophie](#)

When I boil the kettle, I fill a flask up so I can have another cup of tea later. These are the realities of this energy price increase

- This article is part of [the heat or eat diaries](#): a series from the frontline of Britain's cost of living emergency



‘It’s about scrimping and saving where I can.’ Illustration: Eleanor Bannister

Fri 26 Aug 2022 11.00 EDT Last modified on Fri 26 Aug 2022 14.18 EDT

This winter, I'll be wearing an extra jumper and the heating won't be going on until it's cold enough to see my breath. Even then, it will be timed to go

on when I've done a wash and I need to dry laundry. Life is going to get a lot more harsh. At the moment I'm paying £95 a month, and a few months back it was £66. I'm just about covering my bills and I don't know what happens when the [changes announced on Friday](#) hit – I'm looking at £200 a month.

I've lived on benefits for years – I'm a single mum to two autistic children – and I've never felt poor. But actually, I am at the point where I'm thinking: is it cheaper to do a small wash or one big wash? Do I need to put the lights on? Who knows if they'll make a dent in the bill, though.

Today I had cold rice pudding because I didn't want to use the microwave. When I boil the kettle, I fill a flask up, so I can have another cup of tea later or some instant soup for lunch. The other day, I boiled some eggs in the same pan I was cooking pasta. Frozen veg seems to cook quicker and I do it all in one pan, and I'm certainly not cooking a roast dinner at the moment. It's about scrimping and saving where I can to minimise that initial shock.

I got absolutely soaked in the rain earlier, but I don't use my hairdryer any more. In January, when it's pouring with rain, normally the heating would go on, and I'll hang my bag and coat on the radiator to dry them out. Not this winter. I'll stuff them with newspaper and hope they don't go a funny colour or start to smell. I know how many steps there are in my house and how to get around in the dark, so I don't need to put the lights on. These are the realities of this price increase.

I will almost certainly be buying less food, or food that is not as good, but until I get a bill, I won't know. There are things I will consider whether to buy or not, things that might not seem big to somebody else, like a weekly bus pass. It's £18.50, and I don't get one every week but when I do, I use it as much as possible, and it allows me to go to places that don't cost anything, like a museum.

It feels unfair. That sounds silly, but when you [see the profits](#) that are being made you think surely there's some scope for help. In the energy industry, those at the top get wages and bonuses that are unthinkable to me. You've got politicians who can claim their expenses, so you think does it matter to

them enough? Do they really understand that there are people who cannot afford the bill? I'm not sure politicians are really grounded in reality. I'm on universal credit, and I received the cost of living payment, and I've put some aside to go towards my next bill, but is it going to see us through the winter?

At the food bank where I volunteer, I talk to people when they arrive and ask how they're doing. Most of the conversations are about money and bills that are coming. It has been an expensive month for many people – school uniforms to get, new shoes, new coats. They're already saying they're not going to be able to pay their energy bills.

I've realised that if I haven't got the money, there's not a lot I can do about it, but that doesn't stop me worrying. I rang the electric company to ask what would happen if I couldn't pay, and they said they wouldn't be able to help me until I defaulted on my bill – but I don't want to get to that stage. So maybe it is rationing the heating, and having a cold tin of rice pudding rather than heating it up, or towel-drying my hair rather than putting the hairdryer on. These never used to feel like luxuries.

- As told to Emine Saner. Sophie is in her 40s and lives in the north of England. Her name has been changed
- The Trussell Trust is an anti-poverty charity that campaigns to end the need for food banks. Show your support at: [trusselltrust.org/guardian](https://www.trusselltrust.org/guardian)
- ***Do you have an opinion on the issues raised in this article? If you would like to submit a letter of up to 300 words to be considered for publication, email it to us at [guardian.letters@theguardian.com](mailto:guardian.letters@theguardian.com)***

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## The heat or eat diariesUK cost of living crisis

# I never thought I'd be grateful for my auto-immune illness. But a doctor's letter means at least my heating can't be cut off

Liz

No matter how hard people like me try, we'll never be able to pay the obscene amounts energy companies are charging

- This article is part of [the heat or eat diaries](#): a series from the frontline of Britain's cost of living emergency



Illustration: Eleanor Bannister/The Guardian

Fri 26 Aug 2022 07.00 EDT Last modified on Fri 26 Aug 2022 09.43 EDT

They've been talking about it for weeks now. Every time they do, I'm almost sick. But talking about it is still different from it actually happening. Well, not any more. This is the day. The energy price cap rise is here, and it doesn't bear thinking about. Why? Because there is simply no way I can even begin to think about how I could pay it. It's a non-starter. So what do people like me do? Answers on a postcard please to Liz at Ain't-Got-A-Bleeding-Clue Lane, SW England.

In October last year, my bill went up to about £1,200 a year. As a single mum of two youngsters, getting no help from their dads, working part-time because of my disabilities, it was unaffordable. That's when I decided I'd better get an energy meter, and pay upfront. I've still got a bill of £495 from my pre-meter days. I haven't paid it yet, and I'm scared that's going to come back on me in winter when I have to put the heating back on. You know what's most disgusting? People like me who pay on meters are charged at a higher rate. I heard on the radio that I'll be looking at £600 for January alone because I can't spread out the payments through the year.

In April, that £1,200 rose by a horrific 54%. Meanwhile, my universal credit rose by 3.1%. Today the bill has risen by 80% to £3,549 for the typical household. It's like living in the Weimar republic. Next thing we know people will be pushing wheelbarrows full of tenners to the energy providers to pay the bills.

But not me, or people like me. Because however hard we try, we'll never be able to pay these obscene amounts. Apparently there's worse to come. The regulator OfBollocks, or whatever it's called, instead of reducing the cap has decided to update the cap every three months rather than every six months because the prices are rocketing. Unbelievable. Hardly surprising that people think OfBollocks is in the pay of the energy giants. Next January, it's estimated that it will rise by another 31%, or £4,650 a year, for typical households. I can't begin to get my head around these figures. It's another financial planet.

I've got an energy meter and I'm living on the edge of my nerves. And this is making it so much worse. I can barely sleep most nights anyway, and that

£495 bill is looming large. If they want to be funny with me they can claim that because the kids are over the age of 10 and they're not "vulnerable" they can cut us off.

I never thought I'd say this, but thankfully I have an auto-immune illness. That puts me into the vulnerable category. I need to get a letter from my doctor so they don't switch me off. That's the backup plan if my provider decides to play silly buggers with us.

- As told to Simon Hattenstone. Liz is in her 40s and lives in the southwest of England. Her name has been changed
- The Trussell Trust is an anti-poverty charity that campaigns to end the need for food banks. Show your support at: [trusselltrust.org/guardian](https://trusselltrust.org/guardian)
- ***Do you have an opinion on the issues raised in this article? If you would like to submit a letter of up to 300 words to be considered for publication, email it to us at [guardian.letters@theguardian.com](mailto:guardian.letters@theguardian.com)***

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**Guardian Opinion cartoon**

**Liz Truss**

# Martin Rowson on the final days of Liz Truss's campaign to become Tory leader – cartoon

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- ['A wonderful memorial' Nichelle Nichols to become latest Star Trek star to have ashes sent into space](#)

**Julian Assange**

## **Julian Assange files appeal against US extradition**

Lawyers for Wikileaks founder, who is indicted on 17 espionage charges in US, say he faces persecution for his ‘political opinions’



Lawyers for WikiLeaks publisher Julian Assange have filed an appeal against his extradition to the US. Photograph: Dominic Lipinski/PA

*AAP*

Fri 26 Aug 2022 23.03 EDT

Lawyers for WikiLeaks publisher Julian Assange have filed an appeal against his extradition to the US, as the [United Nations](#) human rights chief lends support to the Australian’s cause.

Assange, 51, has been indicted on 17 espionage charges in the US and one charge of computer misuse over WikiLeaks’ publication of thousands of

military and diplomatic documents leaked by whistleblower Chelsea Manning. The charges carry a maximum sentence of 175 years in prison.

WikiLeaks says Assange's legal team filed "perfected grounds of appeal" in the UK's high court against the US and the UK home secretary, Priti Patel, who [approved his extradition in June](#).

Assange's lawyers argue he is "being prosecuted and punished for his political opinions".

His wife said the prosecution was unlawful. "Overwhelming evidence has emerged proving that the US prosecution against my husband is a criminal abuse," Stella Assange said on Twitter on Saturday.

"The high court judges will now decide whether Julian is given the opportunity to put the case against the US before open court, and in full, at the appeal."

Assange remains in London's Belmarsh prison, where he has been in detention since April 2019.

A UK judge blocked his extradition last year but the US government successfully appealed in the high court.

The Australian prime minister, Anthony Albanese, has previously stated "[enough is enough](#)" regarding Assange's ongoing detention.

The appeal comes after the UN human rights chief, Michelle Bachelet, met with Assange's lawyers and his wife in Geneva.

Advocacy group the Assange Defence Committee told AAP they detailed to her his deteriorating health, with the Australian publisher suffering a mini-stroke recently.

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## Vatican

# Pope Francis to create new cardinals who may select his successor

Ceremony on Saturday to name 20 cardinals comes after Pontiff raised possibility of retiring for health reasons



Pope Francis meets French pilgrims during an audience at the Vatican on Friday. Photograph: Vatican Media/Reuters

*Agence France-Presse in Vatican City*

Sat 27 Aug 2022 02.52 EDT Last modified on Sat 27 Aug 2022 02.54 EDT

Pope Francis is creating 20 new cardinals picked from the four corners of the world, most of whom could one day end up choosing the pontiff's successor.

Francis has raised the possibility of retiring due to his declining health, a path taken by his predecessor, Benedict XVI. If he were to do so, a conclave involving all cardinals aged under 80 would be called to pick a successor.

Sixteen of the 20 cardinals to be created on Saturday would be eligible for that conclave based on their ages.

The ceremony at St Peter's Basilica is the 85-year-old pope's eighth since being elected in 2013 and includes clergy known for their pastoral work and, in some cases, progressive views.

All parts of the globe are represented, including new cardinals from Brazil and Nigeria, Singapore and East Timor, among others.

After this weekend, Francis will have chosen 83 out of the 132 cardinals currently qualified to elect a new pope.

That is nearly two-thirds of the total and precisely the percentage needed for any proposed name to pass.

In recent months, the pope has been forced to rely on a wheelchair due to knee pain, which he has said is inoperable.

He also suffers from sciatica, a chronic nerve condition that causes pain in his hip.

The new cardinals are always scrutinised by [Vatican](#) observers for clues as to the future direction of the Church and its 1.3 billion faithful.

Experts caution, however, that cardinals named by one pope do not necessarily choose successors in their likeness.

The Argentine pontiff has this year completed a major shake-up of the Vatican's powerful governing body, the Roman Curia, which makes winning new converts a priority.

In keeping with his focus on making the church more inclusive, transparent and responsive to the needs of the poor and marginalised, Francis has chosen two Africans and five Asians, including two cardinals who hail from India.

Vatican expert Bernard Lecomte said the pope's choices were "representative of the church today, with a large spot for the southern

hemisphere”, where 80% of the world’s Catholics live.

Virgilio Do Carmo Da Silva, the archbishop of Dili, will on Saturday become the first cardinal of tiny East Timor, an overwhelmingly Catholic nation in South-east Asia.

The pope has also felt free to bypass the archbishops of major cities to choose those from less powerful seats, such as Robert McElroy, the 68-year-old bishop of San Diego, California.

McElroy has supported gay Catholics and criticised moves to deny communion to US politicians, such as President Joe Biden, who support abortion rights.

The pope will also create the youngest cardinal in the world, 48-year-old Italian missionary Giorgio Marengo, who works in Mongolia.

The new crop of cardinals also includes Nigeria’s Peter Okpaleke, the bishop of Ekwulobia, and Leonardo Ulrich Steiner, the archbishop of Manaus, Brazil.

The 80-year-old bishop emeritus of Ghent, Lucas Van Looy, had been nominated but asked to be exempted following criticism of his handling of child sexual abuse by priests in Belgium.

Saturday’s ceremony at the Vatican will be followed by the traditional “courtesy visit” in which the general public is invited to greet the new cardinals.

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**Facebook**

# Facebook agrees to settle Cambridge Analytica data privacy lawsuit

The four-year-old case alleged that the company had violated consumer privacy laws by sharing users' personal data with third parties



Facebook has agreed to settle a lawsuit that accused the company of allowing third parties to access users' private data. Photograph: Daniel Felipe Kutepov/Sopa Images/Rex/Shutterstock

*Reuters*

Fri 26 Aug 2022 20.32 EDT Last modified on Sat 27 Aug 2022 08.29 EDT

Meta's Facebook has in principle agreed to settle a lawsuit in the San Francisco federal court seeking damages for letting third parties, including [Cambridge Analytica](#), access the private data of users, a court filing showed.

The financial terms were not disclosed in the filing on Friday that asked the judge to put the class-action suit on hold for 60 days until the lawyers for both plaintiffs and [Facebook](#) finalize a written settlement.

The four-year-old lawsuit alleged that Facebook violated consumer privacy laws by sharing personal data of users with third parties such as the now-defunct British political consultancy Cambridge Analytica.

Facebook has said its privacy practices are consistent with its disclosures and “do not support any legal claims”.

Facebook and its lawyers from Gibson, Dunn & Crutcher did not immediately respond to a request for more details regarding the settlement.

Of the two law firms representing the plaintiffs, Keller Rohrback did not comment while Bleichmar Fonti & Auld declined to comment.

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## [Ethiopia](#)

# Ethiopia: airstrike hits playground in Tigray, killing at least seven

Medical officials say three children among those killed as fighting resumes in northern Ethiopia days after a truce collapsed



A man crouches to examine a damaged playground following an airstrike that left at least seven people dead in Mekelle, the capital of Ethiopia's northern Tigray region. Photograph: Tigrai TV/Reuters

*Reuters in Nairobi*

Fri 26 Aug 2022 21.20 EDT Last modified on Fri 26 Aug 2022 21.30 EDT

An airstrike on a children's playground has killed at least seven people in the capital of Ethiopia's northern Tigray region, medical officials there said, in the first such attack after a four-month-old ceasefire collapsed this week.

The officials said three children were among the dead but a federal government spokesperson denied any civilian casualties.

The airstrike on Mekelle on Friday took place two days after fighting broke out again between the national government and Tigrayan forces on the border of the Tigray and Amhara regions, shattering the ceasefire.

Tigray Television, controlled by the regional authorities, blamed the federal government for the strike. No other military aircraft operate in Ethiopian airspace.

The Ethiopian government subsequently urged residents of Tigray to stay away from military facilities, saying it intended to “take actions to target the military forces”.

Kibrom Gebreselassie, chief executive of Ayder hospital, said on Twitter the hospital had received four dead, including two children, and nine wounded. He said the strike had hit a children’s playground.

Some media reports called the site a kindergarten. It was not clear if there were any military facilities nearby.

Federal government spokesperson Legesse Tulu said news of civilian casualties was “lies and fabricated drama” and accused Tigrayan authorities of “dumping body bags”.

He denied government strikes hit civilian facilities and said they only targeted military sites.

Footage published by Tigray TV showed a building with the roof blown off, revealing a twisted jumble of slides and emergency workers carrying a stretcher from behind a damaged pink wall painted with a giant butterfly.

Fasika Amdeslasie, a surgeon at Ayder Hospital, said a colleague at Mekelle Hospital told him it had received three more bodies – a mother and her child and another unidentified person – bringing the total number of dead to seven.

“Their bodies were torn apart,” he said. “I have seen their bodies myself.”

The surgeon said that restrictions on medical supplies entering Tigray meant the hospital was short of vital supplies, including intravenous fluids, antibiotics and pain killers.

The Ethiopian health minister, Lia Tadesse, did not immediately respond to requests for comment on the shortages.

A humanitarian source in Mekelle confirmed hearing an explosion and anti-aircraft gunfire in the city on Friday.

Government airstrikes have previously killed civilians, investigators say. In January, a drone strike killed 56 people and injured 30, including children, in a camp for displaced people in Dedebit, according to witnesses. The government did not respond to requests for comment.

War erupted in Tigray in November 2020 and spread to the neighbouring regions of Afar and Amhara a year ago. Last November, Tigrayan forces marched towards Addis Ababa but were driven back by a government offensive.

A ceasefire was announced in March after both sides fought to a stalemate and the government declared a humanitarian truce, allowing badly needed food aid into the region.

When fighting erupted this week, both blamed each other.

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## [Star Trek](#)

# Nichelle Nichols to become latest Star Trek star to have ashes sent into space

The late actor best known as Lieutenant Uhura will join James Doohan, who played Scotty, and creator Gene Roddenberry



Nichelle Nichols, an original Star Trek cast member, is credited with helping shatter racial stereotypes for Black actors at the height of the civil rights movement. Photograph: Chris Pizzello/Invision/AP

*Reuters*

Fri 26 Aug 2022 18.06 EDT Last modified on Sat 27 Aug 2022 08.40 EDT

The late actor Nichelle Nichols, best known as Lieutenant Uhura on [Star Trek](#), will become the latest member of the 1960s television series to be memorialized by having some of her earthly remains flown into space.

Nichols, who [died on 30 July at age 89](#), is credited with helping shatter racial stereotypes and redefining Hollywood roles for Black actors at the

height of the US civil rights movement, as one of the first Black women to portray an empowered character on network television.

Now she has been added to the posthumous passenger manifest of a real-life rocketship due to carry a collection of vials containing cremated ashes and DNA samples from dozens of departed space enthusiasts on a final, and eternal voyage around the sun, according to organizers of the tribute.

A date for the launch has not yet been set.

Other Star Trek cast members and executives who have had remains launched into space include James Doohan, who played the show's chief engineer Scotty, and Star Trek's creator, Gene Roddenberry.

Also joining the launch will be the remains of Roddenberry's wife, Majel Barrett-Roddenberry, who played nurse Christine Chapel on the series, and the renowned sci-fi visual effects artist Douglas Trumbull, whose work was featured in such films as 2001: A [Space](#) Odyssey and Star Trek: The Motion Picture.

The launch is organized by Celestis Inc, a Texas-based company that has created a unique niche in the burgeoning commercial space sector by offering a measure of cosmic immortality to customers that can afford a dramatic send-off, which contracts with private rocket ventures.

Celestis has not publicly divulged the fees and other financial details of its service.

The upcoming memorial flight will be aboard a Vulcan Centaur rocket, still under development by the Boeing and Lockheed Martin joint venture United Launch Alliance (ULA).

Plans call for the 200-plus capsules carrying human remains and DNA for what Celestis is calling its Enterprise Flight to go inside the upper rocket stage that will fly on into deep space, beyond the gravitational pull of the Earth and moon and eventually enter a perpetual solar orbit, said Charles Chafer, co-founder and chief executive officer of Celestis.

“It’s a wonderful memorial for her, an eternal one,” said Nichols’ son Kyle Johnson.

In the 1970s, Nichols was hired by Nasa to help recruit more marginalized groups and women to the space agency, where she was influential in attracting such talent as the first female US astronaut, Sally Ride, the first Black female astronaut, Mae Jemison, and the first Black Nasa chief, Charlie Bolden.

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## Headlines thursday 25 august 2022

- [GCSEs Results show fall in top grades and pass rate in England](#)
- [Live GCSE results day 2022: anger over north-south divide as proportion of top grades and pass rate fall](#)
- [UK weather Torrential rain batters parts of country as storm warning issued](#)
- [Live Sunak suggests Johnson let Covid lockdown go on for too long](#)
- [Coronavirus Sunak says it was a mistake to ‘empower scientists’ during pandemic](#)

## GCSEs

# Covid disruption must still be taken into account in 2023 GCSEs, say schools

Calls for mitigation measures to remain come on day 2022 grades show downturn in line with official policy



Students queue to receive their GCSE results at Longdendale high school in Hyde, Greater Manchester. Photograph: Anthony Devlin/Getty Images

[Sally Weale](#), [Richard Adams](#), [Pamela Duncan](#), [Ashley Kirk](#) and [Carmen Aguilar Garcia](#)

Thu 25 Aug 2022 10.33 EDTFirst published on Thu 25 Aug 2022 04.30 EDT

Headteachers in England are calling on ministers to delay the return of pre-pandemic exam conditions for another year, after GCSE results showed a disturbing gap in attainment between pupils in the north and south.

On the day that about 600,000 pupils in England in year 11 received their GCSE results, the Association of School and College Leaders (ASCL) said pupils due to face exams next summer should have the same additional support as this year's cohort because they too have been disadvantaged by Covid.

The government had hoped that exam conditions and grades would return to pre-pandemic levels next year after a gradual glide back to normality, but with the threat of further waves of infection over the winter more disruption could lie ahead.

Thursday's results, awarded to the first cohort to sit summer examinations in three years, revealed considerable regional variations across England, with London in particular increasing its lead in top grades over the rest of the country. Figures published by Ofqual showed a significant gap of more than 10 percentage points between London and the regions with the lowest proportion of top grades.

Just 22.4% of grades in Yorkshire and the north-east of England were 7 or above, compared with 32.6% in London. Attendance statistics show that year 11 pupils in London have missed less school over the last two years overall than their peers in other regions, while pupils in northern regions have tended to miss the most time in school.

Students sitting [GCSEs](#) this summer were helped by a number of adaptations to their exams – for example, being given some choice over content and advance warning of topics. But only around a third of the grade inflation that has accumulated since 2019 as a result of teacher assessments has been erased from top grades this year, suggesting a more painful drop will be required next year.

Geoff Barton, the ASCL general secretary, said: “Moving to this midpoint was done to give these pupils more leeway than directly returning to the 2019 standard in order to mitigate the impact of Covid on their education. Adaptations were also made to exams for this reason.

“The government and Ofqual will now need to decide whether to put mitigations in place for next year. The strong indication we are hearing from school and college leaders is that this must happen because next year’s cohort will have also been heavily impacted by Covid. This is particularly important given the likelihood of more waves of infections during the autumn and winter.”

Thursday’s results show the proportion of top grades for 16-year-olds in England has fallen since last year – though they are still up on pre-pandemic levels – with the overall pass rate also down.

Top grades of 7 and above – equivalent to A and A\* – were down three percentage points this summer, meaning results are still significantly higher than the midway point Ofqual was aiming for, which will require an even bigger fall next year in order to return to pre-pandemic levels.

Meanwhile, the proportion of pupils achieving grade 4 and above – 4 is a pass – also fell by four percentage points, from 79% last year to 75%, meaning thousands more pupils could now face resits in English and maths.

Ofqual said on Thursday the expectation was that GCSEs would return to outcomes seen in 2019 next year, as planned.

Richard Garrett, Ofqual’s director of policy and strategic relationships, said the regulator would reflect on this year’s results and confirm arrangements for next year. “But I would stress that the announcement that we made last September, set out our expectation over the next two years and a clear direction of travel.”

A Department for Education spokesperson said: “Our intention is to return to the carefully designed and well-established pre-pandemic assessment arrangements as quickly as possible, given they are the best and fairest way of assessing what students know and can do.

“Working with Ofqual, the exams regulator, we will evaluate the delivery of arrangements this year before finalising 2023 plans in the autumn.

Schools North East, which aims to improve outcomes for young people in the north-east of England, said the north-south gap showed that adaptations made this year had not gone far enough. The group's director, Chris Zarraga, said the pandemic had exacerbated "serious perennial issues, especially that of long-term deprivation", and called for a support plan.

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[regional differences chart](#)

Private schools had the biggest drop in the proportion of top grades awarded, down by eight percentage points this year compared with assessed grades in 2021. In contrast the proportion of top grades awarded to pupils at academies and grammar schools in England fell by just over two percentage points.

Nevertheless the gap between private and state schools in England has grown slightly compared with 2019, with students in independent schools achieving top grades at more than twice the rate of those attending academies and secondary comprehensive schools.

Lee Elliot Major, professor of social mobility from the University of Exeter, said: "These results reveal the stark academic divides that define our school system, with GCSE entries from independent schools still twice as likely to be graded 7 or A and above than entries from state academies (53% versus 25.6%)."

[This year 27% of GCSE grades in England were 7 and above](#)

Girls [continued to outperform boys](#) – nearly one in three entries by girls in England got a grade 7 or above (30.7%) – though the gender gap at the highest grades narrowed by 1.6 percentage points compared with last year. A total of 2,193 16-year-olds in England got grade 9 in all subjects, including 13 students who completed 12 GCSEs.

The results come after two years of unprecedented disruption in schools due to the Covid pandemic, when schools closed, learning moved online and exams were cancelled and replaced with teacher assessment. Even once schools reopened, the disruption continued with large groups of children being sent home after contact with the virus and high levels of teacher absence.

### [The fail rate for GCSEs in England was almost four points higher than 2021 – graph](#)

In Wales close to 70% of results were C grade or higher, and 69.7% of entries by 16-year-olds got at least a C, compared with 63.8% in 2019, the last time formal exams were taken. Jeremy Miles, Wales's minister for education, said: “I welcome these results as we transition back to exams this year – it’s great to see what our learners have achieved.”

In Northern Ireland, 37% of GCSE entries received A or 7 and above, slightly below the 40% of entries that received top grades last year but above the 30% that did so in 2019. Some 90% of entries received a C or better, similar to last year but above the 82% recorded in 2019.

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## GCSEs

# GCSE results day 2022 live: anger over north-south divide as proportion of top grades and pass rate fall – as it happened

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## UK weather

# UK weather: torrential rain batters parts of country as storm warning issued

Yellow warning in place for London, south-east, east of England and east Midlands, with flooding likely



A wet high street in Gravesend, Kent, on Thursday as rain swept across the south-east of England. Photograph: Fraser Gray/Rex/Shutterstock

*[Gemma McSherry](#) and agency*

Thu 25 Aug 2022 05.42 EDTFirst published on Thu 25 Aug 2022 05.08 EDT

Torrential downpours have battered parts of the UK as yellow thunderstorm warnings came into force for [London](#) and the south-east, the east of England and the east Midlands until 3pm on Thursday.

The Environment Agency issued six alerts for areas where “flooding is possible”. Forecasters have predicted flooding to be likely amid “intense downpours” and have warned that 50mm (1.97in) of rain could fall in a short space of time in some areas, with one part of Essex being hit by more than 25mm of rain in one hour.

Andrewsfield in Essex reported 36.4mm of rain in the early hours of Thursday as heavy showers and storms swept across the east and south-east of England.

In east London, Dagenham Heathway station was closed on Thursday morning due to flooding caused by heavy rain, while a number of exits were closed at Charing Cross station in central London.



A man walks his dog on a waterlogged Wimbledon common in London on Thursday. Photograph: Amer Ghazzal/Rex/Shutterstock

The Met Office has warned of difficult driving conditions and some road closures due to spray and standing water. Train delays are also likely as well as power cuts, lightning strikes and, in some areas, hail.

The warnings come after a period of dry weather that led to drought being declared across areas of England, with parched grass and struggling crops,

streams drying up and river, reservoir and aquifer levels low. Hosepipe bans were brought in for millions as heatwaves pushed up demand for water.

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By Wednesday, the UK as a whole had had only 46% of the average total rainfall for August. A spokesperson for the Met Office, Grahame Madge said: “We’ve definitely switched from the hot and dry regime to something that has rain in the forecast.”

While the downpours will mean this month will “catch up a bit” with rainfall totals, he said: “It’s certainly going to be a dry August for the whole of the UK.” And he said some areas had gone without any significant rainfall from the middle of June until last week.

“We’ve had below average rainfall for such a long time, it’s going to take a period of above average rain to make it up,” he warned.



People on their way to the Reading festival on Thursday amid downpours.  
Photograph: Geoffrey Swaine/REX/Shutterstock

The bank holiday weekend is expected to be largely dry with warm sunny spells, though possibly wetter in the north-west with temperatures potentially climbing to 30C (86F) or into the mid-20Cs depending on how the high pressure builds, the Met Office said.

With the weather expected to improve over the bank holiday weekend, swimmers are being urged to stay away from beaches along the English coast due to an [increased risk of sewage and pollution at several beaches](#). For those living in areas with a risk of flooding, the Met Office advises residents to have a bag containing water, insurance details and anything else that may be required ready to vacate their property should it be required.

The Met Office is set to bring out its seasonal forecast for the likely conditions over the next few months next week.

It is possible for the weather to turn around: the severely dry summer of 1976 was followed by rain that meant that rainfall levels had caught up with the average by the end of autumn.

But scientists warn that the climate crisis is making weather extremes more likely, increasing heatwaves, droughts and heavy rain events that can lead to

flash floods.

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# Truss and Sunak face Tory hustings after both say Covid lockdown went too far – as it happened

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This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/politics/live/2022/aug/25/rishi-sunak-liz-truss-boris-johnson-covid-lockdown-uk-politics-live>

## Rishi Sunak

# Sunak says it was a mistake to ‘empower scientists’ during Covid pandemic

Ex-chancellor admits being furious about school closures, adding trade-offs of lockdowns were not properly considered by experts



Social distancing signage is displayed on a locked school gate in February 2021. Rishi Sunak says he saw minutes of Scientific Advisory Group for Emergencies meetings that had opinions critical of majority viewpoints edited out. Photograph: Nathan Stirk/Getty Images

## Nadeem Badshah

Wed 24 Aug 2022 18.51 EDT Last modified on Wed 24 Aug 2022 19.06 EDT

Rishi Sunak has claimed that it was a mistake to “empower scientists” during the coronavirus pandemic and that his opposition to closing schools

was met with silence during one meeting.

The Conservative leadership candidate believes one of the major errors was allowing the Scientific Advisory Group for Emergencies (Sage) to have so much influence on decision making such as closing nurseries, schools and colleges in March 2020.

Sunak also disclosed that he was banned from discussing the “trade-offs” of imposing coronavirus-related restrictions such as missed doctor’s appointments and NHS waiting list backlogs.

In an interview with the Spectator to be published on Saturday, the former chancellor said: “We shouldn’t have empowered the scientists in the way we did. And you have to acknowledge trade-offs from the beginning.

“If we’d done all of that, we could be in a very different place. We’d probably have made different decisions on things like schools.”

Schools in the UK shut with the exception of those for looking after the children of keyworkers and vulnerable children. Some schools started to reopen in August 2020.

Sunak’s remarks came a few days after he praised British scientists and pledged to set up a multibillion-pound research programme if he became prime minister after the exclusion of British scientists from EU funding.

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Sunak said during one meeting he tried to voice his opposition to closing schools, saying he got “very emotional about it”. The former chancellor added: “I was like: ‘Forget about the economy – surely we can all agree that kids not being in school is a major nightmare.’

“There was a big silence afterwards. It was the first time someone had said it. I was so furious.”

He said that minutes from Sage meetings were edited, which resulted in opposing opinions being omitted from the final draft. Sunak added: “Those meetings were literally me around that table, just fighting. It was incredibly uncomfortable every single time.”

Sunak said Sage advisers were unaware for “a very long time that there was a Treasury person on all their calls”.

He revealed that his Treasury official briefed him on what was said during the meetings and what was omitted by telling him “actually, it turns out that lots of people disagreed with that conclusion” or “here are the reasons that they were not sure about it”.

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- ['They robbed me of my children' Yemen's war victims tell their stories](#)
- [The rise of Yugonostalgia Everyone loved each other](#)
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- [Myanmar Five years after the crackdown, remaining Rohingya 'living like animals'](#)
- [Rohingya crisis Plight of Myanmar's displaced people explained in 30 seconds](#)

# ‘They robbed me of my children’: Yemen’s war victims tell their stories

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## ‘Everyone loved each other’: the rise of Yugonostalgia



Children dressed as Yugoslav socialist youth 'pioneers' at the Museum of Yugoslavia in Belgrade. Photograph: Jessica Bateman

While many citizens of the former Yugoslavia miss the lower prices and global recognition, others warn against over-romanticising the Tito era

Jessica Bateman

Thu 25 Aug 2022 00.00 EDT Last modified on Fri 26 Aug 2022 11.26 EDT

On a recent day in Belgrade, as the sun beat down, coaches pulled up and departed outside the Museum of Yugoslavia, an imposing mid-century block in the Serbian capital. A steady trickle of people emerged, some carrying flowers and a few waving the country's old flag. They had come to visit the mausoleum that houses the grave of Josip Broz Tito, the founder of socialist Yugoslavia.

Many of the visitors had grown up under the old system and had come to mark the dictator's birthday, which was a major public holiday before Yugoslavia's disintegration. Some belonged to far-left political parties, and sported kitsch-looking T-shirts and banners.

But there were also a few younger people. On the steps outside a special exhibition examining the Tito years via posters, artworks, artefacts and the recorded memories of "common people", I met 18-year-old Milos Tomcic wearing the hat and scarf of the "pioneers", the Yugoslav socialist youth movement.

"I wanted to see a picture of that time," he said, when I asked why he had come. "It was a great time. Everyone loved each other." Did he consider himself Serbian or Yugoslavian? "Yugoslavian," he replied, without hesitation. "My mum is Serbian, my dad Montenegrin, my grandma Croatian. Actually, my family is from all over Yugoslavia."

The Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, made up of six republics – Serbia, Croatia, Bosnia & Herzegovina, [Slovenia](#), Montenegro and Macedonia – plus two autonomous regions – Kosovo and Vojvodina – was established by Tito in 1945.

Tito's state aimed to unite the region's different ethnic and religious groups under the slogan "unity and brotherhood". Rising nationalism after his death in 1980 led to its breakup in 1992 and the bloody Yugoslav wars of the 1990s.

A common narrative during these years was that Tito had, for nearly half a century, forced different peoples to live together against their wishes. But 30 years on, many still hold deep affection for the country that no longer exists and regret its dissolution.



Marshal Josip Broz Tito in uniform, late president of former Socialist Federative Republic of Yugoslavia. Photograph: Reuters

In Serbia, [81%](#) say they believe the breakup was bad for their country. In Bosnia, which was always the most multicultural of the republics, 77% share that sentiment. Even in Slovenia, which was the first ex-Yugoslav country to join the EU and is widely regarded as the most “successful”, 45% still say the breakup was damaging. Unsurprisingly, only 10% in Kosovo, which didn’t have full independence in Yugoslavia, regret the breakup.

Fondness for the old system is often referred to as “Yugonostalgia”. However, Larisa Kurtović, a political anthropologist from Sarajevo who studies post-Yugoslav identity in Bosnia, is cautious about the term. “Nostalgia implies some kind of melancholy or longing,” she says. Of course this exists, with many restaurants and guesthouses around the region, such as the famous Café Tito in Sarajevo, festooned in kitschy memorabilia and presenting a rose-tinted view of the era. But Kurtović says there is also a

movement of younger people who look more critically at the period, assessing both its positives and negatives.

“There’s a great deal of appreciation for the socialist period, and it’s associated with economic growth and vast improvements in the standards of living,” she says, adding that the Yugoslav project’s “failed promises” paled in comparison to the nationalism and violence that followed. Most ex-Yugoslav states have seen huge economic decline since the wars and still suffer high levels of [brain drain](#).

Bosnia and Serbia in particular are plagued by political strife, and their once utopian brutalist housing estates and Yugoslav-built railways sit decaying. Although Croatia and Slovenia have found relative stability as EU members, [other countries’ applications](#) have stalled and [negotiations failed to materialise](#), leaving many doubting whether they will ever join the bloc.

Against this backdrop, some wonder whether the past could hold any solutions for the future. Kurtović cites the workers’ rights movements that have sprung up in Bosnia over the last decade, based on the old Yugoslav socialist model of worker self-organisation. “This system was very specific to Yugoslavia,” she says, explaining its divergence from Stalinist state-ownership of industry.

Although Yugoslavia was a one-party state, there were distinct differences from other iron curtain countries. Tito founded the non-aligned movement and maintained balanced relationships between the west and the USSR, and Yugoslav citizens could travel to either region. The strength of the old Yugoslav passport is mentioned by many of those I meet visiting Tito’s grave who now require visas to enter most countries.



'I consider myself Yugoslavian': Milos Tomcic with his Croatian grandmother. Photograph: Jessica Bateman



A Tito supporter in Belgrade carries the old Yugoslav flag to mark the former dictator's birthday. Photograph: Jessica Bateman/The Guardian

Another common theme Kurtović sees is a loss of status, and a perception that people have gone from living in a relatively large, well-respected country to much smaller, less significant ones. George Peraloc was born in

Macedonia (now North Macedonia) in 1989 but currently lives in Bangkok. “Whenever I have to do something bureaucratic like open a bank account here, they can never find North Macedonia on their system, but they can find Yugoslavia,” he told me.

“If you ask me, we could still benefit from a federation, even if it’s not Yugoslavia, because we’re so small and insignificant on our own.” He believes these feelings are common among people of his age, who never actually lived under the old system. “All our infrastructure is from that period, and now it’s falling apart,” he adds.

There are also emerging movements that re-examine the region’s anti-fascist, anti-nationalist heritage, which the wars revised or sought to erase. Choirs singing old partisan songs have sprung up, both in the Balkans and among diaspora communities.

In Vienna, the [29 November choir](#), named after the date the Federal People’s Republic of Yugoslavia was declared in 1945, consists of members from all ex-Yugoslav countries. Its initial aim was to challenge the nationalism that rose in the diaspora community during and after the wars. Yugoslav workers’ clubs, where people had formerly met to drink coffee, chat and play chess, had become segregated by ethnicity.

Choir members dress in red and blue jackets with stars, referencing the old Yugoslav flag, but they avoid singing songs associated with the Communist party or that celebrate Tito.

“That’s a conscious decision because we know there’s a glorification happening, which is problematic,” says conductor Jana Dolecki, who is originally from Croatia and moved to Vienna in 2013. “Plus, they didn’t really have any good songs,” she laughs.

Growing up in Czechoslovakia, Yugoslavia seemed like a paradise to me

*Peter Korchnak*

Instead, members carefully select melodies they believe can be applied to current political struggles such as rising nationalism and populism. “We try stay away from historical revisionism,” she says. “You can get into this celebration of the past, always saying it was better, but not reflecting on what ‘better’ actually means.”

The choir has helped some members explore a sensitive period of history. Marko Marković, who was born in Belgrade but grew up in Vienna, says his family refused to discuss the wars with him as a child. “It was too complicated for a seven-year-old to understand, or so they thought,” he remembers. “So I always had the feeling that the history of where I came from is a taboo topic.” When he found the choir, he felt he could finally “patch up some holes.”

The internet also provides a gateway for people to rediscover overlooked aspects of their heritage. Several popular [Instagram accounts](#) collate the furniture, brutalist architecture and graphic design of the period.



The Hall of Yugoslavia in the Palata Srbija building in Belgrade, which hosted world leaders in the Tito era. Photograph: Marko Đurica/Reuters

Peter Korchnak, who grew up in then Czechoslovakia, launched the [Remembering Yugoslavia](#) podcast in 2020. “Growing up, Yugoslavia

seemed like a paradise to me,” he says, explaining that many people fleeing the Czechoslovakian regime would escape to Yugoslavia. Dissidents from other communist countries, such as Ceaușescu-era Romania, often did the same.

“We watched the violent dissolution of Yugoslavia while I witnessed my own country’s peaceful dissolution,” he says. “I started looking for comparisons, comparing the two. And I just became fascinated by it.”

Korchnak has been struck by the emotional outpouring he receives from some listeners. “The best comment I’ve heard is that it’s like a public service,” he says. “And a lot of people say, ‘For a long time I was ashamed to even think the word ‘Yugoslavia’. Some have said it’s even been like therapy.”



An admirer poses with a portrait of Tito as anti-fascists and regional politicians held a ceremony in Sarajevo to mark the former president’s birthday. Photograph: Elvis Barukcic/AFP/Getty



Tito memorabilia for sale in Belgrade. Photograph: Jessica Bateman

Korchnak finds the fondness many ex-Yugoslavs have for their old system striking. “You might hear older people [in Slovakia] saying, ‘Oh, things were cheaper back then,’ but mostly everyone has moved on,” he says. “But [in ex-Yugoslavia] it’s kind of transformed into something else.”

However, some are more critical of what they see as an over-romanticism of the period. Arnela Išerić’s family are from Bosnia and fled to the US, where she was raised during the war. “My impression as a child was that [Yugoslavia] was the most wonderful time and everything was harmonious,” she says. “But when I grew up, I realised there were things about it I did not like.” She cites the lack of LGBT rights and suppression of political dissent. However, she says she can still identify with the “spirit” of Yugoslavia.

“When I travel to other parts of the region, such as Montenegro or Croatia, I always feel like I connect with people. I can speak their language and we have a similar culture.”

As time moves on and younger people are less directly affected by the trauma of war, some feel it’s becoming easier to analyse the period. “Almost every day, someone is asking if they can interview us for their dissertation on post-Yugoslav identity,” says Dolecki, the choir conductor. “For a long

time it was a socially taboo topic,” agrees her colleague Marković. “But this generation has the luxury of being far enough away to not have all the biases, and the trauma that comes with it. And I think this will become bigger.”

This article was amended on 26 August 2022 to clarify that the country now called North Macedonia was previously called Macedonia; that 29 November is the date when Yugoslavia became a federation, not when it was founded; and that Vojvodina was part of the federation. A photo caption was also amended to remove a description of Palata Srbija as a “brutalist” building.

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## Dance like no one's watching – and six more ways to recapture childhood fun



Dancing queen ... Coco Khan shows off her new moves at Frame, King's Cross, London. Photograph: Sarah Lee/The Guardian

It's never too late to attempt an activity you might have missed out on as a kid. Learning to dance, skip, swim, blow bubbles, play football, or go to a

funfair can bring you unexpected joy, as our writers discover

[Sadia Nowshin](#), [Simon Hattenstone](#), [Kerry Hudson](#), [Coco Khan](#), [Chris Godfrey](#), [Saima Mir](#) and [Jenny Stevens](#)

Thu 25 Aug 2022 01.00 EDT Last modified on Thu 25 Aug 2022 03.15 EDT

Skills such as riding a bike or learning to swim are often considered part of growing up – but not everyone gets to experience these childhood staples, and some only discover them much later in life. [Drew Barrymore, who has spoken about her traumatic childhood](#) in the past, recently shared TikToks of herself enjoying the experiences that, in a more conventional youth, might be considered unexceptional. In one, she laughs in pure pleasure at feeling the rain on her skin; in another, she dances with abandon in her living room. Here, seven writers describe belatedly embracing “childlike” endeavours – and experiencing the joy they can bring later in life.

## **Sadia Nowshin: ‘I can’t wait to frolic in the sea on my next holiday’**

I have a vivid childhood memory, from around the age of nine, of clinging to an equally anxious friend as we squeeze our eyes shut and jump into the cold water of lane one. We emerge beaming with achievement, having entered the pool for the first time just a few months earlier, marking our last swimming lesson with a final, fearless leap of faith.



