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2022.10.24 - 2022.10.30

- [Headlines friday 28 october 2022](#)
- [2022.10.28 - Spotlight](#)
- [2022.10.28 - Opinion](#)
- [2022.10.28 - Around the world](#)
- [Headlines saturday 29 october 2022](#)
- [2022.10.29 - Spotlight](#)
- [2022.10.29 - Opinion](#)
- [2022.10.29 - Around the world](#)
- [Headlines](#)
- [2022.10.25 - Spotlight](#)
- [2022.10.25 - Opinion](#)
- [2022.10.25 - Around the world](#)
- [Headlines thursday 27 october 2022](#)
- [2022.10.27 - Spotlight](#)
- [2022.10.27 - Opinion](#)
- [2022.10.27 - Around the world](#)
- [Headlines](#)
- [2022.10.24 - Spotlight](#)
- [2022.10.24 - Opinion](#)
- [2022.10.24 - Around the world](#)

## Headlines friday 28 october 2022

- [Live Elon Musk reportedly plans to become Twitter's interim chief executive after buying platform](#)
- [Twitter Elon Musk completes takeover and 'fires top executives'](#)
- [Analysis Twitter braces for Trump's return as Musk takes over platform](#)
- ['To help humanity' Musk explains his Twitter acquisition](#)

**Business liveBusiness**

# Twitter shares taken off stock exchange after Elon Musk seals \$44bn takeover – business as it happened

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[Twitter](#)

## Elon Musk completes Twitter takeover and ‘fires top executives’

The \$44bn deal will give world’s richest man control of social media platform with more than 230m users



Elon Musk was previously determined to walk away from Twitter deal before surprise U-turn. Photograph: Anadolu Agency/Getty Images

*[Kari Paul](#) in San Francisco and [Dan Milmo](#) Global technology editor*

Fri 28 Oct 2022 04.40 EDTFirst published on Thu 27 Oct 2022 21.03 EDT

Elon Musk has completed his \$44bn takeover of Twitter, taking control of the company and reportedly firing several top executives, including the chief executive, Parag Agrawal.

The world’s richest man tweeted “the bird is freed”, in a reference to Twitter’s corporate logo, just hours before [a court-ordered deadline](#) to buy the business expired.

the bird is freed

— Elon Musk (@elonmusk) [October 28, 2022](#)

Shortly after taking the helm of [Twitter](#), Musk reportedly ousted several senior figures, including Agrawal; Ned Segal, the chief financial officer; and Vijaya Gadde, the head of legal policy, trust and safety.

Agrawal and Segal were in Twitter's San Francisco headquarters when the deal closed and were escorted out, Reuters reported.

Twitter confirmed the deal on Friday in a filing to the US financial regulator, disclosing the deal had closed on Thursday. Shares in the company have been suspended and will delist on 8 November, capping a chaotic saga that began when the billionaire first announced his plans to buy the company in April.

The firings followed news last week that Musk planned to eliminate nearly 75% of Twitter's staff in an effort to pay down a debt burden that will have grown substantially since the acquisition, which is part-funded by borrowings of \$13bn. Musk later dismissed those reports, telling [employees](#) he would not cut such a large portion of the staff.

A sense of confusion hung over the deal on Thursday night, however, with neither Twitter nor Musk immediately confirming the firings. Musk, who had earlier changed his Twitter bio to "Chief Twit", did not mention the dismissals after the news broke.

Twitter now enters a new chapter, with questions hanging over what Musk plans to do with [a platform](#) that plays an outsized role in the political and media landscape due to its following among journalists, commentators, celebrities and politicians.

Musk [visited](#) the company's San Francisco headquarters on Wednesday, carrying a sink and meeting staff. He has said he [is buying](#) the company "to try to help humanity".

“The reason I acquired Twitter is because it is important to the future of civilization to have a common digital town square, where a wide range of beliefs can be debated in a healthy manner, without resorting to violence,” he said in a tweet earlier on Thursday.

The purchase will give the world’s richest man control of an influential social media platform with more than 230m users.

Musk walked away from a deal to buy the company in July, beginning a months-long standoff that was scheduled to go to court before Musk [made a dramatic U-turn](#) and offered to buy the company after all.

Musk became embroiled in a row with the company over the number of spam accounts on its platform, leading him to announce in July that he was [walking away](#) from the transaction.

Twitter then [sued Musk in Delaware](#), where the company is incorporated, to demand that he close the deal. After a surprise [change of mind by Musk](#) as a court date approached, a Delaware judge then gave both sides [until 5pm on 28 October](#) to close the deal.

Throughout the back and forth, Musk regularly clashed with senior figures at Twitter, including Agrawal and Gadde.

Musk is expected to speak to Twitter employees directly on Friday, according to an internal memo cited in several media outlets. Despite internal confusion and low morale tied to fears of redundancies or a dismantling of the company’s culture and operations, Twitter leaders this week have at least outwardly welcomed Musk’s arrival and messaging.

Sarah Personette, the company’s chief customer officer, said she had a “great discussion” with Musk on Wednesday and appeared to endorse his Thursday message to advertisers.

“Our continued commitment to brand safety for advertisers remains unchanged,” Personette tweeted on Thursday. “Looking forward to the future!”

Musk has already signaled that he will reverse a permanent ban on the former US president Donald Trump, reflecting his stance as a self-confessed “free speech absolutist”. Civil rights groups have repeatedly sounded the alarm over the takeover, stating that loosening the content moderation rules could lead to disaster, especially as midterm elections approach in the US.

“Elon Musk’s plans for Twitter will make it an even more hate-filled cesspool, leading to irreparable real-world harm,” said the Stop the Deal Coalition, a collective of nonprofit organisations opposed to the purchase. “Musk’s plans will leave the platform more vulnerable to security threats, rampant disinformation and extremism just ahead of the midterm elections.”

*The Associated Press contributed reporting*

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

[Twitter](#)

[Analysis](#)

## Twitter braces for Donald Trump's return as Elon Musk takes over platform

[Kari Paul](#) and [Alex Hern](#)

Civil rights advocates fear proposed rule changes will turn site into 'a supercharged engine of radicalisation'

- [Musk completes Twitter takeover and 'fires top executives'](#)
- [Business updates: Musk reportedly plans to be Twitter interim CEO](#)



Musk has said that as Twitter's owner he would lift the ban on Donald Trump, contending that kicking the ex-US president off the site 'alienated a large part of the country'. Photograph: Olivier Douliery/AFP/Getty Images

Fri 28 Oct 2022 05.45 EDT Last modified on Fri 28 Oct 2022 16.36 EDT

Hate speech and misinformation experts are bracing for the return of [Donald Trump](#) to the platform, as Elon Musk completes his acquisition of Twitter.

The social media site permanently [removed Trump](#) in January 2021, saying the former president's tweets were "highly likely to encourage and inspire people to replicate the criminal acts that took place at the US Capitol on 6 January 2021".

However, earlier this year Musk said he would [reverse that ban](#), calling Twitter "left-biased", and on Thursday he reportedly sacked the executive responsible.

"I do think it was not correct to ban Donald Trump," the Tesla chief executive told a Financial Times conference in May. "I think that was a mistake. It alienated the country and did not result in Donald Trump not having a voice. I think it was a morally bad decision and foolish in the extreme."

Within hours of taking charge of [Twitter](#), and before the completed acquisition was even formally confirmed, Musk sacked Vijaya Gadde, the head of legal and policy, alongside Twitter's chief executive officer, chief financial officer and general counsel.

Gadde, who joined the company in 2011 as general counsel, had risen to become the most powerful woman at the site, with a remit that covered moderation, public policy and legal affairs. As such, she is the staff member most identified with the suspension of Trump, and her exit created questions around Musk's future plans.

Musk however said in a tweet on Friday the platform would be forming "a content moderation council with widely diverse viewpoints" to address such issues. "No major content decisions or account reinstatements will happen before that council convenes," he wrote.

Trump himself has been ambivalent. In [a post](#) on his personal "Truth Social" website, in which he falsely claimed that it had "bigger numbers than all other platforms", he said he preferred his own site, but that he was "very

happy that Twitter is now in sane hands, and will no longer be run by Radical Left Lunatics and Maniacs that truly hate our country”.

Civil rights advocates warn that the billionaire’s proposed changes, which [are thus far vague](#) but focus on moderating content less closely, in the name of “freedom of speech”, [risk making the platform](#) “a supercharged engine of radicalisation”. Allowing Trump to return in particular could have a huge impact on content.

In his time on the platform, the former president amassed more than 88 million followers. He shared [strange and crude missives](#) as well as troubling [apparent calls for violence against media](#), [market-moving tweets](#) about companies, and [threats of nuclear war](#). Allowing him to return would amplify his reach at a time when social media firms are [already struggling](#) to tamp down election misinformation, experts say.

“Musk made it clear that he would roll back Twitter’s community standards and safety guidelines, reinstate Donald Trump along with scores of other accounts suspended for violence and abuse, and open the floodgates of disinformation,” said Angelo Carusone, the president of the advocacy group Media Matters for America.

Media Matters and a coalition of 26 other human rights groups have published a letter asking Twitter advertisers to boycott the platform if Musk’s acquisition leads to more lax policies on hate speech and misinformation, warning that the takeover “will further toxify our information ecosystem and be a direct threat to public safety”.

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In the hours leading up the completion of the deal, Musk tried to contact advertisers and reassure them that his desire to promote free speech would not result in the company becoming a “free-for-all hellscape, where anything can be said with no consequences”.

He added: “In addition to adhering to the laws of the land, our platform must be warm and welcoming to all, where you can choose your desired experience according to your preferences, just as you can choose, for example, to see movies or play video games ranging from all ages to mature.”

A withdrawal of advertisers could have a big impact on the platform, as they currently provide 90% of its revenue. Companies have already hinted at moving their advertising dollars elsewhere if Musk changes the platform’s safety and misinformation policies. That threat comes as ad spending is down across the social media industry because of inflation and other outside factors.

Allowing Trump back on Twitter could also create an exodus of users, leading to further revenue loss for the company. Musk has expressed a desire to move away from advertising-based revenue on Twitter, preferring a subscription business model, which some have called “a risky bet”.

Twitter was the only social media company to permanently ban Trump after the 2021 Capitol riot, as Facebook and YouTube only did so on a temporary but indefinite basis. Nick Clegg, Meta’s president of global affairs, said he is charged with the final decision on Trump’s reinstatement to Facebook and will make a ruling by 7 January 2023. YouTube has not put forward a timeline on Trump’s ban but said it will be lifted “when risk of violence decreases”.

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

## Elon Musk

# Elon Musk claims he has acquired Twitter ‘to help humanity’

Tweet comes as advertisers fear one of his first moves as chief will be to restore Donald Trump’s account



Despite Elon Musk’s use of the past tense in the tweet, he did not legally own Twitter when it was posted. Photograph: Odd Andersen/AFP/Getty Images

*Alex Hern* UK technology editor  
[@alexhern](#)

Thu 27 Oct 2022 11.46 EDTFirst published on Thu 27 Oct 2022 10.44 EDT

Elon Musk has claimed he has “acquired Twitter” in a post to the social network reassuring advertisers it will stay a safe place for their brands, amid fears one of his first actions as chief executive will be to restore Donald Trump’s account.

After months of uncertainty over whether or not his \$44bn acquisition of the social media platform would go through, the Tesla chief executive's post is the strongest acknowledgment yet that the deal is expected to be sealed before its deadline of 5pm in Delaware on Friday.

Musk wrote in a statement attached to the tweet: "The reason I acquired Twitter is because it is important to the future of civilisation to have a common digital town square, where a wide range of beliefs can be debated in a healthy manner, without resorting to violence."

He added: "That is why I bought Twitter. I didn't do it because it would be easy. I didn't do it to make more money. I did it to try to help humanity, whom I love."

Despite his use of the past tense, he did not legally own Twitter at the time of the post and the company continued to trade on the New York stock exchange. The final paperwork is expected to be completed on Friday afternoon.

He published the tweet a day after visiting the company's headquarters in San Francisco and posting a video of himself entering the building while carrying a sink, with the caption: "Entering Twitter HQ – let that sink in!" On Wednesday, Musk also changed his Twitter handle to "Chief Twit".

Entering Twitter HQ – let that sink in! [pic.twitter.com/D68z4K2wq7](https://pic.twitter.com/D68z4K2wq7)

— Elon Musk (@elonmusk) [October 26, 2022](#)

In a sign of market confidence that the purchase will now go ahead, the platform's shares rose by 1% on Thursday to \$53.90, close to the \$54.20 a unit agreed price.

However, Musk's note also underscores the long-term fallout of his aggressive negotiations, which have seen him denigrate Twitter's published user figures and promise an almost moderation-free experience after the purchase.

Despite Musk being the world's richest man, Twitter's revenue will have to stay high even as a private company: the loans he has taken out to buy it will lead to an interest bill of about \$1bn a year, which he will need to pay out of the platform's profits.

Musk said in his tweet: "There is currently great danger that social media will splinter into far right wing and far left wing echo chambers that generate more hate and divide our society ... That said, Twitter obviously cannot become a free-for-all hellscape, where anything can be said with no consequences!"

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"In addition to adhering to the laws of the land, our platform must be warm and welcoming to all, where you can choose your desired experience according to your preferences, just as you can choose, for example, to see movies or play video games ranging from all ages to mature."

He added: "Fundamentally, Twitter aspires to be the most respected advertising platform in the world that strengthens your brand and grows your enterprise. To everyone who has partnered with us, I thank you. Let us build something extraordinary together."

Although Musk did not acknowledge it, the message was apparently prompted by [an earlier report in the Wall Street Journal](#) suggesting advertisers considered the return of Trump to the site a "red line". A dozen clients of one agency had issued orders to pause all adverts on Twitter if the former US president's account was reinstated, the paper reported.

In a now deleted tweet sent in April, just after his first offer to buy Twitter, Musk wrote that his plans for the platform included “no ads”. He wrote: “The power of corporations to dictate policy is greatly enhanced if Twitter depends on advertising money to survive.”

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

## 2022.10.28 - Spotlight

- 'People had to urinate in Pringles pots' Passengers on Avanti travel trauma
- 'I think about death 35 times a day' Bill Nighy on sex, social media – and still being able to manage the stairs
- Race Uncovering Britain's record of bussing ethnic minority children
- You be the judge Should my partner get rid of our lockdown wormery?

## Rail industry

# ‘People had to urinate in Pringles pots’: passengers on Avanti travel trauma

Rail users have plenty of horror stories about their experiences and the train operator is on a deadline to fix its problems

- [Metro mayors: ‘Rail failings causing serious damage to north’](#)



An ‘emergency incident’ between Watford Junction and Milton Keynes Central left crowds of people stranded at London Euston who were trying to return home after jubilee celebrations. Photograph: Joao Souza/PA

[Mabel Banfield-Nwachi and Gwyn Topham](#)

Fri 28 Oct 2022 04.47 EDTFirst published on Fri 28 Oct 2022 02.00 EDT

It would take a lot to make Arran Kent ditch the train to drive across the country for gigs. The musician, 32, has persisted with Avanti West Coast, even when unable to book a ticket, and even on the day of a staff strike. He

paid top whack to go from Preston to London last Saturday, almost missing his performance because the train arrived two hours late.

If that was averagely bad, the return home on Sunday was, he says, “like an apocalyptic film”.

“I couldn’t believe what was going on,” Kent recalls. “There were pregnant ladies lying on the floor in the corridors to try and be near the breeze because they were overheating. You couldn’t get into the toilets. Some men were having to urinate in empty Pringles pots.”

A direct 190-mile, three-hour journey from the capital turned into an 11-hour epic requiring three Avanti trains. Problems with the power lines left him and 450 other passengers trapped inside for four hours, without food, water or air conditioning, just past Milton Keynes.

They were eventually disembarked via a bridge on to another crowded train running back down to the line, taking him to the previous station. To complete his misery, the service he caught home left on time but arrived in Preston an hour and a half late at 10pm.



Arran Kent stuck on a hot Avanti train without power on Sunday 23 October.  
Photograph: Arran Kent

Not all recent Avanti travel trauma has been the operator's own fault. Although its train managers were on strike on Saturday, it could not control further mayhem caused by Network Rail engineering work and signalling failure. On Sunday, overhead power lines came down in bad weather, while on Monday attempts to restore services came up against broken-down freight trains on the mainline, leading to more cancellations and delay.

Nevertheless, passengers have lost their confidence in the intercity operator, a joint venture between the UK's FirstGroup and Italy's Trenitalia, after a sharp decline in its service this summer that has commuters, businesses and civic leaders along Britain's major rail artery, from the capital to Birmingham, Liverpool, Manchester and Glasgow, in despair.

Like many firms, Avanti relied on overtime, or rest day working, by drivers and crew to run its full timetable, until industrial relations and staff morale started dipping fast. Suddenly few staff wanted to volunteer, and more were reporting sick, leaving many trains cancelled at short notice and passengers unable to book advance tickets.

The disruption has hit some particularly hard. There are only two standard spaces for disabled passengers on Avanti trains; and limited advance tickets and overcrowding owing to reduced services have made travelling for disabled people virtually impossible, says Jas Taylor, 23.

"People think it's acceptable to sit on my wheelchair, or lean against me, finding any space between the wheels or pressing against my back to slide in or store their cases," they say. "It's a consistent experience for me when I travel now. It has made me very scared and upset to take the train."

## [Map](#)

Businesses too are adapting their operations because of the unpredictability of Avanti's services.

Mercè and Steven Cozens, principal consultants at Knutsford-based management consultancy Think Beyond, used to travel on Avanti to meet

clients in London. Since recent disruption they have resorted to waking up at three in the morning to drive five hours to see customers in the south-east.

They say it is now quicker, and cheaper, to reach clients in Europe than to travel by train to London on Avanti.

“We could go to some of our European customers twice and stay overnight versus the cost of the train to London Euston,” Steven Cozens says. “We’re almost back to a pandemic type situation with clients in the south. We’ve had to move most of our meetings to video.”

Until recently, Ian O’Donnell, director of Real Point design and marketing agency, would get on a 7.30am from Coventry three days a week, to arrive in Euston with time to spare before his 9am meeting. After delivering an afternoon seminar in London, he was still able to make it home in time to have dinner with his family in the Midlands. “It was efficient and worked well,” he says.

However, in the last few months, O’Donnell has encountered so many delays, cancellations and “absolutely rammed” journeys that he has stopped using Avanti West Coast trains altogether. “It has become just too unreliable.”



Business owner Ian O'Donnell has given up with Avanti. Photograph: John Robertson/The Guardian

Avanti's timetables were pared back during Covid as travel dropped away. But as passenger numbers returned to about 75% of pre-pandemic levels this year, Avanti proved unable to meet rising demand. Punctuality and reliability declined through spring, and by summer 2022 it was already the worst performing train company, according to Office of Rail and Road data, with only 77% of trains arriving on time.

Andy Street, mayor of the West Midlands, says insufficient attention to rail services plus industrial action have made travelling between some parts of the Midlands more expensive and "desperately inconvenient" for passengers.

There are alternative routes from Birmingham to London with other operators such as Chiltern and London Northwestern, but in places like Coventry that rely on Avanti, it's a more significant problem, Street says. "If it were to persist, it might be difficult to do business between London and the Midlands ... It makes those practical arrangements a lot less possible," he said.

At the start of August the company announced [it could no longer run its schedules](#), and cut back to just one train an hour on key intercity routes, blaming "unofficial strike action", [which unions denied](#). Adding to outrage, Avanti's contract meant it was not penalised significantly for failing to run promised services; lost revenue is the government's problem.

### [Cancellations](#)

Meanwhile, further rail strikes are coming next month – this time across the industry, after last Saturday's walkout by Avanti's train managers, who have been "completely neglected", according to the RMT union.

On a visit to Manchester Piccadilly, some passengers express sympathy, despite having been inconvenienced by poor services and strikes. Waiting on a platform, lecturer David Swanson says: "The responsibility lies with the bosses of the rail industry. I'm in full solidarity with the rail workers."

Last weekend aside, according to Avanti, things are improving. In September, [its managing director was axed](#) and the firm drew up a recovery plan – promising to restore the bulk of the pre-Covid timetable by Christmas, with about 100 newly recruited and trained drivers now on board. Avanti's contract [was extended for another six months earlier this month](#), with a warning from ministers that it was on trial to deliver.

That needs to happen soon. Steve Rotheram, metro mayor of the Liverpool City region, says poor transport connectivity is costing the northern economy billions of pounds – with TransPennine Express, another FirstGroup operator, now starting to rival Avanti for cancellations and disruption. “Wherever you go in the north, the story is the same: urgent appointments missed, late arrival at work and school, cut off from vital public services, isolated from friends and families – and some put in dangerous situations.”

A spokesperson for Avanti apologised but said the incidents at the weekend were “caused by matters beyond our control”.

Trains' backup battery power typically lasts about 90 minutes, and in longer delays other facilities are switched off to maintain power to essential lighting and toilets, he said, adding: “We are sorry for the inconvenience our customers faced and would like to thank them for their patience and understanding. We encourage anyone whose journey has been affected to claim delay repay compensation.”

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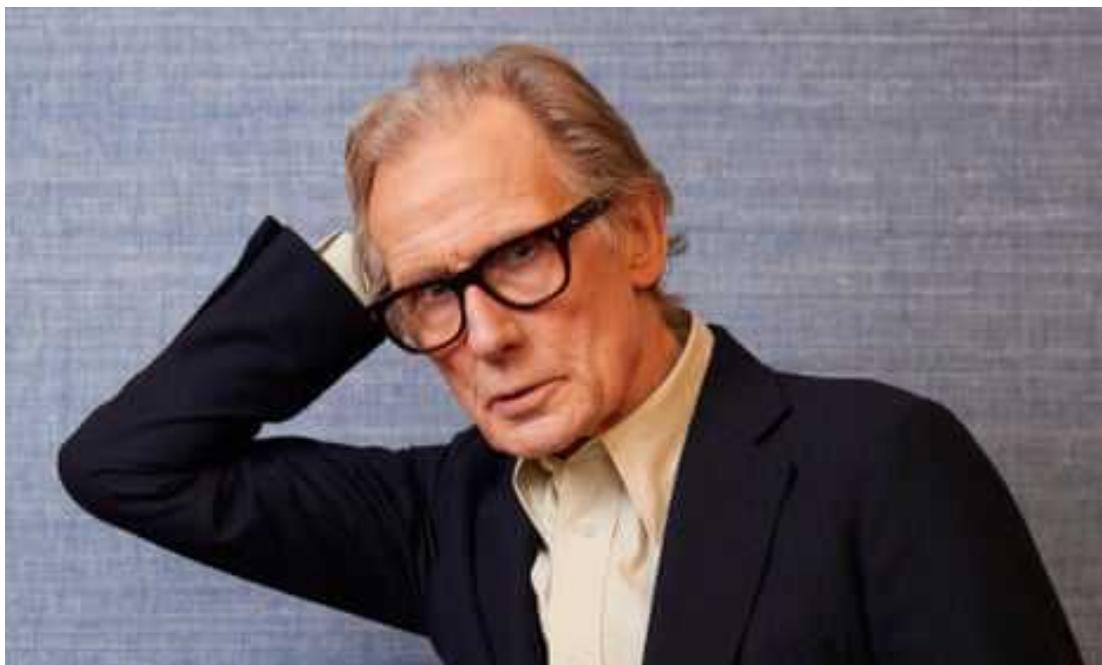
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[Bill Nighy](#)

[Interview](#)

## **‘I think about death 35 times a day’: Bill Nighy on sex, social media – and still being able to manage the stairs**

[Catherine Shoard](#)



‘I’m working on less contact, not more’ ... Bill Nighy Photograph: Tristan Fewings/Getty Images for IMDb

In his new film, *Living*, Nighy plays a civil servant who has six months to live – a part tailor-made for him by Kazuo Ishiguro. He talks about the power of nostalgia, keeping it minimal and his close brush with Instagram



[@catherineshoard](#)

Fri 28 Oct 2022 01.00 EDT Last modified on Fri 28 Oct 2022 16.53 EDT

So far, [Bill Nighy](#) has been offered a seat on the tube on 10 separate occasions. “Not that I’m counting. But obviously I am.” He snorts. “The worst thing is everyone in the carriage turns to look and see what you say.”

Always a polite decline. “Last week, I was carrying my gym bag and I felt like saying: ‘You know, I’ve just been doing quite vigorous things. And I can actually remain upright for quite long periods of time.’”

He snorts again: the signature Nighy sound, unmistakable as a chiffchaff. It’s the same with stairs, he sighs; he’s forever being steered towards the lift. “The first couple of times, I couldn’t understand it. ‘Are the stairs ... unsafe? Oh! Stairs! Am I OK with the stairs? Yeah, stairs are OK. I’m not bad on the stairs, y’know.’”

Does Nighy look in urgent need of a sit-down? Or are people just really keen to offer? Here, after all, is one of the world's few actual rock star actors. "He has a brand," says his latest director, [Oliver Hermanus](#). "A singular type of British cool."

His hangdog sex-god languor remains immaculate, regardless of the squid (*Pirates of the Caribbean*) or ninny (*Emma*), naff has-been (*Love, Actually*) or withered civil servant (his new one, *Living*) he's currently playing.

Spend any time in Pimlico and you're all but guaranteed a sighting. Navy Dunhill suit, Cutler and Gross specs, suave and obliging for the selfies. His appeal was never predicated on plump youth. And, at 72, he's still whippet-thin: vigorous things, plus a strict regime of restaurant-only dining and a bare fridge.

How did he cope in lockdown? Ah, he smiles. He rented an Airbnb in the Suffolk countryside near his family (ex [Diana Quick](#), their daughter, Mary, her two children) and the woman who ran it asked if he'd like her to cook for him. "I said: 'I would *love* you to cook for me ...'"

Occasionally I'll catch a glimpse of myself. And you go: 'Jesus, God almighty. Wow'

Small wonder he assumes people leap to their feet at the sight of him because he looks so decrepit. He recently had his cataracts done. "When you remove the bandages, then you *see* how old you are. I thought: 'Oh! *That's* why people behave so weirdly around me.' Because I had been living behind, y'know, quite a serious film."

Again, mostly his own neuroses. He's long been allergic to his face. No looking at photos, or films, or interviews. "I gave it up because – as a practical thing – I have to go to work. I can't have all that rolling around in my head. So I don't keep track. But then occasionally I'll catch a glimpse of myself. And you go: 'Jesus, God almighty. Wow.'"



Nighy as Mr Woodhouse in Emma. Photograph: Focus Features/AP

He keels gently in his chair. We're in Soho and Nighy has water with ice and a fat wedge of lime. He hasn't drunk alcohol since 17 May 1992 – that hard-living history fuels the louche vibes – and, perhaps to compensate, always seems to style up the mundane.

Shooting *The Best Exotic Marigold Hotel* in India in 2015, he took his own Yorkshire teabags and decanted Marmite into 30 tiny tubs to evade airport security. Behaviour that might seem mad from anyone else, but is transformed by Nighy into the height of aestheticism.

Shooting their new film in Mayfair last year, says co-star Aimee Lou Wood, he "somehow managed to source a table, chairs and beautiful Italian dinner for us seemingly out of nowhere. There was even a bit of table decoration. We sat eating arrabbiata in the middle of a busy London street while people walked past and waved."



Bill Nighy in *Living*. Photograph: Ross Ferguson/Number 9 Films

That film is [Living](#), tailor-made for Nighy by its scriptwriter [Kazuo Ishiguro](#), who asked if he might like to star in a remake of [Kurosawa's Ikiru](#). He would; it's now his first proper shot at an Oscar. Nighy plays Mr Williams, a widower who oversees an office of paper-shufflers in post-war County Hall. A doctor tells him he has stomach cancer and six months to live. So he starts trying to do so, helped by a boozy playwright ([Tom Burke](#)) met on a botched suicide trip to the seaside, as well as Wood's waitress and a sunny civil servant played by [Alex Sharp](#).

What drew Ishiguro to Nighy, the former emails, was “his ability to arouse, seemingly at will, not only an audience’s emotions, but also its affection”. That makes Nighy “unique among his generation”; only Cary Grant and James Stewart are apt comparisons.

For Nighy, the character presented an irresistible challenge: how little can you get away with? Every movement is muted. He speaks in a desiccated whisper.

“I kept waiting for the soundman to come over and say: ‘Bill, I can’t hear a word.’” The Japanese and British share “a very elaborate code of conduct, performing their manners. And a kind of taboo on any public expression of

deep emotion – or any emotion at all. I love doing that because I find it very moving. I find it also quite funny that there's virtually nothing you can say or do. It's sort of bonkers, obviously.”



Nighy in Living. Photograph: Ross Ferguson/Number 9 Films

Nighy was born in 1949, four years before the film is set. His first memory was getting a Coronation mug at a fete. “That black-and-white footage of kids playing in shorts,” says Nighy. “I was one of those kids.”

Living, he thinks, might be one of those movies that “refer to other movies as much as to real life. When you hear people talking about the 60s, I was there but I don’t recognise anything they say. Because only selected comment persists into the modern world. The way it actually was is entirely different.

“Conspicuously, today, there are other ways of behaving which are the opposite of restraint. But maybe not everybody in 1953 was as restrained as Mr Williams.”

Living is as far up Nighy’s alley as you can get without hitting the next street. He’s an old pro at bureaucrats [awakened by girls in cafes](#). There’s also rain, cigarettes, Westminster, fabulous tailoring (Nighy has always

avoided Shakespeare on account of the trousers) and lots about the transformative power of a trilby.

It's the easiest way to manipulate people: invent a bogus past and a future which is frightening because there are people of different ethnic origins.

It's the period in time to which he's most drawn. Everyone hankers after an age about 60 or 70 years before, he once read. "Sixteenth century monks would complain that the modern world was going to pieces and that 70 years ago it was all fine. It's how politicians can manipulate people by saying it used to be great. No, it didn't. It was actually much worse. But there's a sort of reflective nostalgia."

Sometimes, that's harnessed for the bad. At the moment, he thinks, "there's a wave of reactionary thought, people trying to drag us backwards in time purely for self-advancement. It's the easiest way to manipulate people: invent a past for which you can have bogus nostalgia and a future which is frightening and scary, largely because there are people of different ethnic origins. They've been doing it since I was a kid. The difference is, it's digitised now."

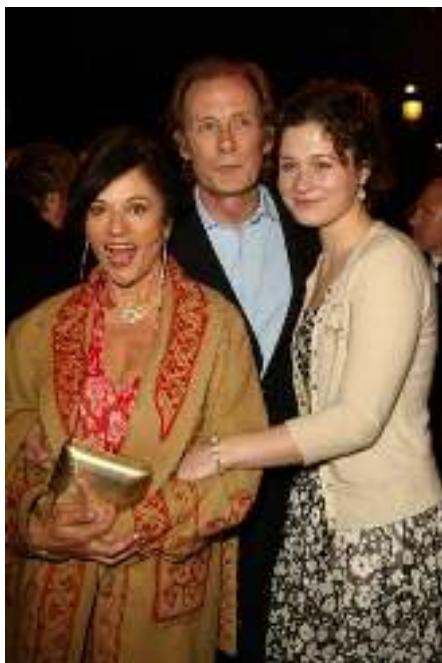


With Oliver Hermanus and Aimee Lou Wood promoting Living in Toronto, September 2022. Photograph: Jeff Vespa/REX/Shutterstock

Anyway, back to the Blitz: Nighy knows it was horrendous but still hankers after it. “I think it’s to do with romance and sex. It unified people. They put aside any enthusiasm for division because they had bigger fish to fry.”

In fact, that fellow-feeling faded fast – though still a bit slower than it did after the early days of Covid. “How many times did you hear people say: ‘I hope we can hang on to some of this? Isn’t it great to hear the birdsong? To be in a clean environment? I hope people won’t just withdraw from one another again.’ And of course we’ve just pretty much gone back to normal.”

Nighy was raised in Caterham, halfway between Croydon and Crawley, by his mother, Catherine, a psychiatric nurse, and father, Alfred, a garage owner with natty sports jackets. The war was their big topic of conversation. “You were supposed to slip back into your life having seen dreadful, terrible things and been through an enormous amount of trauma.”



At the Paris premiere of Love, Actually in 2003, with Diana Quick and Mary Nighy. Photograph: Toni Anne Barson Archive/WireImage

Alfred died of a heart attack when Bill was 25. The two men looked sufficiently similar that Catherine (who died in 2003) would go very quiet

watching her son on screen. Some of Nighy's stylings – social as well as sartorial – are emulation. "I did think about my dad making Living, because he was not unlike Mr Williams. He was a very nice person."

Williams becomes galvanised by a modest project to construct a children's playground on a bomb site: an 11th-hour attempt to be one of the kids getting stuck in on the swings, he says, not waiting for their mother on the sidelines.

Nighy was a fan of slides as a child, he says, "quite happy running and playing football. When I reached puberty it got complicated. I made a meal of it. I took it rather hard." He overheard his mother saying he was shy. "Shy is a word I have difficulty with because I think there's an enormous amount of vanity involved somewhere. But I aimed to please. I wanted to come top. I was an altar boy. I served mass five times a week."

Nighy was all set for the seminary, but the call from God failed to materialise, not for lack of listening. Doubts began. "Certain people were gonna apparently burn in everlasting hellfire. People I knew. So you thought: 'Maybe I should sort of say something?' I remember asking questions and not getting any answers. And then I started worrying about my hair."



In Love Actually (2003). Photograph: Moviestore Collection Ltd/Alamy

At 15, he and a friend ran away to the Persian Gulf (“it looked good on the map”) and got as far as Marseilles. “We were very hungry and a bit scared because there were some very strange people on the docks.”

Back in Caterham, he was kicked out of grammar school and taken by his mother to the National Youth Employment Agency. “The bloke there had a big book of jobs and asked me what kind of thing I was interested in. I said: ‘Well, I wanna be an author.’ And my mother put her foot on mine under the desk and pressed down very, very hard, as if to say: ‘Don’t be so bloody stupid.’ And the bloke said: ‘Well, we don’t have any jobs for authors.’ And I said: ‘Well, I didn’t think you would. I just thought you’d best know.’”

Anyway, he did wangle Nighy work as a messenger boy on the Field magazine, going round posh London hotels changing their editions. “Sometimes they gave me the cab fare. It was all a bit, y’know, marvellous.”



Nighy in Pirates Of The Caribbean: At World’s End (2007).  
Photograph: Disney/Kobal/REX/Shutterstock

He was less keen on the commute up to Victoria. “I remember thinking: if this is supposed to be my life, you have got to be kidding. This can’t happen.

Too many people not saying anything crammed together. Awkward, embarrassing and uncomfortable.”

So, at 17, adventure No 2: to Paris, alone, “to write the great English short story. And I didn’t write a word.” He begged from tourists, was offered sex work but declined citing lack of experience.

Eventually he found his way to the Guildford School of Dance and Drama (“prance and murmur”), from there to rep in Liverpool, and touring the north with the likes of Jonathan Pryce and Julie Walters.

A decade of solid stage and radio work sustained him, just. In 1991, Sunday night serial [The Men’s Room](#) – shagging academics – upped his currency. He was in Arcadia and Skylight and Blue/Orange on stage; Lawless Heart, Still Crazy, Underworld, Shaun of the Dead at the cinema.



Nighy in *Shaun of the Dead* (2004). Photograph: Allstar

Love, Actually in 2003 saw another status upgrade. Skylight went to Broadway; so did another David Hare play, The Vertical Hour. On TV: award-winning turns in State of Play, The Lost Prince, Gideon’s Daughter and Page Eight.

Film credits became more prolific and prominent. Lots of big British hits: Pride, About Time, the Dad's Army remake. Sometimes a bit of a blockbuster: Pirates, Harry Potter. Quiet dramas galore (Hope Gap, The Bookshop, Sometimes Always Never) but nothing with the kind of Oscars cut-through Living could manage.

Maybe Nighy's shtick – hard to shift, because it's genuine – can be a yoke? "I think his brand causes people to lose sight of his skill as an actor," says Hermanus. He hopes Living "showcases his flexibility, the rigour of his process, and his capacity to deliver a heart-wrenching monologue as well as a twinkly one-liner".

Every Sunday before the shoot, the director would head to Nighy's place at 11am "and we would sit in his lounge and pore over the script. Bill would make us some tea. This is when we really bonded – talked about lives, our families and all the performances and films we love, and I would get to listen to the amazing array of music that he listens to – anything from bluegrass to hip-hop. I will remember my Sundays with Bill always."

Nighy is not a method actor. Another reason lay-people love him is his habit of exploding his own profession. In [one Bafta video](#), he recalls telling a drama student that, on stage, "I can absolutely guarantee you that I'm not feeling anything. I'm at work. I'm a bit busy. I'm a bit pushed. I have to achieve a total of about 15,000 things over about two-and-a-half hours. I can't be feeling stuff. That I do in my own time."

He's catty about colleagues who fail to memorise their lines before rehearsals for fear it might stifle their creativity. Being off-book is a point of principle. "Wandering about saying the lines over and over and over so that you can eventually give an impression of spontaneity. That's the job."

Nighy talks about prep in the parlance of a footballer or a guitarist – both professions he much admires. Hours of keepy-uppy, endless perfecting the lick.

Ask co-stars about him and the jazz musician allusions flow freely. Burke says Nighy once “humbly suggested his entire oeuvre was based on ‘the double take’. He advocated double taking at: anyone entering in, any new information received, and he may have even pioneered double taking at one’s own private revelations, so a series of thoughts could fission out; exploding into the next one or interrupting the last; bringing something almost Chet Baker-like to actions as simple as entering, sitting down, and shifting to find a comfortable position. His liveness within such technical wizardry is what makes it so special.”



Tom Burke in *Living*. Photograph: Ross Ferguson/Number 9 Films

Burke, Wood, Sharp: they all rave about Nighy’s depth and discipline, openness and inclusivity, “gorgeous cheekiness, aliveness and playfulness” (Wood). The sense of letting you in on some magical private joke.

Sharp sends over more than 1,000 words of detailed praise. Sometimes he’d find a book in his trailer with a note saying: “Pertains to what we were talking about at dinner, a good read. Stay loose, baby – Bill”

“To say Bill is a good man is a fantastic understatement,” he writes. “He has helped me in my personal life in big ways.”

At another supper, Nighy told him about “a legendary actor, his senior, who he admired and loved” – and who is, I suspect, Michael Gambon. “He spoke of this man’s kindness and humanity, and how doing the simplest things, like fixing Bill’s tie when it was wonky, showed such kindness and respect for Bill, his junior, that it would fill Bill’s eyes with tears.



Nighy and Gambon, right, as Wilson and Godfrey in Dad's Army (2015).  
Photograph: Universal Pictures/PA

“This older actor’s work was of huge inspiration to him, but more than that, the essence of the man’s perspective, capacity for love, and natural inclination to create an equal playing ground with a younger actor, moved Bill beyond what he could articulate. He said he could never fully express this to him, but hoped he knew. Taking another bite of my food, I nodded, thinking: ‘I hope Bill knows that is exactly how I feel about him.’”

In Living, Williams is revived by the young. Nighy too? Not exactly, he says, then revises. “Thinking about it, I do find it refreshing to work with people of other generations. Older people can be kind of slightly besieged by life, or by the fact of their age.



Hermanus, Nighy, Wood and Sharp at Living's Venice premiere, September 2022. Photograph: Tiziana Fabi/AFP/Getty Images

“And I am unspeakably fortunate, beyond lucky. I don’t have anything I need to be younger for.”

In fact, he shudders, he’d hate it. Social media is “exactly what I don’t want. I don’t want to enumerate my friends. I’m working on less contact, not more.”

He tells me with horror that young people today must act as their own publicist. “Edit and curate and broadcast their own experience. That’s really tough. And if you are inexperienced and it gets combative … no wonder people become unhappy.”

Nighy’s people almost got him on Instagram, with the promise they’d do all the work. “But I pulled out. I just thought: I *can’t*. One of the things that I would’ve been required to do was to tell people that I’m in a film. I’m *never gonna tell people I’m in a film*. It’s just never gonna happen.”



On the red carpet in London for *Living*, October 2022. Photograph: Stuart C Wilson/Getty Images for BFI

At the London premiere of *Living*, he was asked by red carpet journalists what his favourite scene was. “And I couldn’t remember any of them. Normally, just to be sociable, I’d choose one. But I just didn’t have that kind of energy.

“There are certain PR questions to which there are only PR answers. It’s not lying, but it’s a very edited truth. And if you are in any way a moral creature, that’s probably why it’s sort of enervating. It’s a very particular kind of tiredness not because you’ve been doing anything dishonest, but it’s just not quite normal contact with other human beings.”

I’m never gonna tell people I’m in a film. It’s just never gonna happen.”

He hurriedly adds some qualifiers: it’s a champagne problem. And *this* isn’t abnormal. “This is nice and I’m not just smooth-talking.”

So I ask him what he would do if a doctor gave him six months. “I have no idea, honestly, Catherine. I’d want to spend time with my family. I might go

somewhere distant and beautiful for a bit. But that would be worrying in case you started to, y'know, need some healthcare.”



‘I know it’s gonna happen [death], but I think maybe at the last minute somebody might make an exception’ ... Nighy. Photograph: Andrew H Walker/Shutterstock

Might he like to die by the sea, like Williams? He thinks he might. He goes to Aldeburgh quite a lot anyway. “It makes me philosophical, which is what you require sometimes.” The Shetlands could be good, he thinks. He talks briefly about how high a cliff he’d need. “I’d probably want to do it myself, rather than dwindle away in pain.”

Nighy once said he thought about death 12 times a day. He snorts, remembering the amazement. “That was quite a modest assessment. It’s probably more like 35.” Not all doomy, though: mostly whether or not shoes will outlive him.

He drains his water and the ice clinks. Noon with Nighy can feel like 3am with someone else. “And I don’t really *believe* it,” he says. That he’s going to die? “Yeah. I know it’s gonna happen, but I think maybe at the last minute somebody might make an exception.”

He leans back. “But then again, I sometimes think: I don’t think I can do a lot more of this. I’ve had *quite a lot on*.” He snorts again and I leave him, prepped for death, having the time of his life.

Living is released on 4 November. Join the team behind Living, including Kazuo Ishiguro, Aimee Lou Wood and Oliver Hermanus, for a Guardian Live online event on Tuesday 1 November. Book tickets [here](#).

In the UK and Ireland, Samaritans can be contacted on 116 123 or email [jo@samaritans.org](mailto:jo@samaritans.org) or [jo@samaritans.ie](mailto:jo@samaritans.ie). For more information visit [www.samaritans.org](http://www.samaritans.org). In the US, the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline is at 800-273-8255 or chat for support. You can also text HOME to 741741 to connect with a crisis text line counselor. In Australia, the crisis support service Lifeline is 13 11 14. Other international helplines can be found at [www.befrienders.org](http://www.befrienders.org)

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## Uncovering Britain's secret history of bussing ethnic minority children



Shabina Aslam's exhibition *Bussing Out* at the Theatre in the Mill Bradford University is on until April. Photograph: Gary Calton/The Observer

Shabina Aslam was sent away to a remote school under a policy of dispersing non-white children in the 1960s and 1970s, which she now

explores in a Bradford-based exhibition

*Aina J Khan Community affairs correspondent*

Fri 28 Oct 2022 01.00 EDT Last modified on Fri 28 Oct 2022 13.18 EDT

Shabina Aslam was a seven-year-old in [Bradford](#) when she was placed on a bus and moved out to a white-majority suburban school, where she and her brother were placed in the special needs department.

This is despite the pair – whose family had migrated from Kenya as part of the exodus of Indians from east Africa – being fluent in several languages.

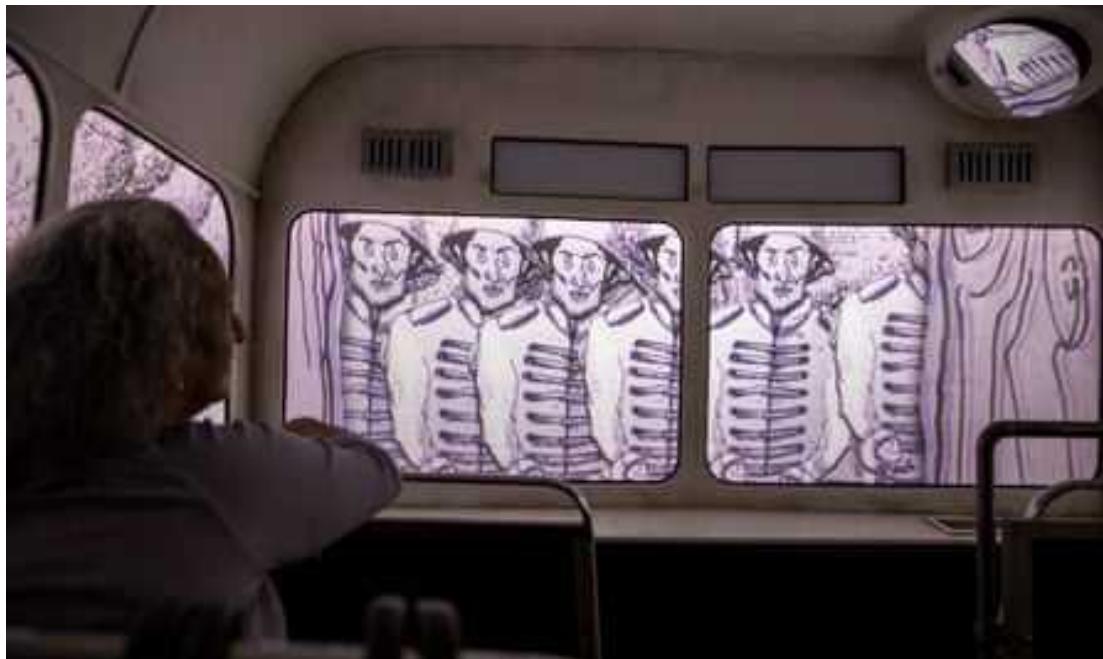
“We spoke English, Swahili and Punjabi,” Aslam recalls. “Nobody spoke to us or tested our language abilities.”

Aslam and her brother were part of the controversial “bussing out” policy from the 1960s, which transported primary schoolchildren from ethnic minority backgrounds to such schools. On the surface, its aim was to integrate the non-anglophone-speaking children of immigrants from former British colonies with south Asian, West Indian and African backgrounds.

Aslam recalls how the bus was painted with a yellow circle, and was deemed the “Paki bus” by white children.

It was only when she trained as a teacher in her thirties that she stumbled across an inconspicuous footnote in a book about the experience of black people in British education, when she realised others had also been bussed outside their city.

“One of the problems with bussing is that when it was happening, no records were kept,” she said. “There’s no real records of it other than in people’s memories.”



Shabina Aslam's exhibition *Bussing Out* at the Theatre in the Mill Bradford University reflects on Asian and African-Caribbean children being relocated to rural schools with large white pupil populations. Photograph: Gary Calton/The Observer

After strong opposition over several years from a chorus of affected families, anti-racism groups and ethnic minority associations, the policy was eventually scrapped for being discriminatory, although when dispersal began and ended varied in each area.

Now, Aslam's personal experience is the basis of an immersive art exhibition and archive she has created, [Bussing Out](#), which is based on 21 oral history interviews she conducted with fellow Bradfordians.

The exhibition includes a purpose-built set of the top floor of a 1970s bus. Visitors are immersed in the experience of Aslam's interviewees, where they can hear actors giving reconstructions of the interviews, as animations of the bus route are projected on the windows.

Bussing has mostly been associated with desegregation efforts in the US, but "also took place in Britain, encouraged through educational policies on 'immigrant pupils' ratios'", said Dr Shirin Hirsch, a senior lecturer in history at Manchester Metropolitan University.

Talk of the policy first came about in the autumn of 1963, when white parents organised protests in Southall against the arrival of immigrant children to Beaconsfield Road school.



Bussing took place in many British cities yet is largely undocumented.  
Photograph: Gary Calton/The Observer

After meeting some of the disgruntled parents, the Conservative minister for education at the time, Edward Boyle, declared in the House of Commons, that the school had become “irretrievably an immigrant school”.

“It is desirable on educational grounds that no one school should have more than about 30% of immigrants,” he said.

It was under Harold Wilson’s Labour government, elected in 1964, that the policy finally found a foothold in British schools. This was despite the fact that only a fraction of schools, 569 out of 26,000, accommodated more than one-third of immigrant children in 1971, according to Olivier Esteves, the author of *The Desegregation of English Schools*.

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From 1964 to 1986, Blackburn, Bradford, Bristol, Ealing, Halifax, Hounslow, Huddersfield, Leicester, Luton, Walsall, West Bromwich and Wolverhampton opted to “desegregate” schools with a large intake of immigrant children.

“The racial suspicion towards such children was justified through a narrative that to truly integrate they would need to be spread out,” said Hirsch. “In reality the bussed ‘immigrant’ was selected far more on skin colour than on immigration status. It was only the ‘immigrant pupils’ who were ‘bussed out’ rather than white children ‘bussed in’.”

By the early 1970s, as word of bussing targeting only immigrant families began to spread, Usha Prashar of the [Race](#) Relations Board decided to lead the first investigation into bussing.

The Race Relations Act 1965 had been introduced to address racial discrimination, followed by the Race Relations Act 1968, which focused on eradicating discrimination in housing and employment.

It was under this legislation that the Race Relations Board’s investigation concluded that there was a “pattern of discrimination”.

“The impact was quite worrying on small children,” Prashar said. “Bussing meant a very long day for very small children who had to leave home at the crack of dawn to arrive late in the evening.”

She added: “They could have been taught English in their local areas. I think it was a response also to the comments when [Boyle] visited [Southall] that he got from the local community that, ‘Too many immigrants are coming in,

our schools are becoming all Asian, it's going to lower the standard of schools', and so on.

"This investigation which was led by me, concluded that bussing was unlawful and detrimental for the children, and led to the dismantling of this policy."

The Race Relations act was updated again and the Commission for Racial Equality created [in 1976](#), a year that coincided with [Gurdeep Singh Chaggar's murder](#) by a racist gang. "Nobody in this country, to this day, appreciates that bussing was taking place in the United Kingdom," Prashar said.

- *The Bussing Out exhibition is on show at Theatre in the Mill in Bradford until April 2023.*
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## You be the judge: should my partner get rid of our lockdown wormery?



Illustration: Ilse Weisfelt/The Guardian

Leandra says the worms stink and fears they'll escape into the flat. Cindy says they celebrate nature. You can start digging through the evidence

- [Find out how to get a disagreement settled or become a You be the judge juror](#)



[Georgina Lawton](#)  
[@georginalawton](#)

Fri 28 Oct 2022 03.00 EDT Last modified on Fri 28 Oct 2022 20.55 EDT

## The prosecution: Leandra

*I like nature, just not in my living room. The worms get everywhere – and the food scraps stink*

During lockdown, my partner Cindy and I were stuck at home, bored like everyone else, so started developing new hobbies. Cindy thought it would be fun to get a wormery and keep it on the balcony of our flat.

Our council doesn't take food waste, so it was going to be a good way to be more eco-friendly, passing our food scraps on to the worms. We had grand ideas of transforming the balcony, filling it with amazing plants and flowers.

That didn't happen, but we still have a large wormery, which has become a pain.

When I suggest moving the wormery elsewhere, Cindy makes a really sad face

When the worms arrived, a couple escaped from the bag. I came home once, saw them on the floor, and said, "What the hell is this?" I like nature, but not in my living room. When we go away, I have this anxiety they might escape again. I'm also worried about them falling through cracks in our balcony.

The leftover food is also an issue. We keep it in boxes and it quickly turns rotten and mouldy. I convinced Cindy to keep the box on the balcony, so it wouldn't stink indoors, but she'd find excuses not to take it out. If it was raining, she wouldn't want to. Then she suggested putting our scraps through the blender – she said mixing the eggshells and vegetables together would actually be better for the worms. Cindy never even uses the blender to cook for herself, so I said no.

This summer lots of the worms died as it was so hot. Cindy was sad. I didn't rejoice as they are living creatures, but did say: "Maybe the wormery isn't a good idea?" I suggested contacting schools, parks and the council to see if they'd take it. Cindy hasn't contacted anyone yet.

We spent the first year of lockdown growing things. Since then it's been a question of: "Shall we do the balcony or go out with friends?" We've picked the latter. When I suggest moving the wormery, Cindy makes a really sad face and it breaks my heart. But if we keep the wormery, we should improve the whole balcony like we planned, as right now it's the same old – only with a messy box of worms on it.

## **The defence: Cindy**

*The wormery is an eco-friendly slice of nature. And it doesn't stink – it smells of the woods*

The wormery is great. I love it. You put food waste in there and the worms help break it down. Yes, it's a bit disgusting: it's not what most people dream about, but it's a slice of nature on your balcony. And it's good for the environment.

We have always kept our food waste in plastic boxes. The food has to be quite rotten for the worms to eat, as they don't have teeth, so when we kept the boxes inside, I'd wait for the food to become really mouldy before putting it in the wormery. In the summer, as we had the windows open, flies came in. So I started to put the food straight outside. I agreed to that change, but I don't like to go on to the balcony when it rains. I do try to hide the mess so Leandra doesn't get annoyed.

The wormery doesn't stink, it smells like the woods – I like the scent

The worms have only broken free once, so it isn't a huge deal, but I can't guarantee that it won't happen again. One time Leandra got annoyed as she was repotting a plant on the balcony and found some worms in the soil, but they are good for the plants.

Worms eat the leftover food, then poop it out as a free source of high-quality plant nutrients. The wormery doesn't stink; it smells like the woods. I like the scent.

I notice when the worms are reproducing, and I like watching how they act together to break down the food. I look at the fluctuation in their activities, how they behave in different temperatures. I was very sad when loads of them died in the heatwave this summer. The colony almost became extinct.

I've already inspired one colleague to get a wormery. He gave me the idea for blending the scraps. It would increase the output of the colony if Leandra would let me do that, but I understand why she said no.

I think we both need to make an effort if we want a nicer balcony, but the wormery has made it better. Leandra would really like to get rid of it, but you never know when the next lockdown will be, so I think it's important to keep it.

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## The jury of Guardian readers

### Should the wormery stay or go?

Maintaining a messy hobby just in case there's another lockdown is pretty unreasonable. Though it sounds like the rotting food is more of an issue than the worms themselves, and Cindy seems to be very nonchalant about that.

**Laura, 30**

The wormery is a nice idea in principle but it's not really working on the balcony of their flat post-lockdown. It seems like it's hard work – which Cindy is not wholly committed to.

**Chris, 68**

The wormery is Cindy's hobby, and it seems it's only a mild inconvenience to Leandra. The issue could be solved by getting a sealed outdoor compost bin for the food scraps. I think by working together to improve their balcony, and making the wormery a fun feature, they could both be happy.

**Zoe, 35**

Cindy is guilty of instigating the wormery and then failing to take responsibility for its conservancy. Nonetheless, with regard to Leandra's anxiety about further escape attempts, worms are not known for their agility or ingenuity. It should be a fairly simple task to contain them.

**Jon, 55**

I think the wormery was a lockdown hobby that has outstayed its welcome. While I love the creativity of the idea, something as disruptive as this needs passion from both parties to sustain it. It sounds like it's making Leandra anxious and resentful, and may have a negative impact on their relationship.

**Rushda, 36**

## Now you be the judge

In our online poll below, tell us: should the wormery stay or go?

**The poll closes on Thursday 3 November at 10 am GMT**

## Last week's result

We asked if Niamh should listen to her friend Martha and make more of an effort to keep in touch.

**19% of you said yes – Niamh is guilty**  
**81% of you said no – Niamh is not guilty**

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## 2022.10.28 - Opinion

- Patients dying outside A&E, hospital corridors as makeshift wards – and it's only October
- Oil and gas firms are still making a killing – and No 10 is letting them
- M&S is a shining example of how not to treat the high street – or the planet
- The cult of Putin in Serbia reflects a nation that has still not dealt with its past

[\*\*OpinionNHS\*\*](#)

# **Patients dying outside A&E, hospital corridors as makeshift wards – and it's only October**

[Gaby Hinsliff](#)



Rishi Sunak's threats of 'efficiencies' crown a decade of Conservative neglect of the NHS



Illustration: Alex Mellon

Fri 28 Oct 2022 01.00 EDT Last modified on Fri 28 Oct 2022 10.08 EDT

Last week, a hospital trust in Bury offered its condolences to the family of an elderly patient who died in the back of an ambulance after waiting a reported three hours just to get into A&E.