‘I’ve reclaimed the exhilaration’ ... Sadia Nowshin embraces the sea.

But that was the last time I went near a pool until years later, on a family holiday, when I discovered that, contrary to my expectations, swimming was decisively *not* like riding a bike. The shock had me scrambling back to safety, a fear of water flooding in. A cultural expectation for girls to cover up had already removed revealing swimming costumes from my wardrobe. This, coupled with teenage body-image issues, saw me vow to remain on dry land.

Then, earlier this year, I booked myself on to a beginner’s course of swimming lessons as part of a post-pandemic mission to break out of my comfort zone. I had thought my experience was unique, but quickly found that I was the youngest in a group of exclusively south and east Asian women chasing the same mission. We became sheepish swimming comrades, united by a desire to overcome the shame that comes with learning late, and encouraging each other at every metre milestone. I might not be winning races, but I no longer feel anxious every time I go over a bridge and will accept the next pedalo offer that is extended, with confidence, knowing that that a tumble into the water won’t result in a mortifying rescue mission. Most importantly, I’ve reclaimed the feeling of exhilaration I embraced as a child and can’t wait to frolic into the sea on my

next holiday to make up for all the salty memories I've missed out on making.

## **Simon Hattenstone: ‘Skipping makes me feel like a king of the universe’**

I was so jealous of people who could skip. I couldn't work out the magic – was the rope going through them, across them, under, over? Whooosh! It didn't matter. It was so fast and pure and beautiful.

I never skipped at school. I missed a few years, due to contracting encephalitis, which may well have been the skipping years. When I returned, it was all football. No boy skipped in the playground at secondary school unless he wanted his head kicked in. Well, this was the 1970s.

A few years ago, [Jimmy, a sprinter, became part of our family](#). Wow, could he skip. He was mesmerising. I would watch his big toe rising every millisecond, thinking, how?



‘I love the feeling’ ... Simon Hattenstone gets to grips with skipping.  
Photograph: Jimmy Thoronka

A boxing club opened near work. A brilliant way to get fit, people said, such fun. But skipping was part of the training. And I couldn't skip. People would laugh at me. It's not that I wasn't willing to learn; I was convinced I couldn't. I blamed it on the encephalitis, which can screw up perspective and coordination. Whatever the cause, it was humiliating.

One day, Jimmy brought home orange plastic skipping ropes to send back to kids in Sierra Leone. When everybody was out, I had a go. I tripped up. I'd jump on the rope or miss it all together. But I didn't give up. I managed two skips, then three, and built up. It was the middle of lockdown and there was lots of time to practise. My sister came over and I showed her. "Wow – three!" she said. Then I changed technique. Instead of jumping with both feet, I'd lift my left foot, and it felt easier. Ten became 20, then 30. But I would get out of breath. Skipping was so much harder than running.

Gradually, the two came together – skipping and breathing. Now, I love the feeling. I'm slow and clumsy but on a great day I can get to a hundred without stopping. People laugh when they see me because I look so happy and childlike. They ask if I can launch off my right foot (no) and what other techniques I can do (none). I'm terrified of trying anything new in case I forget what I can already do. It feels like the first thing I've learned to do since kick-ups with a football when I was 11-ish. Occasionally, I can even hear the wind through the rope. It makes me feel like king of the universe. Whooosh.

## **Kerry Hudson: 'At the funfair I was alive with my happy, deeply loved kid riding on my shoulders'**

In my teens, the funfair was omnipresent – from our Great Yarmouth council estate, I could hear the screams from the Pleasure Beach rollercoaster. But, in the working-class towns of my earlier childhood, annual fairs always seemed to be for "other kids". For us, the walk to the fair was punctuated by a fierce briefing from my hard-up single mum: "One ride; don't ask for a *single* extra thing. Otherwise, you're right home."

My eyes lit up with the rainbow of lights and I stuck my tongue out to catch silky wisps of candyfloss floating through the air like new snow but there

was always so much more that I wanted – a goldfish in a bag, doughnuts, a ride on the waltzers! – that I would spend a lot of time tussling with the natural childish urge to *want, want, want* and eventually I would always buckle and *plead, plead, plead*. The memory of my mum’s expression, when she had to open her purse to show me there were no more coins, twists my heart even now. Eventually, I learned not to ask; instead, I lingered in arcades snaking my fingers, smelling of tangy copper, into the payout slots in the hope of finding a forgotten two-pence piece.



‘The greatest joy’ ... Kerry Hudson at the funfair in Prague. Photograph: Peter Strauli

I’m a mum myself now and, at Easter, Prague’s biggest funfair arrived. My happiness was twofold. I knew my toddler – though he wouldn’t have everything he demanded – wouldn’t see the stress on my face as I weighed up the waltzers against dinner. I had also just had life-saving airway surgery and, as I watched him delightedly devour “chimney cake” and bounce along to Haddaway, I was alive with my happy, healthy, deeply loved kid riding on my shoulders. Growing old, and getting to experience childlike pleasures alongside your children, truly is the greatest joy. Getting to ride the dodgems and waltzers as many times as I want is just an extra bonus.

## **Coco Khan: ‘Dance classes gave me a new appreciation of my body’**

At school, it never occurred to me that I might like dance classes. Even when I was going to “nappy nights” – club nights for the under-18s – nurturing a love of raves that I still have now, it didn’t cross my mind to actually learn some moves.

Part of this was circumstance – being one of three kids in a single-parent family meant money was tight, and having different pickup times from school could be an impossible hurdle. But I have also wondered if culture played a role: many girls get into dancing through infant ballet classes, yet none of the south Asian girls from my council estate did them. By my teenage years, some of these same friends were facing active discouragement from performing arts or sport by their families. I couldn’t see anyone who looked like me doing it, so, perhaps, I deduced, it wasn’t for me.



‘Something clicked’ ... Coco Khan. Photograph: Sarah Lee/The Guardian

Then, three years ago, I arrived at my regular gym looking for a class to find the only one available was dance. I went for it. The worst bit was the mirror. Dancing in a club is one thing, but seeing yourself in the cold light of day –

the clumsy shortness of your limbs, and how parts of you continue to jiggle long after you've paused – takes some getting used to. Eventually, however, something clicked. Concentrating on the steps helped push my body insecurities away. Soon enough, a new, different appreciation of my body began: a love for what it can do, rather than how it appears.

These days, I dance once a week. Even when the pandemic forced studios to close, there were plenty of YouTube videos teaching the latest TikTok dance or a classic Britney routine (pro tip: add it to your karaoke routine and watch everyone lose their minds). To me, dance classes are win-win. It's one of the best all-round exercises for improving strength, lung capacity and coordination; it requires no equipment and most people can participate at some level. When else in life do we get a deal this good?

## **Chris Godfrey: ‘I’m quietly confident that I’m now an asset to my football team’**

My older brother Matt used to tell everyone that I had a foot problem: that's how bad I was at football. I'm still not sure if this lie was to protect him or me from embarrassment. Still, it's fair to say that my fervour for Arsenal off the pitch wasn't matched by my ability on it. “I'd sometimes think to myself, ‘can he even see the ball?’” said my lifelong friend Josh. “We'd have been better off if you just stayed at home and played video games,” added his brother, James. And, to be fair, that's eventually what I did.

But last year's lockdown presented an opportunity to rectify the situation. There was an abundance of spare time and an urgency to be outdoors. I bought some new boots. I got my match fitness up (sprints, mainly). And I took a ball to my local park where I trained alone (and there is no sadder sight than a man in his early 30s, on his own in a park, teaching himself kick-ups and dribbling around cones). I watched YouTube videos, enlisted friends to critique my game, and repeatedly passed the ball against walls.



Goal! Chris Godfrey (*centre*) playing five-a-side football in north London.  
Photograph: Alicia Canter/The Guardian

Eighteen months later, I'm playing five-a-side once a week. As a defender, I've taken my game from Shkodran Mustafi to Rob Holding (AKA "error prone" to "competent"). At the rate I'm going, I'll soon be as elegant on the ball as Ben White, capable of effortlessly dribbling out of defence and laying on silky attack-minded passes. My teammates agree. "I couldn't believe how relaxed he was on the ball along with his first touch, control and decision making," says personal trainer Matt Godfrey, my aforementioned brother, after a recent a game. "It's a proud feeling seeing all the things we've been teaching him come together."

"Most improved this season: Chris. Solid defender," says Rob Timanti, which means a great deal, because Rob is a baller. "It's been really great to see Chris go from strength to strength," says Adam Hartnell, who is as good a coach as he is a player. "I knew it would just be about confidence and after he started getting more minutes on the pitch things just completely changed. He now keeps up with even the best players." And, while it may be four games without a win at the time of writing, I'm quietly confident that I'm now an asset, not a hindrance.

## **Saima Mir: ‘I plan to be a silver-haired 70-year-old, sparring with my twentysomething son’**

At 47, I am a latecomer to martial arts. Growing up, my brother and I would scour the shelves of Blockbuster for films such as Kickboxer, Bloodsport, China O’Brien, and, of course, anything starring Bruce Lee. Despite loving the idea of learning to fight, I didn’t think it was an option for a brown, Muslim girl from inner-city Bradford. If someone had told me then that Muslim masters used martial arts as a spiritual tool, and that Islamic teachings of self-control and restraint are mirrored in disciplines such as Silat and Wushu, maybe I would have thought differently.

When I heard that one of the dads at my children’s school was starting a club, I signed my son up. Sifu Carl Jackson had amassed 17 British titles, three European titles and six world championship silvers, and had achieved the feat of creating a club that felt hugely inclusive. Knowing my interest in the sport, my husband nudged me to sign up too. I was nervous that first day, but the minute my boxing glove made contact with a pad, I knew I was where I belonged. Something about it felt comforting. I was hooked.



‘I was hooked’ ... Saima Mir spars with a partner at Carl Jackson Martial Arts, south London.

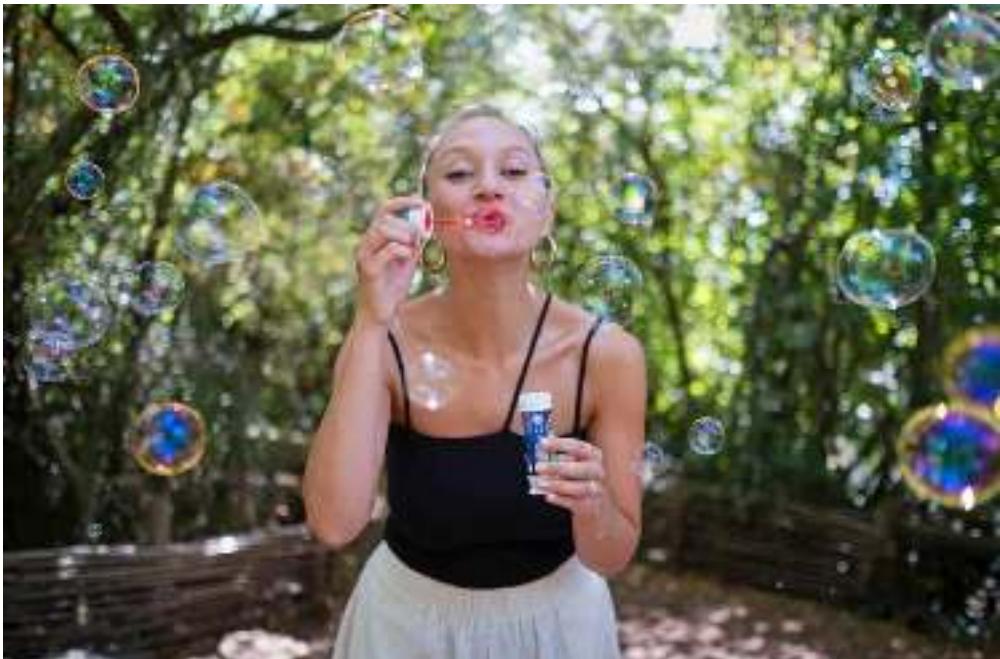
My Saturday mornings are now spent learning to jab, cross, kick and power punch with women ranging in age from their 50s to teenagers. Some members fight in hijab. We learn Jeet Kune Do, the martial arts form devised by Bruce Lee, which of course makes it incredibly cool. I'm not as fast or slick as I would have been in my youth, and my knees aren't what they used to be, but I've passed my yellow tag.

With work, book festivals, and three children, my free time is short. I choose to spend it only doing things I like, with people I love. Martial arts ticks these boxes. I've learned not to regret my life choices, but I do wonder about the chances I let slip by. I won't do that again – I plan to be a silver-haired 70-year-old, sparring with my twentysomething son.

## **Jenny Stevens: ‘I found myself staring at the bubbles with wonder’**

My sanity was fragile and I was looking for a reason to keep going. I found it, unintentionally, in the glossy, iridescent, unfathomable magic of a bubble. Pop!

I had just been discharged from a psychiatric unit. My relationship, I had finally realised, was bad. I left it and my flat behind, and was taken in by two close friends and their 18-month-old baby, Nico. I was fascinated by him: his shiny brand-newness, and how unencumbered he was by thoughts of the kind that were strangling my potential happiness: the hurt and the pain. He laughed with abandon, farted with glee, and woke up every morning yelling the only word he knew: “Achoo!” His delight at the most mundane events, like the ping of the microwave or counting the stairs, was infectious.



‘Bubble magic’ ... Jenny Stevens at Camley Street Natural Park.  
Photograph: Linda Nylind/The Guardian

During summer 2018, my friend brought home a bottle of bubbles. I don’t remember liking them much as a child – kids at school lobbing the soapy water at each other put me off – but, as I blew through that little ring, and a bubble grew and then detached itself into the air, Nico looked on in silent rapture. It was one of the purest things I had ever seen: his undiluted joy at witnessing something as humble as a bubble for the first time.

It was, I thought, what medical professionals were talking about when they spoke to me of mindfulness. There was absolutely nothing else in Nico’s mind at that moment but the smooth surface of that bubble, the way it wobbled into the air and its colour shifted from a blue sheen to a pink and silver one. I found myself staring with that same wonder – what a thrilling, beautiful and completely baffling thing. Sometimes, when I feel hopeless, I think of Nico seeing bubbles for the first time and remember that there is always someone looking at the world with new eyes – and that joy really is both the smallest and biggest of things. Now, I blow bubbles whenever I can.

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## Global development

# Five years after the crackdown, Myanmar's remaining Rohingya 'living like animals'

While 700,000 Rohingya Muslims fled Myanmar after 25 August 2017, 600,000 remain, facing harsh restrictions on movement, persecution and poverty

- ['Like an open prison': a million Rohingya refugees still in Bangladesh camps five years after crisis](#)



An estimated 600,000 Rohingya remain in Myanmar, facing conditions that Human Rights Watch has described as amounting to crimes against humanity. Photograph: Anadolu Agency/Getty Images

Global development is supported by



[About this content](#)



[Rebecca Ratcliffe](#) South-east Asia correspondent

Thu 25 Aug 2022 02.08 EDT Last modified on Thu 25 Aug 2022 04.19 EDT

Five years ago Muhammad\*, his wife and two children sheltered at their home, terrified as they heard of violence tearing through nearby villages. The Myanmar military had launched so-called “clearance operations” in

northern Rakhine state, forcing huge numbers of [Rohingya](#) people to flee into neighbouring Bangladesh.

“If we remember those times, to be honest, it’s difficult to eat or sleep,” he says. “25 August was one of the black days for Rohingya.”

Rohingya who fled across the border gave harrowing testimonies of mass rape, murder and of torched homes. The events shocked the world, and have led to [allegations of genocide in the UN’s top court](#), a case the UK has announced on Thursday that it will support.

About 700,000 Rohingya fled to Bangladesh, where they remain in squalid and overcrowded camps. But an estimated 600,000 Rohingya remain in [Myanmar](#), facing conditions that Human Rights Watch has described as amounting to crimes against humanity of apartheid, persecution, and deprivation of liberty.

## **‘I cannot express the suffering’**

Muhammad’s village was spared. Along with neighbours, his family decided it was safest to stay put for two months, sharing vegetables and supplies for as long as they could. “It was like a prison, we couldn’t go out of the village, we couldn’t get any food,” he says.

When they were finally able to leave their village, their region had changed irrevocably.

Today, communities continued to face severe restrictions on their movement, including being confined to camps and prevented from accessing livelihoods or basic services such as education and healthcare. An estimated 2,000 Rohingya, hundreds of them children, have been arrested for “unauthorised travel” by the military since the coup, according to Human Rights Watch.

“We’re in name human beings, but we’re living like animals,” says Muhammad. “Even animals are happy ... I cannot express the suffering.”

Even getting medical treatment at a hospital is almost impossible because of the travel permissions required and the exorbitant costs and discrimination they face.

Zaw Win, human rights specialist at Fortify Rights, said Rohingya were also under pressure to obtain national verification cards (NVC) that would identify them as “foreign Bengalis” rather than rightful Myanmar citizens. The military isn’t actively campaigning for people to obtain the cards, he added, but in practice they are necessary for essential tasks such as opening a bank account or taking work at an international NGO. “The people unavoidably have to accept the NVC, even though they don’t want to,” he said.

Within Rakhine state, Rohingya are caught between two rival groups, the military and the Arakan Army, a pro-Rakhine ethnic armed group. The latter fought against the military throughout 2019 and 2020 and now controls vast swathes of Rakhine state.

Many Rohingya, including Muhammad, say they are forced to pay taxes to both.

The Arakan Army, which was previously hostile towards Rohingya, has shifted its approach, including by referring to Rohingya as “Muslims” rather than “Bengalis”, which is considered offensive by Rohingya as it suggests they are foreigners. The group has also reportedly relaxed the military’s harsh restrictions on movement in areas it now controls.

More broadly across Myanmar, the relentless violence imposed upon communities by the military has led to signs of a shift in public opinion, with some expressing regret for not showing greater solidarity towards Rohingya in 2017. Yet, scepticism remains among Rohingya communities.

“They’re telling from mouths, not from their heart,” says Kader\*, who lives near Maungdaw, north of Rakhine state, and who was one of the few people to remain in his village after 2017.



The remains of a burned Rohingya village are seen in this aerial photograph near Maungdaw, north of Rakhine state. Photograph: Soe Zeya Tun/Reuters

## Soaring food prices

While the Arakan Army and military agreed an informal ceasefire in November 2020, fighting has broken out over recent months, say residents. Even for those who live far away from the conflict, this means road closures and higher food prices.

Romida\*, who is among 120,000 people who live in camps for Rohingya in Rakhine state, which were set up after communal violence in 2012, said the cost of basic goods has soared. She was forced to take her two teenage boys out of school three years ago so that they could work. "I had no alternative," she says. She worries about her sons travelling out of the camp for work; others have been attacked and robbed by Rakhine youths, she added.

Romida said the cost of a 50kg bag of rice had already doubled to 50,000 kyats. Others told the Guardian price rises elsewhere were even more extreme and that they don't know how communities will cope if increases continue.

That day, Romida said she had eaten only during the morning. “I can manage some vegetables or snacks, some spinach at least. But there are so many families who cannot even manage spinach or chilli or anything. The young children have been lying down at home since the morning, many families could not feed their children,” she adds. The shelters in which families stay are flimsy and cramped; in rainy season, their tin roof leaks, letting in heavy rain, while in the hotter months the heat is unbearable.

The military has blocked aid that has been sent to Rohingya camps and villages after the coup, according to Human Rights Watch, adding to the desperation.

The difference between her life now and when her family lived freely is “like the sky and the earth”, she says.

\* Names changed to protect their identity

*Additional reporting by Nurul Hoque*

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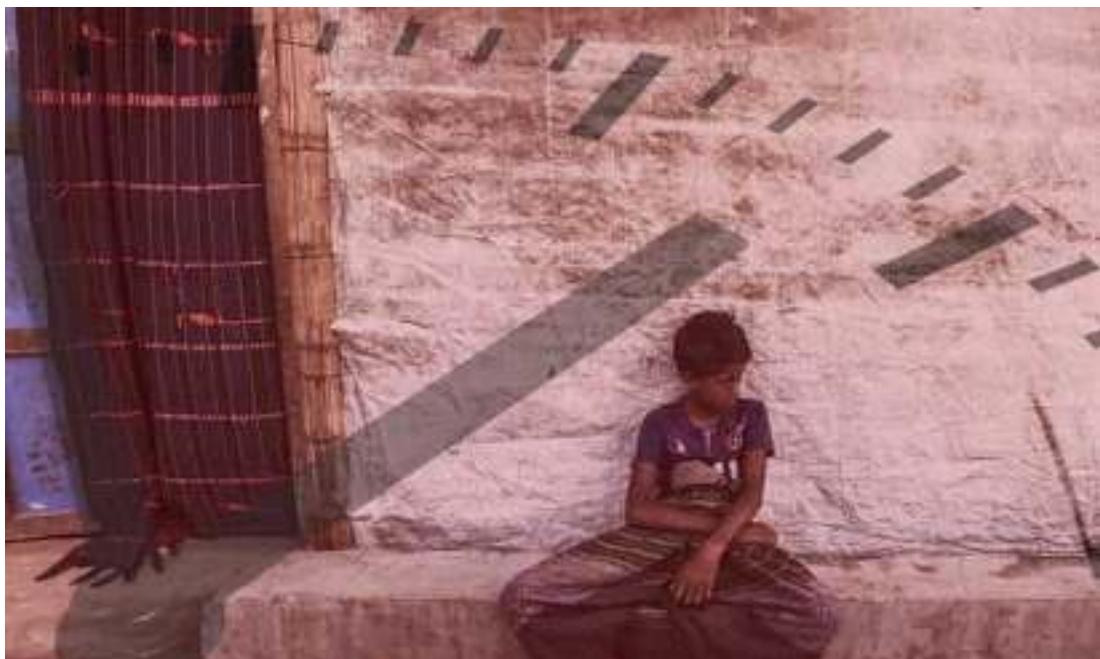
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## Global development

### Explainer

# Rohingya crisis: plight of Myanmar's displaced people explained in 30 seconds

One million Rohingya remain in Bangladesh refugee camps and the persecuted group has little hope of returning to Myanmar



Due to long-standing oppression and violence in Myanmar, one million Rohingya people live in refugee camps in Bangladesh. Composite: Damir Šagolj/Getty images

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[Kaamil Ahmed](#)

Thu 25 Aug 2022 01.44 EDT Last modified on Thu 25 Aug 2022 04.40 EDT

It has been five years since Myanmar’s military launched a campaign of massacres that killed about 7,000 Rohingya in a single month and compelled 700,000 to flee for the Bangladeshi border.

Since the first major military operation against the Rohingya minority in 1978, which forced out 200,000, the Rohingya have been collectively stripped of their citizenship and targeted by increasing violence and discrimination that culminated in the “clearance operations” that began on 25 August 2017. Those operations were years in the planning, according to military documents uncovered by the [Commission for International Justice and Accountability](#) and sent to the international criminal court.

One million Rohingya have been [left to live in shelters](#) in Bangladesh designed only to be temporary – made of bamboo and tarpaulin that offer little resistance to regular fires and flooding.

More than 100,000 have been moved to Bhasan Char, a remote island camp in the Bay of Bengal, while a fence was built around the rest of the camps,

stopping [Rohingya](#) moving without permission. Rohingya are not allowed to work and Rohingya-run education centres for secondary-level children have been closed.

No other country has helped Bangladesh by taking refugees in, and a return to Myanmar is a remote prospect. [The military coup of 2021](#) means the country is no safer than it was five years ago and the country has done nothing to improve conditions or indicate that it would recognise the Rohingya as citizens. Many of their villages have been turned into military bases or simply swallowed by the vegetation.

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Opinion**Liz Truss**

## **Think it's all over? Think again – if Truss wins, she will have to call an election**

[Martin Kettle](#)



The politician tipped to be the next Tory leader will not be an illegitimate prime minister. But she will be a weak one



'In a very real sense, Liz Truss will be a prime minister imposed from outside parliament.'

Photograph: WIktor Szymanowicz/NurPhoto/REX/Shutterstock

Thu 25 Aug 2022 01.00 EDT Last modified on Thu 25 Aug 2022 07.40 EDT

The [Conservative leadership](#) contest has been dragging on for so long now that familiarity may be breeding indifference. It seems an age since Boris Johnson resigned, and there are still nearly two weeks before the new prime minister takes over. In news terms, the contest is slipping into a downpage summer sideshow. As a result, we may be losing sight of what a groundbreaking event this 2022 succession race actually is.

We should be clear that on 5 September political history will be made. What makes the contest special is that, if the polling and betting are correct, the members of a political party are about to select a prime minister, Liz Truss, for whom neither [Tory MPs](#) nor the country itself has voted. Truss will be the third prime minister to be chosen by the Tories in mid-parliament since party members got the final say in leadership contests. But she will be the first to win through party members overturning the MPs' choice from the earlier rounds.

Until the 21st century, when a prime minister resigned during a parliament, their successor was chosen either informally or by a ballot among the ruling party's MPs. Among those who reached No 10 in that way in the postwar period were James Callaghan and John Major. This was a logical adaptation of the parliamentary system, under which MPs are chosen at a general election and government is in the hands of the party leader who can command a majority in the House of Commons.

However, the leadership electorate has now been broadened (since 1981 for Labour and [1998 for the Tories](#)) to include a role for party members. There have been four occasions when party members had the power to choose a British prime minister in mid-parliament. In the first, Gordon Brown won the Labour contest unopposed in 2007 because there was no other candidate to succeed Tony Blair. Theresa May won the second, in 2016, by default, because the withdrawal of Andrea Leadsom made a membership ballot unnecessary. Johnson did indeed face a ballot in 2019, becoming the first British prime minister to be chosen by a ruling party's members; but, crucially, he was also the [clear first choice](#) of MPs too in all the earlier parliamentary rounds.

This will not be true of Truss. Unlike May in 2016 or Johnson in 2019, she is not the first choice of Tory MPs. Only 50 of the party's 357 MPs (14%) [voted for her](#) in the first round in July. She trailed both Rishi Sunak and Penny Mordaunt in the next three rounds of the contest before nudging ahead of Mordaunt in round five to qualify for the membership runoff with Sunak. Even in the final round among MPs, Truss had the support of only 113 MPs, or 31.6% of the total. Yet it is she who now seems likely to cross the threshold into No 10 next month.

This does not make Truss an illegitimate prime minister. But it does make her a weak one. It also means she is a prime minister of a new kind, since her mandate to lead comes from the extra-parliamentary party membership and not from parliament itself. This should make supporters of representative democracy wary. It will create problems. Moreover, compared with a general election, when the choice of prime minister is governed by rules to ensure some kind of balance, a party membership election is more open to outside influence, as the Daily Mail clearly grasps. Voters in a membership ballot are also inevitably more partisan.

This may matter rather less in practice than it does in theory. The country is heading into a gale-force economic and [cost of living crisis](#). The Tory party at Westminster will doubtless rally behind its new leader, at least for a few weeks. But the moment, and what it embodies, will resonate. In a very real sense, Truss will be a prime minister imposed from outside parliament. This has not happened in Britain's parliamentary system since the unreformed era when monarchs still chose their first ministers, about 200 years ago. It will have political, and arguably also constitutional, implications.

To allow the members of any political party to choose the prime minister is dubious in principle and fraught with problems in practice. It inevitably reshapes the institutional balances within a representative government system like Britain's. But there is no going back.

Prime ministers who win general elections unquestionably have a mandate from the country. Those who come to the job in midterm merely inherit theirs. Recent midterm leaders have fretted about this. Brown, May and Johnson all spent their early months in Downing Street angling for the opportunity to secure their own, distinctive mandate. Brown bottled his opportunity. May squandered hers. Johnson [seized his triumphantly](#).

Which mandate will Truss claim in order to govern? She will inherit the economically expansionist Brexit mandate that Johnson won in 2019 from a wide-ranging coalition of voters across Britain. But she will only be in No 10 because of the mandate from a party membership that, as we should all know by now, is disproportionately old, male, white, southern English and rightwing. Her voters want smaller government, lower taxes and harder Brexit. Truss's answer to this dilemma will determine the fate of her prime ministership.

But this new kind of prime minister inescapably faces the need to establish her new kind of legitimacy more firmly. It will not be easy. She has to manage a parliamentary party that did not want her as leader (as happened to Labour under Jeremy Corbyn); to [choose ministers](#) willing to serve while disagreeing with her approach (the dilemma facing Sunak and others); to cope with an increase of [articulate former ministers](#) (including Johnson and Michael Gove) on the backbenches; and to deliver a legislative programme

without the major backbench revolts that at times have made the modern Tory party almost unmanageable.

Above all, though, Truss has to win a general election within the next two years. Like most midterm prime ministers, she will instinctively want to stay on until an election is no longer avoidable. Callaghan, Major and Brown all did this. Yet, looking down the barrels of ballooning inflation, spiralling energy prices and a health service on its knees, she may decide that things can only get worse. The one thing we can be certain of about Truss is that she is a bold gambler. It is why she stands on the threshold of Downing Street. For all the risks, an early general election may be the only way open to her to turn her weak mandate into a strong one.

- Martin Kettle is a Guardian columnist
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OpinionOil and gas companies

## How much longer can we tolerate this price-gouging racket of an energy sector?

[Damian Carrington](#)



We are all footing the bill of a crooked system that drains our bank balances and heats the planet



‘The power bestowed by these colossal sums has changed the world, driving both geopolitical conflict and the climate crisis.’ The Havana oil field, west of Kirkuk, Iraq. Photograph: Ahmad Al-Rubaye/AFP/Getty Images

Thu 25 Aug 2022 02.00 EDT Last modified on Thu 25 Aug 2022 08.26 EDT

Today’s soaring energy costs are frightening. But the deeper truth, often overlooked, is even more shocking. The global oil and regional gas markets are anything but – they are rackets, a profiteer’s paradise. If they operated in a single legal jurisdiction, they would have long been deemed illegally rigged.

The excess, unearned profits of the oil and gas industry are astronomical, recently revealed as [\\$3bn every day](#) for the past 50 years. That’s \$1tr a year, on average, from the pockets of you and me into the bank vaults of dictators and big oil. It may be the biggest shakedown in history.

That has consequences. The power bestowed by these colossal sums has changed the world, driving both geopolitical conflict and the climate crisis. But this price gouging also contains the seeds of its own destruction and the green shoots are starting to show.

Cartels have dominated the oil and gas industry for so much of its history, it has become normalised. But, if you take a step back, the absurdity becomes clear. Countries such as Saudi Arabia can produce a barrel of oil for [a few dollars](#), sell it for \$100 and still [talk about cutting production](#). Russia's invasion of Ukraine and manipulation of gas supplies has sent prices through the roof, sending yet more [billions of unearned dollars](#) into the Kremlin.

Such behaviour is deeply embedded. From the 1920s to the 1970s, a group dubbed the “international petroleum cartel” by the US Federal Trade Commission dominated. Its members were Exxon, Shell, Chevron, Mobil, Texaco, BP and Gulf. Opec was formed in 1960 by Saudi Arabia, Kuwait and others to challenge it. It succeeded, quadrupling prices by the end of the 1970s.

Today, an expanded Opec remains influential, as do US companies following the [fracking revolution](#), which was enabled by politicians flush with fossil fuel cash. Governments across the world, lobbied or controlled by fossil fuel interests, have colluded by keeping us addicted to oil and gas long past the time the climate dangers had become clear, reaping huge tax revenues along the way.

Remarkably, a €50 lawsuit filed quietly in April at a court in Berlin may just change all this. The lawyer Armin Steinbach, acting alone, aims to use EU competition law to prove that Opec is influencing prices illegally. If he wins his test case, every person in the EU would be able to seek damages from the organisation. “This would mean the end of Opec in the European market. It would be a huge thing,” he told me.

It’s a long shot. Ending the rent-grabbing of the oil powers through market reform may even be impossible. But we already know how to escape the grip of fossil fuels – stop using them. A glimmer of what that could look like was seen after the 1970s price shocks, which drove energy-saving measures around the world, such as the [55mph speed limit](#) in the US.

These efforts were stymied, but today is different. The inflated cost of oil has driven its use out of almost all sectors bar transport, and for that we now have a permanent solution – electric vehicles. Almost [one in three new cars](#)

[in China](#), the world's biggest market, are now electric. Renewable energy is now the cheapest option in much of the world and could squeeze out gas-fired power stations if vested interests are faced down. Energy-efficiency drives are under way again in many countries, though incomprehensibly [not in the UK](#).

The potential prize is huge. Not just truly affordable energy, but an end to the climate crisis that threatens us all and the fossil-fuelled regimes that oppress so many. Big oil will not go without a fight, but it may be doomed in any case, says the analyst Kingsmill Bond at the Rocky Mountain Institute.

“They can make super-profits for a while longer,” he says. “But the more they do so, the greater the incentive to change. In its current orgy of cashflow, the industry is thus sowing the seeds of its own destruction. It is one final party.”

But for how much longer can we tolerate this last hurrah? We are all footing the party’s bill, through our diminishing bank balances and the increasing [extreme weather impacts](#) of global heating. It is time for the racket to end.

- Damian Carrington is the Guardian’s environment editor
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## Why I quitSmartphones

# **Lord of the pings: how I turned off my phone notifications, and got my life back**

[Georgina Lawton](#)

From WhatsApp to Instagram to texts and email, I was spending my life frantically picking up my phone. It had to stop



‘Chances are you won’t actually miss the empty feeling that comes from browsing the lives of others and hearing awful news 24/7.’ Photograph: Yui Mok/PA

Thu 25 Aug 2022 03.00 EDT Last modified on Thu 25 Aug 2022 13.05 EDT

It officially started during that strange and mystical stretch of time now known as the first lockdown, when negative news notifications were at an all-time high and the only way to have a drink with your mates was through the [Houseparty](#) app, which would be inexplicably gatecrashed by strangers.

I was inundated with infection stats, digital book club invites, viral memes that no one would have found at all funny at any other time, and work emails postponing just about everything. I wanted an off switch for the world – but I settled instead for switching off my notifications.

But if I think back even further (hard: did life exist before the C-word?), this idea first sparked in 2019, when a now ex-boyfriend told me he had been living without phone notifications for years. I was impressed. Not least because our early digital courtship had been composed of rapid, quickfire texts and voice notes. “So how have you been staying on top of our messages?” I remember asking. “I just check the things that are important to me,” he said. “Like your texts.”

The reasons for turning off your notifications are numerous: better focus and concentration, being more present, better sleep, feeling in control of your life. When people who are still at the mercy of pings, rings and push notifications ask me how it all works, I paraphrase my ex: “You just check your phone as and when you need to.” My friends look horrified. But in this era of constantly breaking news, keeping them on seems like self-flagellation. Allowing yourself to become panicked by yet another depressing political update as it unfolds, or the news that your ex has had a baby, is like having an extra voice in your ear saying: “You’re worthless, no one loves you – and you’re doomed!” I actually like to schedule in some time for self-loathing around 7pm on Sunday instead of having it forced upon me ad hoc by my phone, thanks very much.

If you’re too scared to switch everything off from your phone’s main settings, you can try apps that limit time on certain apps, or just switch off notifications individually and ease yourself in gently. It can happen in stages. First you can try your big social media ones: Instagram, Facebook, Twitter, et al. Chances are you won’t actually miss the empty feeling that comes from browsing the lives of others and hearing awful news 24/7.

Then if you’re feeling braver, go for your email notifications. Friends who work as business managers, editors and lawyers tell me that there’s no way they could do that for fear of missing out on an important message and jeopardising their whole career. “I could be deemed negligent and get

sacked,” the lawyer said, before admitting that his work phone never goes off and that he has notifications on both his personal and work phones. But are we ever paid enough to be on call 24/7? (Actually, the lawyer probably is). Surely, setting aside a slot in your day to respond to work messages is more time-efficient than frantically picking up your phone every time it goes off and distracting yourself from other urgent tasks?

WhatsApp seems to be the one most people can’t let go of. Turning off notifications there for me involved both the push ones and the read ones. I still remember Googling “how to read a [WhatsApp](#) message without people knowing”, which involved putting my phone on airplane mode then opening the message, to ensure the blue ticks (which signal a message has been read) did not appear. But no more!

My mum still has this panicked sense of duty to respond to all texts immediately. “They’ve seen that I’ve seen it now!” she says. I tell her to switch off read receipts as I’ve now done, but she refuses. She also still has all her phone alerts on full volume, which is a very particular form of notification obsession favoured only by the over-50s.

WhatsApp is also funny because once you turn your read notifications off, it means you’re freed from the tyranny of seeing whether your message has been read by others, but they might still worry about you knowing if they’ve read yours. “Sorry I saw your thing and didn’t reply,” a friend said to me recently. Don’t apologise, I said, I’ve turned off all read notifications. The shackles are off for both of us now. Finally, we can dance.

- Georgina Lawton is the author of *Raceless: In Search of Family, Identity, and the Truth About Where I Belong*
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## OpinionParks and green spaces

# Never visited Tividale Park in the Black Country? You're missing a treat

[Adrian Chiles](#)



You can keep your fancy royal parks. I love seeking out the little local ones – and doing a spot of litter-picking



‘We must cherish these little pockets of green space. They give us room to breathe.’ Photograph: John Hollidge/Alamy

Thu 25 Aug 2022 02.00 EDT Last modified on Thu 25 Aug 2022 15.25 EDT

The three things that make us most proud to be British are, [according to Ipsos](#), the NHS, our history and the royal family. If they’d asked me, I’d have told them it’s our parks that make me proudest of this country. Not so much the big, grand parks but the little local ones we’re all generally only a short walk from. I don’t come across these so much in towns and cities elsewhere in the world. We should be proud of them. Tuesday’s headlines about “[parks at risk](#)” from funding cuts were chilling. We must cherish these little pockets of green space. No matter if they’ll bag no horticultural awards; they give us all room to breathe. Wherever I go, I seek them out.

To name one of these tiny places feels pointlessly random, but I’ll do it anyway: Tividale Park, bang in the middle of the Black Country. I was filming at a pub down the road, a place called the Wonder, and I went for, well, a wander. And there it was, the entrance near a chip shop, litter from which was strewn around the park benches. No matter: I picked it up, binned it and walked right around the place, which didn’t take long. All around, the post-industrial West Midlands hummed away doing whatever it does or

doesn't do these days. There was a good view of a lot of it from this little haven.

Magnificent as they are, you can keep your fancy royal parks. These are the little green hubs around which our communities revolve. There will be one near you that the rest of us will likely never have heard of nor ever visit. It's precious; do be sure to look after it.

Adrian Chiles is a broadcaster, writer and Guardian columnist

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## **Ten years on, first full report records Syrian regime's massacre at Daraya**

Investigation into attacks by Bashar al-Assad's forces that left 700 people dead could help bring justice for victims



This photograph provided by the Shaam News Network shows a mass grave said to contain the bodies of victims of the Daraya massacre. Photograph: Anonymous/AP

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[Ruth Michaelson](#)

Thu 25 Aug 2022 02.00 EDT Last modified on Thu 25 Aug 2022 11.11 EDT

The “startling display of violence” meted out by Syrian government forces against civilians in the town of Daraya 10 years ago has been laid bare in the first detailed investigation into the massacre.

At least 700 people were killed when forces loyal to president Bashar al-Assad [stormed the town](#) between 24 and 26 August 2012. Troops went door to door killing and detaining men, women and children. Terrified people sheltered in basements.

To mark the 10th anniversary of the atrocity, a team of investigators from Syria, or of Syrian descent, backed by the Syrian British Consortium (SBC) advocacy group, tracked down survivors and witnesses scattered around the world to record and analyse their testimonies. Some of the investigators’ names have been changed for security reasons.

The team hopes the [findings, published on Thursday](#), will be used by [UN bodies](#) and other legal institutions to prosecute some of those responsible.

“This report records the atrocities perpetrated in Daraya based on the testimony of witnesses and victims, thereby memorialising their accounts and maintaining a record for posterity,” said the report.

“It also showcases that despite the passage of 10 years and the collection of substantial evidence, accountability and justice continue to elude the people of Daraya. Despite their disappointment in the international system, witnesses provided their testimony, recounting the heinous crimes committed in Daraya by their own government, based on their belief that their story – their truth – is not only worthy of documentation, but may one day assist in bringing justice and accountability.”



A tank advances into Daraya during the assault on the town by Syrian government and allied forces in August 2012. Photograph: Courtesy of Syrian British Consortium

At the time, the events in Daraya, a few miles from Damascus, were regarded as the worst single massacre of the civil war. Assad’s regime described it as a counter-terrorism operation. Internationally, it has gone largely undocumented, apart from a brief mention in a broader [UN report on Syria in 2013](#), which acknowledged government forces committed war crimes and said more investigation was required.

“We chose to investigate this massacre because it was the beginning of the unravelling of Daraya,” said Yasmine Nahlawi, a specialist in international law and atrocity prevention. “The army had engaged in skirmishes before, going into the city and shooting at demonstrators. But this was the first major event that led to a spiral of targeted campaigns against the city, further massacres, a siege and bombardments.”

Investigator Yafa Omar, who recalled hearing the bombardments from her house in the centre of Damascus, said: “If you allow these crimes to happen in Syria it will become the norm, and it will happen elsewhere.

“Syrians doing this paves the way for victims in other countries to use the same tools to pursue justice.”

In the days leading up to the massacre, witnesses, many of whom were being interviewed about events for the first time, said the Assad government and its allies indiscriminately shelled neighbourhoods across Daraya, killing and injuring civilians.



A home damaged by shelling during the August 2012 attacks. Photograph: Courtesy of Syrian British Consortium

One witness stated: “The regime’s escalation against the city of Daraya began on the first or second day of Eid (19 or 20 August). The

bombardments became worse than normal. There was mortar shelling and worse types of bombardments with weapons that we didn't know, with new sounds.”

“We knew that our area’s turn came when the mortars stopped,” said another.

One witness told researchers the scene at the hospital after one attack was “horrific, like doomsday”.

“Everyone was looking for their loved ones, trying to get them treatment. People were running and hiding … A lot of people were coming to the hospital. Everyone was screaming, saying, ‘Save this person or he will die.’ Entering the hospital meant that you were going to see people dying. I was only thinking about my brother … [and whether he] was alive or not. The sight of blood was frightening. I still remember the people’s cries; everyone was calling the name of their loved one … I remember wondering whether some people were dead or alive because they had stopped screaming.”

The report said investigators were able to identify government forces and Iranian and Hezbollah militias involved in the attacks by their uniforms, insignia and weaponry. The team also identified some individuals responsible.

The investigation also details how the massacre and its aftermath were the target of disinformation, including evidence that television reporters pressured gravely wounded civilians to bolster the state’s narrative that rebel forces were responsible for the killings.

Efforts to blur the facts of what happened “were almost worse than the massacre itself”, said investigator Ahmed Saied, who grew up in Daraya.

Saied said documenting crimes that took place in his home town was hard. “You think that you are stronger and these stories are not affecting you, but sometimes you realise they are in subtle ways,” he said. All the researchers were offered counselling during the work.



Mass graves dug in the land behind Abu Suleiman al-Darani mosque to bury those who were killed in the Daraya massacre. Photograph: Courtesy of Syrian British Consortium

Mohamad Zarda, who lost his brother and cousin during the attack, said that giving testimony had provided an outlet for his traumatic memories. He added that he found comfort in speaking to other Syrians, who were better placed to understand what he experienced.

“I think it’s important to have official documentation, an investigation saying that these groups are responsible and we can prove it. But the people of Daraya all know who was responsible,” he said.

A recent trial in Germany saw a [former Syrian officer convicted for crimes against humanity](#), but attempts to refer Syria to the international criminal court by the UN security council have been vetoed by Russia and China.

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**Imran Khan**

## Pakistan court grants Imran Khan extended bail in terrorism case

Police barred until 1 September from arresting former PM, whose supporters gathered outside court



Imran Khan addresses an anti-government rally in Islamabad on 20 August.  
Photograph: WK Yousafzai/AP

*[Shah Meer Baloch](#) and agencies*

Thu 25 Aug 2022 03.44 EDT Last modified on Fri 26 Aug 2022 00.27 EDT

A Pakistani court has barred officers from arresting the former prime minister [Imran Khan](#) until the end of the month, according to officials, after police filed terrorism charges against him.

The court protected Khan, the leader of Pakistan's opposition, from arrest until 1 September over accusations that during a speech at the weekend, he threatened police officers and a judge.

Events before the court's decision had raised fears of violent clashes between police and Khan, who is leading mass rallies and seeking snap elections after being ousted.

The government says elections will be held as scheduled next year.

On Thursday, Khan told reporters outside the court that he never threatened anyone. He said the terrorism charges against him were politically motivated and that Shehbaz Sharif's government feared his growing popularity.

"You are making fun of Pakistan," Khan said of Sharif's government.

Later, Khan went to another court where a criminal case was registered against him this week on charges of defying a ban on staging rallies in the capital, Islamabad. He was protected from arrest in that case as well until 7 September.

Earlier, in the alleged terrorism case, Khan's lawyer, Babar Awan, requested the court grant bail to Khan. Awan said the charges filed against Khan were "an act of revenge".

Arriving at court, Khan was asked to walk toward the courtroom as ordinary suspects do. The court agreed to extend Khan's protection from arrest until 1 September.

Hundreds of Khan's supporters gathered outside the court building, chanting slogans against Sharif's government. Protesters said Khan was being politically victimised by Sharif's government. Later, Khan left the court for his home on the outskirts of Islamabad.

Sharif replaced Khan in April when the former cricket star turned Islamist politician was [ousted in a no-confidence vote](#) in parliament. Legal experts say Khan could face from several months to 14 years in prison, the equivalent of a life sentence, if he is found guilty of the terrorism charges in the trial, which has not started yet.

Thursday's appearance by Khan before the anti-terrorism tribunal amid tight security was the latest development in the saga between Pakistan's

government and the former prime minister, who has been holding mass rallies as he seeks to return to power.

Khan is also due to appear before the Islamabad high court on 31 August to face contempt proceedings on charges of threatening a judge. A conviction in this case would disqualify him from politics for life under Pakistani law, as no convicted person can run for office.

It is the second time Khan has faced contempt charges. After elections in 1993 he was summoned but pardoned by the supreme court after describing the conduct of the judiciary as “shameful” and saying it did not ensure free and fair elections.

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Legal experts say Khan has limited options and could avoid a conviction if he apologises for his remarks against Judge Zeba Chaudhry, after he told her to “get ready for it, we will also take action against you”.

Since his ousting as PM, Khan has alleged – without providing evidence – that Pakistan’s powerful military took part in a US plot to unseat him. Washington, the Pakistani military and the government of Sharif have all denied the allegation.

Khan came to power promising to break the pattern of family rule in Pakistan. His opponents contend he was elected with help from the powerful military, which has ruled the country for half of its 75-year history. Since his removal from power Khan has demanded early elections and vowed to oust Sharif’s government through “pressure from the people”.

Nusrat Javed, a political analyst and author, said the military supported Khan as an alternative to dynastic politics and to break the cycle of power sharing.

“Khan is a true populist and charismatic personality and his narrative, ‘us vs them’, made him the military’s man to back him against the Sharifs and Bhuttos,” said Javed, referring to families who have long dominated the country’s politics.

Dr Ram Bhat, an author and expert in social media and politics, said: “Khan has cultivated a loyal online following and it helps him to weaponise social media for political ends. The physical spectacle of large rallies is mediated efficiently and at scale, giving him considerable media power.

“The establishment will make a mistake if it enables him to cash in on a hero or a victim image.”

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[Japan](#)

## Japan eyes return to nuclear power more than a decade after Fukushima disaster

Move designed to secure energy supplies would mark a dramatic shift in Japan's policy stance held since 2011 reactor meltdown



Workers construct water storage tanks at the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear power plant in 2020. Japan is considering increasing its dependence on nuclear power. Photograph: Kimimasa Mayama/EPA

*[Justin McCurry](#) in Tokyo*

Thu 25 Aug 2022 00.32 EDT Last modified on Thu 25 Aug 2022 06.16 EDT

[Japan](#) is considering building next-generation nuclear reactors and restarting idled plants in a major policy shift, 11 years after the triple meltdown at the [Fukushima](#) Daiichi nuclear power plant rocked the country's dependence on atomic energy.

The prime minister, Fumio Kishida, said he had directed a government panel to look into how “next-generation nuclear reactors equipped with new safety mechanisms” could be used to help Japan achieve its goal of [carbon neutrality](#) by 2050. His “green transformation” council is expected to report back by the end of the year, he said on Wednesday.

The change of direction, which could include extending the lifespan of existing reactors, have highlighted Japan’s struggle to secure a stable [energy](#) supply as a result of the war in Ukraine and soaring energy costs.

Successive governments have been forced to lower Japan’s dependence on nuclear since the March 2011 disaster, when a powerful [tsunami](#) destroyed Fukushima Daiichi’s backup electricity supply, causing three of its six reactors to suffer meltdowns.

Most of Japan’s nuclear plants have remained idle ever since, while the government said it would not build new reactors or replace ageing reactors, fearing a public backlash.

If realised, Kishida’s plans would mark a dramatic reversal of that stance.

“Russia’s invasion of Ukraine has vastly transformed the world’s energy landscape … Japan needs to bear in mind potential crisis scenarios,” he said at an energy policy meeting this week.

“To overcome an imminent crisis caused of a power supply crunch, we must take the utmost steps to mobilise all possible policies in the coming years and prepare for any emergency.”

The economy and industry minister, Yasutoshi Nishimura, said it was “extremely important to secure all options to redesign a stable energy supply for our country. From that perspective, we will also consider all options regarding nuclear power.”

Kishida conceded that the government would have to win support from the public, which turned against nuclear power in the wake of the Fukushima meltdown. Officials believe voters have become more receptive to nuclear

power due to rising fuel costs and after an [energy crunch in Tokyo](#) during a recent heatwave. The country is heavily dependent on imported fossil fuels.

“It is the first step towards the normalisation of Japan’s energy policy,” said Jun Arima, a project professor at the Tokyo University’s graduate school of public policy.

Seven reactors are currently in operation, with three others offline for regular safety inspections. Dozens of others are still going through a relicensing process under stricter safety standards introduced after the 2011 disaster, which some experts blamed on the “[nuclear village](#)” of operators, politicians and regulators.

A bigger role for nuclear in Japan’s energy mix could see seven additional reactors being restarted after next summer, including two at [Kashiwazaki-Kariwa](#), the biggest nuclear plant in the world. Restarting the plant would be particularly controversial, since it is run by Tokyo Electric Power, the same company that operates Fukushima Daiichi.

The 2011 disaster sent huge quantities of radiation into the atmosphere and forced tens of thousands of people to flee their homes. Some areas near the plant remain off-limits, while others have only recently [reopened to residents](#).

The government will also consider extending the lifespan of existing reactors beyond the legal limit by excluding the period they remained shut down – in some cases several years – when calculating their operating time.

Plants can operate for up to 40 years in principle, but can continue generating electricity for another 20 years if they undergo safety upgrades and pass screenings conducted by regulators.

Japan has set a target for [nuclear power](#) generation to account for 20-22% of its electricity supply in 2030. Before the Fukushima meltdowns, about a third of its power generation came from nuclear, but in 2020 the figure was less than 5%.

*Wires contributed reporting*

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**Shinzo Abe**

## Japan's police chief to resign after fatal shooting of Shinzo Abe

Itaru Nakamura says fresh start needed after assassination ‘to ensure this never happens again’



Itaru Nakamura at a press conference in Tokyo. Photograph: JIJI Press/AFP/Getty Images

*[Justin McCurry](#) in Tokyo*

Thu 25 Aug 2022 04.12 EDT Last modified on Fri 26 Aug 2022 00.25 EDT

Japan’s most senior police officer has said he will resign to take responsibility for security lapses leading up to the [fatal shooting](#) last month of the former prime minister, Shinzo Abe.

Itaru Nakamura said on Thursday that he intended to step down as head of the national police agency to give the organisation a “fresh start”, weeks after Abe was gunned down while making an election campaign speech.

“We have decided to shake up our personnel and start afresh with our security duties, and that’s why I tendered my resignation today,” Nakamura told reporters at a press conference in which he detailed the lapses in security on the day of the shooting.

“In the process of verifying our new security plan, we have come to realise that our security system needs a fresh start … we need a new system to fundamentally reexamine security measures and ensure this never happens again.” He did not say when his resignation would take effect.

Media reports said Tomoaki Onizuka, the head of police in Nara, the western prefecture where Abe was killed, had also said he would quit.

Abe’s assassination, which occurred late in the morning outside a suburban railway station, immediately raised questions about how the suspect, Tetsuya Yamagami, was able to shoot his target from behind at close range.

Security experts have said bodyguards could have saved Abe by shielding him or pulling him out of the line of fire during the two-and-a-half-second gap between the first shot, which missed the target, and the second, fatal shot.

The prime minister, Fumio Kishida, acknowledged security arrangements had been flawed, while police officials admitted there had been “[problems](#)” with security.

“We failed to fulfil our responsibility to protect dignitaries,” Nakamura said soon after the 8 July shooting, before calling for an investigation and a review of security for politicians and other VIPs. “We take this extremely seriously. As the [police agency] commissioner general, who is in charge of directing and supervising prefectoral police, my responsibility is truly grave.”

Abe’s death, just two days before national elections, prompted other candidates to cancel speeches or step up security measures.

Japanese media reported that none of the three local police officers assigned to watch the area behind Abe had noticed Yamagami approaching the

politician shortly before he opened fire with a [homemade gun](#). Instead, according to the Mainichi Shimbun newspaper, they had been observing the growing number of people stopping to listen to Abe's speech.

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Yamagami, who is reportedly undergoing a psychiatric evaluation, got to within about seven metres of Abe before firing the first shot, the Yomiuri Shimbun said, citing investigative sources, before firing the second from a distance of about five metres.

Yamagami has told investigators he was driven to kill Abe by a hatred of the [Unification church](#), saying his mother had left their family financially ruined after making huge donations to the organisation.

Abe last year delivered a video message to a group affiliated to the church, and his grandfather, the postwar prime minister Nobusuke Kishi, helped it establish a presence in [Japan](#) to counter the growing influence of communism and the trade union movement.

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## [Iran](#)

# US says clashes with Iran-backed militias won't affect Tehran nuclear talks

Nuclear negotiations under way, as US-led mission against the Islamic State exchanges fire with armed groups in Syria and Iraq



President Joe Biden on August 23 ordered air strikes in eastern Syria targeting facilities used by Iranian-backed militias, a US military spokesman said. Photograph: Christina Sears/US NavyY/AFP/Getty Images

*[Julian Borger](#) in Washington and [Martin Chulov](#) in Beirut*

Wed 24 Aug 2022 18.55 EDT Last modified on Thu 25 Aug 2022 09.51 EDT

US-led forces and Iran-backed militias exchanged fire for the second day in a row, but the Biden administration said the fighting would not affect nuclear negotiations with Tehran.

US Central Command said the two bases, Conoco and Green Village, used for the US-led mission against the Islamic State (IS) had come under rocket attack on Wednesday evening, but there were no serious injuries. The US struck back with attack helicopters, killing “two or three suspected Iran-backed militants conducting one of the attacks” and destroying vehicles.

“The response was proportional and deliberate,” a CentCom statement said. “The United States does not seek conflict with Iran, but we will continue to take the measures necessary to protect and defend our people.”

US officials have stressed there is no connection between the fighting between the US and alleged Iranian proxies, and the delicate endgame of negotiations to revive a 2015 agreement between Iran and major powers which has largely disintegrated since Donald Trump withdrew the US in 2018.

The state department confirmed that the US had sent a response on Wednesday to Iranian proposals on ways to return to the deal.

Iran said that it had received the US response and was studying it. Both the US and Iran responses follow a proposed EU blueprint for restarting the nuclear deal, by which Iran would roll back its nuclear program in return for sanctions relief.

John Kirby, spokesman for the US national security council said Iran had made some concessions which had closed the distance between the negotiating positions but added: “Gaps remain. We’re not there yet.”

As the nuclear negotiations appeared to end the final stretch, fighting flared up in Syria, where the US-led anti-IS coalition is in close proximity to Tehran-supported militias in Syria and Iraq. Wednesday’s clash came a day after US airstrikes against targets in Deir Azzour, which Washington said were arms bunkers used by militias affiliated to Iran’s Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC). That action was taken in retaliation for drone attacks on US military outposts on 15 August.

Kahl said Tuesday's US strikes had struck nine bunkers, and had originally targeted 11 but people had been seen near two of them. The aim was not to cause casualties but to send a deterrent message, he said.

"Our response was extraordinarily carefully calibrated. It was meant to be proportional to the attacks that the Iran-backed groups carried out on 15 August. It was very precise," he said.

There have been a succession of attacks on the residual US military mission in [Syria](#), left behind to monitor and contain the remnants of IS. Kahl said the decision was taken to strike back after the 15 August drone attack in part because wreckage from a downed drone could be traced back directly to Tehran. He added that US airstrikes were also a cumulative response to a series of attacks by Iranian-based militias.

"We don't want Iran to draw the wrong conclusion that they can continue just doing this and get away with it," he said.

He insisted the US military operations in Syria were not linked to negotiations on the nuclear deal, known as the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA).

"Whether the JCPOA is reborn or not, it actually has nothing to do with our willingness and resolve to defend ourselves," Kahl said. "I think the strike last night was a pretty clear communication to the Iranians that these things are on different tracks."

Ellie Geranmayeh, a senior policy fellow at the European Council on Foreign Relations, said there were signs of anticipation on both sides of a deal being clinched.

"The US and Iranian governments have begun shifting the message for their audiences in expectation of something happening," Geranmayeh said.

The Iranian press has noticeably changed tone over recent weeks, swapping nationalistic and anti-western views for more neutral positions on the deal, which Iranian leaders have framed as a pillar of sovereignty.

The Israeli government, which has struggled to prevent the JCPOA being reborn, struck a defiant tone as the prospect of a new deal rose.

“We are not prepared to live with a nuclear threat above our heads from an extremist, violent Islamist regime,” the prime minister, Yair Lapid, said. “This will not happen, because we will not let it happen.”

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# Headlines

- [Liverpool Man arrested on suspicion of murdering Olivia Pratt-Korbel, 9](#)
- [Live Liz Truss criticised for saying ‘jury’s out’ on Emmanuel Macron being friend or foe](#)
- [Tory leadership Truss and Sunak clash on energy costs at penultimate hustings](#)
- [Rivers Flow rates in England at lowest point since 2002, data shows](#)

## [UK news](#)

# Second man arrested on suspicion of murdering Liverpool girl Olivia Pratt-Korbel

Arrest of 33-year-old follows earlier arrest of 36-year-old man suspected of being the gunman



Olivia, nine, known to her family as Liv, was shot by a gunman who burst into her home. Photograph: Family handout/PA

[Mark Brown](#), [Robyn Vinter](#) and [Nadeem Badshah](#)

Fri 26 Aug 2022 17.13 EDTFirst published on Fri 26 Aug 2022 04.44 EDT

A second man has been arrested by armed police on suspicion of the murder of nine-year-old Olivia Pratt-Korbel in Liverpool. The 33-year-old, from Dovecot, was also arrested on suspicion of two counts of attempted murder.

He was arrested by armed officers on Lunsford Road in Huyton, Liverpool, on Friday afternoon. Merseyside police said the man has been taken to a police station where he will be questioned by detectives.

A police spokesperson said: “The investigation into Olivia’s tragic murder is ongoing and we still need to build up a strong evidential picture so that we can bring those responsible to justice.

“Anyone with information is asked to DM MerPolCC or contact CrimestoppersUK on 0800 555 111.”

On Thursday night police arrested a 36-year-old man they suspect of being the gunman who shot Olivia. She was shot on Monday night by a masked gunman who burst into her family home while chasing another man in the Dovecot area of Liverpool.

An earlier police statement said: “A 36-year-old man has been arrested on suspicion of the murder of nine-year-old Olivia Pratt-Korbel. The man, who is from the Huyton area, was also arrested on two counts of attempted murder.

“The arrest came after an operation involving armed officers in the Merseyside area last night, Thursday 25 August. The man is currently in custody, where he is being questioned by detectives.”

Huyton is three miles east of where Olivia was killed.

Olivia was shot dead after a stranger, 35-year-old Joseph Nee, burst into her home while fleeing a gunman.

Olivia’s mother, Cheryl, sustained a gunshot wound to the wrist while trying to stop the gunman from entering. Nee was shot in the leg and torso. Both adults survived the attack, which police said crossed “every boundary”.

Police have released a picture of the Audi Q3 that is believed to have taken Nee to Aintree hospital after he was picked up by a driver and another passenger. They are keen to speak to anyone who saw this car in the days

leading up to the shooting or has any information about its movements after it left Kingsheath Avenue on the night.

The car is being forensically examined after being seized at the hospital, and the driver and passenger have been questioned by police.

Speaking before the second arrest was made, Det Supt Mark Baker said: “Although we have made an arrest in connection with the horrific murder of Olivia, I want to make it completely clear that we need any information about this vehicle or the wider investigation as much as ever. Whatever information you have, and whether you are sure that it is the same vehicle or not, pass it on and we will assess its importance.”



The black Audi Q3 that police have appealed for more information about  
Photograph: Merseyside Police/PA

Merseyside police said they were grateful for the levels of information coming in from the public, which had led to “a number of very positive lines of inquiry”.

After appeals for the gunman to hand himself into police were ignored, Mark Kameen, the head of investigations, addressed the killer in a press conference on Thursday morning. “We will not rest until we find you. And we will find you,” he said.

Paying tribute to Olivia, her family issued a statement urging anyone with information to contact the police and thanking the emergency services who tried to save her life.

The family said: “Liv was a unique, chatty, nosy little girl who broke the mould when she was born. She loved life and all it had to offer. Liv loved dressing up and was very particular on how she was dressed. Like any other little girl, she loved doing her makeup and nails – she was nine going on 19.

“Liv was adored by everyone who knew her and would instantly make friends with anyone and everyone. She was often seen going up and down the street on her new bike she had just got for her birthday.

“Although her life was short, her personality certainly wasn’t, and she lived it to the most she could, and would blow people away with her wit and kindness. We as a family are heartbroken and have lost a huge part of our life.”

Serena Kennedy, the chief constable of Merseyside police, had appealed to members of the public to help identify Olivia’s killer. She described it as “a shocking and appalling attack which will reverberate around our communities”.

Extra officers, including detectives, were brought in from other forces in north-west England to help with the investigation.

On Friday morning, shortly before the news of the first arrest, the former Liverpool footballer Ian Rush and ex-Everton player Ian Snodin left flowers in Kingsheath Avenue on behalf of the Merseyside clubs.

On the flowers from Everton FC, a message read: “RIP Olivia. No words will lessen the pain or explain such a tragedy. Our city stands united. Forever in our thoughts.” A card on the floral tribute from Liverpool FC said: “Rest in peace, Olivia, with deepest sympathy from all of us at Liverpool Football Club. You’ll Never Walk Alone.”

Olivia’s killing was the third shooting death in Liverpool in the space of a week.

Police have arrested the suspected killer of Ashley Dale, a 28-year-old council worker shot outside her home in Old Swan on Sunday, in what was thought to be a case of mistaken identity.

Three men were also arrested in a separate case on suspicion of murdering 22-year-old Sam Rimmer, who was shot dead in the Dingle area on 16 August. They have been released on bail.

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**Politics live with Andrew Sparrow**Liz Truss

## Macron says UK is a friend of France ‘in spite of its leaders’ after Truss remarks – as it happened

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## Conservative leadership

# Truss and Sunak clash on energy costs at penultimate Tory hustings

Truss remained loath to ‘bung money’ at those struggling to afford spiralling bills, Sunak said millions may be forced into destitution



The frontrunner Liz Truss took shots at her rival Rishi Sunak, as well as the BBC and the French president, Emmanuel Macron, at the hustings in Norwich. Photograph: Composit

*Aubrey Allegretti  
@breeallegretti*

Thu 25 Aug 2022 17.31 EDT Last modified on Fri 26 Aug 2022 02.43 EDT

Liz Truss has doubled down on her reluctance to “bung more money” at those who will struggle to afford spiralling energy costs this winter while Rishi Sunak said millions may be forced into destitution without extra support, as the pair clashed at the penultimate hustings of the [Conservative leadership](#) race.

With energy regulator Ofgem expected to raise the price cap to [f3,500 a year from October](#) for the average dual-fuel tariff, Truss warned the issue of spiralling fuel costs was not a short-term one. “If people think this problem is going to be over in six months they are not right. This is a long term problem,” she told the audience in Norfolk.

But Sunak said her planned tax cuts would fail to help pensioners and those on lower incomes, and added that extra support for businesses struggling with energy bills was “clearly something the new prime minister will have to look at”.

The two candidates’ economic plans were the focus of Thursday night’s hustings given the threat of a worsening cost of living crisis.

But Truss appeared more at ease, given she is comfortably the frontrunner in polls of Conservative members, and confidently took shots at Sunak, the BBC and the French president, Emmanuel Macron.

The foreign secretary said she would prefer Boris Johnson to be prime minister over her rival in the leadership race. When asked if Macron was a friend or foe, she said: “The jury’s out. If I become PM, I’ll judge him on deeds not words.” And she said anybody who thought the BBC was neutral is “kidding themselves”.

After Sunak claimed the downsides of lockdowns [had not been properly considered](#) during the Covid pandemic, Truss went further by arguing schools should never have been shut down and said she raised concerns over whether the government was “too draconian”.

Conservative party hustings: Covid lockdown went too far say Truss and Sunak – video

Truss pointed to education when asked by the host, Julia Hartley-Brewer of Talk TV, which public service had improved over the past 12 years of Conservative rule. Sunak struggled to name one, but highlighted the success of the furlough scheme he introduced.

He was more gracious when quizzed on whether Johnson or Truss would make a better prime minister, choosing his rival over the outgoing leader.

Despite going over familiar territory for the two candidates, the issue of the cost of living became more pertinent in light of Ofgem's impending announcement on Friday.

Sunak said Truss' national insurance rise reversal and green levy suspension "don't help" millions of people who are at risk of "falling into destitution".

He said it was "not credible" for the government to protect everyone, but that he would "go further" by providing extra financial support to pensioners, and those on the lowest incomes – around a third of workers – as well as cutting VAT on energy bills.

"If we don't do something specific for those people, there's a high risk that millions of people will fall into destitution," the former chancellor said. Tax cuts "don't help" those groups, he added.

Truss admitted there was "a massive issue with people not being able to afford energy", but added: "What isn't right is to just bung more money into the system, what we actually need to do is fix the supply of energy."

She said there should be greater supplies of nuclear and renewable energy, as well as oil from the North Sea.

Truss pledged last night to get people through the energy crisis. Writing in the Daily Mail, she said she would use an emergency budget next month to "ensure support is on its way to get through these tough times".

"I know how hard it is for millions of Britons, and how grave concerns are about the consequences of today's decision by Ofgem on the next energy price cap," she wrote. "The rest of Europe is facing the same challenge, which will loom large as winter sets in.

"If I am elected leader of the Conservative party and prime minister, I will take decisive action on entering No 10 to provide immediate support, but will also tackle the root causes of these issues so we are never again in this

difficult position. To those of you feeling the squeeze, my message is clear: I will ensure support is on its way and we get through these tough times.”

The Times reported that Truss this week also held talks with Kwasi Kwarteng, likely to be appointed her chancellor should she win the Tory leadership contest, to discuss emergency support payments for the most vulnerable over winter.

The pair apparently met at Chevening, the foreign secretary’s grace and favour countryside mansion, to consider a multibillion-pound package aimed at pensioners and the poorest households.

Among the measures said to have been discussed were adopting Sunak’s plan to scrap VAT on energy bills and using universal credit to increase help those with larger families or who have disabilities.

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## [Rivers](#)

# River-flow rates in England at lowest point since 2002, data shows

Exclusive: Experts warn drought could be start of three-year cycle with dire impacts on wildlife and environment



People wading in the River Wharfe, in Burnsall, Yorkshire. River flows in England in July were lower than normal in 88% of rivers. Photograph: Christopher Furlong/Getty Images

*[Fiona Harvey](#) Environment correspondent*

Fri 26 Aug 2022 05.13 EDT Last modified on Fri 26 Aug 2022 14.15 EDT

River-flow rates in [England](#) have been lower this summer than at any time in the past 21 years, data has shown, and could be much worse next year, with dire impacts on wildlife and the natural environment, conservation experts have warned.

Analysis since 2002 of England's groundwater, reservoir levels and river flows – three key indicators for the [severity of drought](#), and for river health – shows that July this year was the worst in that period.

River flows [this July](#) were lower than normal in 88% of rivers, and reservoir levels stood at about 64% of their capacity, the lowest level in the past two decades. Groundwater was at its fourth lowest level, with about two-thirds of sites showing lower groundwater levels than normal.

The analysis, seen by the Guardian and coordinated by Wildlife and Countryside Link (WCL), based on [Environment Agency](#) monthly water situation reports from July in each year, showed that this year has been the worst overall for drought when ranked across the indicators.

Ellie Ward, policy and information coordinator at WCL, said: “Our resilience to drought is not good enough. This puts nature and people at risk of running out of water. We need ambitious, holistic action to [build that resilience](#) and to secure a clean and plentiful water supply.”

Experts also warned that this year’s drought [may not be a one-off](#) but could be the start of a three-year drought cycle, which has struck three times in the past two decades, in 2004-06, 2010-12 and 2017-19, as the WCL analysis shows.

If that is the case, water levels and river-flow levels would get much worse next year, which would spell disaster for swathes of England’s wildlife and the natural environment. Fish and other aquatic life, and the ecosystems that depend on rivers and streams, have already suffered badly in this year’s drought.

Mark Owen, the head of freshwater at the Angling Trust, said: “At the beginning of this year, our rivers had still not fully recovered from the impacts of previous years’ dry weather events. We now need government to expedite action to allow full recovery and plan for possible impacts in 2023 and beyond, if this weather is repeated.”

He called for the government to take steps to reduce water demand, increase resilient supplies and “build back wetter”, such as by restoring wetlands.

Low water-flows mean not only less water for aquatic species, but also more concentrated pollutants, rivers choked with sediment, and lower amounts of dissolved oxygen, which leads to the death of fish and invertebrates.

Conservationists have raised concerns that some rivers will take years or decades to recover from the record drought, compounded by [increasing pollution](#) both from farms and human sewage that water companies have been allowed to discharge into rivers and streams. The River Wye, for instance, was already [heavily polluted by runoff from poultry farms](#), and Windermere, probably the UK’s most famous lake, has been so affected by phosphate pollution and drought that a [dangerous blue-green algae has bloomed](#).

If pollution and poor management are allowed to continue, another year of drought could spell disaster for those and many other English waterways.

Ali Morse, water policy manager at the Wildlife Trusts, and chair of the Blueprint for [Water](#) coalition, said: “Over the last 100 years we have lost 90% of the wetlands we once had, so it’s hardly surprising that our landscape is less able to capture and absorb water. Wildlife-rich wet meadows, reedbeds, fens, peat bogs and beaver-created wetlands were once widespread, acting as a sponge to absorb the rain that replenishes underground aquifers and tops up rivers.”

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The climate crisis also means future years are likely to bring similar weather. This year's [record-breaking heatwave](#) will be the [average summer by 2035](#), according to research by the Met Office. That means more must be done to prepare the UK for hotter weather and drought.

Nathan Richardson, the head of strategy and policy at Waterwise, said: "We know the frequency and severity of severe drought is increasing with climate change. We have to use the water we have more wisely and we urgently need to see government promises on new policy to reduce water demand turned into action."

Torrential rain has [battered parts of the south-east](#) and east of England in recent days, relieving some parched soils but only partly, as soil that has dried out over a long period does not absorb water well and much of the rain will have run off, adding to the problem of [sewage outflows](#).

Sir James Bevan, the chief executive of the Environment Agency, said: "Water pressures on wildlife and the environment remain high and despite recent rainfall and the pause in the hot dry weather, we must continue to manage water wisely. Both for the coming year and, with the impact of climate change, for the coming decade, a complete gear change is needed for how water companies and all water users, from farmers to households, think about how they use water and understand its fundamental value."

He said: "This summer should be a wake-up call for how the nation prepares for weather extremes and how we make the very best use of our water resources. Our National Framework for Water Resources sets out clearly what we are doing in the face of a new normal for water and we are determined to drive that forward."

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## 2022.08.26 - Spotlight

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## Royal Mail

# **‘We have no choice’: why the strike at Royal Mail is no cookie-cutter pay row**

As opening salvo begins in dispute that could reshape a UK institution, group chair does not mince his words



Executives have said the success of its international arm GLS should not be used to fund Royal Mail, unless reforms are agreed with unions, Photograph: Carl Court/Getty Images



Alex Lawson

Fri 26 Aug 2022 01.00 EDT Last modified on Fri 26 Aug 2022 04.40 EDT

In a summer when picket lines have become a familiar sight, the casual observer could be forgiven for mistaking Friday's strike at [Royal Mail](#) as a cookie-cutter pay dispute. In fact, the strike, the first of four, represents the culmination of years of simmering tensions between executives and its main union. If Royal Mail's board takes the nuclear option, it could result in the break up of a 500-year-old postal service still struggling to find its feet nearly a decade after privatisation.

The corporate drama intensified on Thursday when the government said it would step in to review the billionaire Daniel Křetínský's stake in the company. The investor, known as the Czech Sphinx owing to his inscrutable public persona, hopes to raise his Vesa Equity Investment's shareholding in Royal Mail from 22% to above 25%, sparking speculation he may launch a full takeover bid.

The union dispute provides a pugnacious backdrop for the shareholder manoeuvres. In the red (and yellow) corner is Keith Williams, Royal Mail's non-executive chair, who says his clashes with unions while running British Airways readied him for a role he has held since 2019. In the opposite

corner is the Communication Workers Union, self-described as the “strongest union in the UK”. With an unassuming presence, casually dressed in light brown slacks and trainers, Williams cuts an unlikely figure for a board room union-buster. But he does not mince his words. His message to the company’s 115,000 employees is simple: “Without modernisation we die.”

Royal Mail employees began 24 hours of strike action at 4am on Friday, and will strike again on Wednesday, before further action on 8-9 September. It has been estimated the four days of strikes will cost Royal Mail £100m, with each day worth £10m and £15m in lost letter and parcel revenue respectively. The knock-on effect for businesses will be notable too: eBay has informed buyers that Royal Mail and Parcelforce deliveries may be delayed and advised sellers to switch couriers.



Warrington Royal Mail centre.

Photograph: John Davidson Photos/Alamy

Royal Mail workers have been offered a 2% pay rise, backdated to April, and further benefits equivalent to a 3.5% increase if they agree to changes in working practices to support the growth of its parcels business, says the company. Staff stand opposed to these changes and argue they should receive a pay increase in line with inflation with no strings attached after

keeping deliveries to locked-down Britons flowing during the Covid-19 pandemic.

Williams response: “The amount of change you could put through this business is absolutely enormous. But they want to do a no-strings pay deal and we can’t agree to that. We have no choice.”

With the growth in online shopping, the business has changed dramatically since 2013. Back then, Royal Mail delivered 17bn letters a year, but that number has fallen to 7.8bn. Parcels have gone the other way, reaching 1.7bn, and Royal Mail has held on to a 40% share of the UK parcels market.

To remain competitive, management want to invest in a series of “super hubs”, such as the massive sorting centre opened in Warrington this summer that can process 800,000 parcels a day. The hubs are designed to process orders made online in the evening, for delivery within 24 hours. They can automate the scanning and sorting processes, which means fewer staff are needed at a smaller number of local delivery offices. Unions representing staff at those 1,200 local offices are concerned.

Williams has taken the unusual step of threatening to break up the group if the CWU blocks reorganisation. Under this doomsday scenario, Royal Mail would be split off from its international arm, GLS, which has provided the engine room for profits in recent years. “We will look for significant operational change or split the company,” says Williams. It has been estimated GLS is worth £4bn as a standalone company, but on the London Stock Exchange the entire group is valued at just £2.5bn excluding debts by investors, suggesting Royal Mail has a negative value.

The UK rump would be left with mounting losses, and a costly universal service obligation to deliver parcels and letters to the most remote parts of the UK, leaving it hamstrung against competitors, the largest of which, such as Amazon and Evri – formerly Hermes – are foreign owned.

Executives have said the success of GLS should not be used to fund Royal Mail, unless reforms are agreed with unions. But is it not practical to use the benefits of operating as a group to have stronger divisions support others?

Williams says: “Even if you did cross-subsidise, if you don’t get the change in the business, what’s the point? This is a dispute about the future of the company. It’s about can you change into being a parcels business. There are a lot of strikes across the country right now, but what I want to be clear about is this one is different.”



Keith Williams, Royal Mail. Photograph: Twitter

This is not his first head-to-head with the CWU since joining the company. In late 2020, after ousting the chief executive Rico Back – who failed to cultivate good relations with the union – Williams ended a two-year dispute with a pay and hours deal in return for plans to automate processes and offer longer delivery windows. However, despite implementing the pay rise, executives argue they have not seen the change they demanded at its delivery offices.

“The union have to come along primarily to the idea of change and pay which recognises that, rather than the other way round. Every other agreement we did we have paid the pay and never got the change,” he says.

Williams says he wants to preserve what has made Royal Mail part of the fabric of British life: posties in shorts whistling up garden paths, Postman Pat-style vans climbing country roads and cheery morning retorts. However,

competition for parcel delivery has intensified since the start of the pandemic and rivals including Amazon and DPD have beefed up their services, delivering later until the evening and weekends.

Williams wants Royal Mail to match these services. “The union says it won’t accept hours later into the night but we’re up against competition that delivers until 10pm,” he says.

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“We pay 40% more than the market. Unless we become more efficient we will run into trouble. This is not a race to the bottom. But we’ve got to be as or more efficient than other companies. We are not that today.”

He adds: “Since privatisation the union effectively won 26% pay increases for its membership. Nurses have had 14%. That’s not bad.”

Dave Ward, the CWU general secretary, said this week: “Postal workers in this country are being pushed to the edge, but there can be no doubt that they will fight the planned erosion of their workplace rights with determination. Right now, this country is growing sick of a business elite who are completely out of touch with ordinary people and their lives.”

Friday’s strike is the opening salvo in a dispute that could reshape a British institution and – if it is not resolved quickly – threaten deliveries this Christmas.

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## [Russia](#)

# ‘There were hundreds of us’: Navalny ex-staffer tells of being FSB informer

Former anti-corruption activist who has fled to Netherlands tells how Russian state infiltrated opposition



Mikhail Sokolov (centre) and Alexei Navalny (left). Composite: Guardian Design/Reuters/AP/NurPhoto/REX/Shutterstock/Alamy

*[Pjotr Sauer](#) in Zeeland*

Fri 26 Aug 2022 01.00 EDT Last modified on Fri 26 Aug 2022 05.33 EDT

When Mikhail Sokolov signed up to work for the FSB security services, he never imagined his journey would end here: in a crowded refugee camp on the outskirts of a sleepy town in the rural Netherlands.

“The last six years were a rollercoaster. I am happy I am no longer in the claws of the FSB,” the former FSB informant and staffer for the [jailed](#)

[opposition leader Alexei Navalny](#)'s anti-corruption network said in an interview with the Guardian this week.

The 25-year-old is now living in a crowded dormitory, shunned by fellow activists, while being trolled online by his former FSB handlers.

"I bet you're smoking weed over there," one handler recently wrote.

Sokolov's story shines a rare light on the inner workings of Moscow's secretive security services and their attempts to infiltrate the Russian opposition at home and abroad.

He is part of what appears to be a trend of ex-FSB informers coming clean after Moscow's decision to invade [Ukraine](#).

"I am convinced there were hundreds of us," Sokolov said, sitting at a cafe near the refugee centre in the south of the Netherlands. "Nearly every organised opposition group had an informer at low or mid-level."

Sokolov grew up in Votkinsk, an industrial city in the Udmurt Republic, 800 miles east of Moscow. There he made a name for himself as a young and ambitious anti-corruption activist, posting videos of his investigations into local officials on his personal YouTube channel.

His life changed, he said, one day in 2016 when he was summoned to a police station in Votkinsk, where an FSB agent told him he was facing prison for dodging compulsory military service.

"I was 19 and absolutely terrified of the security services. I wasn't ready to spend time in prison," he said.

So he took up the FSB's offer to cooperate, avoiding a possible two-year sentence. "Maybe it was selfish, but at that time I was looking out for myself."

From then on, he would meet his FSB handlers once or twice a month in desolate car parks, where he handed over information about forthcoming

investigations and notified them of any planned anti-government protests in the city.

“They were always amicable, treating me like I was their friend, and I would smile back.

“But in my mind, I thought: ‘You guys are fucking bastards.’”

Despite working as an informant, Sokolov maintains that he always felt loyal to his fellow activists.

“From the day I signed the paper, my motto was to do as little harm to the opposition as possible and to help my friends when I could,” he said. “But of course, I did some shitty things, and many people will hate me now.”

According to him, the local FSB branches he worked for never intervened in his investigations, instead using him to gather information on corrupt officials for their own purposes.

“They always wanted compromising information about officials and businessmen to blackmail them, but were often too dumb to find it themselves,” he said.

He also insisted that he sometimes acted as a double agent, tipping off some activists to protect them against possible prosecution.

“I would warn friends that the security agencies have taken an interest in them, that it is better for them to be careful,” he said.

The Guardian has not been able to independently verify all the details of Sokolov’s story, but he showed what he said were conversations between him and his handlers. Two Navalny staffers also told the independent Russian outlet Verstka that Sokolov recently contacted them to confess about his work with the FSB.

He had volunteered for Navalny from 2017, and Sokolov’s handlers were delighted when he got a paid job as an investigator at the Navalny Anti-Corruption Foundation in early 2021.

“The FSB wanted to know where Navalny’s funds were coming from, who was paying for everything,” he said.



Alexei Navalny is escorted from a police station in Khimki in 2021.  
Photograph: Sergei Ilnitsky/EPA

It remains hard to know what impact Sokolov’s FSB work had on the crackdown on Navalny’s movement.

“People might think that I was passing along highly incriminating information, but even if I wanted to, I simply did not have access to those documents. I didn’t even know how much my seniors were making,” he said.

“Not a single criminal case was started because of me,” he added.

A former colleague who worked closely with Sokolov corroborated that account, telling Verstka that he did not have access to internal documents from the headquarters of Navalny’s foundation.

“He could only have access to future investigation scripts on Google Docs. And there wasn’t anything top secret there. We always worked openly,” the former colleague said.

It is also difficult to verify Sokolov's claims about the far-reaching extent to which the FSB infiltrated Navalny's network. A number of former Navalny activists said the FSB approached them too.

"I don't know how many informants there were, but it is something we were always aware of," said Vladimir Nечаев, 19, a former Navalny staffer from St Petersburg, who said he was also pressured to work for the FSB after being arrested for attending an anti-government protest. Nечаев declined the proposition.

"It is obviously wrong to work for the FSB, but every circumstance is different. Being alone in a room with the FSB can be scary," he added.

Several senior Navalny aides declined to be interviewed for this article.

Sokolov said the security service's unchecked powers made it hard for many young activists to ignore its threats.

"The FSB goes for the young and vulnerable. They will always find something they can charge you with, whether it is attending a protest or drug possession, you name it."



The FSB building, Lubyanka square, Moscow. Photograph: alex5711/Getty Images/iStockphoto

By the summer of 2021, there was not much for Sokolov to report in Russia.

Navalny had been jailed earlier in the year. Then, in June, a Russian court outlawed his organisation for being “extremist”, leading to a mass exodus of Navalny staffers to the Baltic states and the Georgian capital, Tbilisi.

Seeing that he was no longer needed in Russia, the FSB proposed moving Sokolov to Tbilisi to monitor the newly exiled opposition.

“I knew I could not live like this forever,” he said. “This was my chance to finally escape.”

He claimed that a previous attempt to flee Russia in 2019 had failed when he was turned away at the Polish border.

Once in Georgia, he said, he quickly cut ties with the FSB and confessed to Anton Mikhalkuk of the Free Russia Foundation, which organises anti-war rallies in Tbilisi, that he had been tasked with informing on Free Russia’s activities.

In Tbilisi, he also met Vsevolod Osipov, 20, a libertarian activist who told the Russian independent news website Meduza last month that he had been recruited by the FSB under pressure and sent to Georgia to monitor the Russian opposition.

When Russia invaded Ukraine on 24 February, Osipov said he quickly cut ties with his handlers.

“I thought I wasn’t a great person before, but after the war started I just felt like a scumbag,” Osipov, who now works as a sommelier in Tbilisi, said.

The invasion also had a profound impact on Sokolov.



Sokolov (left) with Navalny. Photograph: Sokolov archive

A video of an anti-war protest on 1 March in central Tbilisi shows an emotional Sokolov taking the stage. “I am a citizen of Russia, and I am against Putin,” he said, waving his Russian passport. “I want to volunteer, and I want to go to war to fight for Ukraine. I did not choose Putin.”