Doctors came out to try to treat the patient in the vehicle, but unfortunately to no avail. It's the sort of story that sounds as if it should be a shocking one-off, but may soon become more common. One anonymous paramedic spoke afterwards to the Manchester Evening News of patients waiting for [up to eight hours](#) in ambulances, being treated inside them, and then being driven home without ever actually managing to get through the doors of a hospital that was full to overflowing.

The last few days alone have seen reports in the Health Service Journal (HSJ) of a Liverpool hospital [redesignating a corridor as a ward](#) by closing the doors at both ends, and a heartrending letter to this newspaper from a reader describing the nine and a half hours her 91-year-old brother had spent lying on the floor with a broken shoulder [waiting for an ambulance](#). The letter-writer understood there had been a lot of high drama at Westminster

lately, but felt that what was happening to the NHS should be “foremost in everyone’s minds” now. Frankly, she had a point.

As it happens, I listened to Rishi Sunak’s first speech to the nation as prime minister on the way back from a routine hospital appointment. The staff were great, but the clinic was basically a prefab in an old car park: in high winds it’s noisy and in winter, the nurses said, it gets pretty cold. This clinic was in a specialism that must have expanded very fast lately, so some make-do-and-mend is understandable. Still, it wasn’t reassuring that when Sunak was asked in parliament this week whether the 40 “new hospitals” Boris Johnson rather misleadingly promised are still definitely happening, he didn’t quite answer. Next week, meanwhile, the Royal College of Nursing will reveal the results of a strike ballot over pay.

As the dust settles around this month’s prime minister, we can now see the shape of him more clearly. The country does feel on a more even keel, and the polls will probably narrow from sheer relief that he isn’t Liz Truss. But he remains living proof that you can be young and modern and genuinely affable but not necessarily a cuddly liberal Tory; that if anything, the idea he’s some kind of centrist wet is a reminder of how far right the Conservative party has moved lately.

Sunak clearly plans to reoccupy the electoral sweet spot – socially conservative but economically left of traditional Tory thinking – identified in 2019 by Boris Johnson, except without the associated toxic Johnson behaviour. That makes perfect electoral sense, given that a report this week for the centre-right thinktank Onward shows it’s the so called left-authoritarian voters – hardline on immigration but keen on help for low earners and more money for the NHS – who have deserted the Tories in large numbers for Labour. Sunak’s staggering decision to reappoint Suella Braverman, days after she resigned in disgrace from a job she shouldn’t have been doing in the first place, suggests he’s certainly going all out to tick the socially authoritarian box. The economically leftwing bit, however, looks a lot harder than it did in 2019 when Johnson was still sunnily promising an end to austerity. How Sunak responds to a potentially brutal winter ahead for the NHS, with seven million patients already backed up on waiting lists, is now a crucial test.

His chosen health secretary, Steve Barclay, has a formidably hawkish reputation earned in his days at the Treasury. (In an unusual twist, the reverse is arguably true for the new chancellor, former health secretary Jeremy Hunt.) The normally restrained HSJ greeted Barclay's first brief stint in the job this summer under Johnson with an editorial headlined "[Steve Barclay is the NHS leadership's 'worst nightmare'](#)", suggesting he saw the service as a "bottomless pit, resistant to change and unaccountable". The HSJ's editor, Alastair McLellan, calls him "[the Millwall of health secretaries](#)", someone who wears NHS leaders' dislike with pride.

Back in September, Barclay did identify ambulance handover times as his top priority [in a speech](#) to the Policy Exchange thinktank, which is a promising start. Mainly thanks to holes in social care, the NHS has 12,000 beds occupied by patients who are medically fit to discharge. This means those who actually make it into A&E can't be moved on to wards, and those waiting in ambulances sometimes can't make it through the door. Tackling one means tackling logjams throughout the system. But he also complained that there was "too much management" in the NHS, a favourite Tory rightwing theme that's increasingly used to back up demands for yet more so-called efficiency savings, but which is often mysteriously short on detail.

Over-management is not what is making the NHS sick. The truth is that soaring inflation plus anticipated pay awards are already eating into budgets, while a recent analysis for the health thinktank the Nuffield Trust suggests that once rising demand for healthcare from a growing and rapidly ageing population is factored in, even the real-terms spending rises of recent years look more like [a period of stagnation](#). That helps explain why things feel threadbare on the ground, even as billions pour into the NHS. During the leadership hustings, Sunak declared that putting more money into the NHS, was "not enough; we need to reform things so we can get more efficiency". But what that meant was never quite explained; all we really gleaned from summer about Sunak's thinking is that his dad was a GP and his mum a pharmacist, and now he wants to fine people for missing appointments.

NHS reform needn't be just a weaselly euphemism for cuts and privatisation. There are perfectly benign and sensible ways of dealing with the fact that hospitals are full of people who shouldn't really be there – above all by sorting out social care. There's more we could do to prevent

people getting sick in the first place, too, including using the newly revived levelling up agenda to help tackle health inequalities in poorer communities.

But there are ominous rumbles on the broader Tory right now about whether the NHS is sustainable at all in its current form, an argument that has lingered uneasily in the background for a while now without ever quite daring to show its face. Our correspondent was right: the political drama is compelling, but real life must now share the stage.

- Gaby Hinsliff is a Guardian columnist
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| [Section menu](#) | [Main menu](#) |

## Oil and gas companies

# Oil and gas firms are still making a killing – and No 10 is letting them

[Prem Sikka](#)

Rishi Sunak's rushed 25% windfall tax is easy to minimise or avoid – and it could be replaced



Shell has paid nothing so far under the windfall tax, despite making record global profits. Photograph: Finnbarr Webster/Getty Images

Fri 28 Oct 2022 04.00 EDT Last modified on Sat 29 Oct 2022 00.10 EDT

It is Christmas every day for oil and gas companies, and their shareholders and executives are laughing all the way to the bank, leaving the rest of us to pick up the cost in higher energy prices, inflation, bankruptcies and a deepening cost of living crisis.

Shell's third-quarter profits have [more than doubled](#) to \$9.5bn (£8.2bn) and add up to a whopping \$30bn so far this year. Most of the additional profit is

not made by sudden extra investment or effort. The cost of producing oil and gas has not changed much, but the selling price has.

In May this year, after initially resisting calls for a windfall tax on oil and gas companies, [Rishi Sunak introduced](#) a temporary 25% levy on excess profits for the period from 26 May 2022 to 31 December 2025. It was expected to raise around £5bn in the first year. But that number now looks optimistic.

On Thursday, Shell admitted that it had so far [paid zero](#) under the new levy in the UK, despite making record global profits. Indeed, it has [not paid any corporation tax](#) on oil and gas production in the North Sea for the last three years, and does not expect to make any windfall payments until 2023.

As usual, the Conservative government used its big majority in the Commons to rush through [the legislation](#) with minimal scrutiny. The result was a badly designed and ineffective tax that is easy to minimise and even avoid.

One of the glaring gaps in Sunak's scheme is that the tax only applies to profits from oil and gas extraction in the North Sea. It leaves untaxed huge pools of excess cash [Shell](#) has been collecting from its trading arm, from refining and from its forecourts.

Motorists have been paying record prices at petrol stations, many controlled by oil companies. [A study](#) by the Competition and Markets Authority indicated that an extra 24p a litre profit may have been made. That profit is not captured by the UK windfall tax.

Oil and gas companies also own or control refineries. Shell's indicative refining margin for the third quarter of 2022 is about \$15 a barrel, compared with \$28.04 a barrel for the second quarter and \$10.23 a barrel in the first quarter. It was \$4.17 a year earlier. However, the massive profits from refining are not subject to the UK windfall tax.

Shell and other energy companies employ armies of traders to buy, sell and speculate on the price of oil and gas, including that produced by the

company itself. Traders earning an average of £100k a year can make thousands in bonuses. Company accounts do not reveal the profits made from trading, but Shell's trading arm is estimated to make around \$4bn a year. Trading profits are not subject to the UK windfall tax either.

The most optimistic forecast for the portion of Shell's pre-tax earnings that would fall under the windfall tax – the gains it makes from North Sea extraction – would amount to just 3% of its pre-tax earnings. Even that is likely to be eroded by tax perks handed out by the government. For example, companies get £91 subsidy for every £100 invested in fossil fuels. In addition, oil and gas companies are masters of shifting profits to low- or no-tax jurisdictions through intragroup transactions, such as royalties, management fees and loan interest payments, all of which reduce UK taxable profits.

In principle, UK resident companies are taxed on their worldwide profits, subject to international tax treaties and credits for taxes paid in other jurisdictions. The government can tax the profits which escape UK taxes altogether. It can also design a more effective windfall tax to claw back excessive profits made by oil and gas companies, but has so far shown no interest in it.

Lord Sikka is an emeritus professor of accounting at the University of Essex and the University of Sheffield

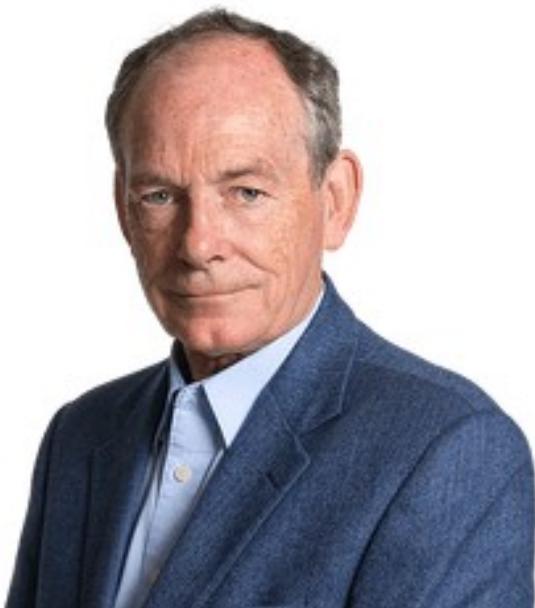
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Opinion**Marks & Spencer**

## **M&S is a shining example of how not to treat the high street – or the planet**

Simon Jenkins



The retailer wants to knock down and rebuild its flagship store, or leave. It should do the latter, and let small shops thrive



M&S's art deco flagship store on Oxford Street, London.. Photograph: Simon Dack/Alamy

Fri 28 Oct 2022 02.00 EDT Last modified on Fri 28 Oct 2022 11.50 EDT

An inquiry opened this week in Westminster that should be revolutionary. It is to decide, in a nutshell, whether the 50% of global carbon emissions embodied in the [world's built environment](#) should be a factor in fighting the climate crisis. If we are all to account for the impact on global temperature rises of our eating, heating and travelling, why not our building?

The inquiry is centred on a decision by M&S to [demolish and rebuild](#) its flagship art deco store in London's Oxford Street, a structure that for some reason was overlooked for listing as historic. We are told that the "embodied" carbon that would be released by the redevelopment is [40,000 tonnes](#), reportedly the same as would be emitted by a petrol-driven car journeying from the Earth to the Sun. Goodness knows the distance for the forest of slabs and towers now [rising out of control](#) on London's skyline.

While this is not the first time embodied carbon has been a planning topic, it is certainly the most prominent. It has also moved to centre stage as M&S fancies itself as a [net zero champion](#). It promises to include in its development a new store that will "revitalise" the street, adding that if

refused permission, [it will close](#), meaning that the building and we shall all be the poorer – classic developer’s blackmail. Such promises mean little, as London stores are opening and closing monthly.



‘Even the sparkling new malls are in trouble.’ Bluewater shopping centre, Kent. Photograph: Gareth Fuller/PA

Walk round any British city and traffic restrictions, emission zones, cycle lanes and pollution warnings are on every side. Yet the many hoardings on these very same streets conceal a turmoil of demolishing, smashing, digging, concreting, towering and basementing, as if global heating had never been heard of. Westminster councillors wear hi-vis jackets and hard hats as party uniform, like Boris Johnson. Labour’s London mayor, Sadiq Khan, even approved the M&S project. It took a minister, Michael Gove, to call an inquiry into the redevelopment.

How far the climate crisis is yet a planning issue is moot. M&S’s lawyers are protesting that no one told them about it beforehand. But the truth is that the retail worm has long been turning. Grand department stores are in terminal decline. Oxford Street has lost Debenhams, House of Fraser and Topshop. John Lewis is struggling, having [closed eight shops](#) already in Sheffield, York, Aberdeen and elsewhere. Even the sparkling new malls are in trouble. The biggest, Bluewater in Kent, has seen its book value [plummet](#)

70% in the last seven years. Lockdowns and online shopping have taken their toll.

According to the property agency Lambert Smith Hampton, half of all Britain's shopping centres are currently uneconomic, with a 20% vacancy rate. A 2021 Economist survey suggested a dramatic switch in offline shopping towards small, bespoke outlets that meet the public's individual tastes, with more direct contact with staff. The concept of a traditional market is returning, grand as in Halifax and Derby or scruffy as in London's Shoreditch. Farmer's markets are booming. In America, even doctors are in on the act. Patriot Place outside Boston offers not just checkups and treatment for mild ailments, but scans for cancers and hip surgery. I can hear the NHS choking.



'The future for offline shopping is in ... experiencing. The evidence is in the busiest of London's streets, Borough Market (above), Brick Lane, Portobello Road and Camden Lock.' Photograph: Tom Nicholson/Reuters

Ask where younger Londoners most like to shop and the answer is somewhere intimate, old and attractive. Oxford Street's crowds now burrow away into St Christopher's Place, Fitzrovia and Soho. As for brash and impersonal Bluewaters and Westfields, they are for yesterday, as are the giant glass silos into which we used to lock office workers five days a week.

In other words, combating the climate crisis can here move in lockstep with a humane urban environment. A conserved high street holds the future for offline shopping. It is for congregating and experiencing as well as spending. The evidence is in the busiest of London's streets, historic Borough Market, Brick Lane, Portobello Road and Camden Lock. These are where people want to mingle, smell the city and spend money. Why do planners not understand this?

That is why M&S should leave its handsome facade unsmashed and go elsewhere. Oxford Street's future lies not in big stores, but in interiors, rear courtyards and back alleys. These should be converted for whatever purpose the market will bear: stalls, cafes, entertainers or just transient tenants. The secret, says the American urbanologist Edward Glaeser, is flexibility and informality. The city of the future is "young, gritty and fearless", fostering "the human contact that enables our species to survive". And it helps the planet into the bargain.

- Simon Jenkins is a Guardian columnist
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## In the shadow of Putin's RussiaSerbia

# The cult of Putin in Serbia reflects a nation that has still not dealt with its past

[Tomislav Marković](#)

In this, one of a [series](#) of essays on the war in Ukraine from countries in or neighbouring the former Soviet bloc, a Serbian poet decries the glorification of Russia's aggression



An anti-EU and anti-Nato mural in Belgrade, 2022. ‘Serbia has never renounced the Greater Serbia ideology that led to the wars of former Yugoslavia.’ Photograph: Andrey Isaković/AFP/Getty

Fri 28 Oct 2022 05.00 EDT Last modified on Fri 28 Oct 2022 23.33 EDT

“Ukraine attacks Russia!” was the surreal [headline](#) on a report in the 22 February edition of *Informer*, Serbia’s biggest-selling tabloid. That headline was not a one off, it was an expression of the [Putinophilia](#) that has been

strong in Serbia for years. As most of the world condemned Russia's aggression against Ukraine, much of the media in Serbia turned to glorification of Russia's actions. Tabloids, web portals, dailies, weeklies and nationwide television channels celebrated the destruction of Ukrainian cities and gave wholehearted support to Russian armed forces. The killing of civilians, the levelling of cities and the destruction of cultural monuments appeared to fill some of Serbia's editors with enthusiasm and exuberance.

Pro-Russia rallies took place in Belgrade, at which the crowd cheered Putin and the letter Z was scrawled on the asphalt. The rest of the world shuddered as it watched real-time coverage of corpses on the streets of Bucha, civilians sheltering from Russian shells in underground stations and millions of refugees fleeing their country, but instead of compassion for innocent victims, understanding for the criminals seemed the response of Putin's Serbian fans.

If President Aleksandar Vučić's allies in the Serb media appear sanguine about death and destruction in Ukraine, he claims that the country is politically neutral. Serbia has grudgingly voted in favour of the UN general assembly's resolutions condemning Russia's use of force and illegal annexation of Ukrainian territory. But the Vučić government has repeatedly refused to back western sanctions against Russia. European officials, US senators and various envoys have flocked to Vučić, telling him that it was time to choose: would Serbia be part of Europe or an ally of Russia? Despite all the pressure, Vučić keeps Serbia in limbo.

But there can be no neutrality when it comes to Russia's campaign against Ukraine. To remain neutral while an executioner butchers a victim means morally siding with the executioner.

Serbia's attitude towards the war in Ukraine requires additional context. Whereas in other countries, the Russian state-owned news agency, Sputnik, and the Russian TV channel RT diffuse the Kremlin's propaganda, in Serbia most of the domestic media act as if they themselves are part of the Russian machinery under the command of the Kremlin's communications supervisors. The problem is not limited to the media. Serbia has never renounced the Greater Serbia nationalist ideology that led to the wars of the

former Yugoslavia. The one exception was the short premiership of Zoran Đindić, but that was cut short by his [assassination](#) in 2003 .

Today's Serb political leaders were participants in the wars of the 1990s. Vučić was a [high-ranking official of the Serbian Radical party](#) of [convicted war criminal Vojislav Šešelj](#). His coalition partner [Ivica Dačić](#), leader of the Socialist party of Serbia, was Slobodan Milošević's spokesman. One of Vučić's closest associates, the minister of the interior, [Aleksandar Vučić](#), began his career as a functionary of the Yugoslav Left, the party founded by Milošević's late wife, Mirjana Marković. Today's minister for European integration, [Jadranka Joksimović](#), worked on the Serbian Radical party's magazine, Velika Srbija, whose title (Greater Serbia) speaks for itself.

Serbian political leaders still don't publicly acknowledge Srebrenica as [genocide](#). If at all, they refer to the "terrible crimes" committed. But there has been no dealing with the past at the state level. On the contrary, political, media, cultural, church and social elites continue to [deny Serbian responsibility](#) for war crimes. Serbia's recent historical revisionism suggests that it was Serbs who were the victims , never the criminals. Internationally convicted Serb war criminals return home after serving their sentences and given [heroes' welcomes](#), sinecures and media space to expound their version of the truth, which The Hague tribunal was of course, unable to understand.

Murals sport the [image of Ratko Mladić](#) often with the slogan "Serbian hero" in cities all over Serbia. Anyone who speaks about Serbian crimes is smeared as a traitor by a media lynch mob. At the Serbian war crimes prosecutor's office, [2,500 cases have been languishing](#) at the pre-trial investigation stage for years. According to estimates by the Humanitarian Law Center in Belgrade, at least 6,000 [unconvicted war criminals](#) freely walk the streets of Serbian cities.



A mural of former Bosnian Serb military chief Ratko Mladic in Belgrade. The mural was painted in July 2021, shortly after Mladic was sentenced to life imprisonment for the massacre of some 8,000 Muslims in Srebrenica and other war crimes. Photograph: Andrej Čukić/EPA

For far-right Serb nationalists, the current state of peace in the Balkans is temporary, just like the borders. They still dream of a great Serbian state that will encompass Kosovo, Montenegro, Republika Srpska and parts of Croatia. The realisation of that dream is not possible as things stand, but the nationalists are patient. After defeat in the Yugoslav wars, they retreated to lick their wounds, fuel hatred towards their neighbours and keep the population in a state of combat-readiness via the media. That they must bide their time until international circumstances change has been one of the main narratives of Russian propaganda for the Serbian market filtered through parts of the Serb media for more than two decades.

Serb ultra-nationalists have waited for Russia to enter into a decisive conflict with the western antichrist, to defeat godless [Europe](#) and the US and to establish a different world order. They have placed their faith in Putin as a messiah and imagine him as an upgraded version of Slobodan Milošević: the ruler of a powerful empire with a nuclear arsenal at his disposal.

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When Russia invaded Ukraine, Putin's followers here thought their hour had come; this was the beginning of the great upheaval in which the old order would be razed and from its ruins a world would arise where sovereignty, borders and international treaties were of no import. Instead of international law and other western trifles, the law of the jungle would prevail, as authoritarian tradition dictates. States such as Serbia, favoured by the world's ruler enthroned in the Kremlin would gain the right to finish what they started three decades ago to finally create the enlarged state for which they have been longing for centuries, to fit their own imagined grandeur.

Lauding Russia's criminal aggression against a sovereign country may seem strange to the uninformed. But for those of us who live in the heart of darkness, a country whose heroes are Slobodan Milošević, Radovan Karadžić and [Ratko Mladić](#), we expect nothing better. Those who still believe conspiracy theories about the 1994 massacre in [Sarajevo's Markale](#) that it was staged and the dismembered corpses were actually dummies, will easily believe similar propaganda about the massacres of civilians in Bucha. If media hyenas can deride the victims of the Srebrenica genocide on primetime TV, why would they grieve for the victims of Putin's crimes? As the great Serbian writer and thinker [Radomir Konstantinović said](#) in 1991: "We live in a world (if this is living) in which the monstrous is coming to be natural, and the natural monstrous." His diagnosis of Serbia has, unfortunately, lost none of its accuracy.

- Tomislav Marković, born in 1976, lives and works in Belgrade. He writes poetry, satire, prose and essays

- This article is part of a [series](#), published in collaboration with [Voxeurop](#), featuring perspectives on the invasion of Ukraine from the former Soviet bloc and bordering countries. It was translated by Will Firth.
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| [Section menu](#) | [Main menu](#) |

## 2022.10.28 - Around the world

- [Iran Protests reignite at commemorations and funerals for those killed](#)
- [India Young girls being sold to repay loans, says human rights body](#)
- [Where is China's former leader? Experts ask whether Hu Jintao's removal from party congress was suspicious](#)
- [US elections Democrats on the defensive as economy becomes primary concern over abortion](#)
- [New Zealand Women to be able to access abortion over the phone](#)

## [Iran](#)

# Iran protests reignite at funerals and commemorations for those killed

Protesters turn out in dozens of towns and appear to take control of largely Kurdish city of Mahabad

Protests rage across Iran after mourners visit Mahsa Amini's grave – video

*Patrick Wintour* *Diplomatic editor*

Thu 27 Oct 2022 10.56 EDTFirst published on Thu 27 Oct 2022 07.31 EDT

Protests against the Iranian government have suddenly regained momentum as funerals for those killed and a highly emotional commemoration of the movement have stretched security forces drawn into a further cycle of arrests and repression.

Dozens of towns were rocked by protests on Wednesday night as mainly young crowds used the cover of darkness to [mark the 40th day since Mahsa Amini](#), a young Kurdish woman, died in police custody, sparking unprecedented unrest.

Official state news agencies focused on an [unrelated attack](#) that left as many as 15 people dead and 30 injured after three extremists fired at pilgrims inside the Shah Cheragh, or Emperor of the Night shrine, in Shiraz.

Protesters appeared to have taken control on Thursday of Mahabad, a heavily Kurdish city of about 200,000 people close to the border with Iraq.

The unrest boiled over when a 35-year-old Kurdish man named as Ismaeli Maludi was shot dead on Wednesday, reportedly by direct fire from government forces, according to Hengaw, a Norway-based group that monitors rights violations in Iran's Kurdish regions. Another protester was shot in nearby Sanandaj.

Iran: hundreds flock to Mahsa Amini's grave 40 days since her death – video

After Maludi's funeral on Thursday a crowd attacked a police station and the governor's office chanting "death to the dictator" and "Kurdistan, the graveyard of fascists." Grainy video appears to show the streets packed with protesters, a bank enveloped in smoke and the police station in flames.

Official news agencies said the protesters had smashed windows in banks, the tax office and the civil registry, but denied the police station had been seized. All market activity had stopped on Thursday as the protests continued. The official news agency, however, reported: "The city is completely calm, and life is normal and the fire and rescue services are busy cleaning the city after the fires in rubbish bins."

Crowds also gathered at the burial site of Nika Shakarami, 16, who died on 20 September in Tehran. Officials said she had killed herself and had a history of depression. But video footage [released by CNN](#) appeared to support the claim that she may have been shot during the protests. The footage showed her hiding behind a car while fleeing the security forces and urging the driver: "Don't move, don't move."



Nika Shakarami died in late September. Photograph: twitter/ZUMA Press Wire/REX/Shutterstock

Nika's aunt had urged crowds to come to her commemoration, but the security forces tried to block the roads.

Her family say the state buried her body without their permission in Vesian village in Khorramabad, the capital of Lorestan province. Chants of "Death to Khamenei" were heard at her memorial. Nika's mother, Nasrin, said in a speech: "I will for ever be in agony for your sufferings, but I love you. When I see that pure seed of your thinking – freedom, courage and honour blossoms in the hearts of other loved ones, I am happy and grateful."

Nasrin previously gave an interview to BBC Persian in which she said: "Like Nika, I have been against compulsory hijab since I was a child. But my generation was not brave enough to protest. People my age accepted years of suppression, intimidation and humiliation, but my daughter protested and she had every right to do so."

Iranian human rights groups said there were unconfirmed reports that some members of Amini's family were under house arrest, but Reuters was unable to verify the reports.

The protests have also taken on a more explicitly anti-clerical flavour.

Ayatollah Javadi Amoli, a leading conservative politician and scholar, called for the state to react. "We are not worried, but the officials should also wake up and stop the insolence, embezzlement, betrayal and banditry so that they do not threaten the country, or else these troubles will continue," he said.

The reformist politician Mohammad-Javad Haghshenas accepted the groups of young people were sometimes small, but said the protests were "like an iceberg in the Arctic Ocean, 10% of which is visible, but the bulk of it, which forms its core, is underwater.

"Iranians have learned that protests should not be concentrated in a specific place or limited to a specific class. All academic levels and cultural, sports, artistic elites, celebrities, join this movement," he said. "This process is irreversible. The issue of morality police, guidance patrol and some taboos has practically collapsed. If the government does not want to understand

these realities, it will deal a serious blow to the country, to itself, to the people, and to the future of Iran.”

Iran is feeling the pressure and on Wednesday announced sanctions against eight institutions and 12 individuals based in the EU, claiming they were “supporting terrorist groups”, “inciting violence” and “provoking riots, violence and terrorist acts” in relation to the protests.

The blacklist includes the International Committee in Search of Justice, the International League against Racism and Anti-Semitism, and the Persian versions of the German broadcaster Deutsche Welle and Radio France Internationale.

European and French politicians and two individuals at the German tabloid newspaper Bild are also among those put under sanctions.

Referring to the terrorist attack on the Shia pilgrims at the shrine in Shiraz, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei said the assailants “will surely be punished” and called on Iranians to unite. “We all have a duty to deal with the enemy and its traitorous or ignorant agents,” he said.

Islamic State, which once posed a security threat across the Middle East, has claimed responsibility for previous violence in Iran, including two deadly attacks in 2017 that targeted parliament and the tomb of the Islamic Republic’s founder, Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini.

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## [India](#)

# Young girls being sold in India to repay loans, says human rights body

Notice issued to Rajasthan state government demanding police inquiry into ‘abominable’ practice



Protesters call for better women's rights during a demonstration on International Women's Day in Delhi. Photograph: Money Sharma/AFP/Getty Images

*[Amrit Dhillon](#) in Delhi*

Fri 28 Oct 2022 05.52 EDT Last modified on Fri 28 Oct 2022 14.35 EDT

Young girls in the northern Indian state of Rajasthan are being sold as “repayment” for loans their parents cannot afford, the national body that protects human rights has said.

The National Human Rights Commission has issued a notice to the state government demanding a police inquiry and answers within a month to what

it called an “abominable” practice.

People living in many rural areas in India often have to borrow money from fellow villagers when a family member falls seriously ill and needs medical treatment.

Local media reports say that in half a dozen districts around Bhilwara, if a family cannot repay a loan, the aggrieved creditor has complained to the “caste panchayats” or caste councils.

By way of “settlement”, the councils have ordered the family to hand over their daughter – sometimes more than one depending on the size of the loan – so that the creditor can sell her to a trafficker to recoup his money.

In its notice, the commission said that if the family refuses to sell their daughter, “their mothers are subjected to rape on the diktats of caste panchayats for the settlement of disputes”.

Among the cases highlighted by the commission is that of a man who borrowed 1.5m rupees (£15,800) from a neighbour who was forced by the panchayat to sell his sister and 12-year-old daughter to settle the debt.