In an unlikely twist, Sokolov and Osipov, flew to Istanbul to try to join the international legion of Ukraine’s territorial defence force. However, they were turned down at the Ukrainian embassy, which was reluctant to send Russian nationals to the battlefield.

“I wanted to fight against Russia in this fucked-up war. Maybe I felt some guilt about working for the FSB, I don’t know,” Sokolov said, showing pictures of himself in Istanbul with Osipov.

“I think because of this awful war we will be hearing more stories like mine coming out soon.”

Eventually, having decided that Georgia, a country riddled with Russian agents, was no longer safe, he flew to the Netherlands and applied for political asylum.

However, he faces an uncertain future there as the country grapples with a major refugee crisis amid accusations of human rights abuses at its overfilled asylum centres.

Having lost most of his friends after his confession, Sokolov looks like a broken man, spending much of his weekly €40 (£34) allowance on cigarettes to calm his nerves.

His FSB handlers are some of the few people who have not forgotten about him, and have been messaging him since he went public.

“None of this will make a difference. You are only trying to justify yourself,” said a recent text message from one of his alleged FSB handlers seen by the Guardian.

Sokolov did not answer.

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## Notting Hill carnival

# ‘I fell asleep on a soundsystem!’ – the pyramid-building artists invading Notting Hill carnival

At this year’s city-shaking, weekend-long bash, a triangular pavilion will be appearing amid the floats and dancers. Revellers can sneak inside for a rest – or climb on top and party



‘Diasporic in its logic’ ... the pavilion takes shape for the raucous party that is Carnival. Composite: Copyright 2022 Glasshopper / NWE. © Sumayya Vally and Alvaro Barrington.

*[Oliver Basciano](#)*

Fri 26 Aug 2022 04.00 EDT Last modified on Fri 26 Aug 2022 04.47 EDT

Alvaro Barrington is recalling his first ever festival experience in Grenada: “I was maybe five years old and my cousins took me to J’ouvert,” he says, referring to the day that acts as a precursor to the main party in Caribbean

culture. “I have a memory of one of my older cousins holding my hand as we walked through the streets. We found a sound system and I climbed up on it and immediately fell asleep with the music blasting. A few hours later, I woke up to my cousin carrying me home while I laid on his shoulder.”

He may have missed out on the good stuff, but the sleepy experience has inspired his latest project. Because amid the floats, sound systems and food trucks at this year’s [Notting Hill carnival](#) there will also be a pavilion designed specifically for people who need to take a bit of time out from the action. Located next to where the carnival’s judges are based on the Great Western Road, the approximately three-metre high structure is made from a series of interlocking plywood components. The pavilion will be completed during the carnival’s opening parade by members of the community who will carry elements of the building, slotting them into the roughly pyramid-shaped construction themselves at the end of the procession. Once finished, party-goers will be able to rest inside Barrington’s pavilion, or clamber up the outside in order to better see the procession. “Carnival can be a place for many different types of culture,” he says. “For the Caribbean community, it has a long history of being a space in which art gets produced. I thought maybe we can bring architecture into that too.”



‘A place for many different types of culture’ ... Performers in costume at the main Parade day of the 2019 carnival. Photograph: Daniel Leal-

Olivas/AFP/Getty Images

Born in Venezuela to a Haitian father, but having spent his early childhood with his maternal grandmother in Grenada, Barrington gravitated towards the annual west London party after arriving in the UK to study art seven years ago. He initiated the project, but it is also a collaboration with the architect Sumayya Vally, who became involved in the British carnival scene after she was picked [to create the annual Serpentine pavilion last year](#). Her Hyde Park structure was a homage to various community spaces across London, not least the Mangrove, a historic Caribbean restaurant. It too spread beyond its initial home, with “fragments” of the building installed across the city, including in the Tabernacle, the Notting Hill music and community space.



‘Carnival has a long history of being a space in which art gets produced’ ...  
Alvaro Barrington. Photograph: Jeremiah Cumberbatch

“This new structure can likewise be taken apart and put back together, it is diasporic in its logic,” says Vally, whose grandparents were Indian migrants to South Africa. “We started to think about spaces of gathering in west London and across the Caribbean. There are characteristics we could reference, like steps and porches.” Barrington, who before he came to Britain spent his teenage years in Brooklyn, agrees that the stoop – the long

external steps leading to the communal front doors of New York's tenements and brownstones, places to socialise or watch the neighbourhood – are symbolic of African American community. The pavilion is, he says, a “place where the carnival judges can view the costumes being paraded, places where carnival elders can sit”.

Vally was the youngest designer in the history of the Serpentine pavilion and Barrington is no less precocious. His first show on graduating from art school was at New York's MoMA PS1 and he is represented by six galleries internationally, curators and critics impressed by his expanded vision for painting. His canvases, the mainstay of his practice, are invariably interrupted by textiles, woven threads and objects, often referencing his own biography. They come together as a form of bricolage storytelling, often with migration as the central narrative.

“In the very short history of humans on this planet, migration is a consistent truth. It became a material interest in my art because though it's personal it is also a universal human condition,” he explains. A recent work, [Lady sing small @proud Mary bottom up](#), features different coloured threads sewn in blocks to a blue painted canvas. A drum and a broom are attached hanging down below the frame. Those elements are glorious intrusions to a composition that otherwise evokes the canonical history of geometric abstraction. At his recent solo exhibition [at the South London Gallery](#), Barrington divided the space into North and South. In the former he hung a series of works reminiscent of cloud studies, made using wet concrete smeared onto dyed Hermès blankets. In the latter, as a commentary on global political and economic power structures, the same technique was used on hessian, the material most frequently associated with food bags and trade.



‘Notting Hill’s power comes from its hybridity’ ... Sumayya Vally.  
Photograph: Guy Bell/Rex/Shutterstock

In 2019, the last carnival before its pandemic hiatus, Barrington organised a float of his paintings to join the parade. “Just to hire a truck can cost anything between £10,000 and £30,000. Now there’s inflation, there’s the cost of fuel. It’s getting harder. So what you find is that a lot of the creativity has had to be reeled in and instead you’ll see advertising for liquor or whatever. So I wanted to use a truck that would have been advertising a brand or whatever but instead show paintings.”

Is there a danger that gallery artists entering the foray could add to this gentrification? “The idea of artists as gentrifiers is a distraction from who actually has power in those processes,” he says. “Gentrification happens through legislation, through the social conditioning that property is an asset. Saying that artists are gentrifiers is often done in bad faith so as not to address the issue.” Vally agrees: “Notting Hill’s power comes from its hybridity, the way it brings so many people into the conversation,” she says.

Working with the carnival organisers was a natural fit. “I think there were a lot of assumptions made by very smart people in the 20th century about ideas of purity and reduction,” says Barrington, “and I think most people didn’t live their lives that way. I think what you see in my practice and

Sumayya's practice is that these definitions were never truly real. Some people fell into an assembly line idea of art making, where they would only make paintings. But most people don't live their creativity that way."

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## Ezra Furman

### Interview

# Ezra Furman: ‘I was like, this record has to be a weapon of war’

Emma Garland

Caring for her infant son changed Furman’s concept of community. It’s a force she believes can save us from hopelessness, as she explores on her rousing new album



‘To hold a baby and feed him changed my brain. It changed what human life looks like to me’ ... Ezra Furman. Photograph: Tonje Thilesen

Fri 26 Aug 2022 05.00 EDT Last modified on Fri 26 Aug 2022 06.01 EDT

‘The future is a text message sending,’ Ezra Furman declares on *Forever in Sunset*, the synth-scorched first single from her new album, *All of Us Flames*. On the face of it, the lyrics tell a classic American tale: two people in a car – one of them “trouble” – pulling on to a highway with a full tank and the sun in their eyes. The backing is a groundswell of power chords and

crashing percussion, recalling Bruce Springsteen's Born to Run, with its depiction of underclass dreams bursting out of the confines of material reality. But Furman completely turns her back on society. As the collapse of civilisation feels increasingly inevitable, she heads for a new frontier where rugged individualism and systemic failure are vanquished by interdependence and resilience. The passengers ditch the unavoidable for the unknown, with nothing but friendship on their side, [Thelma and Louise](#), suspended in midair.

"I was trying to [say], there is no end of the world," Furman explains, sipping a small beer in a quiet garden in east London. It is a few days after the UK's first bout of extreme heat, when record-breaking temperatures left parts of Essex on fire and bin bags melted on the pavement, and a sense of doom hangs in the air. "Your rights being taken away by the government is not the apocalypse. Not being able to buy food at the supermarket any more is not the apocalypse. Or maybe it is – but then we've got to figure out how to grow food ourselves and bring it to our neighbours. We've got to keep taking care of each other."

Ezra Furman singing Forever in Sunset, from her new album All of Us Flames.

Furman, 35, fiddles with the zips on a beaten-up leather jacket. With her cropped brown hair and electric-blue eyeshadow, she cuts a cool figure, resembling the subject of one of the new album's most vulnerable songs, Ally Sheedy in the Breakfast Club – a playful, lo-fi love letter to "the teenage girl I never got to be". "Queer people are just not given a model for how to be that works, so we find it in the trash of pop culture," Furman says. She pauses, smiles, then adds, "And I believe in finding treasure in the trash."

I was writing a document of a particularly threatened moment in my life

Just as the cult John Hughes character's outsider ego and uncompromising self-belief were a beacon for the young Furman, now her songs play that role for others. Her stories of fragility and confusion have provided the

soundtrack to Netflix's beloved [Sex Education](#), which unglues stories of queer sex and romance from the usual territory of suffering. Meanwhile, Furman's solo albums have grown sharper teeth. On 2018's Transangelic Exodus, she and an angel lover run away from an oppressive government in a cinematic road trip, while 2019's Twelve Nudes lashes out at the sad state of the world in brash bursts of punk. While Furman is soft-spoken and thoughtful in person, taking long pauses after each question to gather her thoughts before offering a winding response, as a songwriter she breathes fire.

Produced by John Congleton (St Vincent, Angel Olsen) in Los Angeles, All of Us Flames is an album of dreamy, unshackled indie rock, while the lyrics wield ideas of community and solidarity like loaded guns. Most of the songs speak to the fight for survival, specifically with reference to the Jewish community and "the 20 people I know in the world who would walk across burning coals for me, as I would for them", she says.

The album conveys a feeling of endurance typical of canonical rock'n'roll that speaks to Furman's desire to get closer to crafting the kinds of songs that outlive their maker. During the writing process she listened to a lot of Bob Dylan, Lucinda Williams, the Shangri-Las (whose Dressed in Black inspired a song of the same name about two lovers fleeing a hostile world). "I kept thinking about this world-weary protest music, but also this feminine vitality of teenage girls," she says. "I wanted these things to coexist." On the woozy Lilac and Black, Furman and her "queer girl gang" drive out their oppressors and claim a hostile city for themselves. The anthemic Book of Our Names was inspired by the second book of the Hebrew Bible and etches into history those who are cast to the margins of life. "I want there to be / A book of our names / None of them missing / None quite the same / None of us ashes / All of us flames."



Furman playing in Austin, Texas, earlier this year. Photograph: Tim Mosenfelder/Getty Images

Since the release of [Twelve Nudes](#), Furman's public-facing life has changed somewhat. Last April, [Furman came out as transgender](#) and said she had been a mother for two years. It is something she resisted talking about for a while, wanting to shield her child from "the shitty world of strangers reacting to us". However, there were also feelings of obligation at play. "I've been thinking a lot about suicide culture among trans people, and increasingly understanding that it's because we haven't seen versions of futures or kinds of lives we can have," Furman says. "I became a parent without ever having even seen a picture of a transfeminine parent, you know? That clipped my wings and held me back from imagining what my life could be."

Her original Instagram post was intended for friends, family and fans, but ended up becoming clickbait. It was reported by CNN, People magazine, Fox News – mass media outlets whose reach directed a waterfall of transphobia towards Furman. She was working on the album in California at the time. "I have a problem with addictively reading that stuff, but I was like, if you *fucking* losers understood how cool my life was right now, you'd be so embarrassed of yourselves," she seethes.

Much of the album was written during the early months of the pandemic, a time that Furman describes as “ridiculously happy” for her family. Yet home was also “not a nice place to be”. They had just moved from Berkeley in California to Somerville in Massachusetts, and started renting a property from a landlord they hadn’t met. When they were finally introduced, the landlord made it clear that he had a problem with their family setup. “Because he lived upstairs, his presence was inescapable,” Furman says. She would drive to a lake or a forest – “somewhere I couldn’t really see civilisation” – to write away from her claustrophobic living situation. “I could feel that I was writing a document of a particularly threatened moment in my life,” she says. “It all felt very charged with threat.”

But All of Us Flames is fuelled just as much by love as by anger. Each song considers a vision of the future connected to concepts of care and community as they relate to parenthood and transness specifically. “The thing I really love about becoming a parent is that – to use the phrase from the album – it makes you organise your life around love and care in a concrete way,” Furman says softly. “Daily life is like: ‘I’m not doing that because I have to do this.’ Just to hold a baby and feed him – I think it really just changed my brain. It changed what human life looks like to me.”



Furman at the O2 Forum, Kentish Town, London, in 2019. Photograph: Robin Little/Redferns

That care comes through in All of Us Flames, which is assembled like a circle of people linking arms: it's sonically robust, with a distinct lack of space, creating the sensation that the songs are built to catch you if you fall. Furman says it's her most collaborative album in a long time. She co-wrote some songs with drummer Sam Durkes, and learned to turn the instrumentation over to Congleton and the band more often. "In the past, I've really been like, it has to be like *this*," she says, popping her eyes and straining her voice as if strangling someone. "And I actually think that didn't serve me well. It mirrors a theme of the record, too: that we all do better if we depend on each other."

She has also noted a natural tendency to write in the first person plural; her perspective shifting from "I" to "us". Behind the album, there is a message of hope – something that has been absent from much of Furman's previous work. It speaks to a creeping exhaustion with our crumbling empire and a refusal to wait for it to change. Rather than doomscrolling, it is better to look for ways to rearrange life around networks of support. In some small ways, that's already happening, says Furman.

"When we had this transphobic landlord, word spread throughout the queers that we were in this hard spot, and they were like: 'We will go to the fucking mat for you, let me at this motherfucker!' That really got into my worldview. I was like, oh, I *need* queer community."

In return, Furman raised her own fists. "I was like, this record has to be a weapon of war," she says definitively, as the first spots of rain in weeks start to fall. "This is armour for my people."

*All of Us Flames* is out today on Bella Union.

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## 2022.08.26 - Opinion

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[Opinion](#)[Keir Starmer](#)

# Is Starmer finally making a breakthrough by pledging to freeze these outrageous energy prices?

[Andy Beckett](#)

Labour has leapt in the polls, and even Tory voters like the idea. Now the party needs to realise that gas bills are just the start



Illustration: Thomas Pullin

Fri 26 Aug 2022 01.00 EDT Last modified on Fri 26 Aug 2022 04.38 EDT

For more than two years, an awfully long while in these frenetic political times, people have been waiting for Keir Starmer to do something bold. Since he became the Labour leader, Britain has been shut down by the pandemic, choked by Brexit, made poorer by the cost of living crisis, and governed by the most casually destructive prime minister in its recent

history. In response, Starmer has offered “constructive opposition”, modest and mostly quickly forgotten new policies, and [long silences](#).

The few risks he has taken have been the usual ones of orthodox Labour leaders: picking fights with the left; dropping radical but popular [policies such as nationalisation](#); and generally dragging the party to the right. Meanwhile, he has left the over-mighty business interests and dysfunctional markets that dominate British life largely unchallenged.

Or he has until now. His announcement last week that a Labour government “wouldn’t let people [pay a penny more](#)” for energy this winter, and would partly fund this by taxing “the excess profits” of “the big energy companies”, could mark the beginning of a new phase in his leadership. Nearly two weeks on, we can begin to judge whether this intervention is having a lasting political effect. Has Starmer finally made a breakthrough? And if he has, how can Labour make it matter, still, when the general election comes?

The new policy has many of the hallmarks of clever politics. It’s clear and memorable. It’s being promoted in populist language, offering voters both reassurance and scapegoats. A Labour press release this week [says](#) the oil and gas industry is making “record profits at the expense of the British people”.

The policy seems to be affordable, at least in the short term. It promises both to control energy prices and reduce inflation in general. It makes the Conservative [response to the crisis](#) look even more inadequate. And it finally gives Labour’s many disgruntled leftwing supporters something to get behind. “The energy issue is a good dividing line for us,” someone involved in the policy told me. “It really does mobilise the [party] base.”

Many other voters like the policy as well. Since it was announced, Labour’s lead has leapt in the polls. One survey found that even [85% of Conservative voters](#) liked Labour’s scheme. Parts of the rightwing press have [acknowledged](#) its appeal. “Labour’s plans … have traction and speak to a real need for reassurance,” said a Times editorial. The Daily Mail described Labour’s energy move as “dramatic” – not a word often applied to Starmer –

and suggested it had “heaped pressure” on whoever becomes Tory leader by making it hard for them to avoid coming up with a plan of similar scale.

So far, the Conservative response to Labour’s plan has sounded vague and rushed. Brandon Lewis, a supporter of Liz Truss, told Times Radio that she would deal with the energy crisis “in a structured way, in a professional way ... so when we do deliver something we know it can work and we can be clear with people how it works, why it works, and why it makes a beneficial difference”.

A party that has had 12 years in government to sort out a long failing energy market has been left awkwardly playing for time, until it can come up with an emergency budget under its new leader at some point in September – by which time the weather in much of Britain may be cold enough for millions to be worrying about whether to put the heating on. Having spent most of his leadership reacting to or being squeezed out of the news by huge events, Starmer suddenly seems slightly ahead of them.

His energy plan is hardly perfect. One frequent criticism is that it would help both those who can and can’t afford higher bills. Given the strained public finances, this flaw is hard to ignore, especially if you’re on the left. But if, instead, you’re one of the sometimes right-leaning, relatively prosperous voters whom Starmer has spent much of his leadership trying to lure back, his plan’s indiscriminate subsidies may be its most attractive feature. Recent hints from Truss and Rishi Sunak that they would mainly help the most vulnerable may turn out to be very bad politics.

Offering to protect everyone against frightening energy prices is also a way of animating what has until now been a rather abstract and dour promise from the Labour leader: that a Starmer government would give Britons more security. That promise is in some ways a conservative, even authoritarian one – for instance, when Starmer accuses the Tories of being “[soft on crime](#)” – but when applied to an economy that has been based on insecurity since Margaret Thatcher’s government, “security” has radical potential.

Will his new energy policy be the start of something big, or a one-off? My Labour source is keen to point out that the party has actually been arguing

for a windfall tax on energy companies since January. Yet when I suggest that the spiralling rate of inflation – and of profit in some sectors – makes calling for price caps on other essentials the logical next step for Labour, the source hesitates then quickly changes the subject. Despite our national crisis, the instinctive caution of Starmer and his shadow ministers has not gone away. They first discussed their energy plan more than six months ago, but it was not announced until a week after a similar [proposal from the Lib Dems](#).

In truth, Labour's policy, like most opposition policies, is at least as much about symbolism as offering a practical plan for government. Unless the new Tory leader [calls a quick election](#) and loses, the scheme is not that likely to be implemented, and more likely to be overtaken by events. Further surges in the price of gas since the plan was unveiled have already increased its likely cost by more than a third, according to the Institute for Government. Meanwhile, away from the performative dogmas of the Tory leadership contest, the Treasury, ministers and their advisers, and the shrewder energy companies are all busily trying to come up with new energy strategies – which may steal or supersede Labour's ideas.

Labour has made a breakthrough, for now. But if the party is to win power and then use it to soften our economic crisis, let alone lessen the chance of such meltdowns happening again, helping people with their gas bills has to be just the start. Labour has to realise that so-called free markets are not its friends.

- Andy Beckett is a Guardian columnist
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**OpinionConservatives**

## **Meet Liz Truss's biggest fan – a man whose blind faith reveals a party increasingly driven by ideology**

[Polly Toynbee](#)



The end is nigh when Conservative stalwarts put a vision of a free-market new Jerusalem above winning a general election



Liz Truss is greeted by chancellor Nadhim Zahawi at Conservative leadership hustings in Birmingham on 23 August. Photograph: Anthony Devlin/Getty Images

Fri 26 Aug 2022 03.00 EDT Last modified on Fri 26 Aug 2022 13.25 EDT

She will enter No 10, despite being the [less favoured by the general public](#) of two candidates, both of whom leave it cold. But her small party loves her, sending her ratings up with each interminable hustings, as she throws them reckless new pledges and evidence-free policies. What do they see in her that still escapes most voters?

Let's look into the mind of an ardent Trussite. He was [picked out](#) for me by Prof Tim Bale, the great expert on the inner life of political parties. No one is ever typical, but he (who preferred anonymity) fits the broad profile of those 160,000 Tory members, being a southerner in later middle age. He's a senior member of Liz Truss's grassroots campaign team, closely plugged into the party he has served for decades.

He dismisses Sunak as "a sleek PR product". But, as an old hand at elections, doesn't he worry that Truss's economic stance is rebarbative to ordinary voters? When polls show people want more windfalls on profiteering utilities, subsidies for unpayable bills and a rescue for the NHS,

her [tax cutting](#) and state shrinking looks out of kilter with the times. Her low offer sounds out of touch with half the population crippled by energy prices. “People will always want a handout,” he says. “But they don’t want to pay for it. She will stand firm to her principles.”

Here’s what’s fascinating about him. The party of pragmatism and successful pursuit of power has turned ideological. That’s what he admires in her. “No more of the Cameron-Blair, focus-group-and-marketing approach to politics,” he says. Instead, “People want a clear red-blue choice. Look, I’ve nothing in common with Corbyn, but people saw something in him, inspiring new people.” He’s even an admirer of Tony Benn, “a leftwing libertarian”. Ideas and passions are what matter, and that’s the fire he sees in Truss.

“You wait and see,” he goes on. “She’ll become an outstanding leader, she’ll flower and bloom in office. Remember Margaret Thatcher wasn’t popular at first.” He wants politicians who “don’t shift their own policies, but shift public opinion”, recalling how the free market theories of Keith Joseph and Alfred Sherman swept Thatcher along on her own trajectory.

Truss will step into a tornado of crises, strikes and severe shortages armed only with tax cuts that favour the well-off, so most commentators expect her to pivot towards the public. “I hope not!” he answers sharply. But what if her policies aren’t deliverable? “Properly targeted tax cuts will inject energy into the economy.” He wants privatised utilities to work better, but adds: “We believe in free markets.”

Insiders, the [Financial Times reports](#), plan for her to fix the crisis in her first 100 days. Her second phase, after Christmas, will deliver her “longer-term agenda for reform” when she will “strip away the crap”. Now, there’s a plan unlikely to survive first contact with reality. As for the “crap”, the unstoppable [sewage outflows](#) and the failed Tory privatisations [hated even by Tory voters](#), her every speech suggests a cluelessness about the gigantic omnicrisis ready to swamp her.

Our Trussite expects her to offer some more help, but pins his hopes on the economy coming good in time for the next election. But here’s the crunch:

he wants no policy U-turn. “I’d rather take the risk and fight in clear blue water. I’d rather lose the election than see us become John Major again, in office but not in power.” He wants politicians of “principle and purity”, not “the lowest common denominator machine”.

Not win? Really? I never heard Corbynites prefer to lose; they thought they had the better way to win. Our Trussite sounds like [Militants](#), back in the early 1980s, as they chopped the air and held votes at 2am in my local Lambeth Labour party. The end is surely nigh when a party is so infected with zealotry that it puts ideology above winning. But he thinks Trussite conviction will overcome.

Now he may not be typical, but everything about him suggests authentic shire Torydom. He is a man sincere in his beliefs, a longstanding councillor, local leader, not a maverick. Bale picked him out for his decades of keeping his finger on the party’s pulse. Labourites may think all Tories “lower than vermin”, as Aneurin Bevan [once put it](#), but he has a vision, a free-market new Jerusalem whose hazy shores we on the left can’t begin to imagine. He may see more of a shining path than many cautious Labour figures tiptoeing across a tightrope towards the election.

But if that’s the Tories’ path, it’s a will-o’-the-wisp beckoning them to the precipice. The lady will not be for turning if she really does choose ministers to lash her to the mast: the likes of Kwarteng, Rees-Mogg, Braverman, Duncan Smith and even Redwood, one of John Major’s old “[bastards](#)”.

To see the how far the Tory party has lost its mind, just breathe in the hallucinations of the Telegraph, the Mail and the Spectator. Their wild anti-wokery and bizarre obsession with [re-fighting the lockdown](#) are planets away from everyday lives facing the chill winter of Liz Truss’s first 100 days. Faith sustains her: only believe in Britain and recession will vanish. Tinker Bell economics will save the day if we only clap loud enough to keep the fairytale alive. Labour has been there before, and many will recognise that familiar and terminal disease.

- Polly Toynbee is a Guardian columnist
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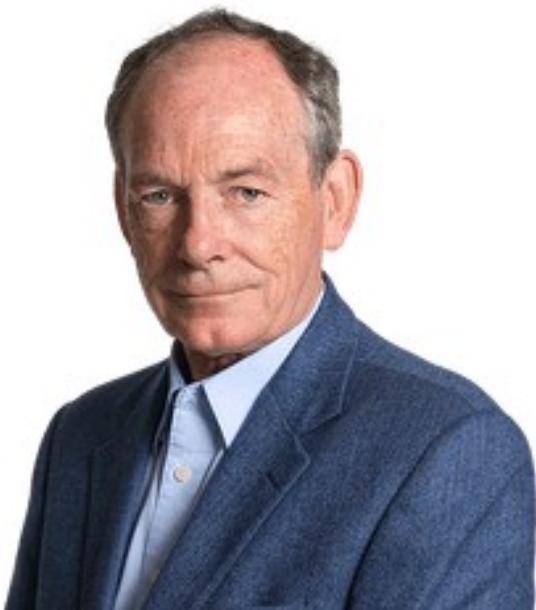
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[\*\*Opinion\*\*](#)[\*\*Afghanistan\*\*](#)

## **Truss's warmongering rhetoric is empty, antagonistic – and wildly dangerous**

[\*\*Simon Jenkins\*\*](#)



The potential PM's plan to cut benefits and boost defence spending merely serves her craving for the theatre of conflict



US troops headed to Kandahar in 2014: ‘By then, 453 British soldiers were dead, at least £27bn of taxpayers’ money had been spent and Helmand had to be rescued by American marines.’ Photograph: Wakil Kohsar/AFP/Getty Images

Fri 26 Aug 2022 04.00 EDT Last modified on Fri 26 Aug 2022 13.25 EDT

Was anything learned? On the first anniversary of Britain’s defeat in Afghanistan there is only silence. The previous defeat in Iraq saw [a searing public inquiry](#) in 2016. It concluded that Iraq had posed “[no imminent threat](#)”. The war was “unnecessary”, and based on dodgy intelligence, dubious legality and feeble attempts at avoidance. But Iraq was the “bad” war. Afghanistan was always the “good” one. Hence [no public inquiry](#).

Afghanistan was the worst fiasco of British foreign policy since Suez. Eager to curry favour with George W Bush in his craving for revenge for 9/11, Tony Blair lost his senses and went on a post-imperial romp. Under Nato auspices and using mercenaries from the Northern Alliance, the Taliban were driven south [out of Kabul](#) in 2001. Strategists including America’s secretary of state Colin Powell and defence secretary Donald Rumsfeld warned against “owning” and “nation-building” Afghanistan. But with “[mission accomplished](#)”, Bush and Blair could not resist. The US was to spend [an estimated \\$1tn](#) there in an effort to create a westernised colony, a monument to democratic values in the heart of Muslim Asia.

The [Afghanistan](#) folly compressed into two decades the history of the British empire in Asia. My first visit in 2006 saw Kabul already starting to decompose. I recall standing at dusk on a fort overlooking the city next to a member of its new ruling class, a Swedish aid worker. He gazed into the seething gloom and sighed: “Oh why can’t Afghanistan be more like Sweden?” I choked.

At the time, [3,000 British troops](#) were about to leave for Helmand province to drive out the Pashtun Taliban. The latter were prospering from the bizarre attempt of a British minister, Clare Short, to [eradicate the Afghan opium crop](#). Poppy revenue then rose to a [record \\$2.3bn](#), surely ranking Short as the most successful agriculture minister of all time.

Eight years later, 453 British soldiers [were dead](#), at least [£27bn of taxpayers' money](#) had been spent and Helmand had to be rescued by American marines. The waste was senseless and astronomical. Britain lingered on another seven years, enmeshing thousands of Afghans in the occupation. Last year, London [ratted on them and fled](#). Now [western sanctions](#) are helping to cause mass starvation. Just as Afghan policy in 2001 was driven by revenge, so now it is driven by ignominy. Empires never last, but rarely has their demise been so awful.

[In recent interviews](#), Britain’s retired defence chief and Afghanistan veteran, the always thoughtful Nick Carter, has been blistering. At the time of 9/11, the Taliban in Kabul [had been infiltrated](#) by the CIA and were in contact with Pakistan. They had begun to switch out of opium production. Their younger, moderate wing had [at least debated](#) expelling Osama bin Laden. Now the same Taliban have been driven back to the middle ages. Even so, Carter stresses the necessity of [reopening contact and engagement](#). He deplores the drone killings that invite retaliation and make negotiation impossible. We must deal with those at whose mercy we have left our friends.



‘Liz Truss uses the language of strutting interventionism.’ Photograph: Charles McQuillan/Getty Images

The attitudes that drove Britain to intervene in Afghanistan seem unchanged. It is the stale Churchillian view of global roles, world stages and British values. They are what induced David Cameron to [help topple Gaddafi](#) and reduce Libya to anarchy. They made him try to join the Arab spring against Syria’s President Assad, until stopped by parliament. They continued with Boris Johnson mimicking President Trump in “[making Britain great again](#)”. He left Europe’s single market, dispatched an aircraft carrier [to the South China Sea](#) and demanded that “we” defeat Vladimir Putin over Ukraine. He even told President Zelenskiy [what not to concede](#).

Johnson is now being aped by his putative successor, Liz Truss. She uses the same language of strutting interventionism. In a flurry of cliches she told a Chatham House audience last year that Britain’s duty was to build “[a network of liberty](#)” round the globe. She sought a policy that would enable “the free world to fight back … to promote freedom not fear”.

Truss’s rhetoric is empty. She says whatever she thinks her audience wants to hear. She was [full of praise](#) for China and is now [fiercely anti](#). On the EU she was [remain then leave](#), according to where her career interest lay. She has negotiated a dreadful [trade deal with Australia](#) and is at sea on the

Northern Irish protocol. Truss's sole objective is to find machismo in the moment.

Such bombast is hard to imagine in a German, French or Scandinavian politician. It has nothing to do with the purpose of foreign policy – guarding national security and prosperity. It merely diverts resources from defence into an aggressive posturing, requiring extravagant kit to match. The defence budget is diverted from manpower towards ships and planes, [vanity projects](#) of no defensive use and riddled with delay and inefficiency.

I find it hard to disagree with Americans – and Europeans – baffled that successive British governments have found themselves unable to break the spell of imperial outreach. That Americans are under the same spell is not the point; they can afford it. Truss is now proposing to starve her welfare state to find [another £10bn](#) for “defence”, upping its budget from 2.1% to 3% of GDP by 2030. This is justified by no knowable threat.

Just as Johnson wanted to win Downing Street by wrenching Britain from Europe, so Truss wants to drag it into one theatre of conflict after another, waving her flag from any stage going. The result is no secret. It lies bleeding in a Kabul gutter. And no one dares ask why.

- Simon Jenkins is a Guardian columnist
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[\*\*OpinionRishi Sunak\*\*](#)

## **Sunak is so desperate to be prime minister that he has decided to rewrite Covid history**

[Rachel Clarke](#)



The misinformation spouted by the leadership hopeful is dangerous and exacerbates the wrongful mistrust of scientists

- Rachel Clarke is a palliative care doctor



‘Sunak is courting votes, twisting what actually happened to fit a narrative certain voters want to hear.’ Photograph: Getty Images

Fri 26 Aug 2022 02.00 EDT Last modified on Fri 26 Aug 2022 09.42 EDT

In an extraordinary – and impeccably timed, from the point view of his Tory leadership campaign – [interview with the Spectator](#), Rishi Sunak has felt compelled to out himself as the scrappy underdog of the cabinet’s Covid strategy battles. No one but him, he claims, even considered the potential harms of lockdown, such as missed doctors appointments, the NHS backlog or children not attending school. “That was never part of it … those meetings were literally me around that table, just fighting. It was incredibly uncomfortable every single time,” he said.

He also says he objected to what he called the “fear narrative”, the messaging from the government about the dangers of the virus. Releasing posters of people on ventilators was the worst, he said.

It’s a potent image, isn’t it? All that fearlessness and resolve rippling beneath a cashmere hoodie. Sunak, in his own eyes, was nothing less than a one-man crusade for common sense and human rights in the face of evangelical lockdown monomania. Even more arresting is Sunak’s root cause analysis of how the UK came to suffer. The government’s fatal mistake, he claims, was

to “[empower](#)” the independent scientists of the Scientific Advisory Group for Emergencies (Sage) to such an extent that they “screwed” the country.

Well. Even *with* lockdowns, according to the latest death certificate data, more than [170,000 people have died](#) of Covid since the pandemic began. Just how many more tens of thousands of casualties would be required for Sunak to concede that actually lockdowns served a vital purpose?

The fact is, in almost every line of the interview – clearly an attempt to pander to the libertarian wing of the party faithful – Sunak is talking nonsense. He alleges, for instance, that Sage “had the power to decide whether the country would lock down or not”. But that’s entirely wrong. Sage’s role was, and remains, advisory. It’s up to the executive to make the tough decisions, a concept that I believe is known as leadership.

In reality, Sage was so impotent that after a few brief months of “following the science” – or at least purporting to do so – Downing Street swiftly went off piste. In September 2020, for example, Sage implored Johnson to lock down in order to avoid a catastrophic second wave. As Sage member [Prof Stephen Reicher explained](#) in this newspaper at the time: “On 21 September the scientific advisory body Sage produced a paper with a simple message: do something now or else lose control over the virus. That ‘something’ would have to be sufficient to reduce infections to a level where the virus could be controlled without shutting businesses and curtailing livelihoods.” The government chose to ignore Sage and sure enough Britain found itself, in Reicher’s words, “occupying the worst of all worlds: a limbo where the pandemic drags on and causes more damage, leaving us hopeless and praying for a vaccine”.

Sunak also alleges evasiveness, spin and lack of transparency from Sage, claiming that the committee would issue horrifying scenarios about what would come to pass if Britain did not impose lockdown, without revealing the basis upon which they had been calculated: “I was like: ‘Summarise for me the key assumptions, on one page, with a bunch of sensitivities and rationale for each one.’ In the first year I could never get this.” But this too is claptrap. Take, for example, the Imperial College modelling which influenced the decision to lock down for the first time in March 2020. That model predicted 250,000 deaths without any interventions. It was published,

in its entirety – raw data, statistical analyses, executive summary and bullet point conclusions – on 16 March 2020. Perhaps Sunak, who must have missed it at the time, would like to [read it here](#)?

I can only conclude that Sunak is so desperate to be prime minister, he has decided to take a populist punt at rewriting Covid history. He reminds me of Dean Russell, the Tory MP who [took on Chris Whitty](#) last December by crassly asking him: “People are concerned we’re prioritising Covid over other things, especially with the Omicron variant. You know, Covid over cancer, Covid over other serious issues. What would you say to that?”

Whitty’s response, blistering in its understatement, applies to Sunak as much as Russell: “This is sometimes said by people who have no understanding of health at all. And when they say it, it’s usually because they want to make a political point. The idea that the lockdowns cause the problems with things like cancer is a complete inversion of the reality. If we’d not had the lockdowns, the whole system would be in deep, deep trouble and the impacts on things like heart attacks and strokes and all the other things people must still come forward for when they had them, would have been even worse than it was.”

Sunak is courting votes, twisting what actually happened to fit a narrative certain voters want to hear. Worse, the misinformation he’s spouting is dangerous. It encourages the public to think the worst of scientists, only exacerbating mistrust and division. The fact is, scientists weren’t empowered enough – and were used at times as human shields for political incompetence and procrastination. Shame on Sunak for debasing himself.

- Rachel Clarke is a palliative care doctor and the author of *Breathtaking: Inside the NHS in a Time of Pandemic*
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## 2022.08.26 - Around the world

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## [Colombia](#)

# Colombia's leftwing government unveils tax-the-rich plan to tackle poverty

President Gustavo Petro's proposed legislation could raise \$11.5bn a year with measures including wealth tax and levy on oil exports



President Gustavo Petro aims to channel the taxes raised in anti-poverty efforts, free public university and other social welfare programs.  
Photograph: Luisa González/Reuters

[Megan Janetsky](#) in Bogotá

Fri 26 Aug 2022 05.30 EDT Last modified on Fri 26 Aug 2022 11.10 EDT

Colombia's new leftist government has proposed an ambitious plan to tax the rich in an effort to combat poverty in one of the most unequal countries in the [Americas](#).

If implemented, the [Piketty](#)-esque legislation proposed by President Gustavo Petro could raise more than \$11.5bn annually to fund anti-poverty efforts,

free public university and other social welfare programs.

Petro, [a former urban guerrilla who became the country's first leftist leader](#), rose to power on a raft of promises centered around social progress at a time when the South American country is still plagued by pandemic-fueled economic turmoil.

If passed, the plan would raise taxes on the country's highest earners – approximately 2% of Colombia's population – cut tax benefits for the richest and fight tax evasion.

The tax hikes would progressively increase as income increases. It would add an annual wealth tax on savings and property above \$630,000, and would add a 10% tax on some of Colombia's biggest exports – oil, coal and gold – after prices rise above a certain threshold.

"This should not be viewed as a punishment or a sacrifice," said Petro. "It is simply a solidarity payment that someone fortunate makes to a society that has enabled them to generate wealth."

The wealth tax was among Petro's chief promises during his campaign and would mark a significant step toward achieving his bold policy agenda, which has inspired hope in some and skepticism in others.

It is also part of a larger debate playing out around the world at a time of deepening global inequalities.

"This is not just [Colombia](#)," said economist Álvaro Pardo. "This is a large conversation in any country – the ideas of equity and progress, the idea that those who have the most have to pay more. These are universal concepts we're drawing upon."

Petro's proposal has prompted alarm in the country's private sector and political elite who argue the tax will dampen investment, push job creators out of the country and – according to the arch-conservative former president Álvaro Uribe – potentially deepen poverty.

“We support all these efforts for the country to overcome poverty,” Uribe [said](#) following a meeting with Petro this summer. “But not at the cost of withering away the private sector.”

But at the height of the country’s decades-long armed conflict, Uribe imposed a similar temporary tax in order to fund his war with the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (Farc) guerrilla group.

Last year, amid stewing resentment for Petro’s predecessor, Iván Duque, [another tax reform proposal ignited months of anti-government protests](#), which became symbolic of deeper social unrest and endemic inequalities.

“It was sort of a perfect storm from political opposition to the government, post-pandemic economic hardship and the government’s response,” said Sergio Guzmán, director of Colombia Risk Analysis. “Under this government, things are different.”



A supporter displays a banner saying ‘Don’t let us down’ at the inauguration of President Gustavo Petro in Bogotá on 7 August. Photograph: Mauricio Dueñas Castañeda/EPA

This bill, he said, “is more progressive in nature”, doing away with key exemptions that he and economists say have allowed richer individuals to pay lower taxes than the average Colombian.

It's also more permanent than other wealth taxes. The measure will now have to go through congress, where it is likely to pass.

The proposal was a welcome move for many Colombians who have felt like they have been on the outside looking in.

Marlon Mendoza, an Afro-Colombian entrepreneur on the Caribbean coast, was one of 1.6 million Colombians who, during the pandemic, were knocked out of the middle class and back into poverty.

“The poor got poorer, and the rich got richer,” he said.

He went from having an office and a home in the city of Cartagena to returning to the unpaved streets of his town of birth on the outskirts of the city, struggling paycheck to paycheck.

Some observers warn that the tax plan will only address the tip of the iceberg.

Pardo said: “The challenge is gigantic because it means breaking a structure that has been in place for decades, a structure that favors rich sectors and big companies. It’s going to be very difficult.”

But it’s that painful growth that needs to happen, says Mendoza.

“This is a new idea. Human beings, not just Colombians, we’ve gotten used to the status quo. Down the line, if that thing is hurting us, it’s hard to branch away from what we’re used to.” he said. “But if we don’t do that, there will never be change.”

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## [India](#)

# India restricts wheat flour exports to ease record local prices

Government also cites food security after heatwave stunted domestic wheat output and drove up prices



Labourers work in a mill of refined wheat flour at Khanna, in India's state of Punjab. The national government will restrict exports of the flour to bring down rising domestic prices. Photograph: Sajjad Hussain/AFP/Getty Images

*Reuters in Mumbai*

Fri 26 Aug 2022 01.28 EDT Last modified on Fri 26 Aug 2022 14.18 EDT

India's cabinet has approved restrictions on wheat flour exports to calm prices in the local market.

The government banned the export of wheat itself in mid-May as a heatwave curtailed output and domestic prices hit a record high. That ban boosted demand for Indian wheat flour, exports of which jumped 200% between

April and July from a year ago, and lifted prices in the local market, the government said on Thursday.

“There was a policy not to prohibit or put any restrictions on the export of wheat flour,” it said in a statement. “Therefore, a partial modification of the policy was required … to ensure food security and put a check on mounting prices.”

Wheat prices jumped to a record 24,500 rupees (\$307) a tonne this week in India, the world’s second-largest producer of wheat.

That was up nearly 20% from recent lows that followed the government’s surprise ban on exports on 14 May, ending hopes India could fill the market gap left by a plunge in exports from the Black Sea region following Russia’s February invasion of Ukraine.

Before the ban, India had aimed to ship a record 10m tonnes this year. Much of that would have gone to other developing countries such as Indonesia, the Philippines and Thailand.

Apart from problems with the heatwave damaging harvests, India’s vast stocks of wheat – a buffer against famine – have been strained by the distribution of free grain during the Covid-19 pandemic to about 800 million people.

*With Associated Press*

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## New Zealand

# Police identify two children whose remains were found in suitcases in New Zealand

Names of the children, whose bodies were concealed in suitcases at an Auckland storage facility, have been suppressed at family's request



New Zealand police investigators at the home where the bodies of two were discovered in suitcases that had been bought from a storage facility.  
Photograph: Dean Purcell/AP

*[Charlotte Graham-McLay](#) in Wellington*

Fri 26 Aug 2022 02.34 EDT Last modified on Fri 26 Aug 2022 14.18 EDT

Police have identified the two children whose remains were discovered in suitcases bought from an Auckland storage facility.