In another, a man who borrowed 600,000 rupees (£6,300) when his wife fell ill and needed hospital treatment was unable to repay it. The panchayat compelled him to hand over his young daughter to the creditor, who later sold her to a trafficker in Agra. From there, “she was sold three times and became pregnant four times”, the commission said.

The commission has sent an official to Rajasthan to investigate the cases. The Bhilwara district collector, Ashish Modi, said the crimes were the first of their kind. “They are total illegal. The police are investigating and we will make sure the victims get justice and the guilty are punished,” Modi said.

Panchayats are often a profoundly regressive force in rural India, acting as kangaroo courts. They have ordered so-called honour killings of couples who have defied tradition by marrying into a different caste or faith or ordered brutal punishments for couples suspected of adultery.

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Kavita Srivastava, a veteran women's rights activist in Jaipur, Rajasthan, said it was well known that caste panchayats informally regulated villagers' personal matters such as marriage, inheritance or custody. If people defy their orders, they are ostracised and shunned by the rest of the community.

"But what is new in these cases is that they seem to have expanded their ambit to settle loan disputes in this way," Srivastava said.

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

[China](#)

[Analysis](#)

## Was Hu Jintao's removal from China's 20th party congress suspicious or not?

[Helen Davidson](#) in Taipei

Incident has split China watchers with some saying former leader was unwell and others it was political purge by Xi Jinping

New footage from China congress fuels questions about why Hu Jintao was hauled out – video

Thu 27 Oct 2022 22.00 EDT Last modified on Fri 28 Oct 2022 11.45 EDT

After eight days of China's most important political meeting, in which the autocratic leader Xi Jinping's precedent-breaking third term was confirmed, belligerent foreign policy reaffirmed, and the leader of the world's largest population and second-largest economy announced through the next five years, one question was on everyone's lips: what on earth happened to Hu Jintao and where is he now?

The drama happened on Saturday morning. In a short window between foreign media being allowed into Beijing's Great Hall and the start of the final public meeting of the 20th party congress, the former Chinese leader Hu [was physically removed from his seat next to his successor, Xi](#), and out of the Great Hall of the People.

It was a shocking scene from the Chinese Communist party's notoriously opaque political environment and an event so controlled that even the refilling of teacups was choreographed. It sparked immediate and occasionally wild guesswork, which continued throughout the week.

Devoid of explanation, the imagery easily lent itself to the narrative of [Xi's extraordinary power consolidation](#), the deck-clearing of potential

adversaries, and his abandonment of his predecessors' vision for the CCP.

"Some people are surprised by the abnormality that is Hu's disorderly exit, at what should normally be a very highly choreographed and orderly event," said Sung Wen-ti, a political scientist at Australia National University's Centre on [China](#) in the World. "That abnormality fuels speculations."

Hu had attended congress as a member of the Presidium, a committee of party elders that oversees key congress processes and events.

According to available footage, Hu was escorted into the Great Hall on Saturday morning by a staff member and took his seat to the left of Xi. Shortly after foreign media were allowed to enter the hall, Hu looked at some papers in front of him on the table. An outgoing politburo member Li Zhanshu, to his left, [appeared to try to stop him](#) by taking the paper and returning it to a red folder, pushing it out of Hu's reach. Xi appeared to call over a clerk and two staff took him away, gently lifting him out of his seat by his armpits. One picked up the folder and as the papers briefly flapped open, a [photo](#) by Spanish media reportedly showed it to be documents relating to the day's proceedings, including the changes to the Politburo.



Document taken from former President Hu Jintao at the closing ceremony of the 20th National Congress of the Communist Party of China Photograph:

Lintao Zhang/Getty Images

Throughout, Hu appeared confused and unwilling, made a short unreadable comment to Xi, and patted China's outgoing premier, Li Keqiang, on the shoulder as he exited.

Hu has not been seen in public since, although his son Hu Haifeng, a rising party official who was in the audience of 2,300 delegates, has appeared at formal events this week.

Global audiences have been told it was health-related. Xinhua News, the official state media, said on Twitter – which is banned in China – that Hu had been ill recently and was taken out of the room by concerned staff so he could rest. China's ambassador to Korea said media reports had been “completely skewed”, and the elderly Hu “had to step outside for a break”.

Domestically, no one has been told anything. There were no results about it on Baidu, Bilibili, WeChat or Weibo. No state media reported on it. No recent posts about Hu or his son can be found on Weibo, although some video and comments were visible on Douyin – China's domestic version of TikTok. Some users accepted the health explanation (“the foreign media are misinterpreting it,” said one). Others were suspicious (“If he feels unwell, others would take care of him, but seeing that he was stopped twice trying to open the red folder – this is so dark,” said another).

The incident has divided China watchers, with some convinced they witnessed a political purging, or at least a deliberate public humiliation, of the former president and leader of Xi's rival Communist Youth League faction. Foreign Policy's editor, James Palmer, noted that many of Hu's former allies have gone this way. Bill Bishop, a China expert and author of the Sinocism newsletter, said if Hu had truly been purged from the CCP it would be odd for state television to then include Hu in news footage of the event – which they did.

Others say the explanations of innocuous health issues offered by state media were more likely. Hu is 79 years old and has been in visibly frail health for some time.

Jeremy Goldkorn, editor-in-chief of the China Project, a New York-based news website, thought the most likely explanation was health issues. “The one thing that some Chinese commentators have pointed out that we can be certain of is that these senior leaders, many of whom owed their careers to Hu, were unable to muster any humanity, warmth, or politeness to show Hu any respect or consideration of any kind,” Goldkorn said.

For some, the footage of Hu trying to read the documents – which wasn’t made public until some days after the event – suggested the factional leader might have been protesting, or about to protest, against the expunging of his last few proteges from the party’s senior ranks and was hustled out to avoid a scene.

“If you’ve watched the CNA video showing the minutes before [he was escorted out], I think the ‘confused and unwell guy’ explanation still makes the most sense,” Kaiser Kuo, host of the Sinica Podcast, said on Twitter. “The whole folder-fumbling. Like the kid who turns his SAT test over before start is announced.”

Sung told the Guardian he doesn’t think that would be Xi’s style. “Even if we entertain the notion that Xi purged Hu because Hu wanted to raise objections in public, Xi would have done that before foreign press were allowed into the room,” he said.

“A high-profile purge of Hu at a critical juncture like the 20th party congress shows the presence of dissent, and the notion that Xi is at least ‘challengeable’. Neither is great for Xi’s image of invincibility.”

Sung said Hu Haifeng’s visibility also pushed against the purge theory. “When [the CCP] purge someone they tend to purge the whole family, at least those family members who are in politics.”

As speculation continues, analysts said we are unlikely to get an official explanation, perhaps at best a very public and government-approved appearance some time soon. “Overexplaining shows weakness,” said Sung. “They will let the next public appearance by Hu do the talking.”

In an analysis piece this week, Rory Truex wrote in the Atlantic that one's interpretation depended in part on one's opinion of China's political system. "Unfortunately, the speculation and rumour-mongering about Hu are a product of the secrecy of the party itself," he said.

*Additional research by Chi Hui Lin*

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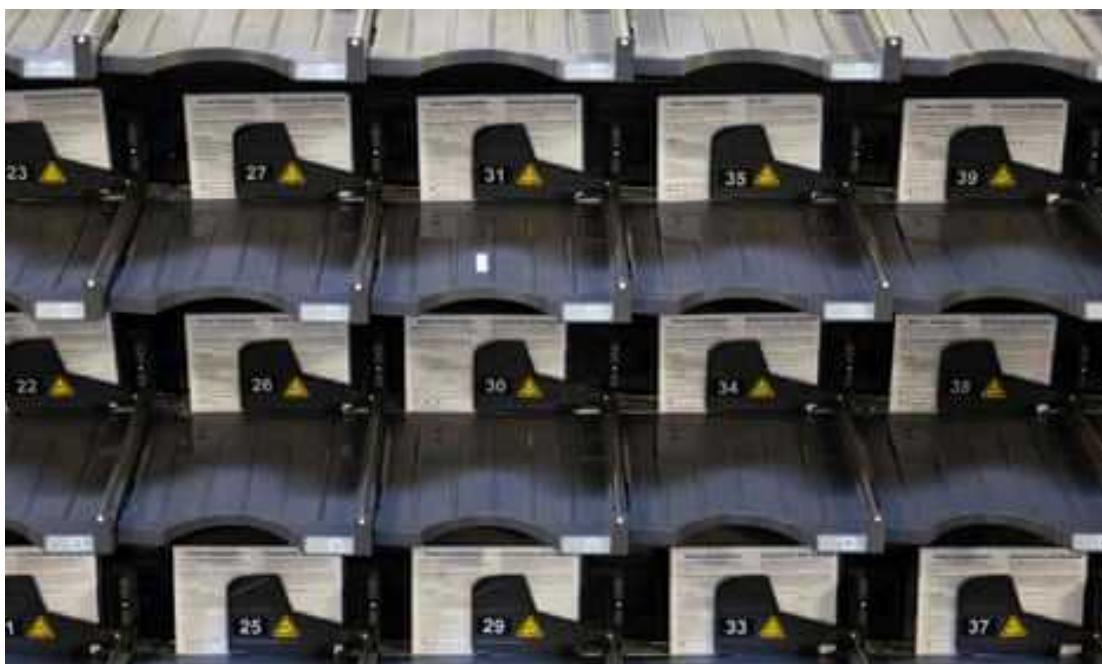
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| [Section menu](#) | [Main menu](#) |

## US midterm elections 2022

# Democrats on the defensive as economy becomes primary concern over abortion

Polls indicate tide shifting toward Republicans with high inflation rates and gas prices working in their favor



Ballots go through ballot processing equipment at the Philadelphia Ballot Processing Center. Photograph: Ryan Collerd/AFP/Getty Images

*[Joan E Greve](#) in Washington*

*[@joanegreve](#)*

Fri 28 Oct 2022 05.00 EDT Last modified on Fri 28 Oct 2022 14.36 EDT

With less than two weeks to go until election day, Democrats' hopes of defying political history and keeping their narrow majorities in the House and Senate appear to be fading, as many of the party's candidates go on the defensive in the final days of campaigning.

Over the summer, many election forecasters wondered if Democrats could avoid the widespread losses typically seen by the president's party in the midterms. With voters expressing outrage over the supreme court's decision to end federal protections for abortion access and gas prices falling, Democrats had been hopeful that their endangered incumbents could win re-election.

In August, Democrats took the lead on the generic congressional ballot, [according to FiveThirtyEight](#). They held on to that lead for two and a half months – until last week.

The national political environment now seems to have moved in Republicans' favor, and Democrats are running out of time to turn the tide. Gas prices started to rise again this month, although they have since [started to moderate](#). With inflation at near record levels, the share of voters who name the economy as their top priority has increased since the summer.

A [New York Times/Siena College poll](#) taken this month found that 44% of likely voters say economic concerns are the most important problem facing the country, compared with 36% who said the same in July. Just 5% of likely voters identified abortion as the most important issue right now. Voters' renewed focus on inflation and gas prices could hurt Democrats' chances in some key congressional races, given that Republicans consistently score better on [surveys](#) asking which party is better equipped to manage the economy.

The shifting winds have prompted some Democrats to question whether they made a tactical error by focusing heavily on abortion rights in their campaign messaging. Just last week, Joe Biden [promised](#) to send a bill codifying Roe v Wade to Congress if Democrats fortify their majorities in the midterms.

“I want to remind us all how we felt that day when 50 years of constitutional precedent was overturned,” Biden said last Tuesday. “If you care about the right to choose, then you got to vote.”

With surveys indicating abortion rights are not top of mind for most voters, some progressive lawmakers are urging their colleagues to instead emphasize economic proposals like raising the minimum wage and creating a federal paid family leave program as they campaign for re-election.

“In my view, while the abortion issue must remain on the front burner, it would be political malpractice for Democrats to ignore the state of the economy and allow Republican lies and distortions to go unanswered,” the progressive senator Bernie Sanders wrote in [a Guardian op-ed](#) earlier this month.

Sanders added: “Now is the time for Democrats to take the fight to the reactionary Republican party and expose their anti-worker views on the most important issues facing ordinary Americans. That is both the right thing to do from a policy perspective and good politics.”

Democrats worry that the strategy pivot may be coming too late for some candidates, as alarm bells go off in battleground states across the country.

In Florida, a state that Donald Trump won by just three points in 2020, the Republican governor, Ron DeSantis, appears likely to defeat his Democratic challenger, Charlie Crist, by [double digits](#). DeSantis, a Trump-like figure who is widely expected to run for president in 2024, has already raised [at least \\$177m](#) this election cycle, setting a record for a gubernatorial campaign. DeSantis’s fundraising haul and Democrats’ bleak polling numbers have led many of the party’s national organizations and donors to [abandon Florida candidates](#), in effect declaring a pre-emptive defeat.

In the battle for the House, Republicans are poised to recapture the majority, as districts that Biden easily won less than two years ago now appear to be up for grabs. [According to Politico](#), a recent internal poll conducted by the campaign of Julia Brownley, whose California district went for Biden by 20 points in 2020, showed the Democratic incumbent leading her Republican opponent by just one point.

Sean Patrick Maloney, the chair of the Democratic Congressional Campaign Committee who is overseeing the party’s efforts to maintain control of the House, now faces the risk of being ousted himself. Earlier this week, the

Cook Political Report [changed the rating](#) of Maloney's race from "lean Democrat" to "toss-up". If Maloney cannot hold his seat, the defeat would mark the first time since 1992 that a sitting House campaign committee chair lost re-election. Republicans are gleeful at the prospect of toppling the DCCC chair, dumping several million dollars into Maloney's district.

Maloney has remained optimistic about his chances, [telling CBS News](#), "I'm going to win this election, and when I do, they're going to wish they had that \$9m back."

But if the national environment is as dire as it appears for Democrats, a Republican wave could soon sweep Maloney and many of his colleagues out of office.

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

## New Zealand

# New Zealand women to be able to access abortion over the phone

Women in the first 10 weeks of pregnancy will be able to obtain abortion medication after a telephone consultation



New Zealand says expanding telehealth will ensure all women have access to abortion services. Photograph: golibo/Getty Images/iStockphoto

*Tess McClure in Auckland*

*@tessairini*

Thu 27 Oct 2022 22.45 EDT Last modified on Thu 27 Oct 2022 23.43 EDT

Women across [New Zealand](#) will be able to order an abortion over the phone from as early as next week, as the country becomes one of the few in the world to offer a full national telehealth service for the procedure.

The country is rolling out the final stage of its abortion telemedicine services, with a national hotline that will provide clinical consultations for

an early medical abortion, then courier out medications.

The service, available from Tuesday, will enable women to access a medical abortion in the first 10 weeks of pregnancy. That procedure involves taking two pills, and can be completed at home. [Women](#) who are beyond 10 weeks' gestation, or who have other medical conditions that mean they may require medical supervision, will be referred to in-person appointments.

Some women have previously been able to access abortion via telehealth through their doctors, but it until now it hasn't been a nationwide service.

The ministry of health has said expanding abortion telehealth nationally “will help to ensure everyone has access to abortion services if they need it, regardless of where they live”. The hotline will provide 24/7 clinical support, advice and counselling for women undergoing abortions, and offer consults for new patients during work hours.

New Zealand is one of just a handful of countries that offer a full telehealth service for abortion. England, Scotland, Wales, and Colombia all began national abortion telemedicine services during the coronavirus pandemic. In the UK, those three countries voted this year to [make the change permanent](#).

When the scheme was first announced“people will be able to immediately talk to a practitioner willing to provide abortion services, removing a key barrier for some people.”

“Everyone should be able to access abortion information and care when they need it,” she said. “Changes like this continue to build on quality, accessible abortion care.”

Earlier in the year, the government also lifted some funding restrictions on abortion medication, allowing nurses and GPs to prescribe it.

Some opponents have raised concerns that telemedicine is less safe than in-person appointments, but research has not borne that out.

A study of more than 52,000 women accessing abortion services in the UK found telemedicine abortion was as safe as those who had in-person appointments and tests.

Wait times were shorter and abortions were provided earlier: 40% of telemedicine abortions were accessed at less than weeks' gestation, compared to 25% for in-person.

An Iowa study that compared rates of adverse events in women who accessed medical abortions over the phone as opposed to inperson found that the rates were very slightly lower among those accessing telemedicine. In March, [the WHO updated its guidelines](#) to recommend telemedicine for early medical abortions.

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## **Headlines saturday 29 october 2022**

- [Royal Navy Chief orders inquiry into ‘abhorrent’ allegations of bullying and sexual harassment](#)
- [US Attack on Pelosi’s husband heightens fears of increasing political violence](#)
- [Paul Pelosi Hammer attack puts Nancy Pelosi's husband in hospital](#)
- [Twitter Elon Musk declares ‘moderation council’ as some users start pushing the limits](#)
- [Twitter Elon Musk completes takeover amid hate speech concerns](#)

## Royal Navy

# Royal Navy chief orders inquiry into sexual assault claims in submarine service

Whistleblowers allege harassment of female members included ‘crush depth rape list’



Adm Sir Ben Key said anyone found culpable will be held to account regardless of rank. Photograph: PA

[Nadeem Badshah](#)

Sat 29 Oct 2022 04.22 EDTFirst published on Fri 28 Oct 2022 18.19 EDT

The head of the [Royal Navy](#) has ordered an investigation into “abhorrent” allegations of inappropriate behaviour in the submarine service and declared that sexual assault and harassment has no place in the fleet.

It follows whistleblowers making harrowing allegations about misogyny, and bullying and sexual harassment of female members.

According to the Daily Mail, the abuse took place in the submarine service for more than a decade after the branch lifted its ban on female recruits in 2011.

One of the allegations is of submariners compiling a “crush depth rape list”, in which women were ranked in the order they should be raped in a catastrophic event.

Senior officers have been accused of making sexualised gestures and comments towards female personnel they command. [Women](#) also reported being screamed at and hit with clipboards, the newspaper said.

Adm Sir Ben Key, the first sea lord and chief of the naval staff, wrote on Twitter that anyone found culpable would be held to account regardless of rank.

“I am deeply disturbed to hear of allegations of inappropriate behaviour in the submarine service and I want to reassure our people, and anyone who is reading this, that any activity which falls short of the highest of standards the Royal Navy sets itself is totally unacceptable and not a true reflection of what service life should be,” he said.

“These allegations are abhorrent. Sexual assault and harassment has no place in the Royal Navy and will not be tolerated.

“I have directed my senior team to investigate these allegations thoroughly. Anyone who is found culpable will be held accountable for their actions regardless of their rank or status.”

The Ministry of Defence said that while most Royal Navy personnel had rewarding careers, the experiences of some, predominantly women, had been affected by inappropriate sexualised behaviour.

The MoD said it accepted more needed to be done and that it was improving reporting mechanisms for sexual offences. In July, Britain’s armed forces

introduced a [ban on the use of sex workers abroad](#) for the first time, as part of an attempt to stamp out sexual exploitation and abuse across the military.

Personnel found to have engaged in what the MoD described as “transactional sex” faced possible dismissal. It was the first time a consistent prohibition across all three services – navy, air force and army – was introduced.

The former rear admiral Chris Parry told BBC Radio 4’s Today programme there should be “zero tolerance” of sexual harassment.

“I am afraid some of the sexualised behaviour that we see in normal working places is transferred to submarines as you would expect, and of course in a compressed environment everything becomes exaggerated.”

He added: “When I was leading a ship I said: ‘The defence of this country is more important than your sex drive and I will take very seriously any attempt to impose any assault or banter on anyone else’.

“It’s about leadership but it’s very difficult when you are living cheek by jowl with everybody and you don’t have a mature society putting people into these submarines.”

Emma Norton, the director of the Centre for [Military](#) Justice, a charity that gives legal aid to victims of harassment, told Sky News that only about 10% of women who experienced serious bullying and harassment in the service made a formal complaint because “they have no faith that they’ll get any kind of justice or a fair hearing”.

Norton said the navy had failed to act on [repeated recommendations for greater independent oversight](#) into such complaints.

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## US politics

# Attack on Pelosi's husband heightens fears of increasing US political violence

Hammer assault on Paul Pelosi is latest in series of violent and threatening acts as midterm elections loom



San Francisco police officers and FBI agents gather in front of the home of the House speaker, Nancy Pelosi, after the attack on her husband, Paul. Photograph: Justin Sullivan/Getty Images

*[Joan E Greve](#) in Washington  
@joanegreve*

Sat 29 Oct 2022 01.00 EDT Last modified on Sat 29 Oct 2022 05.55 EDT

The bloody hammer attack on Paul Pelosi, husband of the House speaker, [Nancy Pelosi](#), has sparked increased fears over political violence in America just weeks before the country's crucial midterm elections.

The assault – by someone who reportedly entered the Democratic leader's home specifically in search of her – comes amid an alarming rise in violent rhetoric and threats targeting US lawmakers.

As Americans prepare to go to the polls on 8 November, many experts and observers have warned of the danger of acts of political violence. The election has played out in an atmosphere of conspiracy and intimidation amid widespread rightwing claims of voter fraud and persistent evidence-free accusations that the 2020 election was stolen.

Paul Pelosi's assailant reportedly posted on social media numerous far-right conspiracy theories around the election, as well as other issues such as big tech and the Covid-19 pandemic.

According to police, a suspect identified as 42-year-old David DePape [broke into Pelosi's San Francisco home and beat her husband](#) with a hammer until officers disarmed him. The suspect is now facing a number of charges, including attempted homicide and assault with a deadly weapon. Pelosi was taken to a nearby hospital, and the speaker's office said he was expected to make a full recovery.

Barack Obama reacts to attack on 'good friend' Paul Pelosi – video

CNN [has reported](#) that the assailant appeared to have targeted the speaker, who was not in San Francisco at the time of the attack. The suspect reportedly entered her home shouting, “Where is Nancy, where is Nancy?”

The assault marked the latest in a string of incidents involving threats of violence against American lawmakers, judges and political candidates.

In June, a man carrying a gun was arrested outside the home of the supreme court justice Brett Kavanaugh after threatening to kill him. A month later, Seattle police responded to a call about a man standing outside the home of Pramila Jayapal and shouting death threats and racial slurs against the progressive congresswoman. Days after that, New York gubernatorial candidate Lee Zeldin was attacked at a campaign event, when a man with a sharp weapon charged at him.

Jayapal weighed in on the assault against Pelosi's husband, saying on Twitter, "My heart breaks for @SpeakerPelosi and Paul Pelosi, and for our entire country. This violence is horrific. Our prayers are with them both and their family."

My heart breaks for [@SpeakerPelosi](#) and Paul Pelosi, and for our entire country. This violence is horrific. Our prayers are with them both and their family. ❤️ <https://t.co/og5ZUVSAhW>

— Rep. Pramila Jayapal (@RepJayapal) [October 28, 2022](#)

The US Capitol police has reported an overall rise in the number of threats against members of Congress since the deadly January 6 insurrection last year.

According to USCP data, officers tracked 9,625 threats and directions of interest (meaning concerning actions or statements) against members of Congress in 2021, compared with 3,939 such instances in 2017. The House sergeant at arms has responded to this worrisome trend by giving lawmakers up to \$10,000 to upgrade security at their homes.

Although both Democratic and Republican lawmakers have faced a number of threats in recent months, the increase is not evenly distributed along the political spectrum. According to [a study](#) conducted by the Anti-Defamation League, rightwing extremists have committed about 75% of the 450 political murders that occurred in the US over the past decade, compared with 4% attributed to leftwing extremists.



A suspect is taken into custody by sheriff deputies after he attacked Lee Zeldin, the Republican candidate for New York governor, in Perinton in July. Photograph: AP

The January 6 insurrection, which was carried out by a group of Donald Trump's supporters attempting to disrupt the certification of Joe Biden's electoral victory, provided a vivid example of the danger of rightwing extremism. A [bipartisan Senate report](#) released in June concluded that seven people died in connection with the insurrection.

The words of the man who assaulted Pelosi's husband on Friday echoed those of the January 6 insurrectionists. One man who participated in the Capitol attack [was recorded](#) saying, "Where are you, Nancy? We're looking for you."

The attack against Pelosi's husband prompted calls for Republican lawmakers to condemn the use of threats and violence against political opponents. One of those calls came from Adam Kinzinger, a Republican member of the the House select committee investigating January 6 whose family [has received death threats](#) over his work with the panel.

"This morning's terrifying attack on Paul Pelosi by a man obsessed with election conspiracies is a dangerous reality encouraged by some members of

my own party,” Kinzinger [said on Twitter](#). “This must be condemned by every Member of Congress [and] candidate. Now.”

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

[Nancy Pelosi](#)

## **Paul Pelosi, husband of Nancy Pelosi, in hospital with skull fracture after attack**

Paul Pelosi underwent ‘successful surgery’ after he was attacked at his home early on Friday by an assailant with a hammer



Paul Pelosi with his wife Nancy at a mass led by Pope Francis in Rome in June. The speaker’s office said the motive for the attack was being investigated. Photograph: Rex/Shutterstock

*[Ed Pilkington](#) in New York*

*[@edpilkington](#)*

Fri 28 Oct 2022 23.52 EDTFirst published on Fri 28 Oct 2022 08.59 EDT

Paul Pelosi, husband of the House speaker, [Nancy Pelosi](#), was hospitalized with a skull fracture on Friday after he was attacked at the couple’s home in California with a hammer by an assailant who was reported to have shouted “Where is Nancy? Where is Nancy?”

Paul Pelosi, 82, underwent “successful surgery” to repair a skull fracture and other “serious injuries” sustained during the assault and is expected to make a full recovery”, according to Nancy Pelosi’s longtime spokesperson, Drew Hammill.

“Earlier this morning, Paul Pelosi was attacked at home by an assailant who acted with force, and threatened his life while demanding to see the speaker,” Hammill said in a statement on Friday afternoon.

San Francisco police said that Paul Pelosi managed to call 911, but didn’t directly report what was happening, but that a dispatcher sent officers to follow up with a “wellbeing check” at about 2.27am local time on Friday morning. They found an adult male confronting Paul Pelosi, and a hammer was being grasped by both men.

“The suspect pulled the hammer away from Pelosi and violently assaulted him with it. Our officers immediately tackled the suspect, disarmed him, took him into custody,” said Bill Scott, chief of the San Francisco police department.

Scott named the suspect as David DePape, 42, and said he broke in through a back door. Charges are to be brought at the San Francisco county jail, including attempted homicide, assault with a deadly weapon, elder abuse, burglary and other felonies. DePape remained in the hospital on Friday evening, but the chief did not disclose his condition.

Scott said police were still investigating the motive, but said: “This was not a random act, this was intentional.”



San Francisco police officers and FBI agents gather in front of the home of Nancy and Paul Pelosi in San Francisco. Photograph: Justin Sullivan/Getty Images

It was [reported by CNN](#) that the suspect intended to tie the victim up “until Nancy got home” and that he had posted rightwing and conspiracy theories online, including content promoting the lie that Donald Trump was deprived of victory in the 2020 election because of voter fraud.

In a [statement](#) to CNN, an acquaintance of DePape’s said he appeared to be “out of touch with reality”. Two of the suspect’s relatives also told the network that DePape, who grew up in British Columbia, Canada, was estranged from his family.

In addition to multiple conspiracy posts on his Facebook account, which was reviewed by CNN and later taken down by Meta on Friday, DePape is also believed to have managed a blog to which he regularly posted screeds concerning the “ruling class”. The blog, which the San Francisco Chronicle reviewed and was later taken down, had a banner that said “Welcome to Big Brothers Censorship Hell”, along with numerous conspiracy posts about the government, media outlets and tech companies.

President Joe Biden called the attack on Paul Pelosi “despicable” and denounced people who spread lies about stolen elections for corroding the political climate and contributing to politically motivated violence.

“Enough is enough is enough,” Biden told supporters at a Democratic party fundraiser in Philadelphia on Friday. “Every person of good conscience needs to clearly and unambiguously stand up against the violence in our politics, regardless of what your politics are.

“Democracy is literally, not figuratively, on the ballot this year,” said Biden, who warned about the dangers of extremism in an impassioned speech in Philadelphia last month.

The president said reports indicated the attack on Paul Pelosi was aimed at Nancy Pelosi and noted that the suspected assailant used the same chant – “Where’s Nancy?” – heard from supporters of former president Donald Trump when they stormed the US Capitol on 6 January 2021.