New Zealand police issued a statement confirming they had identified the children on Friday, but a coroner's order has suppressed the release of their names at the request of the family.

New Zealand police launched a [homicide inquiry](#) in Auckland on 11 August after the remains of the children were found by a family going through the contents of a storage locker they had bought unseen at an online auction.

DI Tofilau Faamanua Vaaelua said on Friday that police were "continuing to investigate the circumstances surrounding the death of the children".

Police have repeatedly stated the family who found the bodies was not connected to the deaths.

Vaaelua said at a media conference last week that a postmortem indicated the children were of primary school age – between five and 10 years old.

"The bodies were concealed in two suitcases of similar size ... I believe the suitcases have been in storage for a number of years," he said, adding that it was likely between three to four years.

The occupants of the home who discovered the remains were "understandably distressed by the discovery" and had requested privacy, Vaaelua said.

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## [Zoos](#)

# Thailand zookeeper dresses as ostrich in novel approach to training drill

Chiang Mai Zoo not keeping its head in the sand, with man captured after fleeing enclosure in bird suit as part of ‘wild animal management plan’



Thailand’s Chiang Mai Zoo held training drills for its ‘wild animal management plan’ which saw one man dress as an ostrich. Photograph: Chiang Mai Zoo Facebook page

*[Samantha Lock](#)*

*[@Samantha\\_Lock](#)*

Thu 25 Aug 2022 22.29 EDT Last modified on Fri 26 Aug 2022 11.10 EDT

A man dressed as an eight foot tall ostrich with a towering bird neck strapped to his head was successfully pinned down with a fishing net after running amok in a [Thailand](#) zoo this week.

The staff member was taking part in a training drill designed to ensure the animal was unable to escape its enclosure, should the real-world situation ever arise.

Although the ostrich is a flightless bird, it is a risk that the popular northern Thailand zoo – home to about 400 animal species – isn't willing to take.



A man dressed as an ostrich for a training drill was successfully captured with a fishing net after running amok in a Thailand zoo earlier this week.  
Photograph: Chiang Mai Zoo Facebook page

The Chiang Mai Zoo director, Wuttichai Muangman, revealed the “wild animal management plan” which simulated various emergency situations including an ostrich falling out of its nest.

The animal care worker dressed as the native African bird “fell out” of its animal show area, prompting colleagues to pursue the man on foot, a series of photos uploaded by the zoo revealed.

Eventually, the man was seen captured and escorted by three fellow staff members, including one man holding a giant fishing net.

A final snap showed the zoo team looking victorious as they held up their arms with clenched fists.

The zoo said the training provided preparation for “managing a real situation” and included measures to control animal emergencies and guidelines to follow in such situations.



The zoo team held up their arms with clenched fists in a seemingly victorious pose. Photograph: Chiang Mai Zoo Facebook page

The ostrich is the world's largest bird, growing up to nine feet (2.7m) tall and weighing up to 350lbs (160kg) according to National Geographic.

A frightened ostrich can run at up to 45mph (70km/h) and can deliver powerful kicks capable of killing lions and other large predators.



The zoo said the training and rehearsal plans provided preparation for ‘managing a real situation’. Photograph: Chiang Mai Zoo Facebook page

It is unclear whether the zoo’s resident giant pandas, hippopotamus or penguin colony will be the subject of similar training drills.

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[Twitter](#)

## Judge orders Twitter to turn over to Elon Musk data from 2021 users audit

The company had said the information did not exist, but it sampled 9,000 users in order to estimate the number of spam accounts



A judge has said Twitter must turn over data used in a 2021 audit of active users. Photograph: Emmanuel Dunand/AFP/Getty Images

*Reuters*

Thu 25 Aug 2022 16.57 EDT Last modified on Sat 27 Aug 2022 00.09 EDT

Elon Musk may get access to Twitter data used in a 2021 audit of active users but other information the billionaire seeks in a bid to end his \$44bn deal to buy the company were rejected as “absurdly broad”, a judge said on Thursday.

Twitter must turn over data from the 9,000 accounts sampled in the fourth quarter as part of its process to estimate the number of spam accounts.

Twitter had said that data did not exist and it would be burdensome to collect it. Chancellor Kathleen McCormick gave the company two weeks to produce the data.

Musk has claimed the company defrauded him by misrepresenting the number of real users in its financial disclosures that he relied on to make his takeover offer and he wanted the data to confirm Twitter's spam estimates.

"We look forward to reviewing the data Twitter has been hiding for many months," said Alex Spiro, Musk's attorney, in an emailed statement.

Twitter declined to comment.

A five-day trial has been scheduled for 17 October.

McCormick also rejected many of Musk's other data demands.

"Defendants' data requests are absurdly broad. Read literally, defendants' documents request would require plaintiff to produce trillions upon trillions of data points," she wrote.

Musk, the world's richest person, has said he wants to test that audit's accuracy because he believes the company fraudulently misrepresented that only 5% of its accounts were spam. He wants McCormick to rule he can walk away from the deal.

Twitter wants McCormick to order Musk to close the deal at the agreed price of \$54.20 per share. The shares briefly rose about 1% after the ruling and ended up 0.6% at \$41.05.

Twitter said at a Wednesday court hearing that Musk's focus on spam was "legally irrelevant" because the company has described the spam count in regulatory filings as an estimate, not a representation. It also said the real level of spam could be higher.

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## Headlines monday 22 august 2022

- [Law Criminal barristers in England and Wales vote to go on indefinite strike](#)
- [Live Tories should end leadership contest now so new PM can tackle fuel bills, energy boss says](#)
- [Cost of living crisis Truss poised to plunge UK economy into 'inflation spiral', says Sunak](#)
- [Live Russia-Ukraine war: Moscow car bomb raises tension in Kyiv as shelling rocks Nikopol near nuclear plant](#)
- [Ukraine Nation braces for intensified attacks after Moscow car bomb](#)

## Barristers

# Criminal barristers in England and Wales vote to go on indefinite strike

Ministers accused of overseeing ‘recklessly underfunded’ criminal justice system, with industrial action to step up on 5 September



The Ministry of Justice has offered criminal barristers a 15% rise in fees, the minimum recommended by the criminal legal aid review. Photograph: Stefan Rousseau/PA

*[Rajeev Syal](#) Home affairs editor*

Mon 22 Aug 2022 12.30 EDTFirst published on Mon 22 Aug 2022 04.19 EDT

Ministers have been accused of overseeing a “recklessly underfunded” criminal justice system after barristers in [England](#) and Wales voted for an all-out strike over jobs and pay.

Members of the Criminal Bar Association (CBA), who have been stopping work on alternate weeks since June, voted for an uninterrupted strike that would start on 5 September, a spokesperson confirmed.

The start would coincide with the announcement of the new Conservative party leader and prime minister.

Ministers have described the result as an “irresponsible decision”. However, the vote will pile further pressure on the government, which faces escalating industrial action in the rail industry and threats of strikes from teachers and health workers.

Reacting to the decision, the victims’ commissioner, Dame Vera Baird, said the strike was the “latest symptom of a criminal justice system that is severely and recklessly underfunded. And it is victims who are ultimately paying the price and will continue to suffer the longer this goes on.”

The Labour leader, Keir Starmer, accused the government of doing “absolutely nothing” to resolve industrial disputes, including the row with criminal barristers.

The ballot of barristers closed at midnight on Sunday and the result was announced on Monday morning. The association said 79.5% of barristers who voted (1,808) supported the move to a full-time strike over legal aid rates, which they said had in effect been cut by 28% over the past decade.

It will result in the vast majority of crown court trials in England and Wales being adjourned, while others could collapse entirely.

The CBA vice-chair, Kirsty Brimelow QC, said this was “last-resort action” over a demand for less money than it costs the government for the courts to sit empty.

She told BBC Breakfast: “The effect of the strike will be that the courts continue to sit empty with trials and cases not being heard. It is a last-resort action.

“The remedy is for an injection of money into the backlog of cases, which currently stands at 60,000 cases, that barristers are working on that will cost the government only £1.1m per month. Currently, it’s costing much more for the courts to sit empty.”

The CBA says incomes have fallen nearly 30% over the past two decades and specialist criminal barristers make an average annual income after expenses of £12,200 in the first three years of practice, driving 22% of junior criminal barristers to leave since 2016.

Barristers say they are being paid less than the minimum wage for court hearings when travel and hours spent preparing are factored in – and not at all when hearings are cancelled.

The Ministry of Justice has offered a 15% uplift in fees, which was the minimum increase recommended by the criminal legal aid review (Clar). The CBA said this was insufficient after swingeing cuts and would not apply to the backlog of 58,000 cases in crown courts.

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The intermittent strikes began in June and were the first since 2014, which was the first time barristers had gone on strike, over legal aid fees.

According to MoJ figures, more than 6,000 court hearings have been disrupted as a result of the dispute over conditions and government-set fees for legal aid advocacy work.

Data released under freedom of information laws shows that during the first 19 days of industrial action, between 27 June and 5 August, there were 6,235 court cases disrupted, including 1,415 trials, across England and Wales.

Responding to the vote, the justice minister Sarah Dines said: “This is an irresponsible decision that will only see more victims face further delays and distress.

“The escalation of strike action is wholly unjustified considering we are increasing criminal barristers’ fees by 15%, which will see the typical barrister earn around £7,000 more a year.”

Speaking to reporters in east London, Starmer said: “I quite understand, whether it’s barristers or others, why people and how people are struggling to make ends meet.”

He added: “I want to see the government step in and actually help resolve these issues, instead of that we’ve got – a government doing absolutely nothing.”

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**Politics live with Andrew Sparrow**  
**Politics**

## Sunak effectively rules out serving in a Truss cabinet, suggesting they don't agree on 'big things' – as it happened

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## UK cost of living crisis

# Truss poised to plunge UK economy into ‘inflation spiral’, says Sunak

Truss cannot deliver £50bn tax cuts and support packages without pushing debt to dangerous levels, says Tory leadership rival



The artist Ciaran Gallagher paints Larry the cat on to a mural in Belfast city centre depicting the Tory leadership battle between Liz Truss and Rishi Sunak. Photograph: Clodagh Kilcoyne/Reuters

*[Tobi Thomas](#) and [Rowena Mason](#)*

Mon 22 Aug 2022 03.50 EDT Last modified on Mon 22 Aug 2022 07.26 EDT

Liz Truss will plunge the economy into an “inflation spiral” if she does not choose between her unfunded £50bn tax cuts and providing cost of living support, her Conservative party leadership opponent, [Rishi Sunak](#), has claimed.

Sunak's leadership campaign said Truss would increase borrowing to "historic and dangerous levels" and place public finances into "serious jeopardy" if she attempted to do both.

The comments came after Truss, the frontrunner to be the next prime minister, signalled another U-turn with direct support for companies and households amid soaring energy bills this winter.

In a statement, Sunak's campaign said: "Following weeks of rejecting direct support payments as 'handouts', Truss supporters have slowly woken up to the reality of what winter brings. They now say that they will provide people with help – but what help, for who, when and how it will be paid for remains a mystery.

"The reality is that Truss cannot deliver a support package as well as come good on £50bn worth of unfunded, permanent tax cuts in one go. To do so would mean increasing borrowing to historic and dangerous levels, putting the public finances in serious jeopardy and plunging the economy into an inflation spiral."

An ally of Sunak's, Kevin Hollinrake, also suggested people would be homeless "on the streets" without further help to pay energy bills this winter.

The MP for Thirsk and Malton told Sky News that promises by Truss's campaign to cut taxes would provide only an extra "pound a week" to the poorest households, whereas it would provide "to the tune of about 30 a week" to a household like his.

"It is simply not right," he said. "These people are going to be on the streets. Things are going to be that bad for some households."

The row comes before [Ofgem's announcement on Friday](#) when the regulator is expected to increase the cap on energy bills from £1,971 to about £3,600.

The former chancellor's team also commented on reports that Truss was [not planning to ask the independent Office for Budget Responsibility \(OBR\) for a forecast](#) ahead of the emergency budget she is planning for next month.

“It’s no wonder they want to avoid independent scrutiny of the OBR in their emergency budget – they know you can’t do both and it’s time they came clean about that now,” Sunak’s campaign said.

Another Sunak supporter, Mel Stride, said Truss’s plans for an emergency budget needed to be transparent and affordable so ministers were not “flying blind”.

The Commons Treasury committee chair told LBC: “At the moment the Liz camp are saying I believe that there will not be any OBR forecast produced at that time and that is kind of like flying blind.

“It means that you do all these dramatic things on tax etc but you don’t actually know what the independent forecaster believes the impact will be on the public finances and I think that is quite a serious situation were that to come about.”

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Sunak’s attack on Truss’s policies came after [Michael Gove said in an article for the Times that Truss was on a “holiday from reality”](#) with her plans for tax cuts during an economic crisis as he endorsed Sunak.

Gove, who was levelling up secretary until being sacked by Boris Johnson before his resignation as Tory leader, said Truss’s vision put the “stock options of FTSE 100 executives” before the country’s poorest.

By contrast, the business secretary came to Truss’s defence, saying there would be support for the poorest households regarding the cost of living

crisis.

Writing [in the Mail on Sunday](#), Kwasi Kwarteng said: “I understand the deep anxiety this is causing. As winter approaches, millions of families will be concerned about how they are going to make ends meet. But I want to reassure the British people that help is coming.”

Truss expressed optimism for the economy, saying there was “too much talk that there’s going to be a recession” as she insisted an economic slump was not inevitable despite the Bank of England’s forecast.

In an interview [with the Sun on Sunday](#), she said she was looking at help “across the board” in a hint that there could be more support for businesses and households.

So far she has focused on cutting taxes, such as an immediate reversal of the national insurance increase, while Sunak has focused on trying to bring down soaring inflation.

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[Ukraine war liveUkraine](#)

# Russia-Ukraine war: Putin condemns ‘despicable, cruel’ killing of Darya Dugina as Russia blames Ukraine for car bombing – as it happened

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## [Ukraine](#)

# **Ukraine braces for intensified attacks after Moscow car bomb killing**

Kyiv denies any involvement in death of daughter of ultranationalist Russian ideologue Alexander Dugin

Daughter of Putin ally Alexander Dugin killed by car bomb in Moscow – video

*[Dan Sabbagh](#) in Kyiv and [Luke Harding](#)*

Sun 21 Aug 2022 15.30 EDT Last modified on Mon 22 Aug 2022 12.38 EDT

Ukraine is bracing itself for an intensification of Russian missile attacks to coincide with its independence day on Wednesday in the aftermath of the car-bomb killing of the daughter of an ultranationalist Russian ideologue.

The country's military warned that [Russia](#) had put five cruise missile-bearing warships and submarines out in the Black Sea and that Moscow was positioning air defence systems in Belarus. Large gatherings have been banned in Kyiv for four days from Monday.

Overnight on Saturday, Ukraine's president [Volodymyr Zelenskiy](#) had warned that "Russia may try to do something particularly nasty, something particularly cruel" this week as the country celebrates its 31st anniversary of independence.

The country's armed forces also warned on Sunday night that Russia had closed the airspace in the Russian border regions of Lipetsk, Voronezh and regions between 22 and 25 August.

Tensions between the two warring countries were at risk of heightening further after [the killing of Darya Dugina](#), whose father is the Russian

political commentator Alexander Dugin, on the outskirts of Moscow on Saturday night.

Investigations into the killing were continuing, although some Russian hawks tried – without evidence – to blame Ukraine, which in turn denied any involvement in the attack, saying it was “not a terrorist state”.

On Sunday night, a former member of Russia’s Duma now based in Kyiv who was expelled for anti-Kremlin activities [claimed](#) that a previously unknown group of Russian partisans were behind the attack.

[Ilya Ponomarev](#) claimed the deadly explosion was the work of the National Republican Army, which he said was an underground group working inside Russia dedicated to overthrowing the Putin regime.

“This action, like many other partisan actions carried out on the territory of Russia in recent months, was carried out by the National Republican Army (NRA),” Ponomarev said, [speaking](#) on his YouTube channel. The Guardian has not verified the authenticity of the claims.

Concern about whether Russia would step up its attacks around Ukraine’s independence day had been in the air for some time and predated the Moscow car bomb. But it could be used as an additional pretext by Moscow.

Prominent Russian hawks blaming Kyiv for the car bomb called it “an assassination attempt” and demanded that the Kremlin respond by targeting government officials in Kyiv.

“Decision-making centres!! Decision-making centres!!!” wrote Margarita Simonyan, the editor-in-chief of the state-funded RT television station, reposting a call to bomb the headquarters of the Ukrainian SBU intelligence agency.

Maria Zakharova, a spokesperson for the Russian foreign ministry, said that if a Ukrainian link was confirmed and was verified by the competent authorities, “then we should talk about the policy of state terrorism implemented by the Kyiv regime”.

If the car bombing is definitively tied to the war, it would mark the first time since February that the violence unleashed on Ukraine has reached the Russian capital, touching the family of a Kremlin ally near one of Moscow's most exclusive districts.

Kyiv strongly denied the allegations. "Ukraine has absolutely nothing to do with this, because we are not a criminal state like Russia, or a terrorist one at that," Mykhailo Podolyak, an adviser to Zelenskiy, said in remarks broadcast on television.

Keir Giles, a Russia expert at the Chatham House thinktank, said it was unclear whether Ponomarev's claims about the NRA were true: "How the Kremlin will respond depends on whether this is a genuine resistance movement or a Russia-style complex conspiracy of smoke and mirrors – and we may not know for some time yet."

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The blast occurred shortly after Dugina left the Tradition cultural festival at an estate where her father had given a lecture. The two were expected to leave together, but instead got into different cars, a friend said.

Five minutes later, a bomb exploded in the car Dugina was driving, killing her instantly. Witnesses said debris was thrown all over the road as the car was engulfed in flames before crashing into a fence.

Dugin is known for developing an extreme rightwing view of Russia's place in the world and had previously advocated violence against Ukraine, while

his daughter held similar views. He has been described as a [“Russian fascist”](#) and is a well-known conspiracy theorist.

Some claim he helped shape the Russian president’s expansionist foreign policy. But the influence of Dugin over Putin remains a subject for speculation, with many insiders saying his sway over the Kremlin was minimal.

Investigators believed the bombing was “premeditated and of a contract nature”, said Alexander Bastrykin, the head of the investigative committee, the main federal investigating authority in Russia.

Andrey Krasnov, a friend of Dugina and the head of the Russian Horizon social movement, confirmed the reports, [according to the news agency Tass](#). He said the bomb could have been intended for her father.

“This was the father’s vehicle. Darya was driving another car, but she took his car today, while Alexander went a different way. He returned, he was at the site of the tragedy. As far as I understand, Alexander or probably they together were the target,” Krasnov said.

However, the independent Russian news agency Agentstvo reported that leaked government databases showed the car was registered to Darya, not her father. Footage on social media appeared to show him at the scene in a state of distress.

Investigators said they had opened a murder case and would be carrying out forensic examinations to try to determine what happened. They said they were considering “all versions” when it came to working out who was responsible.

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## The River Cafe legacy: the enduring influence of one of Britain's best loved restaurants



Anna Tobias, who worked at the River Cafe from 2010 to 2013, at her London restaurant, Cafe Deco. Photograph: Phil Fisk/The Observer

The Italian restaurant, which opened 35 years ago, counts Jamie Oliver and Hugh Fearnley-Whittingstall among its alumni. We speak to three of its chefs who have taken its ethos with them into their own places

### Tony Naylor

Mon 22 Aug 2022 03.00 EDT

“When we hire people,” says Joe Trivelli, executive head chef at the River Cafe, “I’m thinking, ‘Will they be good, and stay for a long time?’ I’m not thinking about what they’re going to do afterwards.” The restaurant, which celebrates its 35th anniversary next month, is not, stresses its other executive head chef, Sian Wyn Owen, a “fancy cooking school”.

The River Cafe’s kitchen needs team players willing to work hard while absorbing knowledge, not chefs in a rush to tick a box on their CV and move on to their own head chef roles. “Often that desire to be important overpowers the desire to learn,” says Wyn Owen.

Famous for its rigorously seasonal Italian cooking, the restaurant is also renowned as an incubator of highly influential talent. Its founders, Rose Gray and Ruth Rogers, fostered the development of Jamie Oliver, Hugh Fearnley-Whittingstall, Theo Randall, Stevie Parle, and Sam and Sam Clark of Moro, creating a lineage now in its second or third generation. Today, it is Tomos Parry of Brat, Max Rocha at Café Cecilia or Yohei Furuhashi at Toklas who are carrying elements of its ethos out into the world.

That conveyor belt of talent may be described as an unforeseen byproduct of the environment Gray, [who died in 2010](#), and Rogers, still very much in charge, created together. The kitchen currently has a roughly 50:50 male-female split, and each week chefs work four single shifts (9am to 5pm or 3pm to 11pm) and at most one double shift. Wyn Owen is trying to eradicate double shifts as they’re “the worst thing about hospitality”. Working parents are offered flexible hours, and the 150 staff can apply for bursaries from the Rose Gray Foundation for their personal and professional development. These have been used to learn languages, research cookbooks or take courses in charcuterie.



River Cafe founder Ruth Rogers (centre), with current executive head chefs Sian Wyn Owen (left) and Joe Trivelli (right). Photograph: Sarah Lee/The Guardian

Wyn Owen is wary of portraying the River Cafe as a “sickly, happy family”, saying: “it’s a stressful working environment meeting two non-negotiable deadlines a day – lunch and dinner.” In summer, the kitchen can do 200 covers at lunch on a Monday, but its chefs tend to stay for several years. Wyn Owen, 50, and Trivelli, 48, have both been there for more than 20 years. Stay long enough, explains Wyn Owen, and, “by osmosis, in real time”, chefs learn to “properly cook”.

Trivelli and Wyn Owen are disappointed when, instead of staying in restaurants, talented alumni leave the industry, often to become private chefs. “It’s sad they’ve vanished inside someone’s house to make scrambled eggs,” says Wyn Owen. “We’re restaurant chefs and you want them to carry on the mantle.”

But a notable number of ex-River Cafe chefs do exactly that: go on to lead highly rated kitchens.

**Anna Tobias**

**Chef-owner, Cafe Deco, London; she worked at the River Cafe from 2010 to 2013**

“When I joined the River Cafe I was 23 and had only been cooking for 18 months. I was very fresh and not entirely sure I wanted to cook any more. I was in a personally difficult moment and my life could have gone another way. But I thought I’d try one more place: I only applied to the River Cafe, got the job and luckily stayed on the cooking path. It was the River Cafe or rethink.

From an employee perspective, there was a level of glamour that felt enticing – big team, huge open kitchen, everyone knew the books, Jamie Oliver had come out of there.



‘Wedges of Amalfi lemons of the most incredible quality served with every fish dish – that’s the River Cafe aesthetic’: Anna Tobias. Photograph: Phil Fisk/The Observer

In the morning, everyone does raw prep, filleting fish and butchery. That was a learning curve. Scaling eight sea bass each day is grim, but you get really good at it. More established chefs teach the newcomers with energy, enthusiasm and in detail. After that, I felt confident in my skills to tutor people. At Cafe Deco, that’s a large part of my job. I love teaching.

The cooking processes behind food described as ‘simple’ – in essence, enjoying ingredients without mucking about with them – aren’t necessarily simple, and those processes must be perfect. That’s the point of going to a restaurant. You get to enjoy a peeled plum cherry tomato that you would never bother peeling at home.

Rose had died two or three weeks before I joined and, when learning dishes from other chefs, instructions would often be prefaced with, ‘Rose used to say’, ‘Rose would do this’, or ‘Rose would hate that’. She was very much there. There was real togetherness and an atmosphere of cooking well, for Ruthie, but keeping Rose’s standards, too.

Cooking simply and seasonally requires great care in produce quality. At the River Cafe, tasting the first summer basil, porcini or cherries together, these were all incredibly exciting moments. I work with tiny farms who can only deliver certain amounts at Cafe Deco, particularly on the veg side. If the produce isn’t incredible the food will, at best, be average to good-ish.

Early on, I remember the first borlotti beans coming in. Ruthie cooked them in the oven and put on a dish of borlotti, good oil and chopped parsley. That was it. That’s bold cooking with strong belief in a delicious product. It requires way more confidence than cooking with a million flourishes on a plate.

The beauty of the River Cafe is that people stay a long time. As an ambitious chef, that’s also a problem. You hit a glass ceiling where you’re banking on someone leaving to get more responsibility. I wanted to learn new skills: write menus, how to cost, have more of a creative voice. I went to Rochelle Canteen and, after a year, was made head chef.

I think of Cafe Deco’s menu as a brainchild of all my former bosses and my own style. My gnudi with good, new season olive oil or my pappa al pomodoro soup aren’t carbon copies, but I take inspiration from the River Cafe. Why wouldn’t I bring some of that learning into my own cooking?”

**Avinash Shashidhara**

***Head chef, Pahli Hill Bandra Bhai, London; he worked at the River Cafe from 2008 to 2018***

“In Bangalore, I worked at Italia, where Antonio Carluccio was a consultant. He and Priya Paul [the chair of Park Hotels India, where Shashidhara trained as a chef] would bring in cookbooks, including the blue *River Cafe* and *Easy*, and say, ‘This is the kind of food we want.’ I’d look at them thinking, ‘This place must be amazing,’ but I never thought I’d work there.

In 2005, I moved to the UK (there was a huge chef shortage in Britain and agencies were recruiting in India) and in 2006 got a job at the Old Bridge Hotel in Huntingdon. The owner, John Hoskins, was friends with Rose Gray’s son, Ossie [a former River Cafe general manager], and John sent us for lunch at the River Cafe. I loved it.

Walking along the banks of the Thames and seeing the Harrod’s Furniture Depository in Barnes was like walking through the cookbooks. The food was so simple, so seasonal, nothing like I’d cooked or eaten. My palate wasn’t complex and I remember the olive oil tasted slightly unpleasant to me, bitter and peppery. Having tried the recipe, I had the chocolate nemesis for dessert and the quality was completely different.



‘As a child, I’d go to market with Dad. And that’s how we cooked vegetables at the River Cafe – simple, seasonal’: Avinash Shashidhara, at Pahli Hill Bhandra Bhai restaurant, London. Photograph: Amit Lennon/The Observer

I arrived at the restaurant in 2008 as a junior chef, starting at the bottom on cold starters and desserts, as everybody does. I trained in French fine dining and had to unlearn everything. The River Cafe way meant elegant but rustic. Sian [Wyn Owen] would say, ‘Babes, imagine you’re at home, helping yourself, that’s how I want you to plate food.’ It was a huge change in how I looked at food.

It works in a fascinating way which is never repetitive. One head chef starts at 9am, another at 3pm, and each writes that day’s lunch and dinner menu. Chefs get a section to work on each service, which changes daily, and over months you move around to, say, hot starters, pasta, the wood-fired oven.

At 10.30am, you also get a jobs list where you’re making risotto or roasting veal for different sections. So every day you’re learning about new dishes and ingredients. Training is intense. Even making salsa verde, somebody would show me start to finish. Next time, you do it with another chef. Third time on your own, but with senior chefs checking it. There is no scope for inconsistency.

Rose and Ruthie were like mothers to me. They could be harsh critics but if you messed up you didn’t get shouted at. You didn’t feel personally attacked. They were always willing to show you what you’d done wrong. This created high standards. People wanted to do their best but they weren’t scared to make mistakes.

I came out of the River Cafe a calmer chef. Now I’m heading a kitchen, managing 10 chefs, some in their 50s. If something isn’t good enough, I tell people on a professional basis and, importantly, show them how to do it. The River Cafe changed the way I handle people.

I had a good work-life balance there. The annual wine and olive oil trips to Italy are a massive perk. I went on 10. You’re taken to hidden restaurants in

Tuscany or feasts with producers' families to understand the River Cafe ethos. You're in the bubble, part of the family. Why would we leave?

Eventually, I needed my own identity. After 10 years, you're certainly confident you can set up your own restaurant. The River Cafe's approach of letting ingredients shine is visible at Pahli Hill. I don't change my menu daily, but I'm in constant touch with my suppliers and use exciting seasonal produce as it comes in: nettles, spring lamb, girolles. I see similarities in Italian and Indian food culture – everything revolves around family and seasonality."

## Pegs Quinn

*Chef-owner, [Sonny Stores](#), Bristol; he worked at the River Cafe from 2014 to 2018*

"I'd applied for jobs at three places in London: Moro, Barrafina and the River Cafe. The first interview I got was at the River Cafe. I started my trial week the next day and then got the job.

I was nervous going in. I hadn't eaten there but the restaurant was always talked about in other kitchens because of the cookbooks and its influence. It's a Michelin-starred restaurant serving relaxed food, and there aren't loads of those. Plus, it's a big restaurant: 10 chefs on a busy shift, the biggest kitchen I've worked in.



‘The River Cafe was the first place I got my hands on olive oil that could really lift a tomato salad’: Pegs Quinn at Sonny Stores, Bristol. Photograph: Adrian Sherratt/The Observer

The amount of time you’re in the kitchen was really manageable. There was space and time for the staff to teach you in depth, while I was dealing with the best produce I’ve ever seen. A senior or head chef would always be around to show you a specific dish. You might get the cookbook out and read the recipe while working together, so you understood how and why it’s cooked that way.

Joe [Trivelli] taught me how to make tomato sauce; Sian [Wyn Owen] is a wizard with artichokes; I learned how to cook sweetbreads with Danny [Bohan, the restaurant’s head chef]. We do that now at Sonny Stores. I’ve sent staff on stages to the River Cafe or to Anna [Tobias] at Cafe Deco. We break lambs down with our local butcher – learning from people who know.

We say Sonny Stores is Italian-inspired. We’re not as strict as the River Cafe and we have a much smaller team of three chefs. Within that, we work with the same ethos. It’s a changing, seasonal menu, using the best produce we can get, cooking in a simple way and not cutting corners. There aren’t exact translations of River Cafe dishes on the menu, but there are similarities in flavour combinations or River Cafe-inspired dishes made with different cuts.

There's regularly a pork tonnato dish on, which is done with veal at the River Cafe.

Keeping staff happy and maintaining a constant team is something I've taken from the River Cafe. They run a civilised kitchen. No swearing. No shouting. What Sian, Joe and Ruthie do, getting brilliant food out without it being a place where people get berated, there's a skill in that.

Everybody sits down together around 4pm for a staff meal at the River Cafe, outside if the weather is good. That time-out is massively important and the staff food was mindblowing: sea bass or monkfish that hadn't been used in the restaurant, fresh pastas and raviolis. We eat together at Sonny Stores. If you've not had that meal and sit down before service, you're not going to make good choices later on.

Today, there are chefs working on seasonal, changing menus who haven't been near the River Cafe. Its relaxed, confident simplicity bled into the wider restaurant community. You see its chocolate nemesis everywhere.

I once did a shift with Jeremy Lee at Quo Vadis and, if not exactly word for word, he put it, 'Well, it's all River Cafe now, isn't it?'''

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## Italy

# Abortion rights at risk in region led by party of Italy's possible next PM

The Brothers of Italy has further impeded access to abortion in the Marche region – a policy it could replicate nationally if it wins power



A pro-choice protest in Rome – several Italian regions have impeded abortion access even further in recent years. Photograph: Stefano Montesi/Corbis/Getty Images

[Angela Giuffrida](#) in Ascoli Piceno

Mon 22 Aug 2022 00.00 EDT Last modified on Tue 23 Aug 2022 00.10 EDT

When Giulia, 20, discovered she was pregnant she immediately decided that she wasn't ready to have a baby. Supported by her boyfriend and family, she sought medical advice in her home town in Italy's central Marche region on how to obtain an abortion. She faced obstacles at every turn, from telephones not being answered and surgeries being closed, to one doctor who tried to persuade her to change her mind.

Abortion in Italy was legalised in 1978, overturning an outright ban enforced by the fascist dictator Benito Mussolini who deemed it a crime against the Italian race, but the high number of gynaecologists who refuse to terminate pregnancies for moral reasons – 64.6%, according to 2020 data – has meant women still encounter huge difficulties in accessing safe procedures.

Conservative leadership in several Italian regions has in recent years impeded abortion access even further, especially [in Marche](#), a former leftwing bastion, which since September 2020 has been ruled by Brothers of Italy – a party with neofascist roots that after national elections in September could be the largest party in a rightwing governing coalition.

Giorgia Meloni, the party chief who hopes to become prime minister, has described abortion as a “defeat”, although recently said abolishing the 1978 law was not on her agenda.



Giorgia Meloni, leader of the far-right Brothers of Italy party. Photograph: Alberto Lingria/Reuters

However, Marche, described as a “laboratory” for Brothers of Italy policies, provides an inkling of what might be to come if the coalition led by the party and including Matteo Salvini’s far-right League, which is equally against abortion, clinches power.

One of the regional council's first moves was to not apply a health ministry measure, introduced last year, allowing health clinics, not just hospitals, to provide the abortion pill. While national policy stipulates that medical abortions can be carried out up to nine weeks of pregnancy, in Marche the limit is seven weeks. By law, after a woman receives a medical certificate authorising her abortion, she must reflect for a week before the procedure is carried out.

"Sometimes a woman doesn't discover she is pregnant until the fifth or sixth week," said Manuela Bora, a regional politician with the centre-left Democratic party. "It's almost impossible to get an abortion here. Yes, we can't deny that it was difficult before, but that was due to the moral objectors; now the erosion of abortion rights is a political theme."

Giulia, the 20-year-old seeking an abortion, in the end went online and found details about AIED, a non-profit family counselling clinic in Ascoli Piceno, almost a two-hour drive from her home, that provides abortion services.

The clinic prepares women for medical or surgical abortions, the latter carried out each Saturday at the local hospital by two non-objector gynaecologists hired from outside the Marche region, who often face the wrath of anti-abortion protesters outside.

The service was contracted out to AIED a decade ago because abortion procedures could no longer be guaranteed by the hospital due to the high number of moral objectors among its staff.

On the same morning as Giulia's consultation, Tiziana Antonucci, AIED's vice-president, returns the calls of six other women who recount similar stories of their struggles to access abortion services through the public system. A pregnancy termination through AIED costs €200, money that goes towards funding the service, compared with €1,500 in a privately run clinic.

"There are some hospitals where there are only objectors, and one hospital – in Fermo – has never even applied the abortion law," said Antonucci. "But even in hospitals where there are no objectors, the service is inadequate. When the left was in power they did nothing to change it, as they feared

losing the Catholic vote. Now we have the right, and remain stuck in this increasingly difficult situation.”

The Brothers of Italy-led council has in addition proposed allowing anti-abortion activists, who already infiltrate hospitals to pressure women not to end their pregnancy, to work in family counselling clinics. “Imagine a woman going to a clinic to seek an abortion and finding fanatical people,” said Bora.

Bora herself is all too familiar with the tactics of anti-abortion activists. After clashing with Giorgia Latini, Marche’s equal opportunities councillor, on abortion she received 1,450 nappies – representing the number of abortions in Marche in 2019 – from a doctor, who delivered the consignment to the council offices while his son held up a sign saying she had blood on her hands.

A priority policy for both Brothers of Italy and the League is to reverse Italy’s [declining birthrate](#). One way of achieving that, they believe, is to reduce abortions by providing [financial incentives](#) to encourage women to carry through a pregnancy.

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“In 2020, when I was elected, there were 2,000 abortions in the region,” said Filippo Saltamartini, Marche’s health councillor. “Could you imagine a square full of this number of children, and their mothers? Mothers who we had helped to provide these children with a home and financial support in their early years. This is the kind of world we need to imagine.”

For some, that imagined world would ideally be pure-blooded Italian. “The Italian population is decreasing. I’m not saying foreigners shouldn’t have children but we need to create the conditions for Italians to reproduce,” said Carlo Ciccioli, the Brothers of Italy group leader in Marche’s council who described abortion as “an absolute rearguard battle” and last year provoked controversy after speaking of “[ethnic substitution](#)” of Italian children in schools.

Ciccioli, a doctor, was a member of the youth wing of the Italian Social Movement (MSI), the neofascist party established by a minister in Mussolini's government that morphed into the National Alliance before becoming Brothers of Italy. In 1974, he shot a political opponent in the leg on a street in Ancona, Marche's capital.

In other policy changes, the party has cut the region's sponsorship of Marche gay pride, while the female president of the council's equal opportunities commission suggested creating conditions for women to work part-time so they could dedicate more time in the kitchen.

A strong sign of a political pivot in the region came on 28 October 2019, when a commemorative dinner was held in Ascoli Piceno to mark the anniversary of Mussolini's "march on Rome". The dinner was attended by Francesco Acquaroli, now the president of Marche, along with a host of other Brothers of Italy mayors.

"Marche is a laboratory for Brothers of Italy," said Paolo Berizzi, a journalist with *La Repubblica* who has written extensively about the extreme right in Italy. "It's where the party has done general tests as it prepares for what it could do on a national scale. In two months Italy could be governed by a party that has never really severed links to its fascist history."

*Additional reporting by Pamela Duncan*

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## Fears of new quakes in Dutch gas field as energy crisis bites



A gas production plant in 't Zandt in Groningen. Photograph: Michael Kooren/Reuters

As Dutch government weighs resuming gas production in earthquake zone this winter, anxiety is rising in Groningen



[Arthur Neslen](#)

Mon 22 Aug 2022 05.00 EDTLast modified on Mon 22 Aug 2022 05.46 EDT

Bastiaan Jeroen's farm in 't Zandt has columns made of reinforced concrete. "During one earthquake, I saw them twisting," he said. "If a chip comes off, it will cut you in half. That's the fear we're living in."

Jeroen lives in the province of Groningen, home to a vast gas field and the subject of a parliamentary inquiry into the links between gas extraction and the hundreds of earthquakes and tremors that have traumatised residents. His farmhouse has been shattered by hundreds of cracks from the last decade's quakes. One outer wall is propped up by several large wooden beams.

"I'm in debt – big time," said Jeroen. "I make good money as a carpenter but I'm at my fourth or fifth chronic burnout. The doctors say they won't go away until I stop working but if I stop working, I can't pay the bills."

But Jeroen is just one of many. Groningen's inhabitants have been affected by the giant gas field for the last few decades. About [80% of houses](#) in villages such as Overschild are being demolished and rebuilt because of earthquake damage. More than [150,000 Groningen residents](#) have suffered

earthquake damage to their properties in the last decade, and 10,000 now face stress-related health problems.

When the parliamentary inquiry began, many believed some kind of resolution was at last in sight. But although the province's gas production had been expected to [flatline in 2023](#), Groningen is also the [EU's largest onshore gas field](#), and has been increasingly regarded as a last reserve if Russian gas supplies dwindle to nought.

Germany is [hungrily eyeing](#) its low-calorific gas reserves, which may have to be extracted under EU solidarity arrangements if there is a major supply disruption. Nato officials such as Lukas Trakimavičius have [led calls](#) for Groningen to open its taps before such a crisis.

The Dutch mining minister, Hans Vijlbrief, believes safety concerns must remain paramount and is frustrated that industry thinks its interests should come before safety in Groningen.

“I don’t agree. It’s clearly a dangerous thing to do,” Vijlbrief said. But he refused to rule out increasing gas production as “a last resort”.

“If we have to shut down industries which would mean a threat to the safety or health of people, then you get a very fine balance with opening up Groningen,” he said.

Hague-watchers believe that while Mark Rutte, the Dutch prime minister, will publicly stick to a “safety first” script in Groningen this summer, he may allow pressure to build for a plot twist in the autumn.

“I have no doubt that if the situation in Germany worsens, pressure will be mounted on the Dutch government – not only from Germany, but from inside the [Netherlands](#) – to do whatever is possible in the context of Groningen gas production,” said Hans Grünfeld, the managing director of the VEMW business lobby.

The VEMW was in “constant dialogue” with the government about the gas crisis and had “actually started to educate” it about the safety risks posed by a shutdown of industry due to gas shortages, he said.

Another senior industry source said: “They will let this go right down to the wire, say ‘now we have to shut down a particular type of industry’. And before there is even a threat of that happening I think they will increase [gas] production in Groningen, and rightfully so.”

Much will depend on the Netherlands’ liquefied natural gas capacity, gas storage levels, ability to reduce demand and the winter’s severity.

The Groningen field contains about 450bn cubic metres of gas – enough to cover Europe’s imports from Russia for three years – buried beneath a soft clay soil, which has the unfortunate quality of amplifying seismic activity.

During tremors, the earth “bounces up like pudding”, one local resident said. In Huizinge, a magnitude 3.6 quake devastated local properties in 2012 and fears of “the big one” – a tremor reaching magnitude 5 or more – are rife.



It is thought the prime minister of the Netherlands, Mark Rutte, will publicly stick to a ‘safety first’ script in Groningen this summer. Photograph: Phil Nijhuis/ANP/AFP/Getty Images

The Nederlandse Aardolie Maatschappij (NAM), which runs the field, was founded by Shell and ExxonMobil. It historically dealt with many of the complaints, but in 2017 the Dutch government took over. “This is informally called ‘NAM at a distance’, ” said a NAM spokesperson. “This was not only

the wish of the Dutch government and citizens in Groningen, but also of NAM.”

The company would not comment on individual cases, some of which are handled by different agencies, but accepted that mistakes had been made. Initially, “claims handling was too slow and due to the high number of claims, attention was no longer focused on the people who needed it most,” the official said.

They said that “since 1993 NAM recognised that gas production can lead to seismicity which can cause damages to houses”. But they also pointed out that “the level of production from Groningen is set by the minister of economic affairs and climate, not by NAM as the field operator. The minister is solely accountable for the security of supply.”

Vijlbrief said Groningen residents who complained about the pace of repairs and compensation payments were “perfectly right”.

“Dealing with their damage has gone fairly well but we’re totally delayed with the reconstruction of houses,” he said.

The current waiting time to receive a first compensation offer from the authorities for damage repair is 238 working days, says Nienke Busscher, of the government-funded Groningen Knowledge Platform. The compensation scheme was “a disaster in slow motion” for locals, she said.

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Nettie Klompsma, a former journalist, said she lost her compensation claim for dozens of cracks in her house's wall and leaky double glazing when she became unable to continue the application after her husband died.

"They denied the leakage from the double glazing was due to earthquakes and at that time I was still in mourning," she said.

Klompsma finally received a €10,000 (£8,584) goodwill payment but has a €23,000 bill for the double-glazing repairs alone. "Look at that and cry for me," she said, holding up the chit.

"I'm a prisoner in my own house. I can't move somewhere else because my mortgage is higher than the house's worth. I'm alone here. I'm not very rich and I'm worried about what might happen if 'the big one' occurs," she said. "I'll have to run for my life if I've still got time."

Klompsma expects the Dutch government to ramp up gas production in Groningen. "When that happens, I will ask Extinction Rebellion to help glue me to a pole because I think there will be protests," she said.

Thousands marched in a torchlit demonstration in January and more actions are planned. As the parliamentary inquiry unravels the causes of mistakes such as an increase in gas production after the Huizinge quake – against scientific advice – anger may grow.

Dutch newspapers have reported that fossil fuel companies – particularly Shell – had a decisive backroom influence on government decisions.

Neglect was the real problem according to a former principal geoscientist for Shell, Jilles van den Beukel, who now works as an energy analyst at The Hague Centre for Strategic Studies.

"From 1993, a connection was established between gas production and earthquakes and all parties involved closed their eyes," he said. "It's a bit like climate change. You continue and continue until it really starts to become blatant and painful."

Van den Beukel said he also regretted that Shell had been largely “silent” about global heating in the 90s. “Internally, we bloody well knew of course,” he added.

Former Shell VP Pieter Dekker [told the inquiry](#) that earthquakes in Groningen had been a “known risk” to the firm before 2012, but were considered an acceptable one.

“With this activity you can’t prevent damage 100%,” he said.

Measured against the threat of blackouts, Groningen’s exhausted quake victims fear that they will again draw the short straw when the next cost-benefit ledger is drafted.

“Once they ramp up gas production again – which they will do, because they’ll never waste a good crisis – do you think the benefits will come to Groningen this time or will they also need a golden tap in the shithole of their castle?” Jeroen asked.

“No man, they’re going to screw us over again,” he replied.

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## Headphones

# Sennheiser Momentum 4 review: tremendous noise-cancelling headphones

Supremely comfortable, feature-packed Bluetooth cans sound brilliant with 60-hour battery life



An understated look hides some of the very best premium headphones money can buy, with a class-leading battery and Sennheiser sound.  
Photograph: Samuel Gibbs/The Guardian

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

Mon 22 Aug 2022 02.00 EDT Last modified on Mon 22 Aug 2022 05.25 EDT

The fourth-generation of the Momentum [Bluetooth](#) headphones from the renowned German audio manufacturer Sennheiser are a wholesale redesign,

ditching their previous retro styling for something simpler and much more comfortable. All this with 60-hours of battery life.

Undeniably pricey at £299 (\$349.99/A\$549.99), the Momentum 4 Wireless are still £50 cheaper than their predecessors and undercut key competitors from Sony, Bose and Apple.

## Extremely comfortable to wear



The new headphones have a few nice design touches, such as a fabric headband and metallic logos, but are much less showy than their eye-catching predecessors. Photograph: Samuel Gibbs/The Guardian

The Momentum 4 are designed from the ground up to be a lot more comfortable and functional than previous versions, with a more understated look. The ear cups have plenty of adjustment and super-soft and plush cushions for a pressure-free fit on the sides of your head. The headband's wide, soft-touch plastic lining stops it from sliding about on your hair, while an extra-soft bit right at its apex relieves pressure on the ridge at the top of your skull.

They are well balanced and the most comfortable headphones I have worn in a very long time, even over eight-hour listening sessions.

## Controls and connectivity



The Sennheiser Connect app handles switching between devices, equaliser and noise-cancelling modes, firmware updates and other settings.  
Photograph: Samuel Gibbs/The Guardian

The headphones support Bluetooth 5.2 with the universal SBC and AAC audio formats for Apple devices and others. But they also support the very latest [aptX Adaptive](#) format, which offers higher audio quality, lower latency and is backwards compatible with the older aptX standard, which is common on Windows PCs and Android devices.

Multipoint connects two devices at the same time, such as your phone for music and your laptop for video calls, and works extremely well. They come with a 2.5mm-to-3.5mm analogue headphones cable and can play audio over USB-C at the same time as charging, similar to the [B&W PX7](#), giving you plenty of connectivity options.

The touch panel on the right ear cup supports a set of excellent gesture controls. Swipe forward or backward to skip tracks, swipe up or down for

volume, tap once to pause the music or twice to switch to the ambient sound mode. Unusually, you can also use a smartphone-like pinch-to-zoom gesture to slowly turn noise-cancelling down and ambient sound up, or vice versa, a bit like turning the volume up or down on the outside world.

The music will pause when you take the headphones off while a single button activates your phone's voice assistant or turns the headphones on and off. Press the button five times and you can turn off Bluetooth but still use the noise-cancelling, a mode designed for use on a plane without having to listen to music.

## Specifications

- **Weight:** 293g
- **Drivers:** 42mm
- **Connectivity:** Bluetooth 5.2 with multipoint, 2.5/3.5mm, USB-C (charging and audio)
- **Bluetooth codecs:** SBC, AAC, aptX Adaptive
- **Battery life:** 60 hours (ANC on)

## Cracking sound and effective noise cancelling



The cushions are super-soft and do a good job of blocking out the world, allowing the large 42mm drivers to shine. Photograph: Samuel Gibbs/The Guardian

The Momentum 4 continue Sennheiser's long tradition of fantastic sound. They are the sort of quality headphones that will have you hearing new elements in your favourite tracks, right up there with [Sony](#), [Apple](#) and [B&W](#). They have a pleasing balance between powerful, deep bass, warm mids and sparkling highs, without any one element overriding the others. They maintain the separation of tones and preserve detail even in the most complex tracks.

The headphones do an excellent job with all music genres, making them extremely adaptable while also handling action-filled movie soundtracks with suitable bombast and immersion. The Control app has an equaliser, bass boost, podcast mode and a system that helps you tailor the sound of the headphones to your liking.

They have effective noise-cancelling that can meaningfully reduce rumbles, fan and road noise, and do a reasonable job on higher-pitched tones such as voices or keyboard taps in an office. They can't quite match the very best from Sony or Bose, but they aren't too far off. The adaptive system automatically turns down the noise-cancelling when in quieter places and

they handle wind noise very well – something that trips up some competitors.

You can also manually adjust how much outside sound is let in with a slider in the app or the pinching-to-zoom gesture on the headphones adjusting from maximum noise-cancelling to full transparency, so you can have as little or as much awareness of the outside world as you prefer.

The transparency mode is very good, too, although on maximum it is louder than not wearing the headphones. Finally, call quality is excellent, matching the very best headphones without a boom mic, even in noisy environments.

## Extremely long battery life



It takes about two hours to fully charge them, with a five-minute quick charge adding up to four hours of playback when low. The headphones can be used when charging or when completely flat via the analogue cable.  
Photograph: Samuel Gibbs/The Guardian

The Momentum 4 last a full 60 hours of playback with noise-cancelling turned on, which is double their nearest competitors and long enough so you won't have to worry about charging them very often. They automatically switch off after 15 minutes of being on standby or when placed in the case,

too, but I found it more convenient to manually turn them off with the power button.

## Sustainability

The battery in the headphones is not replaceable but Sennheiser estimates it will maintain at least 80% of its original capacity after 30,000 hours of listening, which is 27 years of listening three hours a day, meaning it is never likely to need replacing.

Spare parts including cushions and cables are available. The headphones do not contain any recycled material. Sennheiser Consumer's parent company, Sonova, [publishes sustainability reports](#) but does not operate trade-in schemes in the UK.

## Price

The Sennheiser Momentum 4 Wireless cost [£299.99 \(\\$349.99/A\\$549.99\)](#) in black or white and ship on the 23 August.

For comparison, the [Bose QuietComfort 45](#) cost [£319.95](#), the Sony WH-1000XM5 cost [£379](#) and [Apple AirPods Max](#) cost [£549](#).

## Verdict

The Sennheiser Momentum 4 Wireless are some of the very best-sounding, longest-lasting and the most comfortable noise-cancelling headphones available.

What they lack in the visual flair of their predecessors, they make up for in performance. The battery lasts for a full 60 hours of playback, with effective noise-cancelling. They are well balanced with thoughtful tweaks to make them super-comfortable even for very long listening sessions.

They support the latest aptX Adaptive standard and can connect to two Bluetooth devices at the same time. You can even use them for audio as well

as charging over USB-C, plus they still have an analogue headphones cable. Even the controls and voice call performance are top notch.

The best bit is how they sound, producing the sort of sparkling audio few top rivals match for a set of wireless headphones.

There's little to fault. The design might not excite. They don't fold up quite as compact as the very best. You can't replace the battery but it will probably outlast the headphones anyway. At £299 they are competitively priced, if not exactly cheap.

If you want some high-end noise-cancelling headphones, the Momentum 4 are worth every penny.

**Pros:** fantastic sound, effective noise-cancelling, 60-hour battery life, super-comfortable, Bluetooth 5.2 with aptX Adaptive and multipoint, USB-C charging and audio, 2.5/3.5mm analogue cable, great controls, top voice quality, good cross-platform app.

**Cons:** expensive, don't fold up as compact as the best, design less standout than predecessors.



The Momentum 4 fold flat in a good hard case, but do not fully collapse making them slightly larger than the best when packed away for travel.

Photograph: Samuel Gibbs/The Guardian

## Other reviews

- [Sennheiser Momentum True Wireless 3 review: great noise-cancelling earbuds](#)
  - [Sony WH-1000XM4 review: Bose-beating noise cancelling headphones](#)
  - [Bose QC45 review: commuter favourite noise-cancelling headphones revamped](#)
  - [Apple AirPods Max review: stunning sound, painful price](#)
  - [Anker Soundcore Life Q35 review: budget headphones with good noise-cancelling](#)
  - [Urbanista Los Angeles review: solar charging headphones for epic battery](#)
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## 2022.08.22 - Opinion

- The government has led England to the edge of a precipice – now it's up to citizens to pull it back
- Europe put tax havens in the Caribbean – and now punishes them for it
- Whether you're a climate 'doomer' or 'appeaser', it's best to prepare for the worst
- I knew I didn't have a drinking problem – but I had a problem with drinking

## OpinionUK cost of living crisis

# The government has led the UK to the edge of a precipice – now it's up to citizens to pull it back

[Nesrine Malik](#)



Things feel ungoverned and unstable. From strikes to civil disobedience, people are taking matters into their own hands



Illustration by R Fresson

Mon 22 Aug 2022 01.00 EDT Last modified on Mon 22 Aug 2022 13.32 EDT

I remember during the darkest period of the pandemic that there was a feeling the British government had truly abandoned people to their fate. The daily briefings had become an insulting game of denial and lies, the death count was rising, PPE and track-and-trace debacles were unfolding, lockdown policy was clearly unstudied and the prime minister had refused even to meet the families of Covid victims. Around the time when those bereaved families began to organise and campaign for an inquiry, it became clear that the comfort, resources and momentum for reform that people needed was not going to be forthcoming from the government. Citizens were going to have to do it themselves.

That sense of a body politic and government entirely unsuited to crisis has come around again, and with it the same realisation that change is not going to come from our politicians, not unless they are dragged into it. England in particular currently feels like an eerie, unpoliced, ungoverned, unstable country after a coup. One government is gone but another hasn't replaced it, and opposition cannot rise to the challenge. Bureaucracy continues to function on inertia, with queues and backlogs and bottlenecks. Private capital, already rapacious and unregulated, grinds on ever more aggressively,

extracting profits for basic services such as water and gas, as if we were living in a war economy.

The impression of precariousness is not just a feeling. It's a fact. In a research note earlier this month, the head of macro analysis at Saxo, a Danish bank, said that the UK was looking more and more like that dreaded benchmark for a western democracy, "an emerging market country". "What [Brexit](#) has not done by itself," he said, "Brexit coupled with Covid and high inflation have succeeded in doing. The UK economy is crushed."

Lockdowns and a lack of in-person contact during the pandemic smothered anger and civil action. These are the forces this crushing cost of living crisis is now unleashing. Another feature of some of the economies of emerging markets, in addition to trade volatility and high inflation, is a realisation on the part of an exploited workforce and stretched citizenry that the government will not deliver. One outcome of that is the emergence of an informal parallel system of support, one in which people share resources and donate their time to help each other out.

In some north African countries, a yellowed, frayed document informally called a "diagnosis" will regularly do the rounds in offices and with it, an envelope. Inside, there is a brief summary of someone's (often a complete stranger's) medical need, usually a life-saving operation, and a list of names with numbers next to them, detailing their donations to the procedure. With these types of immediate needs – healthcare, food, shelter – people know there is simply no other alternative that involves waiting for the government to step in, and so carry on in a sort of resigned solidarity. The fact that people are giving up on the NHS and begging to borrow money for private healthcare, and the rising dependence on food banks (none of which translated into punishment for the Tories), shows that in that sense, the UK has been an emerging markets country under the [Conservatives](#) for some time. Living in what feels like the final stage of grief, we have long been yoked by a fatalism that things cannot get better.

Not any more. Something has shifted. Taken too far, the conditions that make people give up on politics can jolt them back into anger. People can accept that government is dead, but that doesn't mean another can't be

brought to life. The result is civil disobedience. Reported as “disruptions” and “strike chaos”, these are in fact a healthy, and to be honest, much delayed, response to the terminus that the country has reached during a cost of living crisis where private capital, rightwing government and leftwing opposition have all but agreed that only over their dead bodies will the state intervene to transfer wealth from the rich to the poor.

The scale of this realisation can be measured in strikes, and the [number of industries and regions they span](#). There are strikes planned in England, Scotland and Wales across the transport system, logistics, waste recycling and street cleaning, and Royal Mail. Nurses are also balloting for strikes, and so are communications workers. These are expected to affect everything from public transport to supply chains in supermarkets. This is not to mention the wildcat strikes that began taking place in recent weeks, with thousands of non-unionised employees walking out at factories and [Amazon facilities](#).

Alongside organised strike action, informal and anonymous groups are setting up and sharing plans to put pressure on the government if it fails to address the energy crisis. More than 100,000 people so far have joined [Don't Pay UK](#), which threatens mass non-payment of energy bills if 1 million people sign up. “We are showing the powers that be that our collective power will force an end to this crisis,” the organisation says. [Enough is Enough](#), a campaign to fight the cost of living crisis, launched its first event last week with little publicity and a shoestring budget. There were queues around the block to enter.

This is nothing less than a public and workforce on a collision course with a model of governance that has so centrally embedded weak regulation and small state ideology that it is heresy to speak against it. The conventional economic wisdom is a dictatorship of capitalist fictions presented as unassailable reality. That is why it is only those from outside the political sphere, such as Mick Lynch of the RMT and the consumer rights campaigner Martin Lewis, or those who are distant and divested from it enough, [such as Gordon Brown](#), who have the language, the moral clarity and the sense of urgency to point out that the emperor has no clothes.

One plaintive lament in some parts of the media has been “where are the grownups”? The bad news is that the “grownups” did this. The good news is that more and more people are beginning to realise that. The result is an opening of space for the thing we are constantly told is the indulgence of the amateur and the unrealistic – imagination. The public’s response to the cost of living crisis is more energetic, promising, compassionate and righteous than anything we have seen in a long time. If that brings about the kind of disruption we only see abroad in more unstable places, then that is only because it is the appropriate response to our own instability. Here’s to being more like an emerging markets country.

The headline on this article was amended on 22 August 2022 to refer to the UK rather than England.

- Nesrine Malik is a Guardian columnist
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**Opinion****Tax havens**

## **Europe put tax havens in the Caribbean – and now punishes them for it**

**Kenneth Mohammed**

The EU's tax haven and 'dirty money' blacklists discriminate against Caribbean countries and other poor nations while letting western nations off the hook



'In the European-led global fight against corruption, Caribbean nations like Trinidad and Tobago are blacklisted in a move that is gravely discriminatory.' Photograph: Thomas Trutschel/Getty Images

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Mon 22 Aug 2022 02.15 EDTLast modified on Wed 24 Aug 2022 09.59 EDT

The Caribbean rarely makes international headlines outside of a royal visit or when a secretive tax haven is disrupted and the financial documents of the famous are leaked. Yet tax havens are not a construct of the Caribbean but of Europe. The amount of money laundered through these countries pales in comparison to the money laundering cities of the EU. In fact, whistleblowers and investigative journalists, via the [Panama](#), [Paradise](#) and [Pandora papers](#), have unveiled the true origins of the illicit proceeds of crimes and where laundered or “dirty” money is really parked.

Financial secrecy comes at a premium via shell companies, trusts and other offshore vehicles, artificial mazes designed to both avoid and evade taxation, or launder proceeds from drug and human trafficking, arms dealing, bribery or fraud. Opaque money eventually equates to opaque power; if dirty money is left to flow unhindered into the financial system, the cancer of corruption spreads, global development is retarded and inequity and inequality escalate. Financial secrecy – enabled by bankers, lawyers, accountants and estate agents – has propelled “dark” money into a national security issue.

In the global fight against corruption, Caribbean nations like [Trinidad and Tobago](#) are blacklisted in a move that is gravely discriminatory. The Financial Action Task Force (FATF) is the global standard-setting body for anti-money laundering (AML), for combatting the financing of terrorism (CFT), and against the proliferation of the trade in weapons of mass destruction.

The FATF, with 39 jurisdictions , holds a comprehensive list of high-risk states with AML/CFT deficiencies.

Banking secrecy is nothing short of reprehensible – a fig leaf over the disgraceful role bankers play facilitating tax evaders and enabling corruption to flourish

However, the EU has decided this is not good enough for them, and has turned against some of the economically weakest countries in the world to exercise their superiority. The European Commission, through a contrived process, constructed two blacklists: one for countries they believe were not compliant with international tax standards, and the other for “third countries with weak anti-money-laundering and terrorist-financing regimes”.

After the Paradise papers, the EU’s code of conduct group blacklisted 17 countries. Pierre Moscovici, economic affairs commissioner, said: “The adoption of the first ever EU blacklist of tax havens marks a key victory for transparency and fairness ... We must intensify the pressure on listed countries to change their ways. Blacklisted jurisdictions must face consequences in the form of dissuasive sanctions ... No one must get a free pass.”



Placards featuring the portraits of Chinese Communist party leader Xi Jinping and then British prime minister, David Cameron at the entrance of the regional head office of Panama-based law firm Mossack Fonseca in Hong Kong, April 2016. Photograph: Kin Cheung/AP

The 17 countries in the EU tax blacklist included: American Samoa, Barbados, Grenada, Guam, South Korea, Macau, the Marshall Islands, Namibia, Palau, Saint Lucia, Samoa, Trinidad and Tobago and the UAE. Not one European country was listed; they all got a free pass.

In February 2019, The EU published an updated version of their AML/CFT list, which included Guam, Puerto Rico, US Virgin Islands, the Bahamas, North Korea, Ghana, Iran, Iraq, Libya, Nigeria, Pakistan, Panama, Samoa, Sri Lanka, Syria, and Yemen.

Only 12 of these countries were listed by the FATF. Věra Jourová, European justice commissioner, declared “dirty money from other countries must not find its way into our financial system ... Dirty money is the lifeblood of organised crime and terrorism.”

What Jourová didn’t say was that other nations’ dirty money must not be allowed to mix with European dirty money. Because again not a single European country was listed. The US Treasury Department questioned the

substance of the EU's list and its flawed methodology and stated US financial institutions would not take the list into account in their AML/CFT policies.

The amount of money laundered through these countries is tiny in comparison to that of the money laundering cities of Europe

This year, the EU identified jurisdictions with strategic deficiencies in their AML/CFT regimes that pose significant threats to the financial system, "high-risk third countries" such as Barbados, the Cayman Islands, Haiti, Iran, Jamaica, Jordan, Morocco, Myanmar, Nicaragua, Pakistan, Panama, the Philippines, Syria, Trinidad and Tobago, Uganda, Vanuatu, Yemen, Zimbabwe.

So where are the UK, Switzerland, China, Hong Kong, India, Russia and Ukraine? Where is Venezuela, a narco-state? Where is the Netherlands, a country where a parliamentary investigation found that billions of dollars are laundered and tax evasion cost billions in lost revenue? Why is not a single EU member country or their most influential trading partners listed?

The Tax Justice Network in a 2020 report revealed that tax abuse by multinationals and individuals was costing countries \$427 billion a year in lost revenues. The five jurisdictions most responsible, it said, were the British overseas territory Cayman Islands, the UK, the Netherlands, Luxembourg and the US.

The war in Ukraine has highlighted the immensity of dirty money parked in EU cities. The UK has slowly "fast-tracked" legislation to target money laundering by foreign oligarchs following Russia's invasion. However, both these countries' elite have been guilty of corruption and contributed to draining developmental resources. Why are they not on the lists?

Professional services firms have for years created a haven in the UK for dirty money. London has evolved into financial ground zero for kleptocrats, providing opportunities for foreign elites to convert their vast amount of corrupt earnings and ill-gotten wealth into mansions, stocks, shares, yachts and sports teams.

Denmark, Germany and Switzerland have been complicit, as shown in the recent banking scandals demonstrating how dirty money from kleptocracies travels through the arteries of western financial systems, becoming their lifeblood.

Loopholes continually exploited by professional enablers undermine anti-corruption enforcement and erode both the legal system's capacity to assess corruption risks and the integrity of institutions.



The Pandora papers, along with the Panama and Paradise papers, unveiled the true origins of the illicit proceeds of crimes and where laundered or “dirty” money is really parked. Photograph: Loïc Venance/AFP/Getty Images

What will Europe’s banking tsars do to stem the in-flow of illicit earnings? In the context of how corruption affects global development, banking secrecy is nothing short of reprehensible – a fig leaf covering the disgraceful role bankers play facilitating tax evaders and enabling corruption to flourish while starving developing countries of essential tax revenue. Parliamentarians and legislators are equally responsible with their feet dragging to protect private interests in clear cut cases of corruption.

The blacklists of the EU, which has been called by economist Marla Dukharan the “[self-appointed god of compliance](#)”, are nothing short of economic bullying and hypocrisy. The FATF and the OECD, the international tax authority, have already subjected these vulnerable countries to several processes. The FATF ensure all states are subject to a rigorous peer-review methodology that examines the legal framework to counter illicit finance as well as how effectively they are implemented. The European Commission’s oddly Europe-blind process for developing its lists contrasts starkly with FATF’s thoroughness.

All countries on the European blacklists are small and relatively underdeveloped; most are territories or ex-European colonies with small GDPs.

The amount of money laundered through these countries is tiny in comparison to that of the money laundering cities of Europe. For example, blacklisted Trinidad and Tobago has protracted and rigorous procedures just to open a bank account. Even buying a sim card needs photo identification and proof of address. So the ease with which money can be integrated into these countries’ and moved across financial institutions is far less than in Europe’s financial centres such as London. But it is easier to penalise these small developing states as they are economically weak, with no material impact on Europe.

The EU does not depend on these countries for oil and gas, food or technology. But blacklisting them damages their economies as international corporations move their trade elsewhere. Add in shrinking and ageing populations, Covid, the perennial damage through hurricanes and climate change ... The result is deepening debt, currency devaluations and negative growth.

The result of the EU’s blacklists is the global tax system prioritises the desires of their wealthiest corporations and individuals.

- Kenneth Mohammed is a freelance writer, [Caribbean](#) analyst and senior adviser

- This article was amended on 24 August 2022 to restore the attribution of a quote to Marla Dukharan which was removed during the editing process.
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**Opinion****Climate crisis**

# Whether you're a climate 'doomer' or 'appeaser', it's best to prepare for the worst

[Bill McGuire](#)

While more extreme threats are unlikely to be realised, sticking to the precautionary principle is just plain common sense

- Bill McGuire is professor emeritus of geophysical and climate hazards at UCL



A firefighting helicopter pours water on a forest fire in Bejis, Castellon, Spain on 17 August 2022. Photograph: Domenech Castello/EPA

Mon 22 Aug 2022 03.00 EDT Last modified on Mon 22 Aug 2022 03.13 EDT

Our world is on course for a climate cataclysm. Or is it? Not long ago, the global heating battle lines were clear: you either believed it was happening, and that it resulted from the colossal volumes of carbon spewed out by human activities, or you didn't. As the year on year breakdown of our once stable climate has become more apparent, however, denial has become increasingly irrelevant, and new battle lines are being drawn.

While widespread [blistering heat](#), [drought](#) and [wildfires](#) have kept climate change in the public eye, they have also heightened tensions between those I call climate appeasers, who seek to minimise how bad climate breakdown will ultimately be, and others, disparagingly branded doomers (or doomists), who are honestly concerned that it may be catastrophic, perhaps even posing an existential threat to civilisation and possibly humankind itself.

This growing and increasingly acrimonious dispute has potentially serious ramifications for all of us. Climate appeasers are regarded as being almost as bad as deniers by some, who feel acceptance of their message, that things aren't as bad as they might seem, will ensure we are seriously unprepared if climate breakdown takes a turn for the worse. On the other hand, there are plenty of people out there, including some eminent climate scientists, who call out those touting more extreme scenarios as unhelpful doomers who are out of step with reality, and want nothing more than to scare the hell out of us.

Doomism in the climate arena is nothing new, and looking around at the extreme weather rampaging across much of the world this summer, it is easy to understand why many of us might be scared about the future. But doomer feelings are not just vague intuitions of something nasty lying in wait. Some in the climate science community have also been damned as doomers too, even by colleagues, and their forecasts of bleak, climate-trashed futures are vetted and published in academic journals.

In a [2013 paper](#), the distinguished climate scientist James Hansen and his co-authors, advised that burning all fossil fuels would bring about runaway heating and severe hothouse conditions that we could not adapt to, making most of the planet uninhabitable.

Another study, published in 2018, [warned](#) that we could cross a tipping point where no future actions would be able to prevent a march towards a “hothouse Earth”, ultimately culminating in by far the highest global temperature for more than a million years.

A less extreme but still disturbing conclusion was arrived at in a [2020 paper](#) that showed the world was on a trajectory corresponding to the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change’s worst-case scenario. This assumes no mitigation of emissions and sees us blithely continuing with business as usual, driving a catastrophic temperature rise of 5C or more by the century’s end. Actions on emissions are still happening far too slowly, but it is already clear that we are not collectively stupid enough to do nothing. Nonetheless, say the authors, considering our poor understanding of the impact of the feedback loops that reinforce heating, it would be judicious to plan for such an eventuality.

The tensions between doomers and appeasers have been especially strained recently by the widely advertised publication of a [paper](#) whose authors have been thinking the unthinkable on our behalf. They conclude that ominously termed “climate endgame” scenarios – including societal collapse and the extinction of humankind – have so far been “dangerously unexplored”, and call on the IPCC to compile a special report on bad- to worst-case scenarios.

Such calls are anathema to many climate appeasers, who feel that even voicing such concerns stymies action on emissions through promoting fear and engendering the feeling that it is already too late to bring global heating to heel. Other appeasers simply have an optimistic – some would say naive – outlook, and are brimming with confidence that humankind will overcome this problem, as it has all others. Neither perspective is helpful and indeed, either may well make the situation worse.

Settling on an approach that would satisfy both appeasers and doomers is problematic and perhaps unrealistic. The truth is that the more extreme climate breakdown scenarios are very unlikely to be realised, and even those scientists who have flagged them agree with this. Nonetheless, they are possible, and as such we have a duty to address them, if only because adherence to the precautionary principle makes plain common sense.

While it would be nice to think that we are overplaying the threat of climate breakdown, following an appeaser line would be courting disaster. This is particularly the case as there seems to be a growing propensity to label pretty much anything outside the current consensus as doomist. But consensus doesn't equate to being right. In fact, research has revealed that climate scientists as a tribe (of which I count myself a member), and IPCC reports underplay the speed and intensity with which climate breakdown is happening.

The reality is that our understanding of potential tipping points and feedback effects remains too poorly constrained for us to be confident of how severe climate breakdown will end up proving to be. Furthermore, minimising the potential impact of climate breakdown is more likely to lead to increased reticence in relation to slashing emissions than any potential exaggeration of the likely endgame.

A middle of the road route would be to no one's advantage – so, as for most situations wherein the risk is hard to quantify, there is only one sensible way forward: to hope for the best, while preparing for the worst.

- Bill McGuire is professor emeritus of geophysical and climate hazards at UCL, and the author of *Hothouse Earth: an Inhabitant's Guide*
  - *Do you have an opinion on the issues raised in this article? If you would like to submit a letter of up to 300 words to be considered for publication, email it to us at [guardian.letters@theguardian.com](mailto:guardian.letters@theguardian.com)*
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## Why I quitAlcohol

# I knew I didn't have a drinking problem – but I had a problem with drinking

[Emma Gannon](#)

Many of us don't question daily alcohol use until we hit rock bottom. But I didn't want this damaging habit, so I got 'sober curious'



'I was taking a big bag of clinking bottles out to the recycling bin every week. Something occasional had slowly turned into a nightly habit again, and I couldn't pinpoint when.' Photograph: Andrew Fosker/Rex/Shutterstock

Mon 22 Aug 2022 05.00 EDT Last modified on Tue 23 Aug 2022 00.23 EDT

Like many millennials who grew up in a smallish town, my relationship with alcohol came barrelling into my life hard and fast. Teens getting their stomach pumped on the weekend was a pretty normal occurrence; so was giving a stranger on the street a tenner to buy you and your mates a bottle of

cheap vodka. “She’s speaking on the big white telephone” was slang in Devon for having your head down the toilet.

Everyone found it funny: funny that one time I woke up in a flower bed, and that none of us could ever remember getting home. On holiday in Spain aged 16, I got so sick on sangria that, let’s just say, I never drank anything “with bits in” ever again. Then, university happened, and those three years went by in a white wine blur. Cheap “trebles”, bright blue shots, the Snakebite concoction of lager, cider and blackcurrant. Constant low hum headaches and empty wine bottles rattling about under the bed. Entering the world of work, it was “after-work drinks!!!”, where you got to find out all the juicy stuff about your colleagues and your boss. I drank my way through all of those nights too without ever stopping to ask: is there an option *not* to do this?

It was only in my mid-20s that I finally started to unpick my relationship with drinking. My career was gaining momentum and in my spare time I was reading self-help books and watching Ted Talks. Through my job, I was interviewing psychologists, talking about mental health and listening to doctors explaining facts about our diet, brain chemistry and behavioural patterns , but the elephant in the room was the fact that I was still drinking every night.

I really wanted to change my relationship with alcohol and started making progress. Then, 2020 happened. Even [Gwyneth Paltrow](#) admitted to knocking back the whisky sours seven nights a week during the first national lockdowns. And if it was good enough for the founder of a wellness brand, it was good enough for me. I made a playlist to get drunkly emotional to. I purchased things while drunk, I bought tickets to a band I used to like when I was younger and then asked for a refund when I’d sobered up. I sent people sentimental text messages, waking up the next day wincing. Nothing that *bad* happened, but I was drinking more and more again each night, convincing myself it was nothing but a chic wind-down part of my routine. I remember placing a huge wine order, thinking it was fine because it was organic with a trendy east London label on it. But I was taking a big bag of clinking bottles out to the recycling bin every week. Something occasional had slowly turned into a nightly habit again, and I couldn’t pinpoint when.

It was only when I interviewed author Ruby Warrington, who coined the term “sober curious”, that things started to really change. Ironically, I’d arrived severely hungover to the interview, but Ruby’s non-judgmental message of turning a curious eye to your drinking habits, and/or the role drinking plays in society got my attention. After yet another lockdown was announced, I sheepishly got her book down from my bookshelf. With a deep breath, I decided to be genuinely curious and admit I really wanted something to change.

Some people have to give up drinking completely; they can’t have a couple because they know where it would lead. Alcoholism is real. It requires a serious, courageous ongoing recovery process. That feels separate to what I’m describing here. I had fallen into grey-area drinking, a term coined by Jolene Park, that which describes the feeling that you don’t have a “drinking problem”, but you do have a “problem with drinking” without it being a severe alcohol use disorder.

Many of us want to question our relationship with alcohol while also maintaining the possibility of moderation. The insidious involvement of alcohol in our daily lives means that until you reach rock bottom there has been little incentive to question it as a lifestyle choice, until recent years. My question is: why do we have to wait until we have a serious problem to question our habits? I knew I didn’t want to give up drinking entirely, but I wanted to give up getting drunk. There was nuance to the conversation for me, and it wasn’t until I discovered the mindful drinking movement that I felt I could put words to this without needing to label myself.

Prompted by exercises in Ruby’s book, I gave up alcohol for three months, and found myself reconnecting to the part of myself again that didn’t need to binge or fill a hole. I reconnected with my body and learned how to settle my nervous system through breathwork. I started being more honest with my loved ones, I made changes in my career, I stopped people-pleasing. I found space in my life to be creative for the sake of it. I committed to journalling. I no longer wanted to numb myself out. I enjoyed the odd drink again.

Now, I always have alcohol-free beers in the fridge, because I prefer them. I’ll enjoy a glass of red wine if I’m having a steak. But I won’t drink for the sake of it. I don’t miss getting drunk at all. I want to feel present for my life.

For me, being sober-curious feels like you are living life intuitively rather than passively. Friends who just wanted to get inebriated with me have fallen away. Industry pals who only ever enjoyed a drunken gossip are gone. I don't get invited to crazy parties any more. My life is so much better now. I'm so much happier and less anxious. And, did I mention, my skin looks fabulous, too.

- Emma Gannon is an author, novelist and host of the creative careers podcast, Ctrl Alt Delete
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## South Korea

# US and South Korea begin largest military drills for years as North ramps up tensions

The show of force is expected to prompt an angry response from Pyongyang and follows failure of Trump-era policy of engagement



South Korean troops conduct an artillery drill north of Seoul ahead of Ulchi Freedom Shield manoeuvres with US forces. Photograph: Yonhap/EPA

*[Justin McCurry](#) in Tokyo and agencies*

Mon 22 Aug 2022 00.04 EDT Last modified on Mon 22 Aug 2022 05.16 EDT

The US and South Korea have begun their biggest joint military drills in years – a show of force that is expected to raise tensions with an increasingly hostile [North Korea](#).

The exercises, known as Ulchi Freedom Shield, are being seen as a sign of the allies' determination to restore large-scale training after they cancelled some regular drills and scaled down others to facilitate nuclear talks, and because of the Covid-19 pandemic.

Details of the operation have not been released, but past exercises have involved tens of thousands of troops and large numbers of aircraft warships and tanks.

They will reportedly include simulated joint attacks, frontline reinforcements of arms and fuel, and removals of weapons of mass destruction.

The two militaries said in a joint statement said the drills were a response to an "increased volume and scale of [North Korean] missile tests" over the past year.

"With this in mind, and considering the evolving threat ... both leaders committed to expanding the scope and scale of combined military exercises and training, they said, adding that Ulchi Freedom Shield would "bolster combined readiness".

The 2019 exercises were cancelled after Donald Trump's first summit with the North Korean leader, Kim Jong-un, in Singapore, the previous year. Trump's surprise concession was seen as an attempt to persuade Kim to abandon his nuclear weapons programme amid a flurry of diplomacy led by the then president and his South Korean counterpart, Moon Jae-in.

Four years on, Washington and Seoul have nothing substantive to show for their efforts at engagement. The North has resumed missile tests – including its first launch of an intercontinental ballistic missile at full range since 2017 – and speculation is building that it is preparing to conduct what would be its seventh nuclear test.

The US has said it will consider deploying strategic assets – which could theoretically include tactical nuclear weapons – if the North tests a nuclear device.

South Korea's new president, Yoon Suk-yeol, took office in May [promising a harder line against North Korean provocations](#) that would include "normalising" the military exercises and boosting his country's defences against the North.

The resumption of the drills suggests that [South Korea](#) and the US, which has 28,500 troops in the country, have reverted to robust displays of their combined military might in the wake of North Korea's resumption of ballistic missile tests.

"The significance of this joint exercise is rebuilding the South Korea-US alliance and solidifying the combined defence posture by normalising ... combined exercises and field training," the South Korean defence ministry said.

While the allies insist the field exercises are designed to plan their response to a North Korean attack, Pyongyang routinely condemns them as a rehearsal for an invasion, and in the past has responded with missile launches.

The drills, which will end on 1 September, began against a backdrop of increasingly hostile rhetoric from the North.

It recently warned of "deadly retaliation" against the South, which it blamed for its Covid-19 outbreak, while Kim Yo-jong, Kim Jong-un's influential sister, last week [dismissed Yoon's offer of economic help in return for denuclearising as "absurd"](#), warning that the North would never "barter" its nuclear deterrent for aid.

Kim Jong-un, whose until recently appears to have been focused on containing the coronavirus outbreak, has said his country is "ready to mobilise" its nuclear capability in any war with the US and North Korea, although the regime has always insisted its nuclear weapons are a deterrent against a "hostile" US.

In a TV interview last month, Choe Jin, the deputy director of a thinktank run by North Korea's foreign ministry, said the US and South Korea would

face “unprecedented” security challenges unless they abandoned their “hostile military stance” against the North, including joint drills.

The North has been conducting missile tests at a record pace, with more than 30 ballistic missile launches this year, as it continues to pressure Washington to accept its status as a legitimate nuclear power – and one that some experts believe now has the ability to carry out a nuclear strike against the US mainland.

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## Movies

# Leon Vitali, Stanley Kubrick collaborator and Barry Lyndon actor, dies aged 74

Vitali, who gave up acting to become the demanding director's right-hand man, died in Los Angeles on Friday



Leon Vitali poses for photographers at the Cannes film festival in 2019. The Stanley Kubrick collaborator has died in Los Angeles aged 74. Photograph: Petros Giannakouris/AP

*Associated Press*

Sun 21 Aug 2022 20.31 EDT Last modified on Tue 23 Aug 2022 09.52 EDT

Leon Vitali, the Barry Lyndon actor who became one of Stanley Kubrick's closest associates, has died at the age of 74.

Vitali died on Friday in [Los Angeles](#), his family said on Sunday. He died peacefully surrounded by loved ones including his three children, Masha, Max and Vera.

“Leon was a special and lovely man driven by his curiosity, who spread love and warmth wherever he went,” his children said. “He will be remembered with love and be hugely missed by the many people he touched.”

Though Vitali was often described as Kubrick’s assistant, the 2017 documentary *Filmworker* shed light on his enormous and largely unsung contributions to the work of one of cinema’s greatest figures, from *The Shining* through *Eyes Wide Shut*. He did everything from casting and coaching actors to overseeing restorations. Vitali even once set up a video monitor so Kubrick could keep an eye on his dying cat.

Matthew Modine, who starred in Kubrick’s *Full Metal Jacket*, tweeted his condolences on Sunday.

“There are people we meet who have a profound impact upon our lives. Leon Vitali was one such person in mine,” Modine wrote. “An artist in every aspect of his life. A loving father and friend to so many. A kind, generous and forgiving nature. He exemplified and personified grace.”

The film-maker Lee Unkrich also tweeted that he was “completely heartbroken”. “He helped me enormously with my *Shining* book and I’m gutted that he won’t see it. He was a sweet, kind, humble, generous man and a vital part of Stanley Kubrick’s team.”

Before meeting Kubrick, Vitali was a rising actor in the UK, appearing in several British television shows including *Softly, Softly*, *Follyfoot*, *Z Cars* and *Notorious Woman*.

In 1974 he was cast in *Barry Lyndon* as Lord Bullingdon, the stepson of Ryan O’Neal’s title character.

Vitali was so fascinated by Kubrick and his processes that he made the unusual decision to give up on acting and devote himself entirely to the

famously demanding director for more than two decades.

Vitali's next Kubrick credit was as "personal assistant to the director" on *The Shining*, though that's only part of the story; he famously helped cast four-year-old Danny Lloyd to play Danny Torrance and Louise and Lisa Burns as the creepy Grady twins (citing Diane Arbus as inspiration).

"Meeting Stanley was a turning point for me," [he told the Guardian in 2017](#). "Through him, I started seeing things from a different angle. I talked to Stanley about working with him, and he said, 'OK, let's see what happens.'" That same year, he described his decision to give up acting as the "one truly, truly radical change in my life".

After Kubrick's death in 1999 Vitali oversaw restorations of many of Kubrick's films and received a Cinema Audio Society award for his work. He later worked with the director Todd Field on his films *Little Children* and *In the Bedroom*.

Before making the documentary *Filmworker*, its director, Tony Zierra, said he and many Kubrick-obsessed fans knew Vitali for his performances in *Barry Lyndon* and *Eyes Wide Shut*, in which he played Red Cloak, and for being a key member of Kubrick's inner circle. But when he finally met Vitali to make the film, he was struck by "his kindness, humility and the fascinating scope of his story".

Zierra is working on a director's cut of *Filmworker* that will include new footage that he and Vitali wanted in the film but couldn't get done in time for its Cannes debut in 2017.

This article was amended on 23 August 2022. Lord Bullingdon, the role played by Vitali in the film *Barry Lyndon*, is the stepson of the title character, not the son-in-law as an earlier version said.

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## Cineworld

# Cineworld confirms it is looking at filing for bankruptcy in US

Chain, which accumulated £4bn debt in pandemic, says cinemas would stay open and staff be unaffected

- [Business live updates: Cineworld mulls US bankruptcy filing](#)



Cineworld, the world's second-largest cinema chain, has 5,000 employees in the UK. Photograph: Matthew Horwood/Getty Images

*[Kalyeena Makortoff](#)*

*[@kalyeena](#)*

Mon 22 Aug 2022 05.11 EDTFirst published on Mon 22 Aug 2022 04.33 EDT

Cineworld has confirmed it is considering filing for bankruptcy in the US after accumulating £4bn in debt during the coronavirus pandemic but

assured moviegoers and staff that its cinemas would continue operating even as it tries to restructure its balance sheet.

The world's second-largest cinema chain has struggled after failing to experience a quick enough recovery in the wake of the Covid-19 outbreak, which forced most of its sites to close during lockdowns. It reported a \$708m (£598m) loss last year, and accumulated \$4.8bn (£4bn) in debts while cinemas were shut.

Cineworld has also been grappling with the financial fallout of its abandoned takeover of the rival chain Cineplex. The decision to pull out of the deal means the company is now facing a \$1bn payout to the Canadian firm.

It [emerged last week](#) that Cineworld, which operates 751 sites in 10 countries, had hired lawyers from Kirkland & Ellis, and consultants from the restructuring experts AlixPartners, to advise on how to manage its soaring debts.

On Monday, Cineworld confirmed it was considering a number of "strategic options" including filing for chapter 11 bankruptcy in the US and similar proceedings in other jurisdictions. The company said it was in discussions with major stakeholders including its lenders, as well as their legal and financial advisers about its options.

However, the troubled cinema chain said its Cineworld and Regal cinemas were "open for business as usual and continue to welcome guests and members", adding that its 45,000 global staff, including 5,000 employees in the UK, would not be affected by the proceedings.