Biden said it was not surprising that one party’s repeated lies about stolen elections could affect “people who may not be so well-balanced”.

### Barack Obama reacts to attack on 'good friend' Paul Pelosi – video

According to the Associated Press, the attacker had specifically targeted the Pelosi family home. Video footage of the house showed glass shattered in a side entrance, indicating where the break-in may have occurred.

A person briefed on the situation told AP that the intruder had confronted Paul Pelosi while demanding to know where his wife was.

The speaker, who is second in line to succeed the president, was not at home at the time of the attack, but was in Washington DC with security protection that accompanies her at all times as standard.

Her husband suffered blunt force trauma to the head and body in the attack. He was admitted to Zuckerberg San Francisco general hospital for bruising, severe swelling and other injuries to his right arm and hands. Nancy Pelosi

returned to San Francisco to be with her husband and reportedly arrived at the hospital on Friday afternoon.



Paul Pelosi and Nancy Pelosi in New York. Photograph: Angela Weiss/AFP/Getty Images

While the exact motivation for the attack was unclear on Friday morning, it raised fears about the [safety of members of Congress](#) and their families.

Concerns have been rising, particularly since the insurrection by extremist supporters of Donald Trump intent on overturning his loss to Joe Biden, about a new era of [violent threats](#) against US lawmakers and their families, staff. Recently released [footage](#) showed how Nancy Pelosi took charge during the riot while she and other officials were sheltering from the violence. One man who had [grabbed](#) the speaker's podium during the insurrection has since been sentenced to prison.

In July, members of Congress were [given \\$10,000 each](#) to upgrade security at their homes in the face of rising threats. Some have pushed for even more protection, pointing to people turning up at their homes and an increasing amount of threatening communications.

Political leaders of both parties denounced attack, which occurred in the closing days of a fiercely-contested midterm election.

Biden called Nancy Pelosi on Friday morning and the White House said he was “very glad that a full recovery is expected”.

Chuck Schumer, the Democratic majority leader in the US Senate, called Friday’s attack “a dastardly act” and conveyed his “deepest concern and heartfelt wishes” to Nancy Pelosi.

Kevin McCarthy, the minority leader in the House who is poised to take over as speaker should the [Democrats](#) lose control of the chamber in next month’s midterm elections, reached out to “check in on Paul” according to a spokesperson.

The Senate minority leader, [Mitch McConnell](#), said he was “horrified and disgusted” by the assault.

Paul Pelosi is a businessman who runs his own real estate and venture capital investment firm, Financial Leasing Services, based in San Francisco. He met Nancy D’Alesandro when they were both students in Washington DC, and they married in 1963. They have five children and many grandchildren.

Nancy Pelosi has had two stints as speaker of the US House, between 2007 to 2011 and since January 2019. She represents California’s 12th congressional district.



Police stand at the top of the closed street outside the home of Paul Pelosi.  
Photograph: Eric Risberg/AP

The investigation into Friday's attack is being handled jointly by the FBI, the US Capitol police (USCP) and local San Francisco officers.

A team of threat assessment investigators from the east coast was also sent to assist the FBI and the San Francisco police department with a joint investigation.

Nancy Pelosi had just returned to Washington this week from a security conference in Europe and was due to make a keynote speech at an LGBTQ+ advocacy event on Saturday evening with vice-president, Kamala Harris, but has canceled her appearance. In Philadelphia on Friday evening, the vice-president called the attack an “act of extreme violence” and condemned hateful and divisive discourse in politics, saying, “anyone who professes to be a leader has to really understand the meaning and the impact of their words”.

In addition to the rising threats on members of Congress, state and local politicians have also been confronted by increased threat levels. This week the campaign office of Katie Hobbs, Arizona’s secretary of state who is

running for governor of the state in next month's midterm elections, was broken into.

A suspect, Daniel Mota Dos Reis, has been charged with third-degree burglary.

Often at Pelosi's side during formal events in Washington, Paul Pelosi largely remains on the west coast.

*Lauren Gambino, Sam Levin and Maya Yang and the Associated Press and Reuters contributed reporting*

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## Elon Musk

# Elon Musk declares Twitter ‘moderation council’ – as some push the platform’s limits

Conservative users began recirculating conspiracy theories as others voiced concerns over allowing hate speech and disinformation



Elon Musk had previously pledged to cut back on moderation in an effort to promote free speech. Photograph: Dado Ruvić/Reuters

*Guardian staff and agencies*

Sat 29 Oct 2022 01.00 EDT Last modified on Sat 29 Oct 2022 08.45 EDT

Among the most urgent questions facing Twitter in its new era as a private company under [Elon Musk](#), a self-declared “free speech absolutist”, is how the platform will handle moderation.

After finalizing his takeover and ousting senior leadership, Musk declared on Friday that he would be forming a new “content moderation council” that would bring together “diverse views” on the issue.

“No major content decisions or account reinstatements will happen before the council convenes,” he tweeted.

But that hasn’t stopped users from cheering – or criticizing – what they expected to be a quick embrace of Musk’s pledges to cut back on moderation in an effort to promote free speech.

the bird is freed

— Elon Musk (@elonmusk) [October 28, 2022](#)

Concerns range from whether Musk [will reinstate the account](#) of Donald Trump – who was banned from the platform following the 6 January Capitol attack – to whether a less-regulated platform will allow hate speech and disinformation to flourish further.

With the US midterms just days away, concerns about political misinformation are also taking on renewed urgency. Civil rights organizations have sounded the alarm about the proliferation of harmful content, an issue that [Twitter](#) already struggles with, while Republicans have celebrated the change in ownership.

“His acquisition of Twitter has opened Pandora’s box,” the advocacy group Ultraviolet said in a Friday statement, while also urging Musk, Twitter executives and the company’s board of directors to continue to enforce the ban on Trump “as well as violent right-wing extremists and white supremacists”.

Musk [has tried to play down fears](#), particularly among the advertisers he will depend on to keep the company afloat. General Motors [has already said](#) it will “pause” ads on the site as it weighs what direction Musk will take, and other companies could follow suit.

In a message this week to Twitter's advertising clients, Musk [said that](#) the platform "obviously cannot become a free-for-all hellscape" and the platform must be "warm and welcoming to all".

Dear Twitter Advertisers <pic.twitter.com/GMwHmInPAS>

— Elon Musk (@elonmusk) [October 27, 2022](#)

But many began testing the limits of the site just hours after the billionaire took the helm.

On Friday, conservative personalities began recirculating long-debunked conspiracy theories, including about Covid-19 and the 2020 election, as a means of gauging whether Twitter's policies on misinformation were still being enforced.

Popular rightwing pundits tweeted buzzwords such as "ivermectin" and "Trump won" to see whether they would be penalized. Ivermectin, a cheap drug that kills parasites in humans and animals, [has been promoted](#) by some Republican lawmakers and conservative talkshow hosts as an effective Covid treatment but health experts have [raised serious doubts](#).

"Ok, @elonmusk, is this thing on..?" tweeted Steve Cortes, a former commentator for the conservative TV network Newsmax and adviser to Trump. "There are two sexes Trump won ivermectin rocks."

Ok, [@elonmusk](#), is this thing on □?

THERE ARE TWO SEXES

TRUMP WON

IVERMECTIN ROCKS

— Steve Cortes (@CortesSteve) [October 28, 2022](#)

Meanwhile, dozens of extremist profiles – some newly created – circulated racial slurs and Nazi imagery while expressing gratitude to Musk. And researchers found a surge in new followers flocking to the accounts of high-profile rightwing figures in the 24 hours after Musk took over, the New York Times [reported](#).

The jury is still out on what will become of the social media platform – and what it will tolerate. Observers are eyeing who stays, who goes and who might potentially come back from the list of people the platform has banned over the years. They range from Trump to the conspiracy theorist Alex Jones and former Ku Klux Klan leader David Duke – none of whom have returned to the platform so far.

The former president was quick to offer his praise for Musk on Friday. “I am very happy that Twitter is now in sane hands, and will no longer be run by Radical Left Lunatics and Maniacs that truly hate our country,” Trump said in a morning post on his social media platform Truth Social, though he indicated that he might not return to the platform despite Musk saying he would reverse Trump’s ban.

Seniors figures [in UK and European politics](#) have urged Musk to take his responsibilities to Twitter and its users seriously.

The EU’s internal market commissioner, Thierry Breton, wrote on the platform on Friday that “in Europe, the bird will fly by our rules”. (Musk confirmed his takeover over the business by tweeting: [“the bird is freed”](#).)

Sadiq Khan, the mayor of London, tweeted on Friday: “Any decision about allowing suspended users to return must be taken incredibly carefully & in direct consultation with experts in countering digital hate & misinformation.”

The Facebook Oversight Board, a semi-independent board of experts created to review high-profile content decisions at Facebook, offered to help Musk in his mission.

“Independent oversight of content moderation has a vital role to play in building trust in platforms and ensuring users are treated fairly,” the group tweeted on Friday. “We would welcome the opportunity to discuss Twitter’s plans in more detail with the company.

Independent oversight of content moderation has a vital role to play in building trust in platforms and ensuring users are treated fairly. This is a model we have been proving since 2020. We would welcome the opportunity to discuss Twitter’s plans in more detail with the company.  
<https://t.co/5EwIps748m>

— Oversight Board (@OversightBoard) [October 28, 2022](#)

Twitter’s user base, at just over 230 million users, is far smaller than competitors such as Facebook and TikTok. And while the platform is still highly influential among celebrities, journalists and politicians, many have warned its relevancy could fade if it descends into chaos.

Some are encouraging users to take matters into their own hands and abandon the platform for other sources of news and connection.

Jennifer Grygiel, a social media expert and professor at Syracuse University, predicted a flight if quality declines on a Musk-run Twitter, and suggests that might not be a bad thing.

“Elon Musk bought a platform, he didn’t buy people,” said Grygiel. “And we still have a choice in how we get our news, our information and how we communicate.”

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[Twitter](#)

## Elon Musk completes Twitter takeover amid hate speech concerns

Shares delisted and top execs reportedly fired as world's richest man closes deal to buy social media platform



Some campaigners fears a rise in hate speech after new Twitter owner Elon Musk intimated he would reduce comment moderation at the platform.  
Photograph: Dado Ruvic/Reuters

*[Dan Milmo](#), [Jasper Jolly](#), [Alex Hern](#) in London and [Kari Paul](#) in San Francisco*

Fri 28 Oct 2022 12.25 EDTFirst published on Fri 28 Oct 2022 12.17 EDT

The world's richest man, [Elon Musk](#), has completed his \$44bn acquisition of Twitter, amid warnings from politicians and campaigners that hate speech on the platform must be held in check.

The social media group confirmed the deal in a brief filing on the New York Stock Exchange on Friday morning, disclosing the [deal had closed](#) the day before. Shares in the company have been suspended and will delist on 8 November, capping a chaotic saga that began when the Tesla CEO first announced his plans to take the tech business private in April.

Musk marked the transaction with a post to his 110 million followers declaring the “bird is freed”, in a reference to the company’s corporate logo, before adding: “let the good times roll”.

the bird is freed

— Elon Musk (@elonmusk) [October 28, 2022](#)

There has been speculation Musk will take on the role of chief executive at [Twitter](#) on an interim basis. Shortly after taking the helm, he reportedly ousted several senior figures, including the chief executive, Parag Agrawal; the chief financial officer, Ned Segal; and the head of legal policy, trust and safety, Vijaya Gadde.

Segal tweeted on Friday that he had “concluded 5 years [@twitter](#)”. On Friday Martha Lane Fox, the co-founder of lastminute.com and a Twitter board member, paid tribute to Agrawal, Gadde and Segal, thanking them for “leading with incredible integrity and care”.

Working with [@paraga](#) [@nedsegal](#) [@vijaya](#) [@edgett](#) has been a career high. Thank you for leading with incredible integrity and care. I will get you to [@luckyvoice](#) one day :-)

— martha lane fox (@Marthalanefox) [October 28, 2022](#)

Twitter employees pushed past a scrum of press outside the company headquarters in San Francisco on Friday, declining to answer questions from reporters. The building was tightly secured amid vague reports Musk may be making another appearance on the premises. “We have had a very unique three days,” one unnamed security guard said.

Meanwhile, the mood inside the company was frantic, [according to reports](#), with employees relying heavily on outside information as to what changes Musk would be making in the absence of internal communication.

News of the deal, after [months of legal back-and-forth](#), brought immediate warnings that it must not lead to a surge in hate speech and disinformation on the platform, which has more than 230 million users. Musk, a self-described “free speech absolutist”, has said he intends to bring banned users, including Donald Trump, back to the platform.

General Motors told CNBC it will pause advertising on the platform as it assesses the company’s new direction.

“We are engaging with Twitter to understand the direction of the platform under their new ownership. As is normal course of business with a significant change in a media platform, we have temporarily paused our paid advertising. Our customer care interactions on Twitter will continue,” the company said in an emailed statement to CNBC.



Donald Trump stated he was ‘very happy that Twitter is now in sane hands’ after Elon Musk took over Twitter. Photograph: Philip Pacheco/AFP/Getty Images

GM's decision comes days after Musk [attempted to play down concerns over harmful content](#). In a message to Twitter's advertising clients, he said turning the site into a "hellscape" would not work and [tweeted that](#) the platform must be "warm and welcoming to all".

Trump responded to Musk's takeover on his own platform, Truth Social, on Friday, stating he is "very happy that Twitter is now in sane hands". "Twitter must now work hard to rid itself of all the bots and fake accounts that have hurt it so badly," he wrote. "I LOVE TRUTH!"

Musk seemed to allude to the question of whether Trump would return to the platform in a Tweet on Friday, stating that the platform would be forming "a content moderation council with widely diverse viewpoints" to address such issues. "No major content decisions or account reinstatements will happen before that council convenes," he wrote.

He later sowed confusion by [tweeting](#) that "anyone suspended for minor & dubious reasons will be freed from Twitter jail", then added, "To be super clear, we have not yet made any changes to Twitter's content moderation policies."

Thierry Breton, the European commissioner for the internal market, responded to the freed bird post with a tweet warning that the bird "will fly by our rules" – in a reference to the EU's Digital Services Act, which requires online platforms to tackle illegal content such as hate speech.

One internet safety campaigner said on Friday that the deal could "unravel" Twitter's work on improving the platform, after reports that Gadde had been fired.

Seyi Akiwowo, the head of Glitch, a UK-based charity that campaigns against online abuse, said Gadde's removal was a blow. She tweeted: "I am very concerned that the progress Twitter has finally made on safety over the last 6 years will unravel in the next few weeks."

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Twitter's headquarters in downtown San Francisco on Friday. Photograph: Jeff Chiu/AP

In the US, the first amendment campaign group Pen America said the midterm elections on 8 November would be a “pivotal” moment for the platform, showing whether Musk has grasped the intricacies of its operations.

“With the election two weeks out a pivotal indicator will be whether purveyors of disinformation are given free rein to mislead people over Twitter about when, where and how to vote,” said Suzanne Nossel, the organisation’s chief executive.

However, Musk’s very first public statement on Friday morning was to promise the pseudonymous Maga influencer “Catturd” that he would be “digging in” to why the user’s account is “shadowbanned” – a reference to it

not showing up in search results. With 850,000 followers, the account is one of the more prominent on the US right.

I will be digging in more today

— Elon Musk (@elonmusk) [October 28, 2022](#)

Musk, who is worth \$212bn, has committed to financing most of the transaction himself, although he has received commitments worth [more than \\$7bn](#) from investors including Larry Ellison, founder of the Oracle software group, and the cryptocurrency platform Binance. The deal will also be backed by a \$13bn debt package led by a consortium of Wall Street banks.

Immediate termination of the three Twitter executives' employment could cost the company more than \$120m. Under "golden parachute" clauses Agrawal, Segal and Gadde would all qualify for lucrative payouts to cover previous share awards, plus a year's salary and some insurance benefits. Agrawal would be entitled to total payments of \$57.4m, and Segal and Gadde \$44.5m and \$20m respectively.

They also hold shares worth \$8.3m, \$22m and \$34.8m respectively. Those shares are likely to be bought by Musk during the takeover. The closure of the deal will also trigger payments for Twitter's US investment bankers that were conditional on completion of the takeover. JP Morgan Chase will receive \$48m and Goldman Sachs \$65m.

Completion of the deal brings to a close a takeover that became mired in corporate and legal drama soon after it was announced in April. Within weeks the deal, which Musk had signed on 25 April, began to founder as its prospective owner raised concerns about the number of vexatious spam accounts on the platform.

This led the Tesla CEO to announce in July that he was [walking away](#) from the transaction.

Twitter then [sued Musk in the US state of Delaware](#), where the company is incorporated, to demand that he close the deal. After a surprise [change of](#)

[mind by Musk](#) as a court date approached, a Delaware judge gave both sides [until 5pm on 28 October](#) to close the deal.

*Johana Bhuiyan contributed to this report.*

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

## 2022.10.29 - Spotlight

- [Damian Lewis ‘When someone dies prematurely, you’re left careering in a different direction’](#)
- [‘I want to work’ Why UK parents are taking part in March of the Mummies](#)
- [Garth Marenghi ‘Many writers cite me as an influence ... and I will be suing them all’](#)
- [Talking typewriters and slithering eels: an extract from Garth Marenghi’s chilling new novel](#)
- [Rishi Sunak Finance, property and mining: the money behind £460,000 leadership bid](#)

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[Interview](#)

## **Damian Lewis on grief, espionage and his new musical ambitions: ‘When someone dies prematurely, you’re left careering in a different direction’**

[Simon Hattenstone](#)



Damian Lewis: ‘It’s a very fertile, very creative, raw, open time, as well as being flattening and difficult and sad.’ Photograph: Tomo Brejc/Trunk Archive

They were the golden couple of British acting, but Helen McCrory’s death last year left her husband shattered. Now he is putting the pieces of himself back together – and finding a new creative energy



Sat 29 Oct 2022 02.00 EDT Last modified on Sat 29 Oct 2022 09.03 EDT

The entrance to the private members’ club is so unobtrusive it is barely visible. I walk up the back stairs to a well-disguised roof terrace. A member of staff seems to know why I’m here, and shows me to a discreet table with barely a word. [Damian Lewis](#) is sitting there alone, tucking into a plate of sea bass. “Sorry, I couldn’t wait,” he says, looking up. “I was starving.” We move on to the veranda – an even more private spot. I half expect him to show me a secret code, tell me to consign it to memory, and walk away. It feels like a scene from a spy novel.

Lewis has the urbane ease of a man to the establishment born – a diplomat, say, or an MI6 agent. In his latest drama, *A Spy Among Friends*, based on the [Ben Macintyre book](#), he plays the latter. The story is based on the real relationship between double agent Kim Philby (played by Guy Pearce) and

MI6 operative Nicholas Elliott (Lewis), the friend tasked with extracting a confession from him. This gripping miniseries is his first role since [the death of his wife, Helen McCrory](#), last year. In that time, Lewis admits, his life has been given a thorough shaking.

It feels as if I'm meeting a man putting himself back together, and not quite sure how all the parts fit. He is still reeling from grief, while also embracing a new life, one that includes a surprise career change.



With Guy Pearce in new thriller A Spy Among Friends. Photograph: Sony Pictures Television

We're here to talk about the new drama, but as with so many men, his first language is football. Barely have I sat down and he's chatting footie. Lewis, 51, is still a keen and talented player, who takes part regularly in Soccer Aid matches on behalf of Unicef. He tells me he recently played with Cafu, Brazil's most capped male player, who is a year older than Lewis. "He's kept himself in shape. He's my age, charging around that pitch." He asks me who I support. Manchester City, I say. And now he's started on the phenomenal goal machine Erling Haaland. "He's like a CGI construct. He could be out of Jurassic Park. He's got an incredible physical form." It's so much easier than dealing with the stuff of life. But that's not what we're here for.

I ask why he chose to meet at the club, attached to a music venue called Koko (formerly the Camden Palace). He tells me he is a member – great bands play here, the food's superb and it's close to home. Suddenly he looks self-conscious. "I have an awkward relationship with clubs," he says. "I join them and then I'm not sure that I should go to them." Why? "You immediately affiliate yourself with everyone in there and I may not want to do that."

When Lewis was young, he did a lot of busking. I ask if he could have made a career of it. And now the man who was talking fluent football a moment ago is mumbling diffidently. "Erm ... well ... do you know what I've done recently?" I've heard he's making an album of songs inspired by McCrory. "Well, yeah, it's simplistic to put it like that, but I, erm, I am being a musician. Now. As well as being an actor," he says, like a stage-shy X Factor contestant. "So I suppose, to answer your question, I could have been a musician. And I've ended up trying to be one. I've no idea whether I'll be a good musician."



Playing for England in a Soccer Aid match in 2018. Photograph: Lynne Cameron/Getty Images

Lewis looks wonderful. Great head of marmalade-coloured hair, James Bond handsome and stylishly dressed. One item of clothing stands out. What looks

like a towelling waistcoat underneath his jacket turns out to be a T-shirt. Can he describe it? “It’s one of those weird T-shirts you can’t wear on a hot summer day. You just sit there dripping in sweat cos it’s a terrycloth thinggummibob like those T-shirts that our dads wore in the 70s that are now back and cool. It’s probably a bit self-conscious of me that I’m wearing this,” he says apologetically. “It’s from a website called Phix. Now Phix claims to be making rock’n’roll clothing, so what you’ve caught me doing is creating someone else. Like a construct.” Is this the new you? He smiles. “It’s a bit sad, but it’s really warm and snug. I was actually looking at the website for gig clothing – what to wear on stage, not on a terrace with you on a Thursday afternoon.”

He returns to the subject of members’ clubs and why he feels uneasy about joining one. “You worry about being seen to be like the other people in the thing you’ve joined. That’s always my concern. I get up in the morning, put on a nice shirt, think: ‘That’s all right, I’ve still got it, that’s OK.’ Walk down the road feeling fairly respectable, *semi-fashionable*.” He snorts with derision. “You walk into one of these clubs and you look like every other guy in there.” And now he roars with laughter. What, the men are as good-looking as you? “Better-looking,” he says. “*Better*-looking. There’s a whole milieu of people who have just totally bought into a lifestyle, and now I look like a guy who’s bought his clothes out of the same colour supplement and I don’t subscribe to any magazines!”

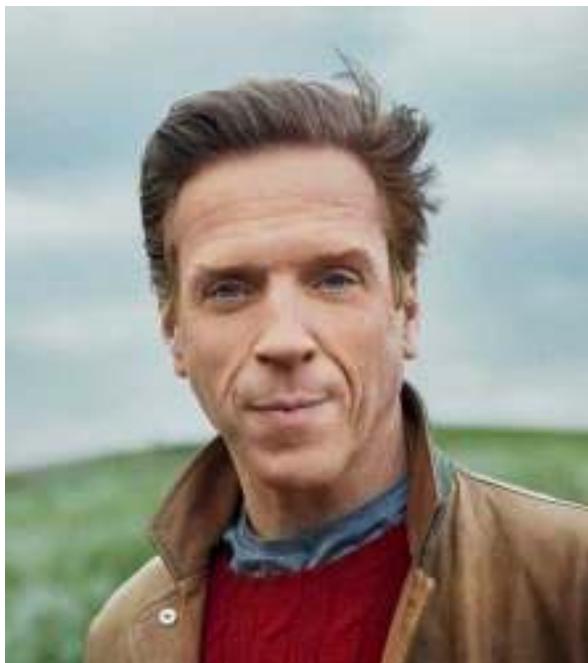
Blimey, there’s a lot to unpick here. How long have you been feeling like this, I ask? “Oh, about a week!” he says.

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Damian Lewis and Helen McCrory were one of Britain’s most feted acting couples. He made his name playing Major Richard Winters in the US second world war TV series Band of Brothers, created by Steven Spielberg and Tom Hanks. Perhaps he is best known as the former US marine and prisoner of war Nicholas Brody in the espionage thriller [Homeland](#). Lewis seems to have two identities as an actor – in American dramas, he often plays macho military types. In British dramas, he tends to be cast in privileged establishment roles, of which the most obviously privileged is Henry VIII in the TV adaptation of Hilary Mantel’s Wolf Hall. Lewis is fabulous as the terrifying yet needy man-baby monarch. As for McCrory, she was simply

one of the greatest actors of her generation on stage (*The Seagull*, *Medea*, *The Deep Blue Sea*) and screen (*The Queen*, *Peaky Blinders*, *Harry Potter*). They had been married nearly 14 years when she died in April 2021, aged 52.

Lewis grew up in St John's Wood, a well-to-do area of London. His father was an insurance broker with Lloyd's. His maternal grandfather was lord mayor of London, and down the generations on his mother's side there is an impressive lineage of aristocrats, philanthropists, shipbuilders and a doctor to the royal family. Lewis was sent to boarding school aged eight, and went on to Eton, the country's most famous private school. There, he studied drama and learned to play classical guitar. By the age of 16, he had decided he wanted to become an actor and went on to graduate from the prestigious Guildhall School of Music and Drama.



Photograph: Tomo Brejc/Trunk Archive

In the summer months, he would travel around Europe singing and playing guitar on the streets. “I was a professional busker in my early 20s. I had a motorbike, a tent with a hole in it, and I went around the south of France playing market towns, then a bit of Spain. I loved it.” Did he make good money? “Yeah, 20 to 30 quid an hour. Everybody’s on holiday and they’d just chuck in 10 francs.” That’s better than Equity rates, I say. “Certainly is.

*Certainly* is, sir. Certainly is.” He sounds every inch the Old Etonian. After he joined the Royal Shakespeare Company in 1997, acting took precedence. He continued playing music, but just for fun. Often at the end of shoots an impromptu band would be formed for the wrap party, and Lewis would invariably be part of it.

It was a couple of years ago that he started to reconsider his career, he says. “I had always identified as an actor, and that was consolidated by being married to Helen. We felt very much like an acting couple. Life takes you down paths, and I wasn’t resistant to that path because I loved what I was doing. But in lockdown we all sat around thinking, didn’t we?” He looks at me. “Did you? Did you do some thinking in lockdown? ‘Am I going to keep writing profiles on people I’m not really that interested in, or am I going to join the Labour party?’” It’s a strange thing to say – assuming both that I dislike my job, and that I would want to work for Labour. No, I say, but tell me about your moment of revelation.

Actually, he says, the project had its genesis the best part of a decade ago when he sang a couple of songs on a Radio 2 show. One of his fellow guests was the singer and broadcaster [Cerys Matthews](#), whose husband, producer Steve Abbott, was impressed with Lewis’s performance. Abbott suggested that he and Lewis record some songs, but then Lewis spent the next five years playing hedge-fund manager Bobby Axelrod in the American drama series [Billions](#). A couple of years ago, with McCrory seriously ill, Lewis asked to be written out of the sixth series so he could be with his family. That was when he reconsidered Abbott’s proposal.

There’s nothing more annoying than an actor who thinks he’s Bruce Springsteen. By the way, I don’t. This is a mini midlife crisis, but not a full-blown one

“Cut to lockdown and I’m noodling on my guitar again and I’m thinking: ‘I would like to pursue that.’ So I called Steve and he said: ‘Can I introduce you to someone I think is the best young jazz musician in the country, called Giacomo Smith?’ and I said: ‘Absolutely.’” Initially they worked on covers, then Smith suggested they write songs together. Lewis had never written a song in his life. “I started writing and found out there was lots that I actually

did want to write, and before we knew it we had a record's worth of songs. We've ended up with a rootsy, jazzy, rock'n'rolly, singer-songwritery-type album. If that doesn't put you off, nothing will." He grins. "But it's been really good fun. *Really* good fun."

Has the album got a title yet? "Yes. Mission Creep." I tell him I'm never sure what "mission creep" means. "Mission creep is when you go to war and you invade one country, and before you know it you've invaded another. You allow your mission to spread and go where you shouldn't." Why that title? Another smile. "Are you a mission creep?" he asks himself. "Or is it *a* mission creep? Or 'That mission creep.'" So is there a hint of self-loathing in the title? "No, not particularly. Not *particularly*."

But he admits he is wary of overselling himself. "There's nothing more annoying than an actor who thinks he's Bruce Springsteen. By the way, I don't think I'm Bruce Springsteen. This is a mini midlife crisis, but it's not a full-blown midlife crisis." If anybody is entitled to a bit of a midlife crisis, surely it's Lewis.