"Cineworld would expect to maintain its operations in the ordinary course until and following any filing and ultimately to continue its business over the longer term with no significant impact upon its employees," the company said on Monday.

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However, any attempt to reduce its debt could result in a “very significant” dilution of shares for its investors. Cineworld’s UK-listed shares were up 0.8% in morning trading.

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## Imran Khan

# Pakistan's former PM Imran Khan charged under anti-terror law

Khan is reportedly accused of making threats to the country's judiciary and police force



Pakistan's former PM Imran Khan addresses supporters in Rawalpindi at the weekend. Photograph: Sohail Shahzad/EPA

*[Shah Meer Baloch](#) in Islamabad*

Mon 22 Aug 2022 06.27 EDTFirst published on Sun 21 Aug 2022 23.57 EDT

Pakistan's former prime minister [Imran Khan](#) has been charged under anti-terrorism legislation after he gave a fiery speech to supporters at the weekend in which he vowed to sue police officers and a female judge and alleged a close aide had been tortured after his arrest.

Khan will have to “face the law for threatening and hurling abuses”, tweeted the interior minister, Rana Sanaullah.

Hundreds of Khan’s supporters gathered outside his hilltop mansion in the capital, Islamabad, on Monday, vowing to prevent his arrest.

The protesters chanted slogans against the government of the prime minister, Shehbaz Sharif – brother of the jailed former prime minister Nawaz Sharif – which took over after Khan [was ousted in a confidence vote in April](#).

Imran Khan supporters gather outside residence after terror charges brought against him – video

A court in Islamabad issued a so-called “protective bail” for Khan for the next three days, preventing police from arresting him over the charges until at least Thursday.

Tensions escalated sharply on Saturday when Pakistan’s media watchdog banned television channels from broadcasting live addresses by Khan after his rally in Islamabad.

A police report of the rally cited Khan’s comments that he “would not spare” Islamabad’s police chief and a female judge for the arrest of his aide. “The purpose of the speech was to spread terror amongst the police and the judiciary and prevent them from doing their duty,” police said in the report.

Under Pakistan’s legal system, police file what is known as a first information report about the charges against an accused to a magistrate judge, who allows the investigation to move forward. Typically, police then arrest and question the accused.

Separately, the Islamabad high court on Monday issued a contempt notice to Khan for threatening a judge in his speech on Saturday.

The use of anti-terrorism laws as the basis of cases against political leaders is not uncommon in Pakistan, where Khan’s government also used them against opponents and critics.

Fawad Chaudhry, a former information minister and a senior leader of Khan's Tehreek-e-Insaf party (PTI), warned of "political and administrative consequences" if Khan was arrested. Chaudhry denied claims that Khan had left his house to avoid arrest.

Another former minister, Ali Amin Gandapur, tweeted that "if Imran Khan is arrested ... we will take over Islamabad with people's power." Others [shared footage of supporters](#) from the scene.

At his latest rally on Sunday night he accused "neutrals" – a term he uses to allude to Pakistan's powerful military – of being responsible for a crackdown on his party and workers.

"A plan has been made to place our party against the wall. I assure you, that the Sri Lankan situation is going to happen here," Khan threatened, referencing the recent economic protests that toppled that island nation's government. "Now we are following law and constitution. But when a political party strays from that path, the situation inside Pakistan, who will stop the public? There are 220 million people."

PTI went to court on Monday to challenge the charges against Khan. Chaudhry told the Guardian from the court that he was waiting for the charges to be quashed.

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Khan, the former superstar cricketer turned pious Islamist politician, [was ousted in April](#) when he lost a no-confidence vote in parliament following

the loss of his parliamentary majority. In the week before his departure he violated the constitution in an attempt to stop the vote going ahead.

After leaving office Khan alleged without providing evidence that the military had participated in a [US plot to unseat him](#). Washington, the Pakistani military and the government of Sharif have all denied this.

Khan has since been touring the country addressing huge rallies with complaints against the military, judiciary and media, and demanding fresh elections.

Nusrat Javed, a political analyst and journalist, said Khan's speeches had invited the state to come after him.

"It is not only the civilian government who wants to arrest Khan," he said. "His tirade against the military establishment and judiciary has pushed him to a place where he can be arrested soon."

Javed played down fears of chaos if Khan was arrested. "We need to understand that Khan is the only face of his party and he is a charismatic leader and crowd puller," he said. "Once he is arrested, I don't think his party leadership can protest for more than three days.

"His party is in power in Punjab and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa provinces and they would not damage the state buildings there."

Khan was elected as prime minister in 2018 as the "modern" face of Pakistan, who had the backing of the military and promised economic prosperity and an end to corruption.

But his time in office was blighted by economic crisis, including [record inflation](#). He had also been seen to pander to militant Islamic groups, and during his time in office religious violence and public lynchings of those accused of blasphemy were on the rise.

*Reuter contributed to this report*

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## US policing

# Arkansas officers suspended after video shows man being beaten

State police investigate three officers captured on video holding down and punching a man outside a convenience store



A video still of the three law enforcement officers making the violent arrest.  
Photograph: Reuters

*[Edwin Rios](#) and agencies*

Mon 22 Aug 2022 08.43 EDTFirst published on Mon 22 Aug 2022 04.28 EDT

Arkansas state police have [launched](#) an investigation into three officers who were captured on video holding down and beating a man outside a convenience store, an interaction that sparked outrage on social media.

The incident comes as video footage captured by body cameras and cellphones continue to expose aggressive and abusive policing practices across the US. Recently, in Florida, a deputy resigned after [video](#) surfaced of him pointing his gun at a pregnant Black woman during a traffic stop.

Officers in Arkansas responded Sunday to a report of a man who allegedly threatened convenience store workers in a nearby area and then rode his bicycle to Mulberry, a town north-west of Little Rock, the Fort Smith Times Record [reported](#).

Video captured of the encounter showed an officer pinning down Randall Worcester, of South Carolina, to the ground as one punched him and another kneeled him.

Worcester, 27, was taken to a hospital for treatment on Sunday. After the hospital discharged him, officers booked him in a local jail on multiple charges, including second-degree battery, resisting arrest and terroristic threatening, state police said.

Two deputies with the nearby Crawford county sheriff's office were suspended pending an investigation into use of force practices while a police officer working for the municipality of Mulberry was placed on leave. Authorities have yet to publicly release the officers' names.

"The state police investigation will be limited to the use of physical force by the deputies and police officer," Arkansas state police [said](#) in a statement. "Upon completion of the investigation, the case file will be submitted to the Crawford county prosecuting attorney who will determine whether the use of force by the law enforcement officers was consistent with Arkansas laws."

Meanwhile, in Florida, deputy Jason DeSue of the Bradford county sheriff's office resigned after footage initially captured by one of a woman's children showed an aggressive interaction following a traffic stop.

Ebony Washington, a mother of three, [told](#) 11 News she was driving from home with her children when DeSue pulled her over for speeding. As she

turned on her hazard lights, DeSue warned her: “Pull the vehicle over, or I’ll put you into the ground,” according to body-camera [video](#).

Washington said she searched for a well-lit area to pull her car over before she parked at a nearby gas station. After she stopped, DeSue raised his gun, pointed it at her vehicle and yelled, “If you make any movement, that’ll be your last mistake you’re gonna make.” Washington pulled her hands out of the car window but did not know DeSue had a gun until he informed her.

Washington said she tried to reason with DeSue, explaining that she waited to pull over because she had her kids in the car and was four months pregnant. In response, DeSue said on video: “Shut up about the why.” Video showed him grabbing Washington by the arm and aggressively handcuffing her. He gave her a speeding ticket, and Washington apologized.

A sheriff’s spokesperson at the Bradford county sheriff’s office [told Action News Jax](#) that DeSue, who joined the department in 2020, had a history of issues and had entered into a “last-chance” agreement. “His verbal abuse was intolerable and we weren’t going to allow that,” said the agency’s chief deputy, Brad Smith.

“Had I done any type of movement outside of what he asked me to do, that could have been an opportunity for him to pull the trigger,” Washington told 11 News.

*The Associated Press contributed reporting.*

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## Headlines tuesday 23 august 2022

- [Energy Use is a ‘decision for individuals’ insist No 10 and Truss allies](#)
- [Live Truss’ tax plan is more like Heath’s than Thatcher’s, says IFS boss – UK politics](#)
- [Energy costs UK customers face ‘catastrophic winter’ as bills soar, says EDF retail boss](#)
- [Gas National Grid extends annual gas shortage drill amid winter supply fears](#)

## [Energy](#)

# Energy use is a ‘decision for individuals’ insist No 10 and Truss allies

Senior Tories rule out asking households to reduce energy use despite planning for winter blackouts



Kwasi Kwarteng, tipped to be Liz Truss’s next chancellor, is against asking people to reduce their energy use. Photograph: Justin Tallis/AFP/Getty Images

*[Rowena Mason](#) Deputy political editor*

Tue 23 Aug 2022 02.00 EDT Last modified on Tue 23 Aug 2022 09.24 EDT

No 10 and allies of [Liz Truss](#) are resisting the idea that people should be asked to cut their energy use, with the government insisting that consumption of gas and electricity is a “decision for individuals”.

With the threat of shortages possible this winter, officials have raised the option of the UK public being requested to reduce their energy usage, after

countries in the EU including [France and Germany were asked to cut gas demand by 15%](#).

People across Europe have been urged to switch off lights and use appliances less often, after all member states apart from Hungary agreed to a voluntary cut in usage.

However, Kwasi Kwarteng, the business secretary, who is likely to be Truss's next chancellor, is opposed to such a move, believing it is not necessary for the UK and that energy use should be up to individuals.

Asked whether people should reduce how much energy they use given the high cost and worries about supply, a spokesperson for Boris Johnson said on Monday: "These decisions, in terms of energy consumption, remain decisions for individuals.

"Households, businesses and industry can be confident that they will have the electricity and gas that they need."

The government favours a plan put forward by National Grid to incentivise households with smart meters to save energy by paying them to use appliances at off-peak times.

"We support the National Grid in developing all options which could benefit consumers and help to reduce bills by spreading out peak demand," No 10 said.

Concern about energy security has risen since a report was leaked to Bloomberg showing the government had prepared crisis plans modelling a situation where businesses and even consumers could face blackouts this winter.

Under the government's latest "reasonable worst case scenario", officials believe the UK could experience blackouts for several days in January if cold weather combined with gas shortages to leave the country short of power.

At the same time, annual energy bills are forecast by one analyst, Auxilione, to top £6,000 next year, triggering Labour to warn that Britons face “serious hardship on a massive scale” if the government does not intervene.

Advising households on how to cut energy usage has previously been attempted in a 1922 Committee report published in April, led by Andrea Leadsom, a former energy secretary. The Department for Business, [Energy](#) and Industrial Strategy (BEIS) committee she chaired proposed that there should be improved guidance on cutting energy usage, better access to existing education and incentive schemes, and clearer messaging on money-saving ideas such as turning off radiators in unused rooms, reducing pressure to hot water taps and reducing radiator settings on gas boilers to between 55C and 65C to optimise energy output.

The committee also suggested stronger public messaging on the advantage of smart meters and pressure on energy companies to bring forward smart tariffs. Leadsom said on Monday there was a “really strong case” for these measures.

However, politicians can be sensitive about public perceptions of asking people to use less energy. Some energy bosses have been pilloried for giving tips on keeping warm, such as putting on jumpers, doing star jumps, cuddling pets or eating porridge.

In the EU, Brussels is [urging governments](#) to launch campaigns to encourage people to switch off lights and turn down thermostats and air conditioning.

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Industrial users may also be given targets to reduce heating and cooling. EU governments are being urged to speed up the switch to renewable energy, but are also asked to consider delaying their exit from nuclear power or coal – an effort to find any alternative to Russian gas.

The government insists that power cuts and energy shortages are extremely unlikely. However, Adam Bell, a former policy senior official at BEIS, told the BBC's PM programme he thought there was about a one-in-10 chance of seeing limited, planned blackouts in certain parts of the country over the winter.

He also said: “The right thing to do now is to get used to lowering our demand so we can eliminate that chance as much as we can.”

Bell said there were stages that could be gone through, including switching some industry off, then export pipelines and then homes. “But because we might be in that situation, there’s a lot households should be thinking about now, to help minimise the likelihood … like turning down your thermostat by one degree and optimising the flow temperature in your boiler as well as draught-proofing where you can.”

A government spokesperson said: “Households, businesses and industry can be confident that the UK’s secure and diverse energy supplies will provide the electricity and gas they need.

“Decisions on energy consumption rightly remain a matter for individuals and we recognise households will have different energy usage needs.”

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## UK cost of living crisis

# UK customers face ‘catastrophic winter’ as energy costs soar, says EDF retail boss

Half of UK households could be in fuel poverty by January unless government steps in, says managing director for customers



The average annual domestic energy bill is currently capped at £1,971, but this is forecast to hit £3,582 in the autumn. Photograph: Andrew Matthews/PA

*Jasper Jolly  
@jjpjolly*

Tue 23 Aug 2022 05.57 EDT Last modified on Tue 23 Aug 2022 07.05 EDT

The UK faces a “dramatic and catastrophic winter for customers” as energy prices soar, according to a stark warning from the head of EDF Energy’s retail business.

Philippe Commaret, the energy firm's managing director for customers, called for extra government intervention, including help for households to insulate their homes and a VAT cut for small businesses as prices jumped to record levels.

Prices for gas and electricity, which had already shot up around the world as economies recovered from coronavirus pandemic lockdowns, have been sent soaring by Russia's invasion of Ukraine, with [Russia using its control over European gas supplies](#) to try to gain political leverage.

"We face, despite the support the government has already announced, a dramatic and catastrophic winter for customers," Commaret told BBC Radio 4's Today programme. "In January, half of the UK households might be in fuel poverty."

The regulator Ofgem will publish its latest update to the energy price cap on Friday, with a uniform expectation of a steep increase in the price households pay for energy. The average annual domestic energy bill is currently capped at £1,971, but this is forecast to hit £3,582 in the autumn and [as much as £4,400 in April](#).

EDF said it will contact 100,000 of the most vulnerable customers to inform them of ways to cut their energy bills and how to access all available support, but Commaret said more government action was needed to help customers financially.

As well as being a big retail supplier in the UK, EDF is one of the largest electricity generators. The company is majority owned by the French state, but [it will be fully nationalised](#) after France's government forced it to sell energy it generated at below-market rates.

"We are going to incur losses this year for EDF," Commaret said. "So for the time being we are doing everything we can do in order to help customers, but we need also the support of the government in order to step in and even to help beyond what has been already announced."

Commaret said [proposals for a “tariff deficit fund”](#), a scheme that would spread the cost of price increases over a decade, should be investigated, as well as a cut in VAT, given that tax receipts had increased as prices had risen. However, he said it would be crucial to “create headroom in the budget of our customers” to repay the money by helping customers use less energy in the long term.

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“Basically, the solution is to insulate the UK households,” he said. The Labour party made insulating homes a key policy proposal as early as April, but the Conservative government has [not yet made any big announcement](#) on improving energy efficiency.

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## National Grid

# National Grid extends annual gas shortage drill amid winter supply fears

Drill, which involves deciding which customers would have to cut gas use in a crisis, will run for four days instead of two



In a shortage, National Grid would try to maintain supplies ‘as long as possible’ to households that rely on gas for cooking and heating.  
Photograph: Gareth Fuller/PA

*Jasper Jolly*

*@jjpjolly*

Tue 23 Aug 2022 04.08 EDT Last modified on Wed 24 Aug 2022 07.21 EDT

The [National Grid](#) has doubled the length of its annual emergency gas shortage drill from two to four days as the energy industry braces for supplies to potentially run out over the winter.

Gas prices have rocketed in recent months amid the recovery from coronavirus lockdowns and as Russia has sought to [use its control of gas supplies to Europe](#) as leverage amid its economic and diplomatic isolation since its invasion of Ukraine.

[European benchmark natural gas prices](#) ended Monday at a record high settlement price of €276.75 per MWh – 10 times the price a year ago. That has triggered a [scramble by European governments to find alternative gas supplies](#) and to try to fill up storage tanks.

The UK's business secretary, Kwasi Kwarteng, has not sought any advice from government officials on the possibility of rationing energy before the end of June, the BBC reported on Tuesday, citing data obtained under freedom of information laws.

Kwarteng, who is likely to be the next chancellor if Liz Truss wins the Conservative leadership race, has also opposed the suggestion from civil servants that the [public should be asked to cut their energy use](#), believing it is unnecessary for the UK and that energy use should be up to individuals.

However, the gas supply industry is bound by law to run drills for gas shortages, including deciding which customers would have to cut their gas use.

Under the UK's practice exercise, the National Grid, a private company that looks after much of the UK's energy supply system, will use mock demand data and simulate a series of supply losses. Industry will then receive notifications to test the communication systems, and National Grid will test gas distributors' responses to a “gas supply shortage which has electricity system implications”, according to a [briefing note](#) from National Grid.

“Exercise Degree” will take place on 13 and 14 September and 4 and 5 October 2022. Last year’s “Exercise Celsius” took place on 29 and 30 September 2021.

Gas suppliers and National Grid are bound by law to prepare for a network gas supply emergency, when the gas pressure in the network falls to

dangerously low levels. If an emergency is declared National Grid has the power to request additional gas supplies or to require consumers – starting with the largest industrial customers – to stop using gas.

National Grid will try to maintain supplies “as long as possible” to households that rely on gas for cooking and heating. It also has “priority customers” whose supplies will be maintained until domestic gas supplies are threatened. These include hospitals and care homes, as well as lower-priority industry such as furnaces and glass works, who would sustain costly damage if gas supplies stopped.

Concern about energy security has risen since a report was leaked to Bloomberg showing the government had prepared crisis plans modelling a situation where businesses and even consumers could face blackouts this winter.

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Under ministers’ latest “reasonable worst-case scenario”, officials believe the UK could experience blackouts for several days in January if cold weather combined with gas shortages to leave the country short of power.

Instead of the suggestion of an information campaign encouraging the public to save energy, the government favours a plan put forward by National Grid to incentivise households with smart meters to save energy by [paying them to use appliances at off-peak times](#).

A government spokesperson said: “These are standard, industry-led exercises by National Grid which take place every year as part of normal

preparations for a wide range of scenarios, including those that are highly unlikely to occur.

“Thanks to the UK’s secure and diverse energy supplies, households, businesses and industry can be confident they will get the electricity and gas they need.”

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## 2022.08.23 - Spotlight

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- [‘You don’t think strikes are the answer? What is?’ RMT’s Mick Lynch on work, dignity and union power](#)
- [Felixstowe strikes How will they affect UK shop shelves and prices?](#)
- [‘It’s a magical experience children never forget’ Why toy shops flourish while others struggle](#)

## Access to green space

# Parks at risk: ‘If it was not for the volunteers, we would struggle’

Local authorities have had to slash funding for maintaining their open spaces, and friends groups are picking up the slack

- [Funding for England’s parks down £330m a year in real terms since 2010](#)



Jane Wilcock in Longsight park, Bolton beside one of three walled flower beds paid for by Jane and her husband, David. Photograph: Joel Goodman/The Guardian

[Damien Gayle](#)

[@damiengayle](#)

Tue 23 Aug 2022 02.00 EDT

Sparse. That's how Chrisie Byrne describes the playground in Walton Hall park. The outlines of missing equipment scar its black rubber flooring. "It's a huge footprint, with nothing in it, or at least very little in it," says Byrne.

There is a set of swings, a low climbing frame with a slide for small children, and a roundabout. A couple of rocking horse-type contraptions date back to the 1990s, well past their usual lifespan, but local people have begged the council not to remove them. Another climbing frame that was burned by vandals was removed and never replaced.

Liverpool is blessed with an abundance of parks but not the money to maintain them. Over the past 10 years, amid plummeting budgets across the board, the council has had to cut its spending on parks by 72%. In 2010 the city had 17 Green Flag-accredited parks: now it has only two.

When Walton Hall opened to the public in 1934, it had a full-time staff of 25. Now it gets a gang of three men in the summer – two in the winter – two days a week. At least, when they can: they have 15 other parks and cemeteries in Liverpool to look after.

That leaves Byrne, and the rest of the volunteers in Friends of Walton Park, the group she chairs, to pick up the slack. Which means picking up the litter, emptying the bins, gardening, cutting back bushes, repainting fences and playground equipment, and any other general maintenance the council can't manage.

And there is more. "The friends groups are becoming active in a different way to what they would have been five years ago," says Byrne. To cut the cost of plants, they now grow their own from seed in their own community garden: leftovers are sold to other parks and local people at a low price.

Two days a week they run a community cafe in the park, with all profits going back to the park's upkeep. That, in particular, has changed the park from a mere green space to a community hub, bringing together Walton locals, including many who had grown isolated during the pandemic. "The government don't get the vital work that these volunteers do," Byrne says.

Daniel Barrington, Liverpool city council's cabinet member for environment and climate change, said the city took pride in its parks, but a 66% overall cut to the authority's budget was having a serious impact on all its services.

"Councils can only do so much with finite and dwindling resources but Liverpool is fortunate to have a long-established and active network of Friends of Parks groups who do brilliant work and we liaise very closely with them to support their activities," Barrington said.

"We're also counteracting the cuts by being more creative with section 106 funding and have earmarked £5m in the past three years to invest in our green spaces and playgrounds. We're also looking to secure our parks' future by strengthening our partnerships with communities and volunteers, alongside new alliances with national stakeholders such as Fields in Trust and Keep Britain Tidy."

But Liverpool is not alone. It is not even the worst-affected area. A Guardian analysis of spending on parks by local authorities in [England](#) found that close to three-quarters had reduced their budgets, with deprived areas such as Liverpool the most likely to have cut funding. The result has been the slow decline of parks across the country, particularly in those areas most in need of green space.

Twenty-five miles away in Bolton, another most-deprived area, Jane Wilcock, a local GP, began the Friends of Longsight Park in 2014 – the same year Byrne took over Walton Hall's park in Liverpool. When Bolton council – which has cut its parks budget by 71% over the past 10 years – could not pay for new benches, bins and flower beds, they stumped up the cash themselves. "It varies a bit but we probably put in about £2,000 a year of our own earnings ... obviously, we've been taxed on that as well," Wilcock says.



Bradshaw Brook in Longsight park. Photograph: Joel Goodman/The Guardian

Apart from one big repair lobbied for by the friends group, the paths in the park have not been repaired since the 1980s, Wilcock says. They include public rights of way in need of a serious overhaul.

Judged alongside the roster of local authorities' responsibilities, it is easy to see why parks have suffered so badly from cuts. In deprived areas in particular, the needs of adult social care, child services, education and housing leave little spare for taking care of green space. And there is no statutory obligation on councils to even provide parks at all.

It's no surprise then that more than nine in 10 parks managers said they thought parks were disproportionately affected by the squeeze on public sector budgets, according to research by the Association for Public Sector Excellence.

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The consultancy, which undertakes research on behalf of public bodies, conducts an annual survey of parks staff. It found 72% expected cuts to budgets in the coming five years; 28% expected cuts of 15% or more. Almost half expected cuts to staffing.

Cuts have had an inevitable impact on the kinds of services council parks departments can offer. Floral and horticultural displays and general maintenance are the worst-hit areas, with almost three-quarters of respondents expecting to cut these duties even more. Almost nine in 10 said volunteers were now relied on to pick up litter.

“If it was not for the volunteers in the parks, we would struggle,” said one parks worker with more than two decades’ experience, who spoke to the Guardian on condition of anonymity.

“A lot of the grounds maintenance has stopped, basically, just because of budgets. You won’t see a lad in the park any more with a pair of secateurs, you will see him with a hedge cutter and they will just take the tops off.

“There is no colour in the park, everything is just green, everything is cut with hedge cutters. I can only do one flowerbed a week.”

Workforce morale is through the floor. Many parks workers have had to take second jobs as private gardeners to make ends meet. “We were speaking about it and the only reason we come to work now is to pay our bills. There is no passion in the job. Some mornings you wake up thinking ‘groundhog day again’.”

Parks in a poor state can affect the mental health of users too. In recent years, studies have shown that being in nature can help manage anxiety and depression. But, says Paul Farmer, the chief executive of the mental health charity Mind: “We don’t all have equal access to green spaces, or to high-quality green spaces … For example, some parks or green spaces may feel

unsafe and evoke worries about crime, harassment or abuse, especially if you've had bad experiences in the past.”

Farmer points to research by [Public Health England](#) that highlights the importance of access to high-quality green spaces, but also suggests that lower-quality spaces – such as those with poor-quality footpaths, vandalism or litter – may have a negative effect on health. “It’s really important that we all feel safe and able to access [high quality] outdoor spaces, if and when we choose to,” he says.

Byrne has a lot of complaints about Liverpool city council, but mostly she is just glad to have a park at all: she was part of a group that saw off plans by Liverpool council to build homes on Walton Park, and has since been instrumental in a campaign that persuaded Liverpool to become the first local authority in the country to guarantee all its green spaces for ever. More than 100 parks in the city – covering 1,000 hectares (2,500 acres) – will be secured in perpetuity in collaboration with the charity Fields in Trust.

Now it just has to find the money to maintain them. On this point, Byrne, Wilcock and parks volunteers across the country are united: parks must be made a mandatory service for councils. Until then, it will be up to the friends groups to fill the gap.

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## **‘You don’t think strikes are the answer? What is?’ RMT’s Mick Lynch on work, dignity and union power**

[Zoe Williams](#)



‘A lot of people are telling me I’m doing good’ ... Mick Lynch on a picket line outside St Pancras station in June. Photograph: Stefan Rousseau/PA

With the cost of living soaring and wages falling further behind, the union boss has become the face of resistance. He talks about the rail dispute, the stereotyping of working-class people and his clash with Piers Morgan



[@zoesqwilliams](#)

Tue 23 Aug 2022 01.00 EDT Last modified on Wed 24 Aug 2022 10.23 EDT

It is rare, these days, for the general secretary of a trade union, let alone a small one, to become a national figure. Yet Mick Lynch has done exactly that. The leader of the National Union of Rail, Maritime and Transport Workers (RMT), which represents 80,000 members, doesn’t like flattery. Nonetheless, as the rail strikes in Britain enter their third month, he will concede that “a lot of people are telling me I’m doing good”.

I meet him in the RMT’s boardroom, round the corner from Euston station in central London, where the RMT recently had 1,000 people turn up at very short notice, to support a picket line in the dispute between railway workers and Network Rail. Lynch looks, in his own words, like “the personification of what an RMT general secretary is”: white, male, bald, 60. He is making the point that he hopes the RMT will be more diverse in the future. He also

looks like a man in charge of the moment: relaxed, with an easy sense of humour. I can't think of a time in my life when that has been the stereotype of a trade unionist.

He has shot to prominence by going on TV and radio and running rings around everyone. Piers Morgan tried the most ridiculous attack line – why did he have a picture of a Thunderbirds baddie as his Facebook profile? Was it because he is a villain?

'Marxist or the Hood?': RMT's Mick Lynch asked bizarre questions amid rail strikes – video

Lynch's detached, almost amused scorn spoke for many of us, not just about Piers Morgan, but also about how long we have been putting up with a media culture that means you can find 17 stories about the orphan/pensioner/dog who had their day ruined by a rail strike, but if you want a sober explanation of what the strike is about you will have more luck on TikTok. (It is about whether railway workers will accept what the RMT says is a real-terms pay cut over the next two years, plus the loss of one-third of frontline maintenance roles and half of scheduled maintenance work. In short, they will not.)

“The state of journalism,” he says, shaking his head. “The questions they ask are so ...” He chooses his word carefully. “Dopey. They obviously don’t know what trade unions are. They think that we are all these cliches that they perpetuate. I’m a baron. My members are pawns. I can just move them about according to who I want to annoy that morning. Which is completely the wrong way around: unions are very democratic. It sounds a bit pompous, but the members are sovereign in this union. They tell us what to do.”

People have been told that they should be grateful for having a job, grateful for earning a living

The traditional attacks on striking transport workers – that they are out to stop hard-working people getting to work, that they are better-paid than you anyway – are failing to land. A poll during the strikes in June showed that

[70% of the public](#) supported the railway workers getting a pay rise that took into account the cost of living. The classic, convoluted centre-left position, held by Labour – that the demands are fair but strikes are bad – has come unstuck; the same poll found that only 18% of people were opposed to railway workers' right to strike. "The bishop of Durham was on a panel with me last week, saying: 'I identify with the issues, but I don't think strike action is the answer,'" Lynch says. "But what is the answer? Do we pray, or play tiddlywinks, or have a sponsored silence? What is there for working people to do if they're not organised?"

Something has changed. Conservative MPs' insistence that railway workers' conditions are pretty good, actually, is no longer provoking kneejerk resentment; it is generating solidarity. At the launch rally last week for the cost of living campaign Enough Is Enough, [Lynch brought the house down](#). "Our message must be this ... the working class is back," he said. "We refuse to be meek, we refuse to be humble, we refuse to wait for politicians and policy-writers – and we refuse to be poor any more."

Today, he says: "They [the Tories] are saying: 'Because you've got the final-salary pension, because you've got sick pay and decent holiday pay, because you've got the ability to negotiate and not just be consulted on your working time and working practices, that's all out of date. You're out of fashion.' Everybody else in the country, at fulfilment centres or mega-warehouses, where they chase you around night and day, there's no dignity in the work, is saying: 'Well, why am I treated like this? Why can't I have a union?'"



‘People have lost the ability to organise’ ... on the picket line at Euston station on 27 July. Photograph: Aaron Chown/PA

Lynch had no great ambition to lead the RMT, he says. “I didn’t want Bob [Crow, a lefty firebrand who died at 52 in 2014 of a heart attack] to pass on, and I didn’t want Mick Cash to have to retire last year, but he did. So we’re here. I didn’t become an officer in this union till I was 54. I didn’t have a trade union career. I was out doing my shifts. I was on the tools for 37 years, as an electrician.”

Lynch has never been on a trade union course. He says there is nothing special about him, or the way he argues. “There’s lots of people who could be in my position, doing what I’m doing. And that’s what they find so shocking, middle-class journalists, present company excepted: that they meet somebody who might have read something in their own time, or is able to go toe to toe with senior people in industry while being on the tools.”

He was born in Paddington, west London, to Irish parents. It was a big family (he is one of five) with no money (his father, a shop steward, went on strike for seven weeks in 1971 and the hit on their income was unimaginable). He says he didn’t notice, because he was the youngest and his siblings shielded him from it. “But you weren’t indebted. That was the

key difference in working-class communities. People now are carrying debt that my parents would have thought: ‘That is impossible.’”

I didn’t become an officer in this union till I was 54. I was out doing my shifts. I was on the tools for 37 years

He left school at 16 and did an apprenticeship. He rattles through his brothers’ and sister’s work – a painter-decorator, a teacher, a plasterer, a midwife – to illustrate that the horizons were fairly broad, especially with free tertiary education. There were a lot of jobs, and the workplace was quite attractive, before Margaret Thatcher came to power.

His childhood was happy, he says: “I’ve got no complaints. We were a coherent family. My mum and dad didn’t split up. None of us went to prison. We weren’t in trouble; we were a respectable family. But, from my memory, there were a lot of families like that. Everyone paints working-class communities as being in crisis the whole time, as if there’s no sense of humour, there’s no fun or joy.”

He worked in construction until he was blacklisted for union organising, at which point he moved to the railways. As happy as he is to talk about the casualisation of the building industry, he is careful to underline that declining conditions are a problem for everyone. “In your industry [journalism], people who are stringers or casualised find it very difficult. In universities, there’s no security whatsoever [for early-career lecturers and researchers and, increasingly, with ‘fire and rehire’, for mid-career academics]. People are beholden to whoever’s doling out the work.”

The reasons for this have to do with more than the decline of unionisation, he says. “People have lost the ability to organise generally, I think, even in communities. Where I grew up, there was a residents’ association, which had some of the most fearsome women you’d ever deal with – working-class women, who could stand up and articulate in front of councillors exactly the services they wanted.”



‘Everyone paints working-class communities as being in crisis the whole time’ ... at the RMT’s head office in central London. Photograph: Graeme Robertson/The Guardian

Then there is the fact we are two generations on from Thatcher. A lot of working people aren’t old enough to remember the assumptions of the mid-80s, when “you’d expect a level of dignity. You respected people for being workers and you had to respect workers’ organisations ... People have been told that they should be grateful for having a job, grateful for earning a living. They’ve been told that if you can’t earn enough in one job, to go and get a second job.”

But you could argue Tony Blair was even more influential than Thatcher, in terms of outsourcing and subcontracting on a huge scale. Now, the NHS, TfL and many other employers get their cleaners from a third party, while local authorities subcontract their housing duties to housing associations and their social care duties to exploitative providers. The results have been catastrophic for working and living conditions.

In the care sector, for example, you will find workers paid the minimum wage in 15-minute segments and expected to provide the car and fuel to get them from one appointment to the next – yet they don’t strike, “because it

affects people who need their care". Plus, of course, poverty wages strip away the option of forgoing pay.



'We refuse to be poor any more' ... speaking at the launch of the Enough Is Enough campaign in south London this month. Photograph: Guy Bell/Rex/Shutterstock

On this point, he has a gripe about the EU: "Everyone told us the European Union would solve all this." This riles me a bit: however we got here, it wasn't via Brussels. [The RMT was a pro-Brexit union](#). It is not affiliated to Labour and can't be held responsible for the party's fudge, but it still contributed, I think, to the split on the left over Brexit that left Boris Johnson looking like the one with the answers.

He deflects that: the RMT is a small union; it wasn't that influential; in any case, he still opposes the EU for its lack of democratic levers. "But I'm not making the point about remain or leave. Frankly, I find all that tedious now. The point I'm making is that we can't wait for court judgments and policy decisions. What I'm trying to encourage, with [Sharon Graham](#) [the general secretary of Unite] and Dave Ward [the general secretary of the Communication Workers Union] and others, is we've got to put the industrial flag up."

The RMT's next campaign will be for cleaners in the transport industry. Lynch wants to get other unions involved, for cleaners in the NHS and beyond. The long game is to "punch a hole in subcontracting and make it really expensive. It's a means of exploitation and people are fed up. Labour have got to say: 'We believe in in-house work.'"

We're going to need the support of the whole of Britain's public opinion. It's got to be bigger than my trade union

He rattles off a list of other things the opposition should say: end low pay; end the housing crisis with municipally run, municipally owned council homes; end food poverty. "You've got to get people to identify with you, through values." He shrugs off Keir Starmer's proposal to [freeze the energy price cap](#) as insufficiently radical: "[That's gonna cost £60bn](#). So we're gonna take that money off ourselves and give it to those companies to subsidise the price they're charging the people they're getting the money off."

He would rather the government sequestered North Sea gas and capped the wholesale price. I run this past a friend later, who remarks sarcastically: "It worked for Hugo Chávez." The Venezuelan president nationalised important industries in the 00s, but by the time of his death in 2013 the country was struggling with high inflation and endless shortages. But socialist chaos looks a lot less scary in the middle of a crisis of late-stage capitalism.

Lynch was attacked in various newspapers last week as a Putin apologist, after accusing the EU of empire-building and saying: "There were a lot of corrupt politicians in Ukraine." That was true before Volodymyr Zelenskiy, but has also been one of Putin's attack lines. It is hard not to see it as a response to his popularity, an attempt to discredit him, but he is sanguine about it.

"Anyone that knows me in this organisation knows that I condemned the Soviet Union; I thought it was a murderous death cult. I never played with any of the symbolism of red stars and hammers and sickles. All oppressive regimes, without exception, are oppressive of workers and peasants. And then people tell me I'm a Putin apologist? I'm not. Putin should stop the war, get out of Ukraine and respect the sovereignty of that nation."

It is unrealistic at this point to think that we can avoid a Liz Truss government, however long it lasts. She has promised to go to war with unions, pledging legislation within 30 days to [curb union powers](#); Grant Shapps, the transport secretary, has chimed in [to threaten redundancies](#). “So they’re escalating the battle. We’re going to have to respond in kind. But this will need a union-wide response. It needs the Labour party, because they are the movement. We’re going to need the support of the community and the whole of Britain’s public opinion. It’s got to be bigger than my trade union, because we’re not able to do this on our own.”

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## Shipping industry

# Felixstowe strikes: how will they affect UK shop shelves and prices?

The eight-day stoppage at Britain's largest container port could have a damaging impact on supply chains



The Port of Felixstowe handles about 2,000 ships a year. Photograph: Toby Melville/Reuters



[Richard Partington](#) *Economics correspondent*

[@RJPartington](#)

Mon 22 Aug 2022 13.48 EDTFirst published on Mon 22 Aug 2022 11.45 EDT

Workers at the Port of Felixstowe, which handles 48% of container trade, began an [eight-day strike over pay](#) at the weekend, threatening to add more disruption to the British economy after the shocks of Brexit and Covid pandemic.

It is the first such action at Britain's biggest container port since 1989, and on Monday a spokesperson for the union behind it claimed "the supply chain will be severely disrupted" as a result. [Unite](#) national officer Robert Morton told Sky News there "will be more strikes" if his members' pay demands are not met.

## Why is it happening?

More than 1,900 Unite members are involved in the strike, including crane drivers, machine operators and stevedores. The union is pushing for the company to improve its offer of a 7% pay increase, which it says is "significantly below" the rising cost of living.

The union argues the docks and its owners are “incredibly wealthy”, with pre-tax profits of £61m in 2020 and paying almost £100m in dividends. Felixstowe says the union has not put an improved offer of a 7% pay rise plus a £500 one-off bonus to its members.

Union officials have pointed to the retail prices index (RPI) measure of inflation as a benchmark, which is now 12.3%. Morton suggested a figure between 7% and 12.3% would be acceptable. The RPI is higher than the consumer prices index measure of inflation, which [reached 10.1% in July](#) and is forecast by the Bank of England to [peak above 13% later this year](#).

## **How important is Felixstowe to UK trade?**

As a linchpin for long-distance shipments to and from Asia, the terminal owned by the Hong Kong-based company CK Hutchison handles goods for about 17 different shipping lines operating to and from 700 ports. Business leaders fear the strike will have a damaging impact on supply chains at a time when companies are grappling with disruption caused by Brexit and the Covid pandemic.

As much as \$800m (£680m) in trade could be affected, according to ALPS Marine analysis by Russell Group, a data and analytics company. That includes more than \$80m of trade in clothing and more than \$30m in electronics.

## **What is the impact so far?**

Josh Brazil, a global supply chain analyst at project44, a research provider, said container capacity on the first day of the strike fell by more than a third compared with last week. Some vessels are being redirected to nearby London Gateway, with a 45% increase in capacity volumes calling there in the last week. “[It] could have massive implications for the nation’s supply chains,” Brazil said.

Industry sources said shipments had been timed to arrive to avoid the strikes, with orders rushed to beat the start and others delayed to arrive afterwards.

Trade is also expected to be diverted to smaller UK ports and EU ports, including Rotterdam in the Netherlands and Wilhelmshaven in Germany.

## Are we going to see shortages?

Consumers are unlikely to see an immediate impact on shop shelves, although experts say any further strike action would lead to delivery delays and shortages of some goods.

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This is because Felixstowe typically handles bulkier items shipped from Asia, such as furniture, clothing and white goods, unlike Dover, which handles food and perishable goods that require a faster delivery time.

UK ports have gradually been recovering from Covid, Brexit disruption and national lorry driver shortages, while warehouses have been restocked with goods. Consumer demand for big-ticket purchases such as sofas and fridges is also fading amid concerns over the rising cost of living, reducing the pressure on supply lines.

## Will it push up prices?

The disruption is likely to add to logistics costs, which could lead to higher prices in shops. “It will add an inflationary impulse,” said John Glen, the chief economist at the Chartered Institute of Procurement and Supply. “We still haven’t got back to just in time supply chains and stocks being held in

warehouses. So you will see some impact in the shops. It won't be a lack of availability of particular products, but you might see a lack of choice."

## What about Christmas?

Experts said any further strikes could affect the festive period, when retailers typically ramp up supplies. Sophie Lund-Yates, a lead equity analyst at Hargreaves Lansdown, said: "This is the latest unwanted twist in our weekly food shops, with high prices already making the experience more difficult for many shoppers."

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## **‘It’s a magical experience children never forget’: why toy shops flourish while others struggle**



Play's the thing ... Louise Evans, right, and Emily Weston, both primary school teachers from Swindon, at My Small World in Bath.

Photograph: Adrian Sherratt/The Guardian

The internet is killing the high street? Not if you're in the market for a doll's house, a pedal car or a make-your-own nodding cat. We get hands-on with a retail success story



[Sam Wollaston](#)

[@samwollaston](#)

Tue 23 Aug 2022 05.00 EDT Last modified on Tue 23 Aug 2022 07.31 EDT

Once upon a time – well, only the other day, actually, a Monday morning during the summer holidays – in the beautiful city of Bath, there stood a building. Just across from the railway station. It was – still is – a grand, handsome building, built not so long ago but in a Georgian style befitting its historic surroundings. But it is not a happy building because its owners fell on hard times and left. Now the Debenhams building stands empty, haunted by the ghosts of sales assistants, a relic of a different, happier retail age.

Hold the violins, though, and walk round the corner to St Lawrence Street, where you will find a little pocket of life – joy even – occupying a unit within the same building. Here is a window filled with hot-air balloons, a red pedal car, mice, a huge fantasy wooden castle. It could be Mr Magorium's Wonder Emporium, Toy Story 2, Big, [Angela Carter](#) even, if you want to go darker or classier: choose your own cultural comparison.

This independent toy shop, called My Small World, is run by a woman called Dawn Burden and I'm spending the morning here.



Fun and games ... Jo Salmon and her children, Thea and Laurie, at My Small World. Photograph: Adrian Sherratt/The Guardian

First, before going inside to play, the why part. Because this little scene in Bath is a bigger retail picture in microcosm. Amid widespread high street misery, department stores closing, and familiar names moving online or vanishing entirely, for toy shops the story is less doom and gloom, more boom.

Sales in toy shops from January to June 2022 were up 44% on the same period last year. Duh, you say: lockdown at the start of 2021, that's why. True, that does have a lot to do with it – but what about this? Even in the second quarter of 2022, sales were up 13% versus the same period in 2021, when shops *were* open.

Speaking from his home in Donaghadee, County Down, Alan Simpson, who has been in the business for more than 40 years and is chairman of the Toy Retailers Association, says there was a bit of extra money around for some people. “People on furlough didn’t have the expense of going to work; they weren’t able to get away on holiday. I think parents felt able to push the boat

out a bit when it came to expenditure on toys and the kids reaped the benefit.”