On stage at the Wilderness festival in August 2022. Photograph: Jim Dyson/Getty Images

Had he discussed his ambition to be a musician with McCrory? “Yes, she knew I was talking to Steve and meeting with Giacomo.” Did he tell her he was really going to go for it? “At that point, it hadn’t formulated that much in my mind.” I ask whether the change in direction is to do with McCrory’s death? “Not consciously, but it’s inevitable there’s change. When you’ve been married to someone and they die prematurely, you’re left careering in a different direction. And that throws up …” He speaks slowly, stops and starts again, making sure he gets his words right. “It’s a very fertile, very creative, raw, open time, as well as being flattening and difficult and sad. It’s all those things at once. Anybody who hasn’t been through it won’t fully understand, but I think anybody who has been through it will.”

McCrory’s death came as a shock to the public. She had hidden her illness. In lockdown, she appeared with Lewis on TV, cheering up the country and raising money for the NHS. After her death, he wrote a lovely tribute to her in the Times. It was as funny as it was moving. He talked about her great qualities, and the advice she left for him and their two children (Manon, now 16, and Gulliver, 14). He started the piece: “As I sit down to write this, I can hear Helen shouting from the bed: ‘Keep it short, Damian, it’s not about you.’” He said he had never known anybody who so consciously spread happiness or enjoyed life as much as his wife did; that his children had “the fearlessness, wit, curiosity, talent and beauty of their mother”. Lewis wrote that McCrory told them: “I want Daddy to have girlfriends, lots of them, you must all love again, love isn’t possessive, but you know, Damian, try at least to get though the funeral without snogging someone.”

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Today, Lewis tells me that he felt wiped out after her death as everything caught up with him. “For four or five months, you’re physically drained. Helen was ill for four and a half years. They say that the first day of diagnosis of an illness that could be terminal is your first day of grief. You are in a state of semi-grief while the person is still alive because there is always the sense that something might go wrong at any point. There’s a hyper-alertness and you are incredibly present and charged at all times. You’re on a sort of war footing. You’ve got something to deal with that gives you great focus. Everything is going into getting that person better.”

Later on, was he on a war footing to make sure the end of her life was as good as possible? “Yes, yes, yes – until the moment of death you’re fully engaged in living the best possible life that can be lived for the person dying, and for you as a family and for the children. And it takes an enormous amount of energy. So the collapse in death, the exhaustion, comes with that.”

I’m thinking about what he said about death being a fertile period. Can he expand on that? “Well, death is oddly ecstatic. Along with birth, it’s the ultimate act of life, and it brings this enormous energy to it. And you carry that energy around with you. However deep and profound your sadness, a new beginning always has an energy to it. And it is a new beginning when your wife dies and you’re left on your own. Life has changed. So there is an energy in that.”

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With Helen McCrory in 2020: ‘Helen was ill for four years. You’re in a state of semi-grief while the person is still alive.’ Photograph: Dave Benett/Getty Images

The way he discusses death and grief is admirably honest. Has he written about this in any of the songs? “No. People will, you know … they’ll find in the songs what they want to find in them.”

In recent weeks, just after he announced the new album, he has been pictured with the Kills singer Alison Mosshart in London and New York.

I ask if he would like a drink. “I want to drink more coffee.” Does he fancy an alcoholic drink? “No, I can’t drink alcohol today. My daughter is 16 today. Sweet 16. We’ve got a little surprise dinner for her tonight.” How have the kids been? “Amazing. They’re incredible. That’s all I’m going to say about them.” He says he thinks he has said enough about Helen and the family.

I tell him how much I like *A Spy Among Friends*. We talk about how the top British private schools proved such a fertile recruiting ground for not only spies but double agents – of the Cambridge spy ring, Philby went to Westminster, Anthony Blunt to Marlborough, Donald Maclean to Gresham’s and Guy Burgess to Eton. Was Lewis ever approached to be a spook? “No,”

he says. Were any of his contemporaries at Eton spies? “Rory Stewart?” Has Stewart ever admitted to it? “No, I’m only guessing.” (Stewart has always denied being a spy, but says that if he had been, he would not be able to confirm it.)

The drama programme at Eton was brilliant. So if you had the talent or inclination, you could do drama 24/7 if you wanted to

Later, I talk to Alex Cary, Lewis’s good friend and collaborator, who wrote and produced *A Spy Among Friends* (and was also a producer and writer on *Homeland*). Cary describes Lewis as “cocky and funny, but also quite humble”. That’s an unusual mix, I say. “Yeah, I’m the same. I was always the guy at school who wanted to be at the back of the class making jokes. But I was always careful that I didn’t want to hurt people, and I think he’s like that. He likes to be the class clown, but he also has a deeper understanding of people’s feelings. He’s a very kind person. And he also likes to piss about.”

Cary says that the more they explored the story of Philby and Elliott, the more personal it became to them. “It’s about our people, posh white men, and how they’ve endangered the country. And that’s what makes it timely. How their friendships, their clubbiness, have endangered the country.” Like Philby, Cary went to Westminster. “The two characters cared more about themselves and their club and way of life than the country itself.”



In Homeland in 2011. Photograph: Landmark Media/Alamy

Perhaps this explains Lewis's ambivalence about clubs. Eton is, after all, one of the world's most elite clubs. "Damian and I have sat in the pub and discussed the benefits of going to Eton and Westminster. You have access to certain things, and there is a comfort zone you can step back into when shit gets rough." How does Lewis feel about it? "I think he was very grateful for his background. And I feel grateful for mine, but I also feel it's dangerous to allow it to cage you."

The thing is, Cary says, the people in politics who are now seen as representative of private-school culture weren't seen as such when they were at school. "David Cameron and Boris Johnson and Jacob Rees-Mogg [all of whom went to Eton], these fucking people appear and you go: 'Wait a minute – when we were at school with you turds, you didn't represent us.' We can't go: 'Well, we're not one of them,' because we clearly are, but we're embarrassed by them. There's a fashion now that everybody wants to escape from the posh white man. I think our job is to shine a light on these people."

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Back at the private members' club, I ask Lewis why Eton has produced so many celebrated actors (Eddie Redmayne, Dominic West, Tom Hiddleston and Hugh Laurie are all alumni). It hasn't, he says. "As a percentage of

people coming out of Eton, there are almost no actors. There's a little clutch of us who did well. The drama programme at Eton was brilliant. So if you had the talent or inclination, you could do drama 24/7 if you wanted to."

[In 2017, he told the Guardian](#): "The cut and thrust of a successful school can be very bonding. I was always encouraged to be on teams at sport; I got a lot from that. Would I send my son to Eton? I might." In the event, he didn't. "It wasn't the right thing for my son," he says now. "We just decided what was best for him."



With his children, Gulliver and Manon, in 2018. Photograph: Dave Benett/WireImage

Does he worry about the dearth of social mobility in the acting profession? So many successful actors come from privileged backgrounds, while the less well-off struggle to pay their way through college – if they can get there in the first place. Lewis says the most important thing to focus on is where today's writers come from. "It's about ensuring people from all different backgrounds are given the confidence to write, and that when they don't meet with immediate success and financial reward, they're given a second chance. That's the only way we'll get a broad representation of everything we are."

This is hardly a problem confined to the arts, he says. “It’s true of any self-employed business. How long can you keep it going before you need to make money? Obviously if there’s independent wealth attached to young artists or their families, then they can be supported through the bleak first five or six years, and then they could meet with great success in years seven and eight. A pattern might emerge where people who don’t have that independent money have given up by years seven and eight, so we’ll never know whether they would have been successful or not.”

Lewis likes to talk about politics, but he is less forthcoming than Cary. We are talking before Liz Truss’s resignation, and he makes it clear that he is no fan of the system that allows people to become prime minister without a mandate from the country. “It’s really wild what’s going on. Maybe I’m reading the wrong newspapers, but I haven’t seen a proper debate about changing our constitution so that a ruling party should not be able to remove its leader without having a general election. It really sticks in the craw.”

He looks at his phone. It’s time to leave. His parking space is about to run out, and he’s got to prepare for Manon’s surprise birthday dinner. On our way out, he tells me he plans to tour with the album, which will be released next year. “We’ve got some festivals booked.” Which ones? “Well, we’re hoping for Glastonbury and a couple of others.” Wow, start at the top, I say. “Well, it will be 11 in the morning in a faraway field, I would imagine.” He loves what he’s doing, but he’s not getting ideas above his station, he insists. “I don’t think I’m suddenly a rock star.”

A Spy Among Friends starts this autumn on new streaming service ITVX.

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## Childcare

# **‘I want to work’: why UK parents are taking part in March of the Mummies**

Organisers Pregnant Then Screwed are calling for affordable childcare, flexible working and improved parental leave



Leonora Catherall, with her daughter, Lyra: ‘I assumed that of course I could go back to work and have it all as a parent.’ Photograph: Linda Nylind/The Guardian

[Clea Skopeliti](#)

Sat 29 Oct 2022 02.00 EDT Last modified on Sat 29 Oct 2022 02.01 EDT

More than [12,000 families plan to take to the streets on Saturday](#) in 11 UK cities to call on the government to provide affordable childcare and flexible working and improve parental leave. The campaign’s organisers Pregnant Then Screwed expect 6,000 people to take part in the Halloween-themed [March of the Mummies](#) in London.

Three parents explain why they are participating and how the issue of childcare has affected them.

## **‘I regularly borrow money from friends’**

When Rebecca Lester, 40, a doctor in Liverpool, was offered a “dream job” in London, she had to think twice about whether she could afford to take the position. Despite being on a “decent” salary, Lester, a single parent, struggles to afford childcare costs. “I have to borrow money from friends regularly,” she says.

Lester is worried about the financial implications of the move to London. “When I started looking at the reality of the situation, I started to panic. Imagine being a consultant in hospital medicine with over 15 years of training and not being able to afford childcare costs. You get nothing for being a single parent who is a moderate earner – I have to pay the same costs as a two-parent, high-earning family. There are people in much worst positions – my salary is decent, but one salary is not enough with childcare costs that aren’t reduced.”

On top of the £1,400 a month for a full-time nursery place, before tax-free childcare calculations, Lester pays about £400 a month in babysitter fees for any extra hours she works outside the nursery’s 8am to 6pm weekday hours.

She says childcare costs for her two-year-old son are double the cost of her mortgage. “Nursery fees have gone up twice since he started in June 2021. Obviously they have to cover their costs, I don’t blame the nurseries. They have such a difficult job and they have to pay staff.”

## **‘I felt forced into making this choice’**



Leonora Catherall and her daughter, Lyra. Photograph: Linda Nylind/The Guardian

Leonora Catherall, 31, did not expect to quit the job she loved after her daughter was born in 2018. “I was brought up by a real battleaxe feminist – when I imagined my own life as a mother, I assumed that of course I could go back to work and have it all as a parent,” she says.

But then she calculated that after childcare, commuting, and food costs, she would only make about £100 a month, as her take-home pay at the London-based charity where she worked was about £1,300. “All to give my child to other people to look after full time,” she says.

Although she was passionate about her job, the slim margins pushed her to become a stay-at-home parent: “The trade-off was really difficult – I felt forced into making this choice.”

Her daughter started preschool in September, and Catherall hoped she would be able to work in the afternoons. “I thought I’d be able to do something economically advantageous in those hours, but there’s not enough flexible, remote-working opportunities,” she says. Her daughter begins school next year and she is planning to retrain as a teacher, in large part to align her hours more closely to her child’s.

Catherall hopes the march will impress upon the government the severity of the situation. “Above all else, we are asking the government take it seriously. They have to have a reality check and an attitude change.”

## ‘We want to contribute to the economy’

Lauren, 34, a communications professional, is taking part in the Leeds march to demand better government investment in childcare. “My concern is that the government will say, everything is expensive now – but it’s not newly expensive, it’s just getting worse. I really hope they take a look at other models used around the world,” she says.

“You have to be earning a huge amount for childcare not to be unaffordable. We have a joint income of almost £80,000 and it’s stretching us – I have no idea how those earning less manage.”

She would like to have a second child but is being held back by childcare costs. “It’s unlikely we will be able to afford to do that until our daughter is at least receiving the [30 free hours](#) [of childcare for three- to four-year-olds living in England]. By that time, I will be 37 and not comfortable having a child at that age as we already lost a baby at 14 weeks.”

Lauren, who pays about £880 monthly for three days of nursery a week, emphasises the economic implications the shortfall of affordable childcare is having on parents. “The government makes it as difficult as possible for young families to work. We want to work, we want to continue building our careers and contributing to the economy,” she says, adding: “No one but the highest earners can comfortably afford childcare, especially on top of the cost of living crisis now.”

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## **Garth Marenghi: ‘Many writers cite me as an influence ... and I will be suing them all’**

[Rich Pelley](#)



Writer of wrongs ... Garth Marenghi. Photograph: Simon Webb/The Guardian

After changing horror for ever with his TV series Darkplace, the dream weaver and novelist disappeared for two decades. Now he returns with a chilling new novel, TerrorTome, and some strong words for pretenders to his crown (back off, Richard Osman)

- [Read an exclusive extract from TerrorTome](#)



Sat 29 Oct 2022 05.00 EDT Last modified on Sat 29 Oct 2022 16.47 EDT

Horror writers don't come much more elusive than Garth Marenghi, AKA "the dream weaver", AKA the "titan of terror". The author (who bears an uncanny resemblance to comedian Matthew Holness) is best known for his 1980s hospital horror "dramumentary" [Garth Marenghi's Darkplace](#), starring Marenghi himself and featuring actors also bearing uncanny resemblances to comedians Richard Ayoade, Matt Berry and Alice Lowe. Assumed lost for decades, the series eventually surfaced on Channel 4 in 2004, as a result of the "worst artistic drought in broadcast history". While some incorrectly assumed it was a spoof, for Marenghi the world of horror fiction remains an extremely serious business. As of 2006, he had personally written 436 horror novels, but since the release of Darkplace, we've heard next to nothing from

the author/shaman. Now he's back with a brand new book, *TerrorTome* – a horror tale in three parts – for which he has been contractually obliged by his publishers to complete a single piece of press, not of his choosing: this one. We caught up at a top-secret location (though I can reveal the No 36 bus went all the way there) to find out just how 2022 is about to get a whole lot horrible-er ...

**Hi Garth! Lovely to meet you [proffers handshake] ...**

[Abruptly] I think I'll decide that ... Have you washed your hands?

**Yes. Well, probably. No. Anyway, you're back with brand new horror book Garth Marenghi's *TerrorTome*. Apparently it's been 30 years in the making. How come it took so long?**

[Wiping anti-bacterial gel into hands] The nature of time has been the main issue. Seconds and minutes quickly form themselves into hours, transmuting by degrees into days, weeks, months and, ultimately, years. Before you know it, decades have elapsed. The essential issue was the ever passing of time between the commencement and conclusion-ment of my task.

**Would it have been quicker had you bothered to learn how to type with more than two fingers?**

Writing balls-to-the-walls horror is extremely physical. Typing with more than two fingers is counterproductive for any horror writer; you need to concentrate your strength on two fingers alone. I get quite hard when I write, so the best way to channel that energy is by banging – bang, bang, bang. If you type with your hands dancing all over the keyboard [mimes touch-typing], you're essentially rubbing without release. It's far more potent to jab.

**What's your writing process?**

Get up, eat, consider the news, reject it (the news, not my breakfast), lunch, nap, have a hot chocolate, then I'm hard at it for a solid hour or two before either Pointless or Tipping Point.



Horror-spital ... (l-r) Todd Rivers, Dean Lerner, Garth Merenghi and Madeleine Wool in Darkplace. Photograph: Channel 4

**Is your lead character, horror novelist Nick Steen, based on you at all?**

I'd say I'm less of a deviant than Nick Steen. In one of the stories – TerrorTome is a triumvirate of three mini-stories that form one epic portent – he develops a questionable psychosexual relationship with his typewriter. I've only done it once with a typewriter, and that was for research for this book.

**As the self-described “master of the macabre”, where do you sit among other horror writers such as Stephen King or Clive Barker?**

I won't sit between anybody. If it's the annual horror convention curry, I am always head of a long, rectangular table. One year, I wasn't sat there and cancelled the entire event. Last year, Richard Osman – who was in the area and had been staring in at us for 20 minutes through the window – tried to cadge a free pudding, saying he was hoping to segue into horror after conquering [cosy crime](#). I sat him at the far end and we all completely ignored him. He left two of his three scoops entirely untouched.

**Did you come up against any problems getting the book out there?**

We had a bit of problem trying to find a publisher, mainly because the content is so terrifyingly prescient. But my job as a shaman is to evolve

mankind. These are stories that *need* to be told. So, having fired several editors, I got chatting with Ken Hodder, head of Hodder books, who was sat to my immediate right at the same horror convention curry, but not level with me, as I was head of a *rectangular* table, remember? He'd agreed to read my manuscript in exchange for a free bhuna, but when the hot towels came I swapped his glass for the metal goblet I insist on quaffing from – which is deceptively deep – and got him to sign there and then. Give or take another bottle.

**Low-budget 80s hospital horror Darkplace only finally aired in 2004 in the form of documentary/presentation Garth Marenghi's Darkplace. Would Darkplace be easier to get off the ground now? They commission all sorts of rubbish on Netflix and BBC Three ...**

The term is “dramumentary”. That’s difficult to answer, because I’m legally bound not to discuss the show, anyone I worked with, nor – in fact – *anything* in my life up to 2009. I don’t think we could remake Darkplace because, the last I heard, the tapes had been covered in 300 metric tonnes of industrial cement by Channel 4. In many ways the current state of the world can be entirely blamed on Darkplace failing to enter the mainstream. Had more people absorbed its teachings, we would have evolved as a species. But that’s mankind’s problem now, not mine.

**Horror shows set in the 80s are all the rage now. Do you watch Stranger Things with a tinge of jealousy?**

Rage is an apt word here. All I *will* say is that TV is broken. And I refuse to mend it twice.

1PCwsy3V2Pjjeoh50JDOLNn9RtJ-EISQ4n3D6gHpsK2g

**Is there room for comedy in horror?**

No. Having said that, horror can create emotions akin to laughter. When I initially took my horror show to the Edinburgh festival, people were so terrified that they screamed with laughter. It’s a survival instinct: extreme fright either induces chronic laughter or the immediate vacating of the bowels. It’s all contingent upon the essential integrity of one’s sphincter.

**Were the gates of hell opened by Darkplace hospital a clever premonition of the current state of the NHS?**

Not the literal gates, no. They were made from wood and plastic. But yes, metaphorically they were indeed a clever premonition, with the emphasis on clever.

**It's a pretty miserable time to be British. Which Darkplace horror plot would you most like to happen in real life to cheer us all up a bit?**

2022 certainly seems like the perfect time for a hellhole to open beneath us. But if said hellhole were to open up and swallow the entirety of the UK like the jaws of some primordial hellbeast emerging from the Earth's living core – which is also sentient, by the way – mankind would certainly need a shaman, or sha-woman, to plan our ascent back up the hellface. Hence: TerrorTome.

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Typing with more than two fingers is counterproductive for any horror writer; you need to concentrate your strength

**Dean Learner, your publisher, describes you as “the Orson Welles of horror, and not just because of your weight”. How are you keeping in general these days?**

Still in my prime, thank you for asking. Though we've all put on a bit of weight. One of the main problems with remaking Darkplace is we'd have to change the aspect ratio to fit everyone on screen, probably going up to 16:9 or, on a particularly fat day, 21:9.

**What do you think Dr Rick Dagless, your Darkplace character, is up to now?**

He is undead, as are most of the other members of the hospital, except for the receptionist, who is part moth.

**What happened to the film you were working on – War of the Wasps?**

Sadly, the wasps escaped and got into the salad, then attacked the entire cast and crew. So, unfortunately the whole film got pulled, which was a blow to us – and a sting to the wasps. Heh heh heh.



Terror-visionary ... Garth Marenghi. Photograph: Simon Webb/The Guardian

**Are you working on any other film ideas?**

Yes, a violent horror thriller called Joist. A man is found half-dead inside an elaborate wooden crate, his entire body racked with pine splinters and Ronseal fence varnish. Elsewhere, the local B&Q has run out of loft panelling and cherry timber planks. With the victim identified as a former exec on the advisory board at Jewsons, police suspect the work of Joist, an insane psychopathic serial killer recently escaped from a local asylum. Joist, an embittered ex-carpenter and joiner once fired for constructing shoddy, splinter-strewn treehouses for the local orphanage, is now wreaking revenge on his former employers, plus anyone else failing to appreciate the

craftsmanship of his fine planing. To stop Joist, Chief Detective Blake Packbury must first sand his way through the plywood Larsen trap blocking the door of the station Portaloo, followed by a wire-meshed mahogany ladder trap encasing the precinct lockers, using only his tongue. It's currently housed in the second circle of development hell, draft four, third revision. I'm going to walk.

**Many other writers and comedians cite Darkplace as a massive influence on their work ...**

Yes, and I will be suing them all.

**What do you think is the secret to Darkplace's lasting appeal?**

Some would cite the script, the acting and the essential message of Darkplace as the reason for its longevity. It's all of those, of course, but Darkplace was ultimately the result of *my brain alone*. So I would say: my brain alone.

**What are your tips for getting into the glamorous showbiz world of horror writing?**

If you are fortunate enough to enter my sphere at a convention, never hand me your own "book" and ask me to read it. If necessary, I will respond with violence.

**Is horror writing a life worth living?**

For the third time, I'm a shaman; I have no choice. But luckily I'm the best at what I do. When I put two fingers to keys, I evolve mankind. I don't know what would happen if you put two fingers to a typewriter. Can you even hammer hard?

**[Mimes touch-typing]. No. I'm clearly a dancer.**

There's your problem. Don't dance on the keyboard – pound like a Norse god, which apparently I am, by the way.

*Garth Marenghi's TerrorTome is out from Hodder on 3 November.*

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## **Talking typewriters and slithering eels: an extract from Garth Marenghi's chilling new novel**



Return of the macabre ... horror maestro Garth Merenghi. Photograph:  
Simon Webb/The Guardian

In a short story from the horror writer's new book *TerrorTome*, an ambitious author finds more inspiration than he bargains for at an antiquities shop

- [Q&A: 'My job as a shaman is to evolve mankind'](#)

*Garth Marenghi*

Sat 29 Oct 2022 05.00 EDT

SO IT DID EXIST.

I stood alone in the pouring rain, peering in through the window of Uniquities Inc, plus Eels, at a machine supposedly invented by Christopher Latham Sholes in 1867, but constructed, according to the price tag slung from its golden carriage-return lever, by a Chinese magician in the latter half of the Tang Dynasty. I smiled, shaking my head. A bold claim ...

Yet true. For my own research had revealed that Eastern antiquity had achieved, in its long-lost past, a level of technological advancement surpassing even Currys.

Nick Steen's the name. Perhaps you've heard of me? Yeah, that's right. The horror guy. The insanely rich, multiple bestselling, dark and dangerous-to-know paperback visionary. That Nick Steen. If not, you soon will (in fact, you do now). But maybe not in quite the way you imagine.

I turned down the collar of my charcoal tweed blazer over my black polo neck sweater, smoothed back my flowing mane of smoky-topaz hair, then removed the buff-tinted shades of my chopper-pilot days to get a better look.

To the casual observer, the typewriter sitting in the shop window before me resembled a conventional model. Aside from its gold-plated exterior, the only difference appeared to be a set of extra keys surrounding the conventional QWERTYs, depicting archaic letterings and runic symbols. These stood out, I noticed, at insane psycho-geometric angles only Carl Sagan and myself could have perceived.

But if the rumours I'd heard were true, and this was the very typewriter I was seeking, then this contraption also possessed certain powers entirely its own. For, by some unknown spiritual process, this machine's creator had supposedly instilled in it the ability to commune psychically with its owner, allowing him or her (but mainly him) access to hitherto unreachable depths of the subconscious mind, freeing the darkest parts of their suppressed imagination.

As a bestselling horror writer, I had to have it. (Also, there was currently 30% off.)

Although I was still the hot news in horror, crafting the darkest, most terrifying novels of supernatural terror known to civilisation, sizzling on the publishing plate for nigh-on 20 years and counting, it wasn't enough. I had too many ideas. Too many tales untold. Too much darkness left untapped.

BUY ME.

I jumped at the sudden sound and looked around me, wondering if the owner had leaned briefly out of his shop doorway. But there was no one there.

Then who'd spoken?

BUY ME.

I made my way to the door. The interior of the shop was dark and gloomy. An old man in a grubby rubber apron stood behind a dusty counter on the far side of the room. He looked familiar.

"Eel?" he asked me, offering up a lidless plastic container clutched in his hand. It was an old ice-cream box half-filled with dirty water, with a writhing cluster of slimy snake-fish wriggling within.

I stared into his cataract-covered eyes.

"I know you from somewhere, old-timer."

"I'm Moses Unique," he rasped, chewing on an eel's head. "I sell ... unquieties." He let the eel slide inside him, swallowing the creature whole.

“Plus eels.”

“I’m interested in that typewriter you have on display in your front window.”

“This one?” he replied, lifting up a large tea cosy on the counter to reveal an identical-looking machine.

“So they’re a pair, are they?” I asked.

“A pair?” he echoed, confused. “This is the only machine of its kind in existence.”

I glanced back behind me at the window display. A Victorian sex chair now stood in the space where the typewriter had been.

“An exquisite machine,” the old man continued, his oily hands hovering over the contraption’s keys. “Tang Dynasty, no less. Look at that gleaming return lever. This resplendent feed roller. Do your fingers not yearn to hammer hard upon those golden keys? Do you not hunger for the touch of its jewel-embazoned ribbon reverse knob?”

“I’m more interested in its mind,” I said, curious to see whether or not he understood me. The old man examined me for a moment.

“Steen . . .” he said. “Nick Steen . . . The horror writer?”

“Correct,” I replied. “But you’re not Moses Unique.”

He grinned nervously then, his milky-white orbs darting from left to right. Hell, I knew him, alright. But where from?

BUY ME.

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That voice again. Whatever it was, wherever it was coming from, it seemed to be reading my innermost thoughts.

I did the math. Despite my fame, I knew I'd be unable to claim ancient antiquities against tax (I've tried several times), meaning I'd need to make my savings elsewhere. If I ceased all alimony payments and sent my ex-wife to live in rented accommodation at her own expense, selling all my daughter's non-transportable toys, I might just be able to afford it without dipping into my own money.

And, if this typewriter really was the one I'd been seeking, those fortunes would soon be mounting even higher. Soon I'd be writing more terrifying novels than any I'd dared write before. Famed the whole world over as the greatest horror writer who'd ever lived. Then finally, Roz Bloom, my editor at Clackett Publishing, would realise, once and for all, that I don't need an editor.

Was the thing truly magical?

I AM INDEED.

I froze. That voice ... That voice in my head .... It was the typewriter's voice! As unbelievable as it might seem, the typewriter itself was speaking to me.

EUREKA.

Then this really was it. After an endless, painstaking search of several hours, the hunt was over.

“And will you be purchasing?” asked the old man.

“I will,” I replied, pulling out my credit card. “But I’ll need a VAT receipt.”

“Oh,” he said, hands fumbling uselessly. “We only take cash.”

“Then put it on my slate, having first set me up with said slate,” I said, reaching for the typewriter. But somehow it was already there, in my arms.

“Ouch,” I snapped suddenly, feeling my right index finger snag sharply against part of its mechanism. The old man chuckled. “You have just felt, sir, the castigating pinch of its dormant ribbon vibrator.”

I stepped outside, yanked open my car door and placed the typewriter on the passenger seat. Then found myself attaching the seatbelt across its front.

THANKS.

“You’re welcome,” I said. Before pulling out, I turned to address it.

“Let me make one thing clear,” I said. “Yes, you may be ancient. You may possess untold powers. But from this moment on, you work for me, capiche? You do my bidding.”

SURE. WHATEVER YOU SAY.

I grinned, pleased we’d reached an early understanding.

COWBOY.

I glanced back for a second, confused, then pulled out on to the road.

Sucking the blood from my injured finger.

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## Financial sector

# Finance, property and mining: the money behind Sunak's £460,000 leadership bid

Multimillionaire flew on private plane and received more donations than any rivals, including Liz Truss



Rishi Sunak launches his campaign for the Conservative party leadership in July. Photograph: Alberto Pezzali/AP



*Rupert Neate* Wealth correspondent

[@RupertNeate](https://twitter.com/RupertNeate)

Sat 29 Oct 2022 03.00 EDT

Rishi Sunak's Conservative party leadership bid was bankrolled to the tune of almost £500,000 by City figures including a multibillionaire hedge fund manager, a spread betting tycoon, and intriguingly, a close friend and policy adviser who masterminded his campaign.

Sunak, 42, who together with this heiress wife [has a £730m fortune](#), received a total of £458,570 in donations as well as gifted office space and the use of a private jet for his failed – but then eventually successful – bid to lead the Conservative party and become prime minister.

He received more money than any of the other contenders in the race, ahead of Liz Truss who collected £424,000, and in excess of the £300,000 spending limit put in place by the Conservative party.

## Chris Rea, industrialist

Sunak's single biggest backer was Chris Rea, a little-known Northern Irish businessman. Rea, who runs the manufacturing company Aesseal, donated £100,000 [according to the register of members' interests](#). He gave £50,000 on 28 July, followed by another £50,000 on 9 August.

Rea, who [has been confused by some with the Road to Hell rocker](#), has been a long-time donor to the Conservatives including £25,000 in 2008 and £100,000 during the 2010 election campaign.

Rea told the Guardian that he chose to donate to Sunak because he was “horrified at the prospect of Liz Truss actually implementing her promises as I am numerate and it was clear to me that it would be bad for the UK”.

He said Sunak did not solicit the donation, but he did call him and invite him to a “thank you dinner in London” after Sunak lost initially to Truss.

Rea insisted there had not been and “never will be any conversations about any policies that will benefit me personally or Aesseal”.

“Frankly neither I nor the business need any help, and I and we are more concerned about what we can give to society than what society can do for us,” he added.

## **Michael Farmer, ‘Mr Copper’ hedge fund manager**



Michael Farmer donated £38,470 including the use of a plane. Photograph: Geoff Pugh/Rex Features

Michael Farmer, a former Tory party treasurer, prominent Brexiter, hedge fund boss and metals trading multimillionaire known as “Mr Copper”, donated £38,470 including, as Sunak described it, “use of a plane during my campaign for leadership of the Conservative party”, a gift in kind valued at £23,470.

Farmer, 77, who made most of his estimated £150m via his Red Kite group of hedge funds, is one of the largest donors to the [Conservatives](#), giving at least £6m over past last 10 years. He was Tory party’s co-treasurer from 2011-2015 and made a life peer in 2014.

Farmer, one of the world’s most influential commodity hedge fund traders, donated £300,000 to the Vote Leave campaign in 2017 and said Brexit would be a “bright new beginning” for Britain. He also donated £100,000 in 2011 to the No to AV campaign, which opposed replacing first-past-the-post voting with a transferable vote system.

He was an early public backer of Sunak, saying in July that the now prime minister was “a serious man” and said his plan to apply fiscal “discipline

now and allowing some generosity later is the right way to handle the current economic difficulties”.

Farmer, who campaigns for “a culture that values family life” and became a Christian “literally overnight when he was 35”, shot to public attention in 2013 when it was revealed he had paid for his son George to join Oxford University’s notorious Bullingdon club, the male-only dining club that David Cameron, George Osborne and Boris Johnson attended.

George Farmer is now chief executive of Parler, the rightwing social media app that Kanye West – who changed his name to Ye last year – has said he is buying after he was blocked by Twitter for making antisemitic posts.

George is married to Candace Owens, the outspoken US rightwing political pundit. They tied the knot at the Trump Winery in Virginia in 2019 with a string of famous US and UK rightwing guests including the former UK Independence party leader Nigel Farage. George stood unsuccessfully for Ukip in the 1999 European parliament elections.

## **Nick Leslau, property developer**



Property investor Nick Leslau's Yoginvest Ltd donated £50,000.  
Photograph: Bowden Birch/REX/Shutterstock

The second-largest donation came from Yoginvest Ltd, a company controlled by the multimillionaire property investor Nick Leslau, which donated £50,000. Leslau, who is estimated by the Sunday Times rich list to have a fortune of about £400m, owns big stakes in Alton Towers, Warwick Castle and Thorpe Park.

Leslau, who donated £20,000 to the Conservatives through Yoginvest in 2019, said in 2020 he would not give any more money to the Tories after the government banned commercial landlords from evicting shop and restaurant tenants struggling during lockdowns. “I think the flippancy with which the property industry has been treated has been narrow-minded,” he told the Times.

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## Mick Davis, mining tycoon



Mick Davis, chief executive of Xstrata. Photograph: Bloomberg/Getty Images

Sir Mick Davis, also a former Tory party treasurer and ex-boss of the mining company Xstrata, gave Sunak £25,000, and said last week any MP backing Johnson's bid to return to No 10 was "delusional". Davis has donated almost £6m to the Conservatives over the years. In 2011 he was revealed to be one of the people funding the jetset lifestyle of [Adam Werritty](#), a friend of the former minister Liam Fox who posed as an official adviser in a scandal that led to Fox's resignation.

## Will Harris, PR boss

Office space in a Grade II-listed building near Westminster, worth £3,195, for advisers running his campaign was provided by Bridge Consulting Ltd, the home of PR firm Bridge F61. The firm, which has boasted on its website "We can make you rich, we can make you famous", was co-founded by the Tory marketing guru Will Harris, part of the team that devised the slogan "The future's bright, the future's Orange" for the mobile phone firm.

Harris, who says he campaigned for Michael Howard in 2003, the year he became leader of the Tory party, [boasts on his website](#) that working for political clients is akin to a "frantic T20 Blast". "Despite a shared love of

Jaffa Cakes and cans of Coke Zero, business campaigners rarely start their day at 5.45am with the morning media briefing, and I don't see that changing any time soon."

## **Eleanor Shawcross, political adviser**

Another £20,000 came in from Eleanor Shawcross, a policy adviser who helped run the campaign from the headquarters in Dean Trench Street. She is expected to be rewarded with the job of head of the No 10 policy unit or possibly chief of staff.

She was among the staff who lined up to welcome the new prime minister as he walked through the door of Downing Street on his first day in the role.

Her donation was made in the name Eleanor Wolfson. She is married to Simon Wolfson, the chief executive of the clothing chain Next, who has given hundreds of thousands to the Tories, and was granted a peerage in 2010.

She is the daughter of William Shawcross, who has written several books on the royal family and former chair of the Charity Commission, and is a non-executive director at the Department for Work and Pensions and was deputy chief of staff to George Osborne when he was chancellor.

She met Lord Wolfson, who is 14 years her senior, while working for Osborne. The couple married in 2012 and have two children, one of whom was born prematurely and spent weeks in neonatal intensive care – she is on the board of the Winnicott Foundation, which works to improve neonatal care.

Shawcross previously worked for the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation and the Blavatnik school of government at the University of Oxford.

## **Michael Spencer, financial entrepreneur**



Michael Spencer, chief executive of Icap. Photograph: Bloomberg/Getty Images

Michael Spencer, the billionaire founder of the broker Icap, donated £25,000. However, the long-term Conservative backer who has given more than £5m to the party and as treasurer from 2006-2010, initially backed Penny Mordaunt with a £25,000 donation. The day after she was eliminated he donated to Sunak, and then later when Truss appeared to be winning he donated the same amount to her campaign.

In her first days in office he praised her as “one of the most pro-business” leaders the country has ever had.

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## 2022.10.29 - Opinion

- [What one change would you make to achieve black equality in Britain? Our panel writes](#)
- [Britain's first Hindu prime minister is destroying Tories' pitiful vision of diversity](#)
- [Orbán says Hungary is ‘exempt’ from the conflict: tell that to his friend in Moscow](#)
- [Rishi Sunak is the best choice the Tories could have made – but Labour can still beat him](#)

## The panelBlack History Month

# **What one change would you make to achieve black equality in Britain? Our panel writes**

Updating the school curriculum, creating an anti-racist politics ... there is a pathway to a fairer and more equal society



‘Race science is an enduring and pernicious myth at the heart of medicine that must be confronted’ – Dr Annabel Sowemimo. Photograph: Atlas Studio/Getty Images/iStockphoto

Sat 29 Oct 2022 04.00 EDT

**Lenny Henry: We need radical empathy, not racial sympathy**



Over the years I have argued for a number of policies to increase racial equality in the media, from diversity tax breaks to ringfenced funds for marginalised production companies. I've even helped set up a [centre for media diversity](#) at Birmingham City University to not only research but also to advocate for better policies. Simply put: there is no silver bullet when it comes to racial equality. But at the core of everything we're fighting for is the need to better understand each other and our different perspectives and values. We must get past simple "racial sympathy" – just feeling sorry for the victims of racism – and move towards "radical empathy". Putting yourself in the shoes of someone who isn't like you and trying to experience what they are going through is perhaps the answer to this age-old question.

- Lenny Henry is an actor, writer and producer

## **Kojo Koram: Rethink Britain's war on drugs**



The easiest change we could make to undermine structural racism would be to change our drug laws. The current system of criminalising drug possession and supply has become a conveyor belt that feeds young Black people into our criminal justice system. It starts with stop and search. Drugs are the most common reason that police use to justify stopping and searching people; Black people are stopped at more than [eight times the rate of white people](#). A fifth of all arrests of Black people result from stop and search, [over three times the proportion](#) for white people. Black people are then more likely to be prosecuted if arrested, be convicted if prosecuted, and be imprisoned if convicted of drug crimes.

Our archaic drug laws turn an innocuous stroll down the street for Black people into a lifetime criminal record, limiting employment and travel opportunities. As the rest of the world starts to recognise that drug prohibition is a motor for racial inequality, so must Britain.

- Dr Kojo Koram teaches at the School of Law at Birkbeck, University of London

## **Lola Okolosie: Change the school curriculum in England**



In English schools, the stories and contributions of black people have either been erased or reduced to a history of [capture and conquest](#). For our education to be truly equitable, we need our government to follow the lead of [its Welsh counterpart](#) and mandate that the English curriculum be diversified to reflect and incorporate the experiences of black and minority communities. Until it does so, black children remain at the mercy of an insidious feedback loop. Overworked teachers exercise the freedom to treat black history and innovation as a marginal concern, an area to be covered briefly, if at all, once a year. Our young people shouldn't be made to submit to this unequal status quo; it does them a disservice.

- Lola Okolosie is an English teacher and writer focusing on race, politics, education and feminism



‘The English curriculum should be diversified to reflect and incorporate the experiences of black and minority communities.’ Photograph: Paul Doyle/Alamy

## **Diane Abbott: Make our politics anti-racist**



Britain has its first ever prime minister of colour. Rishi Sunak's ascent to the top position in British politics is noteworthy. It's something that many of us did not expect to see in our lifetimes. But when it comes to race equality and politics, representation is only part of the equation. More important is whether the political system is prepared to acknowledge institutional racism and do something about it. We will see. Sunak has never demonstrated even a flicker of interest in race or equality. And the austerity he desires will impact black and brown Britons [harder than anyone else](#). While representation matters, what matters even more is having a political leader who is willing to acknowledge the existence of institutional racism and root it out.

- Diane Abbott is Labour MP for Hackney North and Stoke Newington

## **Travis Alabanza: Encourage Black creatives**



Black equality will never be achieved while we insist on carving up identity into neat little boxes. You cannot separate the Black lived experience in the UK from the decimation of the NHS, our bottomed-out social housing offering and the gaping holes in our welfare safety net. In theatre, I want to see more Black creatives given the opportunity to create in a way that is not

limited to what could be viewed as “Black work”. Black creatives need more funding, support and trust, both on stage and behind the scenes, to exist in all our different shapes and forms.

- Travis Alabanza is a writer, performer and theatre-maker

## **Franklyn Addo: Treat children as children, not suspects**



Working with vulnerable young people in London, I witness first-hand the disruptive and disturbing impact of heavy-handed policing. I hear from black children what it is like to be routinely treated as suspects by teachers or police officers. Black people in Britain continue to endure negative outcomes across health, education and criminal justice: we’re inadequately treated for illnesses such as Alzheimer’s disease and sickle cell anaemia; disproportionately excluded from school; shot dead by police officers while unarmed. Our experiences are too often ridiculed or vilified, but in the face of gaslighting we must continue to speak up, and hold the lawmakers who sustain these present realities to account.

- Franklyn Addo is an artist and youth worker

## **Victor Adebawale: Black history is history – teach it all year round**



The main thing we need to do is recognise racism as a systemic challenge in society, one requiring a variety of things to move the needle towards equity and equality. I would start with these. We need black history taught as history not just once a year, and not just as black history. We need economic education to engage citizens in the reality of our market economy. And there must be accountability in public leadership. It must truly be a matter of leading all the people all the time, not some of the people some of the time.

- Victor Adebawale is former chief executive of the social care enterprise Turning Point, current chair of the NHS Confederation and a people's peer in the House of Lords

## **Michelle Kambasha: Make space for black Britons in the arts industry**



The whitewashing of historically black arts spaces has been slow and progressive; 1980s house clubs that were once almost exclusively black are now dominated by white punters – and you would be forgiven for thinking that black ballet dancers or playwrights or theatre performers never existed at all. Those mainstream musicians who do hit the big time despite battling structural racism are often, and rightfully, exalted. But we must not forget underground pioneers from across the Atlantic like dancer Alvin Ailey, playwright August Wilson and DJ Lady D. By honouring the trailblazers of our arts and culture industries, we forge tighter connections with our diverse artistic history and are reminded that black people can never truly be excluded from spaces that we have been instrumental in building.

- Michelle Kambasha works in the music industry



‘You would be forgiven for thinking that black ballet dancers or playwrights or theatre performers never existed at all.’ Dancers from Ballet Black star in Say It Loud at the Barbican, London. Photograph: Bill Cooper

## **Annabel Sowemimo: An end to pernicious race science**



Race science is an enduring and pernicious myth at the heart of medicine that must be confronted. The idea that black people suffer from defective biology, feeding much of the racism we experience; the myth that our skin colour makes us intellectually inferior and that those who do succeed academically are a rare breed; the notion that black people are better suited to physical jobs, despite proven evidence that environmental factors influence our social outcomes.

This dangerous rhetoric must be starved of oxygen, and weeded out from our early education, healthcare and language. To decolonise our medical institutions, we must first reckon with how these ideas took hold, and their enduring role in the oppression of black communities today.

- Dr Annabel Sowemimo is a doctor, activist and writer, and founder of community-based organisation Decolonising Contraception

## **Yomi Sode: A new chapter for black Britons in publishing**



In the publishing industry, I want to see more black people appointed in editing roles, and appropriately rewarded for their work. There is a troubling lack of black faces in senior positions, and too often, juniors are exploited for their ideas by senior executives who have no knowledge of our communities or cultures. Even in recent conversations, I know people who have met their targets, brought awards home for their publishing house, and are still overlooked. Black creatives still lack the opportunity to climb the ladder while lesser-skilled people profit from their talents.

- Yomi Sode is an award-winning Nigerian-British writer. His debut poetry collection, *Manorism*, is published by Penguin

## **Muyiwa Oki: Make Britain's buildings reflect our diverse communities**



Given my Nigerian heritage, the UK's colonial history is deeply personal to me. Look around our cities and its ongoing legacy can be felt in every aspect of urban design, from street names to the materials of the buildings we occupy. To drive forward Black equality in the UK, we need to reckon with these hard truths, and take steps to foreground the voices of those who have historically been ignored. We need to invest time and resources into ensuring people from Black communities have the tools to enter and succeed in the built environment sector. To create a future where all communities can thrive, we must be representative of the society we serve.

- Muyiwa Oki is president-elect of the Royal Institute of British Architects

## **Abimbola Johnson: Let's radically transform our punitive institutions**



Black communities are on the receiving end of the worst discrimination in many areas of society, but we are not a monolith. My “one change” would be to see a multifaceted approach to Black equality, with solutions as complex as we are. Solutions that don’t work in silos, or ask us to assimilate. Solutions that radically transform and reconfigure institutions. We need to prioritise welfare over punitive action and to move away from labels that stick with people and isolate them for life. I want to see concerted and coordinated reform of the justice and penal systems, education, housing, employment, immigration, welfare, and physical and mental health provision.

- Abimbola Johnson is a barrister at Doughty Street Chambers and chair of the Independent Scrutiny and Oversight Board for the police’s National Race Action Plan

## **Athena Kugblenu: Allow Black people to be mediocre too!**



I would like to replace #blackexcellence with #blackmediocrity. True equality is when our talent:recognition ratio is allowed to be as broad as white people's. Lewis Hamilton had to win two Formula One titles before he bagged BBC Sports Personality of the Year in 2014; Greg Rusedski only had to get battered by Pat Rafter to win his. Kwasi Kwarteng steered the economy towards an iceberg and got sacked. Jeremy Hunt [drove the NHS over a cliff](#), now he's chancellor. Don't get me started on how many football clubs get ruined by freshly retired white footballers while very qualified Black managers are overlooked. When the arc of the moral universe bends towards Black people failing upwards as their peers do, we will be in the promised land.

- Athena Kugblenu is a comedian and writer



‘Lewis Hamilton had to win two Formula One titles before he bagged BBC Sports Personality of the Year in 2014; Greg Rusedski only had to get battered by Pat Rafter to win his.’ Photograph: David Davies/PA

## **Sussie Anie: Celebrate ordinary Black lives in books and films**



I would like to see changes in our education systems. Discrimination within schools, when staff fail to see the tenderness, the humanity of Black children can have long-lasting consequences. It can close off opportunities in a space that should be opening worlds. Systemic issues require systemic change, not just in individuals or legislation, but in wider narratives that influence us all. I would like to see more stories in film and publishing that celebrate ordinary Black lives and centre joy and curiosity – stories that reflect the fundamental reality that Black people are equal.

- Sussie Anie's debut novel, *To Fill a Yellow House*, is out now

## **Ruth Honegan: Respond, finally, to issues raised by race reports**



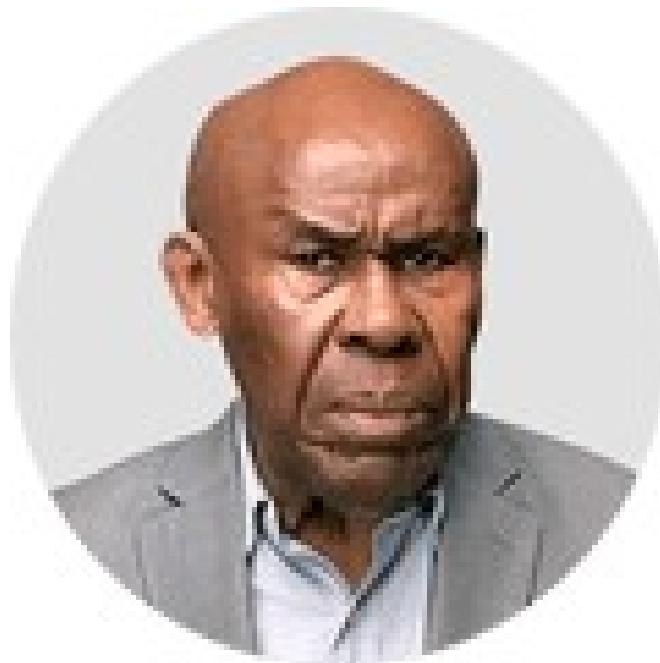
Over the course of nearly 20 years in policing, I have seen collective amnesia and ignorance leading to the repetition of past behaviours. Scarman, Macpherson, Lammy – they have all given their names to reviews into policing and the criminal justice system. They sit alongside the Runnymede report into disparities in the education system and several reports on racial disparities in healthcare. They all echo similar findings, highlighting the

kinds of issues that ethnically diverse communities have been trying, in vain, to convey for years.

To move the dial for black equality, there must be a collective acknowledgement that our thoughts, beliefs and behaviour are influenced by the social construct of race, which perpetuates the myth that lighter skin denotes superiority and a right to fair treatment. Everyone must challenge the status quo through open conversation and by denouncing these apparent truisms.

- Ruth Honegan is a police sergeant and deputy secretary of the National Black [Police](#) Association

## **Gus John: Confront the ‘Rule Britannia’ image of Britishness**



After 58 years of struggle in this country, taking into account my experience of how race and racism is cynically exploited by the state and its institutions, I believe much flows from the failure of Britain to acknowledge the need for repair – especially to white Britain’s image of itself (“Rule Britannia” and all that). At the centre of the policy agenda, however, must be righting racial

wrongs, from the hostile environment to the “school-to-prison” pipeline. No number of black faces in any cabinet, whatever the party and however much they embody the optics of diversity, will change that.

- Prof Gus John is an academic and an equality and human rights campaigner

## **Alice Dearing: I want to see Black people dive in to swimming**



I want to see the discriminatory barriers that prevent people from taking part in opportunities in life broken down and washed away. Swimming has sadly been plagued by racist stereotypes and issues of accessibility, which have caused so many black people to never set foot in the water and take the first steps in learning to swim.

I want that to change. I want to see everyone, no matter their race or background, have the opportunity to swim and know that it is something they are capable of. I helped co-found the Black Swimming Association (BSA) to do just that – we’re trying to make sure that, in swimming, equality becomes a reality for everyone.

- Alice Dearing is a swimmer who represented Great Britain at the Tokyo Olympics



‘I want to see everyone, no matter their race or background, have the opportunity to swim.’ Alice Dearing competing in the women’s 10km marathon at the 2020 Tokyo Olympics Photograph: Clive Rose/Getty Images

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**Rishi Sunak**

# **Britain's first Hindu prime minister is destroying Tories' pitiful vision of diversity**

**Pankaj Mishra**

We should quickly abandon wishful thinking in order to be truly ready for Rishi Sunak



‘Sunak’s carefully trimmed career pathways to plutocratic chic make him resemble a human pinstripe rather more than the devout Hindu in loincloth – Mahatma Gandhi.’ Photograph: Jeff J Mitchell/Getty Images

Fri 28 Oct 2022 11.20 EDT Last modified on Sat 29 Oct 2022 00.14 EDT

The world has watched in appalled fascination as the UK’s ruling party scrapes the bottom of its human resources barrel: it found there its first Black chancellor of the exchequer and then, to clear up his mess, its first

Hindu prime minister. Yet exultant noises from [India](#) as well as Britain would make us believe that some historic milestone has been reached.

Hindu supremacists have pounced on the possibility that [Rishi Sunak](#), a self-proclaimed devout Hindu, is a *desi* bro, even an undercover agent of the “Global Indian Takeover” – the title of a once regular feature in the Times of India. Evidently, he observes upper-caste taboos against beef and alcohol and always keeps his statuette of Ganesha, the guarantor of worldly success, close to him. “Indian son rises over the empire” was one typical headline in India this week.

Never mind that Sunak’s carefully trimmed career pathways to plutocratic chic make him resemble a human pinstripe rather more than the devout Hindu in loincloth – Mahatma Gandhi – who helped the sun set on the British empire. Sunak’s deeper pieties are revealed by his professional choices: credential-stockpiling and network-formation at Winchester, Oxford (PPE) and Stanford (MBA), stints at Goldman Sachs, and then bank-raiding and tax-dodging hedge fund firms, directorship of his billionaire father-in-law’s investment company, a US green card and eager membership of a traditionally nasty political party.

His hasty promotion to 10 Downing Street now emboldens insolent racists to present themselves as the purveyor of racial diversity, and to scoff at Labour’s nearly immaculate frontbench whiteness. Such opportunistic political correctness is validated by a Labour leadership that is quick to reprimand those who discount Sunak as a “win for Asian representation”. Hollow notions of social diversity and racial justice are further affirmed by members of a non-white intelligentsia, who have been trained by the ideology of meritocracy to see success and power, no matter how dubiously achieved or brief, as the measure of all things.

A columnist in the Financial Times this week wrote: “As a British Asian of the same generation, intense feelings overwhelm me when I see Rishi Sunak cross the door into 10 Downing Street.” The same writer had, while celebrating Liz Truss’s “diverse” cabinet, reverently recited the first names of recent British chancellors – “Kwasi, Nadhim, Rishi, Sajid” – and then added: “This is to say nothing of Kemi and Ranil, of Alok and Suella.”

And, presumably, Priti, another Tory daughter of immigrants who seemed as keen as Suella to fulfil the dreams of Enoch Powell. As it happens, the first Hindu prime minister is destroying, more rapidly and comprehensively than Boris Johnson's and Liz Truss's diverse cabinets, the pitiful visions of diversity relaunched by his coronation. Sunak's immediate resurrection of the disgraced Braverman tells us that we should quickly abandon wishful thinking in order to be truly ready for Rishi.

True readiness for such overpromoted Tory *desis* will consist in recognising that collaboration with white ruling classes or political passivity rather than struggles for social justice largely defines the history of the Indian diaspora, especially of its highly educated and upper-caste members. The over-zealous persecutors of refugees and the “tofu wokerati” today resemble, disturbingly, the Indian immigrants in A Bend in the River, VS Naipaul’s novel about decolonising east Africa, who regard their Black and brown compatriots as the losers of history and escape to London to join its white winners. As one character sums up his bleak hyper-individualistic ethic: “The world is a rich place. It all depends on what you choose in it … I know exactly who I am and where I stand in the world. But now I want to win and win and win.”

Winning was always easier for a people who spoke English relatively well and avoided political conflict while pursuing their obsessions with educational achievement and social mobility. While the Chinese diaspora, the world’s largest, remains less visible, many Indians in the west have steadily improved their prospects, becoming, as the 1980s arrived, poster people for the neoliberal ideology of meritocracy – the “model minority”.

Even as Sunak’s Punjabi middle-class parents sent him to Winchester, such far-right political office-bearers of Punjabi origin as Nikki Haley and Bobby Jindal started to sing in the US from Ronald Reagan’s songsheet about hard work and dreams. In particular, twice-migrants, such as Patel’s and Sunak’s families, have been much better placed than any diasporic community to benefit from three decades of neoliberal globalisation under American and British auspices.

These proto-globalisers were helped at the same time by fresh personal and professional networks with a “New India” that swiftly discarded its pretensions to Gandhian values while rushing to embrace power and wealth.

Sunak, now married to a Indian citizen richer than King Charles, shares his glossy biography with many men (and some women) of Indian ancestry who today own the world's biggest industries and run major banks, hedge funds and Silicon Valley companies.

Many of these still strangely unexamined winners of globalisation have assumed power-brokering positions in several countries. Take, for instance, the Gupta brothers, who managed to get South Africa's ruling party on their payroll and nearly ruined the country's economy. Sunak, whose in-laws' company Infosys has made more than \$120m in public sector deals in Britain since he entered government, belongs to this serenely diverse global plutocracy rather than any community demanding reparative justice for damages sustained in the white man's world.

What's truly unprecedented about the new occupant of 10 Downing Street – who held on to his green card while living next door with his then-non-dom wife to Boris Johnson, and who owns a penthouse in Santa Monica, and may soon jet off to sunny California – is not his showy Hinduism or brown skin, but his multiple identities as a ferociously networked transnational that allow him to operate simultaneously in several countries..

That this “citizen of everywhere”, a devout Hindu in a tie and cashmere hoodie, should now be chosen to mollify financial markets and caress the Brexit fantasy of absolute sovereignty says a great deal about the ideological dementia of the Tory party. The turd-polishing abilities of centrist-Dad liberalism, too, are in plainer sight as the logrollers of the BBC, Times and Financial Times work hard to present merciless enforcers of austerity as “grown-up moderates”. But we should be in no doubt about what an immoral and inept political class wants us to celebrate: “Asian representation” leading a cruel Tory programme of mass impoverishment.

- *Pankaj Mishra's most recent book is Run and Hide: A Novel.*
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| [Section menu](#) | [Main menu](#) |

**In the shadow of Putin's RussiaHungary**

## **Orbán says Hungary is ‘exempt’ from the conflict: tell that to his friend in Moscow**

[György Dalos](#)

*In this, one of a [series](#) of essays on the war in Ukraine from countries in or neighbouring the former Eastern bloc, a Hungarian historian asks how long the country can remain on the fence*



‘Viktor Orbán’s closeness to Putin is no mere coquetry but rather an integral part of the “special path” he is seeking to tread between east and west.’ The Hungarian PM, left, and Vladimir Putin in Moscow on 1 February. Photograph: Yuri Kochetkov/Reuters

Sat 29 Oct 2022 05.00 EDT Last modified on Sat 29 Oct 2022 14.41 EDT

The invasion of [Ukraine](#) on 24 February 2022 will go down in the annals of European history. Russia’s undeclared war has cast an almost apocalyptic

shadow. And it has dramatically altered the relationships that had prevailed between east and west since the collapse of the USSR. Whenever or however this armed conflict ends, it will undoubtedly take a long time for a new peace-guaranteeing equilibrium to be established. At the very least, the European Union and Nato now have to reckon with a hostile power on their borders and to prepare for a new phase of the cold war.