There are about 600 toy shops in Britain, well down on 900 five years ago, but that trend is changing. After what it describes as a bumper year, the Toy Retailers Association expects the number of actual physical shops to *increase* by 10% over the next two years. As well as chairing the association, Simpson runs the Toytown chain, which has about 30 stores across the UK. Last year it opened two new shops; this year it will be three. “If your competitors are moving forward and you’re not, you’re basically reversing.”

My son wants to play Minecraft, he wants to play Roblox. But here he’s like: ‘Look, a balancing bird!’

My Small World in Bath is not part of a chain. Burden opened up 17 years ago, in a different part of town, next to Waitrose, and she admits that is her target market. The stuff she sells is tasteful, old-fashioned, wholesome. There are no batteries, not a lot of plastic, plenty of wood. It’s not displayed according to age or gender. “Boys love doll’s houses; girls like building things. I think we’re beyond that,” she says. “It’s important we’re edging boys towards being nurturing and girls towards engineering.”

It’s not cheap. You can get a string of coloured twist-and-lock blocks for £2 or a make-your-own nodding cat for £3, but the most expensive doll’s house is 300 full-sized adult quid, as is the red metal pedal car in the window. “Things like that will last,” says Jo Salmon. “They’ll pass them down to their kids. It’s important to be sustainable now.”



‘It’s important we’re edging boys towards being nurturing and girls towards engineering’: Dawn Burden, owner of My Small World. Photograph: Adrian Sherratt/The Guardian

Jo is here with her children, Thea, eight, and Laurie, five. It’s Laurie’s favourite shop. Thea likes the books and the arty stuff. They are local; hadn’t planned to come in, were just passing. Mum got steered through the door.

Pester power, plus the lure of the toy shop window, is paying off – soon after opening time, it’s already busy. “I like it because there are things my seven-year-old only wants to do on the screen,” says Cheryl Burnside about her son Sam, who is there along with three-year-old David. “He wants to play Minecraft, he wants to play Roblox. But here he’s like: ‘Oh, look – a balancing bird!’ That’s not something he would have been exposed to. It’s important to let them go in and play around.” She ends up getting the bird for Sam and a book for David. They are not local – they are on holiday from Philadelphia, Pennsylvania.

It’s good to have the tourists back, says Burden. While I’m in the shop, French, German and Cornish (“escaping the crowds”) families come into the shop. The Cogswell family – mum Millie, Arthur, 10, and Phillip, three – aren’t tourists. They are from Bath but currently living in Saudi Arabia for work; they have returned for a visit. “It’s nice to be back where anything

goes, and kids are still kids and allowed to play with rainbow toys,” says Millie.



Kids’ stuff ... Millie Cogswell with Phillip, left, and Arthur. Photograph: Adrian Sherratt/The Guardian

“They’re banning rainbow toys and clothes,” explains Arthur about the [Saudi authorities seizing kids’ stuff](#) they think promotes homosexuality. He leaves with a build-your-own crank-operated doorbell, natural wood coloured, but it could be painted like a rainbow. Phillip gets a tugboat for the bath.

Louise Evans and Emily Weston don’t have kids but do work with them. They are primary school teachers from Swindon, and understand the importance of the physical shop. “If you can see something, you can visualise your child, or someone else’s child, with it,” says Louise. “If I buy something online for the classroom I don’t really know what it’s going to be like.” Again they were just passing by. They are in town on a girls’ day out to visit an actual bricks-and-mortar bookshop. Hey, shopping on the internet is so pre-pandemic – the future is in-store.

Juno, 10, agrees about the importance of going into a shop. “You can interact with stuff and they let you try things out,” she says. Right now she is

interacting with a mouse wearing a striped dress lying in a little bed inside a matchbox. “I love tiny stuff and making tiny little worlds.” A mouse in a matchbox is £23.50.

“We’ve been known to spend far too much money in here,” says Juno’s dad, Joe Short. But in tough times, maybe especially in tough times, people spend money on different things. “Even in the shit, people look after their kids. That’s not a bad spend. You don’t tell yourself off for that, whereas you don’t feel so great about drinking that extra bottle of wine. Buying a toy for your loved one is sort of righteous.”

Burden thinks the past couple of years might have seen some family bonds strengthened. “I wonder whether people are more tuned into their children because they spent a lot of time with them in lockdown. Maybe children are more visible in their lives than they were pre-pandemic.”

There’s a lot less disposable income. People are starting to batten down the hatches

Good news for children, good news for toy shops, good news for Dawn. Last year was My Small World’s busiest ever. By November, sales were back to where they were before Covid. Now, month on month, they are pre-pandemic plus 24%. Even taking into account higher-than-average inflation, that is doing well. I’m not a financial journalist but I believe the technical term is ker-ching.

Incidentally, here they have a little set of steps at the counter so smaller people can climb up and get involved. The woman currently paying, Felicity Lynch, doesn’t need it: she hasn’t brought any of her five children along “because they grab everything”. But she likes to come in rather than going online. “I prefer to be able to look and touch and feel.” Today she is getting a wooden puzzle toy for her soon-to-be two-year-old daughter for £16.

Simpson agrees about the need for physical shops – that’s why he keeps opening his own Toytown stores: “It would be incredibly detrimental for toy shops to go only online. You remember being brought into a toy shop when

you were a child – it's a magical experience children remember for the rest of their lives. There's no magic in a cardboard box arriving.”

Tough times ahead though, right? “I'm cautious without getting depressed about it,” Simpson says. “We know what's going on out there with petrol and electric and gas prices. There's a lot less disposable income about. I think people are starting to batten down the hatches and look for value. We're aware that going into the back end of the year isn't going to be the same as last year.”

A lot will depend on what kind of support the new prime minister is going to deliver. But for his business, and for Burden and all the others, there is another, potentially even more important saviour who never fails to deliver, even if it is only once a year. “The difference between toys and most retailers is that Santa comes at Christmas time, and parents push the boat out to try to make sure there's a good Christmas for the kids.”

And so they all lived happily ever after. For the time being at least.

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## 2022.08.23 - Opinion

- Today we remember the tragedy of slavery, but the culture war that denies Britain's past continues
- The French protest at soaring costs and get results - what's wrong with the UK?
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- I realised I would never be an actor – now I'm a big advocate of giving up on dreams

## OpinionSlavery

# Today we remember the tragedy of slavery, but the culture war that denies Britain's past continues

[Olivette Otele](#)

Rightwing activists see any reckoning with Britain's colonial past as an attempt to destabilise the country – but collective memory can bring societies together



Participants in the closing ceremony of London's National Maritime Museum's remembrance day activities scatter white rose petals on to the Thames river in silent commemoration. Photograph: Joshua Akin/National Maritime Museum, London

Tue 23 Aug 2022 01.00 EDT Last modified on Tue 23 Aug 2022 08.00 EDT

There are so many dates in the history of Britain's involvement in colonial slavery that choosing one for collective remembrance is difficult. On 23

August every year, Unesco's [day of remembrance](#) focuses on the Black men and women who started an uprising in Haiti in 1791. In Britain and former British territories, 25 March marks the 1807 legislation that would end the country's involvement in the slave trade, and [Emancipation Day on 1 August](#) commemorates the 1834 act abolishing slavery coming into effect. Despite all of these dates, there has been little recognition of Britain's historical role in the slave trade from our government or political leaders.

When discussions about slavery do happen, they focus narrowly on the British empire and tend to be polarised. David Cameron declared his "[pride in the empire](#)" but rarely mentioned slavery or colonialism (on a visit to Jamaica in 2015, the then prime minister urged the country to "[move on](#)" from this history). Meanwhile, the current Conservative party displays a nostalgia for the glorious days of the British empire, when imperial subjects didn't "disturb" Britain's social and cultural landscapes.

Discussions of slavery bring several, often opposing, viewpoints to the surface. Some would rather focus on abolition and erase the difficult history and legacies of subjugation at the core of enslavement; others keep telling us we need to focus on a multicultural present in a sort of post-racial Britain where, paradoxically, colour doesn't matter. Both of these approaches have a tendency to deny the persistent reality of institutionalised racism and discrimination towards minorities today. They have led to controversies such as the [Sewell report](#), which presented a "new story about the Caribbean experience" that recommended schoolchildren should be taught about the positive side of slavery – such as how enslaved people in the Caribbean supposedly culturally transformed themselves.

The history of enslavement involved subjugation, power, trade and violence. It is complex, and has created [intergenerational trauma](#) on all sides. So it is understandable that Britain might be reluctant to organise a high-profile commemoration each year. In France, the state's national day commemorating the abolition of slavery takes place on 10 May (the televised ceremony is always attended by the president and the president of the senate). Britain has no national ceremony for the thousands of lives that were lost to slavery. Unesco's International Day for the Remembrance of the Slave Trade and its Abolition provides an opportunity for Britain to share

responsibility with other European empires for slavery, and therefore exonerate itself by framing slavery as a common historical practice.

Avoiding discussions of slavery for the rest of the year plays into the hands of culture warriors who are itching for a US-style standoff, and prefer to frame any reckoning with Britain's colonial past as an attempt to destabilise the country. Take, for example, Kemi Badenoch's distracting and ill-informed grandstanding over critical race theory, or [Cressida Dick's portrayal](#) of institutional racism and police brutality as merely a few bad apples, or the repeated attempts to frame Black Lives Matter as a movement that is hostile to white people.

This culture war has become a mechanism of distraction that prevents us from discussing the painful legacies of Britain's colonial past, and examining how this history has entrenched social inequalities in the present day. Instead of intelligent and compassionate conversation about history, there has been a hardening of positions on all sides.

The conversation shouldn't be about deciding whether the British empire was "good" or "bad". The purpose of slavery was to build wealth for Britain by any means necessary, through subjugation, division and coercion. And even in the midst of the exploitation and enslavement that defined plantation life, there were forms of collaboration that benefited some at the expense of others, and hierarchies and class systems among enslaved people that ultimately allowed slaveholders to retain control. On plantations, favouritism based on skin colour was even more complex. Yet we can't teach these layers of history if we don't even acknowledge how important that history was – and still is.

This culture war is the symptom of a selective history about enslavement that has defined how we view this issue in Britain. Frequently we hear the paternalist account of Britain's role in the slave trade, which focuses on the country's contribution to ending slavery and the navy's role in rescuing enslaved people after 1807. Britain would rather be remembered as a saviour and emancipator than a perpetrator. As a result, we hear far less about other parts of its history, such as how, in the scramble to colonise parts of Africa in the 19th century, abolitionist arguments helped to justify imperial expansion.

The solution to this collective amnesia should be honest conversations about the past and its impact on 21st-century Britain. A national dialogue that doesn't turn into a point-scoring shouting match could be the start of powerful momentum for restorative justice. The Bank of England, which has [publicly acknowledged its role in the slave trade](#) and recently hosted an exhibition about the links between slavery and the City of London, and the Church of England, which [launched an investigation](#) into its links with slavery, have already started this conversation. Such initiatives could open the door to a greater understanding of our common history.

Some may ask: why does a nation need to publicly commemorate slavery, when there are already local initiatives, such as [Black History Cymru 365](#), which commemorate and celebrate Black history all year long? The first answer is a “duty of memory”: Britain built unprecedented wealth by exploiting people of African descent as labour and commodities for 300 years and colonising parts of Asia. Parliament played a central role in that history and even paid compensation to owners of enslaved people. The least any government in its place could do would be remembering those who were enslaved, supporting the teaching of this history through curriculum change, and engaging in discussions about restorative justice.

The second answer is related to the idea of collective memory. As memory studies scholars have demonstrated, collective commemoration can be a way to [heal from traumatic pasts and bring societies together](#). In fact, Liverpool’s museums [are bringing together playwright Bonnie Greer and Laurella Rinçon](#), director general of Mémorial ACTe (MACTe), a memorial and museum dedicated to the memory of the transatlantic slave trade in Guadeloupe, for a public conversation and keynote address. In Greenwich, the National Maritime Museum [is organising a series of talks and performances](#). On this day and during Black History Month, there is a flurry of activities around the history of slavery. Now we must ensure this question does not fall into oblivion for the rest of the year.

- Olivette Otele is distinguished professor of the legacies and memory of slavery at Soas University of London

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## The French protest at soaring costs and get results - what's wrong with the UK?

[Owen Jones](#)



Polls show Britons are fed up and willing to challenge the government over the cost of living. We must rediscover our history of rebellion



‘Emmanuel Macron’s attempt to introduce a carbon tax led to a social explosion in the form of the *gilets jaunes*. Once again, the people in the streets won.’ A *gilets jaunes* protest in Paris, January 2019. Photograph: Christophe Petit-Tesson/EPA

Tue 23 Aug 2022 03.00 EDT Last modified on Tue 23 Aug 2022 12.06 EDT

When millions of Britons believe rioting is justified over the soaring cost of living, it’s not hyperbole to describe the nation as a powder keg. According to a [ComRes poll](#) commissioned by the Independent, [29% of voters](#) believe violent disorder is appropriate given the circumstances. Among 18- to 24-year-olds, nearly half think rioting is justified; and even among 35- to 44-year-olds it’s over 40%. If such a large chunk of the electorate believes that it’s justifiable to smash stuff up in protest even before the projected hike in energy prices plunges millions of households below the waterline, what fury awaits this winter?

Before I’m arrested for incitement under the Public Order Act, this is no clarion call for riots. It is to say that a democracy that is unable to satisfy the basic needs of its citizens brings mass unrest on itself. Martin Luther King aptly observed that “a riot is the language of the unheard”; how else can ordinary people force the powerful to listen? Waiting for a general election that may be two years away will not deal with the imminent humanitarian catastrophe we face.

This – entirely legitimate – rage needs to be channelled in ways that can actually force the government to satisfy popular demands, without laying waste to major British cities. That means urgently reviving the tradition of mass peaceful civil disobedience and direct action – the tactics that helped secure many of our rights and freedoms: from women’s right to vote, to the mass movement that brought down Margaret Thatcher’s poll tax. If you’re wondering why governments in other countries have offered more to tackle looming social calamities, there’s a straightforward answer. They still expect mass protest if they fail.

Recently, a seasoned political commentator remarked on findings showing that the poorest households in France were facing one of the smallest increases in cost of living in Europe. “Another one of those charts which makes you wonder why the French are always so angry with their government,” [he mused](#). But those two facts are surely linked: France’s rulers have a rational fear that their citizens will express their rage with upheaval in the streets and town squares, and this inhibits attacks on their living standards.

France is, of course, a self-consciously revolutionary society that sanctifies the sovereignty of the people. This provides legitimacy to explosions of popular unrest. The results over the decades speak for themselves. In May 1968, a [brutal police crackdown](#) on rebellious students acted as a trigger for a general strike and mass revolt. Fearing revolution, President Charles de Gaulle fled the country, and only the dissolution of the National Assembly prevented the overthrow of the government. With De Gaulle triumphing in fresh elections later that year, it is tempting to dismiss the rebellion as a failure, but France’s terrified establishment were compelled to make drastic concessions in the so-called [Grenelle agreements](#), above all accepting a massive hike in workers’ wages.

A key negotiator at Grenelle was the ambitious rising Gaullist star Jacques Chirac. Nearly three decades later, as president, he would also become the target of popular wrath after his government sought to [slash social security](#), freeze public sector wages and raise the retirement age of railway workers. While Chirac’s prime minister, Alain Juppé, was adamant that he would stand his ground, weeks of mass strikes, workplace occupations and popular protests forced the administration into a grinding retreat.

Emmanuel Macron, too, believed his triumph in the 2017 French presidential elections offered a mandate to impose regressive economic policies. His attempt to introduce a carbon tax – a policy that violated the basic principle of a “just transition”, wherein attempts to address the climate emergency should not rest on the shoulders of the poorest – led to a social explosion in the form of [the gilets jaunes](#), or yellow jackets. Once again, the people in the streets won. “No tax is worth jeopardising the unity of the nation,” Macron’s chastened prime minister, Édouard Philippe, [eventually conceded](#). Similarly, [mass protests](#) played a key role in forcing Macron to water down plans to raise the pension age.

Much attention has rightly focused on how public ownership of energy has allowed France to limit [energy bill increases to 4%](#) for most households. But any French government without a political death wish would surely prefer to invest billions in protecting living standards than drive the masses to the barricades. Put simply, France’s rulers fear their people. In Britain, as things stand, they do not.

The reasons for this are not culturally ingrained. Our own establishment prefers us to forget it, but the English had a revolution nearly a century and a half before the French, and from Chartists to suffragettes to trade unionists, rebellion is a tradition as English as queueing or afternoon tea. Our complicity in forgetting our own history – nurturing a myth that we are innately placid and will confine our unrest to angrily bellowing at our TV or mobile screens – allows our rulers to justifiably believe they can get away with almost anything.

The launch of [Enough is Enough](#) – a new mass campaign to fight the cost of living emergency – offers real hope that popular resistance is coming back to these shores. That it has been launched by trade unions – not least the union of Rail, Maritime and Transport Workers (RMT) and its leader, Mick Lynch – is particularly important. This is a movement with an unapologetically working-class leadership. Its task is straightforward: a crash course French lesson for Liz Truss’s likely government. If our rulers are terrified of their own people, drastic measures to protect living standards will follow quicker than you can say “Maximilien Robespierre”. Temperatures may plunge, bills may rise, but a hot winter could be upon us.

- Owen Jones is a Guardian columnist
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## Opinion**Democratic Republic of the Congo**

# **Justice should be colour blind. So why is it served for Ukraine but not the Congolese?**

[Vava Tampa](#)

While the west races to investigate Russia's war crimes, it continues to ignore atrocities perpetrated on DRC for 20 years



Twenty years after the supposed end of conflict in the DRC, people in Goma, on the border with Rwanda, denounce "Rwandan aggression".  
Photograph: Michel Lunanga/AFP/Getty Images

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Tue 23 Aug 2022 02.00 EDT Last modified on Tue 23 Aug 2022 02.01 EDT

The head of the World Health Authority, Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, has suggested that racism is partly to blame for the lack of international interest in the conflict in Ethiopia's Tigray state.

At the Ukraine Accountability Conference in The Hague last month, shortly after [Russian missiles](#) struck two Ukrainian community centres, killing three children and 17 adults, the international criminal court's (ICC) chief prosecutor, [Karim Khan, urged world leaders](#): “In all situations across the world where international crimes are committed, we should feel the same urgency for action and for cooperation.”

For those like me, with friends and loved ones dying amid international indifference, such words offer renewed life to that principal expectation: justice for all – not just for white people.

By the end of The Hague conference, 45 countries – including the US, UK and the EU's 27-member state – had agreed to investigate Russia's war crimes in Ukraine, with Dutch foreign minister Wopke Hoekstra calling for the creation of an [international war crime tribunal for Ukraine](#).

The last time we witnessed such enthusiasm for prosecuting international crimes was in the 1990s, after the violence in the former Yugoslavia, which then brought the ICC into being in 2002. That enthusiasm has since dissipated, in part because the ICC has only targeted “anti-western” African leaders while brutal UK- and US-backed leaders in [Africa](#) continue to kill and maim with impunity.



Dutch foreign minister, Wopke Hoekstra, calls for a Ukraine war crime tribunal at the Ukraine Accountability Conference in The Hague last month. Photograph: Piroschka van de Wouw/Reuters

Nowhere is this more evident than in the [Democratic Republic of the Congo](#) (DRC) where Paul Kagame, president of Rwanda, has been fuelling some of the world’s bloodiest and nastiest killings.

Conflict in the DRC ended in 2002 when Kagame and the Ugandan president, Yoweri Museveni, began withdrawing their troops. But the killings – and the raping, looting and displacement – have not stopped.

In 2003, at the UN general assembly, the then DRC president, Joseph Kabila, called for the creation of an [international criminal tribunal for the DRC](#) to hold perpetrators to account. The appeal, echoed by Congolese civil society groups, was ignored, with the UK, US and a host of western

governments looking the other way while giving Kagame guns and money to operate as he pleased.

The DRC asked the ICC to investigate that same year. So far it has targeted only “low hanging fruit” including Thomas Lubanga, the ICC’s first ever conviction in [March 2012](#), then Germain Katanga and Bosco Ntaganda. What then is the ICC’s purpose in Africa if it cannot investigate a president over “aiding and abetting” some of these crimes?



A Rally for Congolese Democracy soldier on patrol in 2004. Photograph: Gianluigi Guercia/AFP/Getty Images

By 2008, when UN investigators arrived in the DRC to look into crimes committed before 2002 – when the ICC has no mandate – more than [5.4 million Congolese people had died](#) in the 10 years since a rebel group called Rally for Congolese Democracy (RCD) was formed to loot the Congolese minerals that make the [mobile phone you may be reading this on](#).

In 2010, the UN published a 550-page report calling for the creation of a Congo tribunal to try 617 international allegations involving, among others, troops under President Kagame’s command in the DRC. That recommendation was ignored. Because the victims are black?

Besides, creating an international criminal tribunal for the DRC to end the impunity fuelling the ongoing violence in Congo will involve Kagame. What will that mean for the [UK's immigration policy](#), and for the Commonwealth, whose leaders have just [given Kagame responsibility for the club](#) for the next two years?

Because of this impunity, RCD, which became RCD-Goma after [Kagame and Museveni's troops fought in Kisangani](#) over diamond mines, rebranded itself as the National Congress for the Defence of the People (CNDP) in 2006. In 2008, on the day people all over the world celebrated the presidential victory of Barack Obama, CNDP troops [executed 150 civilians, including 14 children, in Kiwanja](#).

A peace deal signed on 23 March 2009 saw the CNDP become a political party. In 2011, it failed to win a single seat in the parliamentary election, so the next year, CNDP took up arms again, with Rwanda's defence minister [General James Kabarebe](#) as its leader, rebranding itself as M23.



Displaced people at the Rhoé camp in the DRC's Ituri province are among an estimated 5.6 million internally displaced Congolese. Photograph: Alexis Huguet/AFP/Getty Images

There are 5.6 million Congolese people internally displaced across the country. Another 27 million people, including 3.4 million children, are “acutely food insecure”.

A 2011 US study estimated that 48 women were raped every hour. In 2017, UN investigators discovered 80 mass graves in the diamond-rich Kasai province. In 2019, the UN unearthed another 50 mass graves in Bandundu.

Where the victims of war are white, the ICC has already opened its own probe, its chief prosecutor has visited frontlines and sent its largest-ever field deployment and an international Ukraine war crimes tribunal to put Vladimir Putin in the dock is already in the pipeline.

Why then are the US and UK refusing to back the creation of an international criminal tribunal for DRC?

- *Vava Tampa is a freelance writer, focusing on Africa's Great Lakes region, decolonisation and culture*
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## Why I quitActing

# I realised I would never be an actor – now I'm a big advocate of giving up on dreams

[Imogen West-Knights](#)

To succeed you need self-belief and drive. But life forces us to give up all the time, and being able to let things go is also a skill



‘There’s some famous advice in acting circles: if you can imagine yourself doing anything else with your life, you won’t make it as an actor.’  
Photograph: Juice Images/Alamy

Tue 23 Aug 2022 02.00 EDT Last modified on Tue 23 Aug 2022 13.05 EDT

When I was eight, I won a competition for reading out loud. The passage I chose was from *The Dare Game*, the second Tracy Beaker book. I remember standing in front of my whole school, the purple book in my hands, pigtails bobbing in my peripheral vision. When I was done and I sat down, my body

ringing with the applause, my dream was born. Clearly, I was destined for stardom on the stage.

I nursed this dream for another 14 years. I acted in school plays. I was, for my sins, a prolific sketch comedian at university. I performed in the upstairs rooms of pubs and in student theatres all over the country. I remember being backstage in Durham and wondering whether I had time to throw up from nerves in a bucket I'd spotted in the wings, still thinking: this is the life. I am sorry to say that there are, somewhere, a handful of short films that I starred in during my early 20s: kissing people and crying and, God help me, pretending to smoke a joint.

After university, I auditioned for master's programmes at all the big drama schools. I committed myself to the idea of taking out an additional student loan to do so, I worked in a pub in the evenings and practised my monologues in front of the mirror during the day. I failed to get into any of them.

Still, I was determined to pursue my dream. There's some famous advice in acting circles: if you can imagine yourself doing anything else with your life, you won't make it as an actor. I took it to heart: I had to persevere. So I did it all again the following year, and once again, I did not get in anywhere. I remember getting the last rejection email I was waiting for, standing in the musty cellar of the pub where I was working. I blushed right up to my hairline and burst into tears. The fact that a self-conscious, physically awkward, depressed girl didn't nail her drama school auditions does not come as a surprise to me now, but at the time I was blindsided. A dream is supposed to come true.

I kept going for a while. I got an agent, went to a few miserable auditions. But six months later, my self-esteem at rock bottom, I felt that I had reached a fork in the road. I could keep going, keep trying. Or I could admit to myself that this dream was over. What I ended up being more afraid of wasn't the embarrassment (in front of whom?) of not achieving what I had wanted to achieve, but sinking more and more time and emotional energy into trudging down a path that was throwing obstacles in my way at every

turn. And so, I gave up my dream. There was grief in it, but mostly I felt relieved.

I learned a phrase recently from a book called When I Grow Up by Moya Sarner. Talking about her insecurity around the fact that many of her friends were getting married or having children in their early 30s, she came to realise that this envy was “not a real kind of wanting”. Giving up on a dream can also mean discovering that a want you had was not a real kind of wanting: in other words, that the desire came from an unexamined place.

Why did I even want to be an actor? It was a question I hadn’t thought to ask myself; the dream had calcified in my bones too long ago. Childish reasons, in my case. Excitement, praise – hunger for fame, even. I know now that the life of an actor would suit me very badly. I would hate the enforced downtime, the unsociable hours, having to worry about my weight and appearance, the relentless rejection, the financial uncertainty. Some of these things are part of my life as a writer but, at the very least, when people read my work, I am somewhere else.

I’m a big advocate of giving up on dreams. Taking away a fundamental lens through which you see yourself – in my case, embarrassingly, believing I was some kind of star waiting to be born – makes you have to reconsider who you actually are. And a dream is by its nature a static, stubborn thing that is ill-suited to the ruthless way things have of changing. Life forces us to give up on dreams all the time. People die, jobs are lost, relationships end, the things that brought you joy go on to bring you sorrow. Being able to let things go is a skill that not everybody is born with, and I certainly was not. But I think it’s a good muscle to train.

There’s a fine line, obviously. To succeed in any career you need tenacity, self-belief and drive. But there is a point beyond which putting that energy in no longer serves you. Failure and its merits have been in vogue for a little while; Elizabeth Day’s hit podcast [How to Fail](#) has had hundreds of guests on it by now. I think even more important than failing, though, is the ability to start failing and say: I could continue to try this, but I could also not. And having the confidence to do the latter.

Do I miss acting? Sometimes. The adrenaline was fun. But there are better ways to get that fix. I have new dreams now. I daresay many of them will also need to be laid to rest, or will die of natural causes. And when they do, I'll grieve them, and then get on with other things.

- Imogen West-Knights is a writer and journalist based in London
  - Comments on this piece are premoderated to ensure discussion remains on topics raised by the writer. Please be aware there may be a short delay in comments appearing on the site.
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[Japan](#)

## Japan PM's popularity dives over party links to Unification church

Church has been in the spotlight since the shooting of Abe Shinzo, but Fumio Kishida insists no relationship exists between the LDP and the group



Japan's prime minister Fumio Kishida faces a popularity crisis over his party's links to the Unification church. Photograph: Eugene Hoshiko/AP

*[Justin McCurry](#) in Tokyo*

Tue 23 Aug 2022 01.53 EDT Last modified on Tue 23 Aug 2022 23.18 EDT

Japan's prime minister, Fumio Kishida, has urged senior members of his party to sever their [ties with a controversial religious group](#) after his approval ratings nosedived to their lowest level since he took office last year.

Kishida and his Liberal Democratic party (LDP) have been rocked by revelations that dozens of party members have connections to the

Unification church. Media reports say they have attended events organised by its affiliates, paid fees or received support during election campaigns.

Support for Kishida's cabinet has plummeted to 36% from 52% in mid-July, according to a poll by the Mainichi Shimbun – the lowest level since he became prime minister last October. The newspaper said 54% disapproved of the cabinet, up 17 points since last month.

In more bad news for Kishida, 87% of respondents believed the relationship between the LDP and the church were either “extremely” or “somewhat” problematic.

The church has been in the spotlight since the fatal shooting of Abe Shinzo. The suspect is said by police to have targeted the former prime minister over his links to the church, which he blamed for bankrupting his family.

Kishida, who is working from home after testing positive for Covid-19 this week, insisted that no organisational relationship existed between the LDP and the church, but said that lawmakers needed to “cut their ties with it going forward”.

He has also denied that the organisation – known for its mass weddings and ultra-conservative views, including opposition to same-sex marriage – had influenced government policy.

The chief cabinet secretary, Hirokazu Matsuno, told reporters this week: “We should pay sufficient attention to relationships with organisations that have come in for criticism in society and address people’s concerns.”

The LDP’s secretary general, Toshimitsu Motegi, suggested a new party code of conduct would demand that members end their relationship with the church, whose members are colloquially known as Moonies. “We will include not having any relationships with groups deemed problematic in society,” he said.

The church, officially called the Family Federation for World Peace and Unification, was founded in South Korea in 1954 by the self-declared

messiah, Sun Myung Moon. It has been active in [Japan](#) since it was encouraged to join the country's anti-communist movement by Abe's grandfather and postwar prime minister, Nobusuke Kishi.

Tetsuya Yamagami, who is accused of shooting Abe dead with a homemade gun during an election campaign speech in early July, has allegedly told police that his mother had [plunged the family into poverty](#) after making huge donations to the church.

Kishida attempted to quell public anger over the controversy by removing ministers with links to the church in a cabinet [reshuffle](#) earlier this month. However, at least five members of his current cabinet have ties to the organisation, including the health and internal affairs ministers, along with dozens of other senior officials.

They include Koichi Hagiuda, the LDP's new policy chief, who admitted he had visited a facility linked to the church with an LDP candidate ahead of the recent upper house elections.

A survey by the Kyodo news agency found that 106 of Japan's 712 lawmakers have had some connection with the group, with nearly 80% of them belonging to the LDP.

Critics describe the Unification church as a cult that has faced legal action over spiritual sales, in which people are talked into buying expensive jars and other items that, they are told, will relieve them of bad "ancestral karma".

The controversy has also overshadowed arrangements for a [state funeral for Abe](#) late next month, with 53% of respondents saying they opposed the service, which will be paid for with taxpayers' money.

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## Rights and freedomIran

# Arrests and TV confessions as Iran cracks down on women's 'improper' clothing

Protests follow appearance of 'tortured' writer on state television, while human rights group warn forced confessions on the rise as hijab laws hardened



Writer and artist Sepideh Rashno seen before her arrest on the left and, right, on state TV, where she made a 'confession' after she was arrested for defying a hijab order. Composite: Handout

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[Rosie Swash](#)

Tue 23 Aug 2022 01.30 EDT Last modified on Tue 23 Aug 2022 01.31 EDT

There were protests and condemnation last week after an Iranian woman who was arrested for defying newly hardened hijab laws appeared on state television to give what observers claimed was a forced confession as a result of torture.

Sepideh Rashno, 28, was arrested in July soon after footage of her being harassed on a bus over “improper clothing”, was circulated online.

Rashno, a writer and artist, is among [a number of women](#) arrested after the introduction of a national “Hijab and Chastity Day” on 12 July.

According to the [Hrana human rights group](#), she was taken to hospital with internal bleeding shortly after her arrest and before her appearance on television.

Iranian women have been required to wear the hijab in public since the 1979 Islamic Revolution, but president Ebrahim Raisi [signed an order](#) on 15 August to enforce the country’s dress code law with a new list of restrictions.

According to Hrana, which says forced confessions are on the rise in Iran, five women were arrested for not observing the dress code, and four were forced to confess, in the days before and after 12 July.

They also reported that three women were arrested for dancing in public, 33 hairdressing salons were shut down and 1,700 people were summoned to law enforcement centres for reasons related to the hijab.

After her arrest, Rashno appeared on state television on 30 July, wearing a headscarf, to give an apology. In the footage, Rashno looks pale and subdued, and has dark circles around her eyes.

“There were clear signs of physical beatings on her face,” said Skylar Thompson, of Hrana. “It is clear that in addition to the psychological torture of being coerced into confessing, she has been physically beaten.”

Rashno remains in custody, Hrana said.



Iranian women walk past a billboard about the new dress code in Tehran, on 12 July. Iranian Police have started warning women about their clothes and hairstyles in many cities in Iran. Photograph: Abedin Taherkenareh/EPA

The confessions have provoked [outrage and alarm among](#) Iranians online. This week groups of women’s rights activists gathered in Tehran, [carrying](#)

placards asking: “Where is Sepideh Rashno?”, and a video was released of Iranian women reciting a poem called The Confession.

Masih Alinejad, a journalist, activist and dissident, described the arrests as an “act of terror”. Alinejad spearheaded the White Wednesday movement, which began in 2014 and encouraged women to wear white and discard their headscarves. She was the target of a kidnap attempt in 2021 and last month a man with a rifle was arrested outside her house in New York.

Prof Ali Ansari, a specialist in Middle Eastern politics at St Andrews University, said the tightening of hijab rules was part of a “systematic wider pattern of repression” within Iran that had worsened in the year since the election of Raisi in August 2021.

Raisi, who is more hardline than his predecessor Hassan Rouhani, took office at a time of economic crisis after the reintroduction of sanctions by the US and a wave of protests against crippling inflation.

His first year in office has been marked by “a programme of Islamisation from the ground up”, which has seen a resurgence of the guidance patrol, also known as the “morality police”, and a crackdown on any perceived western influence on Iranian society.

“State security has become pretty severe across the board,” Ansari told the Guardian. “The women’s movement is presented as a threat to national security, because it represents a breakdown in social norms and western influence penetrating society.”

Tara Sepehri Far of Human Rights Watch said forced confessions were intended to intimidate people and spread fear, but in the case of Rashno it was unlikely to be effective because, “she was visibly pale. She was visibly tired. There was no effort put into trying to portray that this was a voluntary narrative.”

She pointed to the introduction of a population bill in November 2021, which restricts access to abortion and contraception in an attempt to increase

Iran's falling birthrate, as part of political process aiming "to put women back in the house.".

Thompson said that in the past year, "we've seen a surge in crackdowns against women like we have not seen for some time. It is something the international community needs to keep an eye on. These injustices are yet another consequence of the lack of accountability in Iran."

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[Hong Kong](#)

## **Hong Kong tycoon Jimmy Lai to plead not guilty in national security case**

Democracy activist and Apple Daily founder will stand trial without jury and could face up to life in prison



Jimmy Lai will face a court panel of three judges handpicked by the Hong Kong government. Photograph: Anthony Wallace/AFP/Getty

*[Helen Davidson](#) in Taipei and agencies*

Tue 23 Aug 2022 03.25 EDT Last modified on Wed 24 Aug 2022 10.23 EDT

The founder of Apple Daily, Jimmy Lai, will stand trial without a jury in [Hong Kong](#), after he told a court he would plead not guilty to national security charges.

On Monday, prosecutors told a case management hearing that Lai would challenge the accusations but six fellow executives and manager from the

[now-defunct Apple Daily](#) or its parent company, Next Digital, intended to plead guilty.

A guilty plea usually entitles defendants to a sentence reduction. If found guilty of the national security charges, Lai faces up to life in prison.

Lai, 74, a prominent media mogul and pro-democracy activist, is [serving time on protest-related offences](#). He will face a court panel of three judges handpicked by the Hong Kong government, under laws introduced by Beijing, which moved national security cases away from Hong Kong's long-established jury trial system.

The largest national security trial so far, of 47 prominent democracy activists, will also be heard without a jury, Agence France-Presse (AFP) reported last week.

A copy of the judge-only trial order for Lai, seen by AFP, cited the "involvement of foreign elements" in the case, the "personal safety of jurors and their family members" and the "risk of perverting the course of justice if the trial is conducted with a jury".

The move to judge-only trials are among numerous [concerns being raised by international legal observers](#) about changes to Hong Kong's legal system.

Lai, the six executives and three companies are accused of crimes under the national security law introduced in 2020, and anti-sedition laws that have sat on the books since Hong Kong was a British colony but have been increasingly used by current authorities.

Prosecutors say the defendants conspired to seek foreign sanctions or other hostile actions against Hong Kong and Beijing, in breach of the national security laws.

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Lai also faces separate but similar charges against him over interviews and editorials, and for allegedly helping activist [Andy Li attempt to escape Hong Kong](#). Li and 11 others were captured by Chinese authorities who intercepted their boat off the coast of Hong Kong.

Critics of the national security law – which broadly criminalises behaviour as secession, sedition, foreign collusion, or terrorism – say it has been used to crush dissent in the city and [bring it under the control of Beijing](#) decades before a 50-year promise of autonomy expired.

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## Wind power

# Wind turbine blades could be recycled into gummy bears, scientists say

Researchers design composite resin for blades that can be broken down to make new products including sweets



Two gummy bears made from the composite resin that could be used to make wind turbine blades. Photograph: Reuters/John Dorgan

*Chelsie Henshaw*

Tue 23 Aug 2022 05.11 EDT Last modified on Wed 24 Aug 2022 00.09 EDT

The next generation of wind turbine blades could be recycled into gummy bears at the end of their service, scientists have said.

Researchers at Michigan State University have made a composite resin for the blades by combining glass fibres with a plant-derived polymer and a synthetic one. Once the blades have reached the end of their lifespan the

materials can be broken down and recycled to make new products including turbine blades – and chewy sweets.

Wind power is one of the dominant forms of renewable energy. However, turbine blades, usually made of fibreglass, can be as long as half a football field and cause problems with disposal, with many discarded in landfills when they reach the end of their use cycle.

To combat the waste, researchers designed a new form of resin. Digesting the resin in an alkaline solution produced potassium lactate, which can be purified and made into sweets and sports drinks.

“We recovered food-grade potassium lactate and used it to make gummy bear candies, which I ate,” said John Dorgan, one of the authors of the paper.

The alkaline digestion also released poly(methyl methacrylate), or PMMA, a common acrylic material used in windows and car taillights.

On eating gummy bears that are derived from a wind turbine, Dorgan says “a carbon atom derived from a plant, like corn or grass, is no different from a carbon atom that came from a fossil fuel. It’s all part of the global carbon cycle, and we’ve shown that we can go from biomass in the field to durable plastic materials and back to foodstuffs.”

He added: “The beauty of our resin system is that at the end of its use cycle, we can dissolve it, and that releases it from whatever matrix it’s in so that it can be used over and over again in an infinite loop. That’s the goal of the circular economy.”

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Researchers will present their results on Tuesday at a meeting of the American Chemical Society. They plan to make some blades for field testing.

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## [Malaysia](#)

# Malaysia's ex-PM Najib sent to prison as final 1MDB appeal lost

Federal court upholds conviction and 12-year sentence linked to fraud, saying appeal 'devoid of any merits'



Najib Razak greets supporters on Wednesday as he walks out during a break in the trial. Photograph: Arif Kartono/AFP/Getty Images

*[Rebecca Ratcliffe](#) in Bangkok and agencies*

Tue 23 Aug 2022 08.58 EDTFirst published on Tue 23 Aug 2022 05.21 EDT

Malaysia's former prime minister [Najib Razak](#) has been ordered to begin a 12-year prison sentence after he lost his final appeal against a conviction linked to the multibillion-dollar 1MDB scandal, one of the world's biggest financial frauds.

A five-member federal court panel said it unanimously found that Najib's appeal was "devoid of any merits", seemingly sealing the stunning downfall of the 69-year-old, who has become Malaysia's first former PM to be jailed.

Najib, who reportedly appeared shocked as the verdict was read in court, was later photographed being driven away in a black car. His daughter-in-law Nur Sharmila Shaheen told AFP the family had been informed that he was sent to Kajang prison, south of the capital, Kuala Lumpur.

James Chin, professor of Asian Studies University of Tasmania, said the verdict marked a victory for the Malaysian public and the judiciary. "Prior to this, a lot of people in Malaysia will tell you that when it comes to political cases, you can never be sure which way the wind blows in the courts. Now it is quite clear that the courts are quite impartial," he said.

The court had shown it was "even willing to break the ultimate taboo in south-east Asia" by convicting a powerful political heavyweight.

Najib had denied any wrongdoing in relation to the scandal that engulfed [1MDB](#), or 1Malaysia Development Berhad, a state fund set up to promote development. Billions of dollars were estimated to have been siphoned from the fund.

The scandal brought down Najib's government and prompted investigations around the world, including in Singapore, Switzerland and the US.

In July 2020, [Najib was found guilty](#) of breach of trust, abuse of power, and money laundering for illegally receiving about \$10m £8.5m from SRC International, a former unit of state fund 1MDB. Najib, who had pleaded not guilty, was given a 12-year sentence and a 210m ringgit (£40m) fine.

Chief justice Maimun Tuan Mat, who upheld the verdict on Tuesday, said the defence was "so inherently inconsistent and incredible that it does not raise a reasonable doubt on the prosecution case".

During his appeal, which began last week, Najib alleged that his right to a fair trial had been undermined. On Tuesday, he sought to remove the chief

justice, Maimun Tuan Mat, from the case, stating that her husband had previously criticised him on social media and that this could lead to bias.

In his affidavit read out in court by his lawyer, Najib said comments made by Maimun's husband were "highly disturbing" as they may have influenced her opinion of the case.

The court's findings may be seen as "tainted with bias, and the public perception of the independence of the judiciary will be in doubt", Najib said in his application.

Najib, who replaced his legal team only weeks before his appeal began, also claimed his right to a fair trial was at risk because the court had refused his requests to postpone hearings to allow his new representatives time to prepare.

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The court also rejected his attempt to introduce new evidence that could have prompted a retrial on allegations of bias by the high court judge who sentenced him in 2020.

Najib faces five separate trials related to 1MDB. His wife, Rosmah Mansor, is also on trial on corruption charges.

Investigators have said about \$4.5bn was stolen from 1MDB, and that more than \$1bn went to accounts linked to Najib. US lawsuits allege stolen money was used by various recipients, including the fugitive businessman Jho Low,

to fund lavish shopping sprees, buy real estate, a Picasso painting, a private jet, a superyacht, hotels and jewellery.

Had the court overturned the previous verdict, Najib, who remains popular within his Umno party, would have pushed to again become prime minister, said Chin. A conviction prevents him from standing, however, meaning his political career is, in the short term at least, over.

However, Chin added a loophole that may provide a path back to politics: “If you get a [royal] pardon, it means that your slate will be wiped clean”.

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