Hungarians voted in general elections just weeks after the invasion, in April, and it seems reasonable to assume that the war next door had an influence on the result. Given the climate of fear that the devastating “special military operation” created, Hungarians voted to keep Viktor Orbán’s Fidesz in power rather than risk an untested six-party coalition. This assumption also underlies Orbán’s response, which is to stay out of the conflict to the point of being “exempted”, a position that has been condemned as a betrayal by Hungary’s western allies. Hungary refuses to allow arms shipments destined for Kyiv to transit Hungarian territory and blocks the extension of EU sanctions against Russia to the energy sector. This latter stance is intended to enable an already controversial Russian-Hungarian project to build a nuclear power plant on the Danube (Paks II) to go ahead unaltered.

The exemption clearly goes too far, even if Hungary does have special interests that merit consideration. It has a 136km (84-mile) border with Ukraine and there are roughly 150,000 ethnic Hungarians living in the Transcarpathian oblast in south-west Ukraine, many of them married to Ukrainians.

It should be remembered that, while in purely geographical terms, Hungary stayed the same after 1989: the former Hungarian People’s Republic now borders five countries that owe their statehood to the end of the USSR and the dissolution of larger, multi-ethnic entities. To the south, the collapse of the former Yugoslavia led to the creation of Serbia, Croatia and Slovenia. Its northern border is no longer with the former Czechoslovak Socialist Republic but with Republic of Slovakia and independent Ukraine. What now connects most of these newer political entities with Hungary, and indeed its old neighbours, Romania and Austria, is EU membership. Serbia is on the waiting list, Ukraine has been awarded candidate status.

But in the 1990s, all these countries made the transition to parliamentary democracy, during which the rivalries between the various political groups played out openly and, not infrequently, violently. Every twist and turn and every internal conflict in these republics still affects Hungary's interests because of the Hungarian minorities living there: 1.5 million in Romania, 500,000 in Slovakia, 300,000 in Serbia, 16,000 in Croatia, 15,000 in Slovenia and 150,000 in Ukraine.



Refugee children fleeing Ukraine arrive by train at Zahony station in Hungary, March 2022 Photograph: Christopher Furlong/Getty Images

These minorities are a legacy of two accords, the 1920 [treaty of Trianon](#) and the [1947 Paris peace treaties](#), which entailed significant territorial losses for Hungary. Current problems faced by Hungarians abroad, be they to do with language rights or educational institutions, inevitably supply material for domestic politics too. Age-old animosities are resurrected again and again and are easily instrumentalised. Admittedly, some of Hungary's neighbours cannot always resist such temptations either, but so far these conflicts have been kept within peaceful bounds and have only had an indirect impact on its security interests. The Yugoslav wars of 1991-2001 revealed, however, the fragile stability across the region as a whole and what happens when superpowers meddle in internal disputes.

Politically, too, the Ukraine war raises awkward questions: Hungary's relations with the two adversaries are far from equally balanced. In 1995, the Hungarian government led by József Antall signed a treaty of friendship with the independent republic of Ukraine that, among other things, guaranteed visa-free travel. Relations between the two countries cooled, however, largely due to Kyiv's restrictive [language policies](#), which adversely affected both the Hungarian and the enormous Russian minority in Ukraine. At the same time, in the Orbán era, relations with Putin's Russia have positively blossomed, [helped by the similarities](#) between the two leaders: authoritarian posturing and illiberalism underlying their respective concepts of the state.

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Orbán's closeness to Putin, manifested in his visit to Moscow at the end of January 2022, which was hyped as a "peace mission", is no mere coquetry but rather an integral part of the "special path" he is seeking to tread between east and west. Repeated lip service to fundamental "European values" and the signing of joint declarations against the Russian invasion do little to challenge the impression that, in the Orbán era, Hungary is increasingly drifting into token membership of the EU.

While horrific images of the war continue to shock, the Hungarian prime minister preaches "strategic calm". Whatever individual citizens make of this rather nebulous concept, it may conceal the unease of the Fidesz elites. In the 13th year of the Orbán era, the system is facing increasing difficulties arising from its own economic and social policies. The national currency is

losing value by the day (€1 currently costs 414 forints; in 2010 it was just 285) and food prices are soaring.

The government has imposed a [temporary price freeze](#), a measure that is hitting small and micro businesses and which, in the case of petrol prices, has forced many filling stations into bankruptcy due to falling revenues. Orbán tries to explain the soaring inflation rate, [currently running at 20.7%](#), in monocausal terms: “We have been able to stay out of the war, but we will not be spared its consequences. Prices are being driven upwards partly by the war, but partly also by the sanctions imposed by the west.”

Orbán is clearly creating “strategic calm” for himself by shifting the responsibility for the financial crisis on to “the west”. It just remains to be seen how much longer a small country that is poor in both energy and raw materials, will be able to go on sitting on the fence.

- György Dalos is a Hungarian historian and author whose novels and prose works have been translated into 10 languages. He co-founded Hungary’s democratic opposition movement in 1977.
- This essay is part of a [series](#), published in collaboration with [Voxeurop](#), featuring perspectives on the invasion of Ukraine from the former Soviet bloc and bordering countries. It was translated by Paula Kirby.

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**OpinionRishi Sunak**

## **Rishi Sunak is the best choice the Tories could have made – but Labour can still beat him**

[Jonathan Freedland](#)



Keir Starmer may have preferred to face Mordaunt or Johnson, but the new prime minister has plenty of vulnerabilities



‘There’s scope to cast Sunak as a man of slick presentation but of appalling judgment.’ A composite image of Labour leader Keir Starmer, left, and prime minister Rishi Sunak. Photograph: Getty Images

Fri 28 Oct 2022 11.54 EDT Last modified on Sat 29 Oct 2022 00.23 EDT

Publicly, they said they feared no one. When Labour MPs were asked a week ago which of the three would-be successors to Liz Truss looked hardest to defeat, they shrugged off the question, insisting that Boris Johnson, [Penny Mordaunt](#) and Rishi Sunak were all as weak and beatable as each other. But whatever the outward show, the truth is Labour got the Conservative leader that, at first glance, they had good reason to dread.

The evidence has been swift. On Thursday a [poll](#) showed that Sunak is more trusted on the economy, as well as on taxes and business, than Keir Starmer. When asked who they’d [prefer as prime minister](#), it was close, but more voters went for Sunak. Never mind that the survey had Labour comfortably ahead of the Conservatives overall: the economy and leadership are reliably the two key determinants of general elections – and on both measures Sunak has the edge.

His debut at prime minister’s questions would have settled few Labour nerves. He was fluent and, admittedly after the bar was set low-to-

subterranean by Truss, he conveys a basic competence, able to match Starmer's defining offer to the electorate of a safe pair of hands. Only the most deluded partisan would deny Sunak is smart, with the obvious advantage that he is at least an associate member of the reality-based community – a fact vividly demonstrated during his summer campaign against Truss, when he regularly reminded his rival of the laws of economic gravity, only to watch as she crashed to Earth precisely as he had predicted. And though it has brought far less attention, still less resistance, than US satirists might have you believe, the fact that Sunak is the first British-Asian prime minister is not only a historic milestone but also a reminder of one of Labour's enduring weaknesses: the party's elected leaders have only ever been white men.

All of that will trouble Labour supporters who could soon be looking back fondly to the 44-day Truss era and its gargantuan poll leads. They dared to dream that those numbers would hold up if either of Sunak's presumed challengers won the top job: Mordaunt would have been another Truss, while Johnson carried more baggage than a carousel at Terminal 5. Instead, by uniting around Sunak, the Tories look like an opponent that might just be getting its act together.

On one level, that's true: given who they are, and the position they are in, Tory MPs made the best, most rational choice they could. But there are at least five reasons why none of that should induce panic in those who want to see a Labour government both win power and succeed.



Rishi Sunak during his first prime minister's questions on 26 October.  
Photograph: Jessica Taylor/AFP/Getty Images

First, it's clear that however flattering the contrast between Sunak and his immediate predecessor – and Starmer did well to note that, in his only competitive election, the new prime minister was “trounced by someone who was then beaten by a lettuce” – Sunak himself has weaknesses aplenty. His re-appointment of [Suella Braverman](#), after a wilderness period that lasted all of six days, is an early stain that threatens to spread, as more detail emerges of the recklessly casual, and rule-breaking, attitude to information-sharing demonstrated by the woman charged with overseeing those who guard the nation's secrets. Defenders will say he had to bring Braverman back, to keep the right on board and in return for her endorsement. But the same cannot be said of the return of Gavin Williamson, the first man to be awarded a knighthood for services to mediocrity. In his bid for [team-of-rivals](#) unity, Sunak has foregone the opportunity for a fresh start and assembled a government packed with faces wearily familiar from the shaming days of both Johnson and Truss.

Sunak has personal vulnerabilities too. Labour has no need to remind voters of Sunak's vast wealth – which would allow its critics to brand the party anti-aspiration – because they can let others do that. But they can press him on non-dom status, which deprives the national coffers of £3.2bn a year and

from which the Sunak household benefited directly until [public exposure](#) made the arrangement untenable. An even riper bruise to punch is Sunak's summer boast to Tory activists that he had diverted funds from deprived communities to ensure leafy areas like theirs got leafier. Used adroitly, [those few seconds of video](#) should render hollow any promises the new PM makes on levelling up or protecting the most vulnerable.

There's scope too to cast Sunak as a man of slick presentation but of appalling judgment. He should not be allowed to forget the folly of "[eat out to help out](#)" and, on a rather graver scale, his decision, in the very week that the UN warned that the world is [failing to act](#) in the face of a climate catastrophe, not to attend the Cop summit that may be a last chance to limit the havoc. Tories like to say they got the big calls right, but they got the biggest call of recent British political history – Brexit – dead wrong. It's easy to forget, with his [remainer vibes](#), but Sunak was an eager enthusiast for that act of economic and cultural self-harm.

Second, there is much to ensure the bloom falls off the Sunak rose pretty fast. On 17 November, he and the chancellor, Jeremy Hunt, are set to impose a new round of austerity and, no matter how strenuously they insist that they are responding to global pressures, the voters know that the hole in the public finances was made wider and deeper by the Conservative government, thanks to the Truss-Kwarteng mini-budget. This won't be like the austerity of a decade ago, which followed a decade of Labour investment. These cuts will pare already-stripped services to the bone. Witness the hospital [waiting list for England](#) that now stands at 6.8 million people, or the record numbers of people waiting more than 12 hours to get seen in A&E. And that's before winter bites.

Third, Labour can take some comfort that it falls to Sunak and Hunt to clean up the mess left by their immediate predecessors. Had Johnson or Mordaunt taken over, there's every chance they'd have made things worse – before handing the mop to an incoming Labour government.

Indeed, and this is a fourth argument against panic, it might actually be better for Labour if Sunak succeeds. Recall the Labour landslide of 1997, which came after a four-year economic recovery following the Tory disaster

of [Black Wednesday](#). That suggests not only that Britons are capable of inflicting delayed punishment on a government for an economic calamity that took place several years earlier, but that they tend to feel readier to turn to Labour when there is relative calm.

Finally, Labour supporters are also citizens. They should not want the country to be the smoking ruin it was becoming under Truss – the currency tanking, debts rising – just because that would hasten a Labour victory. If Sunak represents the least insane route the [Conservatives](#) could have taken, that should be a source of relief rather than alarm. By now Labour should be confident enough to think beyond merely reaching the summit – looking instead to the scale of the task they will face when they get there.

- Jonathan Freedland is a Guardian columnist
  
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## 2022.10.29 - Around the world

- [Storm Nalgae Floods and landslides in Philippines kill at least 45](#)
- [Exclusive Goal of limiting global heating to 1.5C ‘more fragile’ than ever, says Cop27 chair](#)
- [California Man released from prison after 38 years after DNA test](#)
- [Espionage Suspected Russian spy arrested in Norway spent years studying in Canada](#)
- [Kentucky Man who plays dead on TikTok gets new life as corpse on TV crime show](#)

## [Philippines](#)

# Storm Nalgae: floods and landslides in Philippines kill at least 45

Officials revise death toll after fast-moving waters sweep away entire families and damage almost 500 houses



Philippine rescuers evacuate people from floods from Severe Tropical Storm Nalgae in Parang, Maguindanao province. Photograph: Philippine coast guard/AFP/Getty Images

*Agence France-Presse in Manila*

Sat 29 Oct 2022 04.00 EDTFirst published on Sat 29 Oct 2022 01.21 EDT

The [Philippines](#) has significantly revised down the death toll from a tropical storm ravaging the country, saying only 45 people have been killed.

The civil defence office had earlier reported 72 dead, 14 missing and 33 injured, but civil defence officials acknowledged rescue teams sent to the

country's flood-hit south on Friday had erred in their reporting, leading to some deaths being counted twice.

"When we consolidated the reports at 6am today we realised there were only 40 dead, 31 injured and 15 missing," Naguib Sinarimbo, the spokesman and civil defence chief for the southern region, said on Saturday.

The national civil defence chief, Rafaelito Alejandro, confirmed the lower figure at a news conference in Manila, saying 40 bodies were recovered from the disaster in the southern region of Mindanao. Five other people had been killed elsewhere in the country, Alejandro added.

Tropical Storm Nalgae hit the country's main island of Luzon with maximum winds of 95km/h (59mph) after making landfall on the sparsely populated Catanduanes island before dawn.

Heavy rains triggered by the approaching storm began on Thursday in the southern Philippines, the state weather service said, inundating mostly rural areas on Mindanao island.

That was followed by landslides and flooding, with fast-moving, debris-laden waters sweeping away entire families in some areas and damaging nearly 500 houses.

In recent years, flash floods with mud and debris from largely deforested mountainsides have been among the deadliest hazards posed by typhoons in the Philippines.



A resident beside a damaged house and vehicle after a landslide in Parang town in Maguindanao province, southern Philippines. Photograph: Philippines marines battalion/AFP/Getty Images

Rescuers are focusing on the village of Kusiong, where several bodies were recovered on Friday after the floods hit.

Flooding was also reported in several areas of the central Philippines. No deaths were reported there.

Photos released by the coastguard showed rescuers using an old refrigerator as an improvised boat to pull children from a flooded community on the central island of Leyte.

The state weather service said Nalgae could hit the capital, Manila, a sprawling metropolis of more than 13 million people, bringing “intense, with at times torrential, rains”.

“Widespread flooding and rain-induced landslides are expected” while there was “minimal to moderate risk of storm surge” or huge waves hitting coastal areas, it added.

“Based on our projections, this one is really strong, so we really prepared for it,” Alejandro said, adding that 5,000 rescue teams were on standby.

Deadly floods and landslides hit southern Philippines as Storm Nalgae approaches – video

He urged residents in the storm's path to stay at home until the storm passed into the South China Sea early on Sunday.

"If it's not necessary or important, we should avoid going out today because it is dangerous and could bring you harm," Alejandro said.

More than 7,000 people were evacuated before the storm's landfall, the civil defence office said.

The coastguard has also suspended ferry services through most of the archipelago nation due to rough seas, stranding hundreds of vessels and thousands of passengers at ports.

The civil aviation office said it has cancelled more than 100 flights so far.

The storm struck at the beginning of a long weekend in the Philippines, when millions return to their home towns to visit the graves of their relatives.

The Philippines is hit by an average of 20 major storms a year that kill hundreds of people and keep vast regions in perpetual poverty.

Scientists have warned that such storms, which also kill livestock and destroy key infrastructure, are becoming more powerful as the world gets warmer because of climate change.

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[\*\*Cop27\*\*](#)

## **Goal of limiting global heating to 1.5C ‘more fragile’ than ever, says Cop27 chair**

Exclusive: in a rare interview, Egyptian minister Sameh Shoukry says global tensions are making talks harder

[\*\*Windfall tax must change in face of ‘excessive’ oil profits – Cop26 chief\*\*](#)



Sameh Shoukry speaking at a ministerial meeting in Kinshasa ahead of the Cop27 climate summit in Egypt. Photograph: Justin Makangara/Reuters

[\*\*Fiona Harvey in Cairo\*\*](#)

Sat 29 Oct 2022 02.00 EDT Last modified on Sat 29 Oct 2022 03.26 EDT

The goal of [limiting global heating to 1.5C](#) is “more fragile” than ever, as world leaders prepare to meet for crucial climate talks, the president-designate of the negotiations has warned.

Sameh Shoukry, the foreign minister of Egypt, who will chair the [UN Cop27 climate summit](#) next month, said in a rare interview that forging agreement would be harder than at any other recent climate talks, owing to the “turbulent” global economy and “difficult” geopolitical tensions, stoked by the Ukraine war.

“It is more fragile, because of the impact of the current global situation,” he told the Guardian in an interview. He said the [agreement won at Cop26 in Glasgow](#) last year had been overshadowed by events since. “[The circumstances for Cop27 are] quite challenging. They exceed the circumstances that existed in Paris or in Glasgow in terms of the challenge and impacts, economic or geopolitical. But we have to remain hopeful and focused and try to isolate and insulate the negotiating process from some of the external circumstances.”

He warned that rich countries were losing the trust of the developing world, because they were [falling behind on their commitments](#) to cut greenhouse gas emissions and provide climate finance to poor nations.

“If countries are to backtrack or deviate from their commitments, and their efforts to maintain those agreements and understandings made in [Paris](#) and Glasgow, we will be on track to have over 2C and maybe up to 3.6C, according to the science available,” he said. “These are contradictions and everybody has to be serious in dealing with those contradictions.”

Some rich countries, including the UK, the US and EU member states, have turned to increasing fossil fuel production, amid the energy crisis that has sent gas prices soaring.

Shoukry refused to single out individuals, but warned: “We are encouraging all parties to refrain from backtracking, from resorting to greater dependency on fossil fuels. It defeats the purpose and puts everyone in jeopardy and danger. It’s not an incentive for developing countries, who are being encouraged to transition from fossil fuels, to do so. I think one has to lead by example.”

Last year's Cop26 talks in Glasgow ended with countries [pledging to limit global temperature increases to 1.5C](#) above pre-industrial levels, based on comprehensive scientific assessments showing that beyond that level the impacts of the climate crisis become [catastrophic, and some of them irreversible.](#)

Most countries failed to set targets on cutting greenhouse gas emissions in line with a 1.5C limit in Glasgow, however, or put in place the policies to meet such goals. They were meant to return to the table at [Cop27](#) this year with revised plans.

Those plans have been thrown into disarray by the extraordinary political upheavals of this year, with Russia's invasion of Ukraine sending energy and food prices leaping, and a serious spat between the US and China [over the visit by Nancy Pelosi](#) – the third most senior member of the ruling US Democratic party – to the disputed island of Taiwan.

But Shoukry said the failure of developed countries to meet their emissions targets was the most serious issue. "We recognise the geopolitical conditions that have evolved over this year, whether it's the Russian-Ukraine war, whether it's the tensions between the US and China. But even more broadly, the issue of trust has again come to the surface after the momentum that was created by Paris and Glasgow in how we can achieve progress when we deal with climate change," he said.

Trust would spring from developed countries fulfilling their commitments on emissions – [known as nationally determined contributions \(NDCs\)](#) – and providing finance to the poor world, he made clear. "We were hoping that the momentum that was created at Cop26 [would be translated into revised NDCs](#). Up to now only a very few number of nations, among them Egypt, have deposited revised NDCs with the [UN climate] secretariat. So we hope that during Cop27, more will present not only their commitment but their desire to implement those commitments in an impactful manner."

The issue of trust was "fundamental", he said. "Developing countries are monitoring the situation and seeing to what extent they must continue to undertake the burdens they have said they would, if they see that there are others who have greater capacity, greater facilities, [and] are not doing so.

Those who have contributed more to the problem should be more willing to contribute to its resolution.”

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He said countries could and must overcome the conflicts that had sprung up since Cop26. “We have to try to isolate these geopolitical tensions, disagreements, and focus at the issue at hand, which is how do we move forward together. Because we can't move independently – we will not be successful – we have to move together if we are to achieve progress, if we are to deal with climate change effectively.”

Speaking from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Cairo, Shoukry offered to broker discussions between the US and China, the world's biggest emitters. “I've had extensive discussions with both and offered the potential of being a communicator, and we will see how things develop during Cop itself.”

Rishi Sunak, the UK's incoming prime minister, has [refused the invitation to attend the leaders' summit](#) at Cop27, despite the UK holding the presidency of the talks until Egypt takes over, and despite the presence of leaders including the US president, Joe Biden; France's Emmanuel Macron; the European Commission president, Ursula von der Leyen; and the UN secretary general, António Guterres.

The Egyptian government would still welcome King Charles if he were to come to Cop27, said Shoukry. “We recognise that his majesty has been a long supporter of dealing with climate change, and has had an impact by virtue of his stature, but also by virtue of his personal emotional

commitment to the issue,” he said. “He has been a leader to emulate in that regard, so definitely his presence [would be] a value added to the Cop process.”

Shoukry refused to criticise Liz Truss, the UK’s former prime minister, who reportedly forbade the King to attend. However, asked [whether the UK had contributed positively enough to Cop27](#), he said: “Well let us say that [outgoing Cop26 president] Alok Sharma has. It’s not my place to make an assessment of the UK … and its move away from fossil fuels. That should be determined by the scientific community, maybe.”

Egypt has been [sharply criticised for human rights violations](#) and clampdowns on civil expression. Shoukry insisted that civil society organisations would be able to participate fully in Cop27. “We are hopeful that we will have an important contribution and participation,” he said, pointing out that the space open to them would be bigger than at the Glasgow conference centre, and that 9,000 representatives had registered. “I am encouraged by their enthusiasm, by their commitment, by their advocacy, and I think they have an important role to play to keep the governments honest and on track. They are the constituency that is most concerned.”

The British-Egyptian blogger and pro-democracy activist [Alaa Abd El-Fattah is on hunger strike in prison in Egypt](#). Asked if El-Fattah’s situation could be resolved before Cop27, Shoukry said: “We have to concentrate on the issue at hand, which is climate change … The challenge we face in climate change is quite a substantial one and whatever other issues, though important, should not detract us from our main objective.”

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## US prisons

# Man released from California prison after 38 years following DNA test

Maurice Hastings cleared of murder charge after testing of long-held evidence points to another person



Maurice Hastings, who had been in prison since 1983. Photograph: J Emilio Flores/AP

*Associated Press in Los Angeles*

Sat 29 Oct 2022 04.48 EDT Last modified on Sat 29 Oct 2022 06.01 EDT

A man who spent more than 38 years behind bars for a 1983 murder and two attempted murders has been released from a [California](#) prison after long-untested DNA evidence pointed to a different person, the Los Angeles county district attorney said.

The conviction of Maurice Hastings, 69, and a life sentence were vacated during a 20 October court hearing at the request of prosecutors and his

lawyers from the Los Angeles Innocence Project at California State University.

“I prayed for many years that this day would come,” Hastings said at a news conference on Friday. “I am not pointing fingers. I am not standing up here a bitter man, but I just want to enjoy my life now while I have it.”

The district attorney, George Gascón, said in a statement: “What has happened to Mr Hastings is a terrible injustice. The justice system is not perfect, and when we learn of new evidence which causes us to lose confidence in a conviction, it is our obligation to act swiftly.”

The victim in the case, Roberta Wydermyer, was sexually assaulted and killed by a single gunshot to the head, authorities said. Her body was found in the trunk of her vehicle in the Los Angeles suburb of Inglewood.

Hastings was charged with special-circumstance murder and the district attorney’s office sought the death penalty but the jury deadlocked. A second jury convicted him and he was sentenced in 1988 to life in prison without parole.

Hastings has maintained his innocence since he was arrested.

At the time of the victim’s autopsy, the coroner conducted a sexual assault examination and semen was detected in an oral swab, the district attorney’s statement said.

Hastings sought DNA testing in 2000 but the DA’s office denied the request. Hastings submitted a claim of innocence to the DA’s Conviction Integrity Unit last year and DNA testing last June found that the semen was not his.

The DNA profile was put into a state database this month and matched that of a person convicted of an armed kidnapping in which a female victim was placed in a vehicle’s trunk, as well as the forced oral copulation of a woman.

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That suspect, whose name was not released, died in prison in 2020.

The district attorney's office said it was working with police to further investigate the involvement of the dead person in the case.

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

## [Espionage](#)

# Suspected Russian spy arrested in Norway spent years studying in Canada

Man posing as Brazilian academic José Assis Giammaria thought to have used his time in the country to build up a deep-cover identity



Authorities named the man as Mikhail Mikushin on Friday. Photograph: No Credit

*[Leyland Cecco](#) in Toronto*

Fri 28 Oct 2022 15.41 EDT Last modified on Fri 28 Oct 2022 17.26 EDT

A suspected Russian spy who posed as a Brazilian academic before his arrest this week by Norway's domestic security agency spent years studying at Canadian universities with a focus on Arctic security issues.

The man, who called himself José Assis Giammaria, worked as researcher at the University of Tromsø and was [arrested on suspicion he had entered Norway under false pretences](#). On Friday, prosecutor Thomas Blom named

the man as Mikhail Mikushin, adding that Norway's domestic security agency was "not positively sure of his identity, but we are quite certain that he is not Brazilian".

A researcher at the investigative website Bellingcat said that evidence suggested that Mikushin is a senior Russian military intelligence officer.

"Great job, Norway, you've caught yourself a colonel from the GRU [Russia's military intelligence agency]," Christo Grozev [tweeted](#).

Meanwhile, more details emerged of the years the man lived in [Canada](#), amid speculation that he used his time in the country to build up the cover story of his fake identity.

After his arrest, Gunhild Hoogensen Gjørv, a professor in security studies at the University of Tromsø, told the Guardian that the man had come recommended by a Canadian professor.

In 2015, a José Assis Giammaria graduated with a bachelor of arts in political science from Ottawa's Carleton University, focusing on international relations with a minor in communications studies.

That same year, he volunteered for the country's New Democratic party during the federal election, knocking on doors for candidate Sean Devine.

Devine, now a city councillor, told local media nothing unusual jumped out about Giammaria except for an impressive résumé and strong speaking skills.

The suspect moved west and three years later graduated from the University of Calgary with a master's degree in strategic studies.

"Students in this program are taught by professors and instructors – not military professionals – to build a well-rounded understanding of the drivers of military, security and strategic decision-making," the university said in a statement.

It added that the suspect would not have had any unique access to information, but cautioned questions over a possible criminal background or identify fraud were the purview of the federal government “as part of the immigration process”.

Staff at the Centre for Military, Security and Strategic Studies have told reporters that they did not recall the man, despite him using a number of references from Canada when he applied for a position in Tromsø.

The suspect appeared to take an interest in Arctic policy and in 2019 [published](#) an article in the Naval Review journal on the need for Canada to establish a permanent naval base in its Arctic territory, arguing Nordic nations – and Russia – had already done so. He also highlighted the significant Russian investment in the region and suggested Canada lacked the “political will” to match other nations competing for a place in the Arctic.

“We have no way of assessing the security status of people who submit articles – we simply judge the submissions on their merits,” the journal’s editor, Ann Griffiths, told the Guardian in an email. “People submit material, and if it’s good/interesting we publish it.”

Canada, alongside South American countries, has long been a site for Soviet and Russian programs to create deep-cover identities for “illegals” – [agents who operate covertly and without diplomatic cover](#), said Stephanie Carvin, a professor of international relations at Carleton University and former national security analyst.

The country’s lack of a centralized birth and death record-keeping system makes it relatively easy to appropriate an identity, she said.

And while the case exemplifies the way in which Russia has not dramatically changed its tactics, it also underscores the sustained nature of “traditional espionage”.

“You still need human intelligence. You still need people out there doing things in order to achieve a state aim or goal. Even if it’s a pretty traditional

tactic, it's never really gone away.”

Carvin says she suspected the Russian’s time in Canada was used to develop a deep cover or backstory, known as a “legend”, for use in possible missions outside the country.

“Canada, generally speaking, is a non-specific country. It’s a good place to burnish your legend without raising too many red flags,” she said. “The whole point of the legend is you don’t want to stick out at all. You want to seem extremely boring and plain. And Canada fits the bill.”

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This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/oct/28/russian-spy-norway-canada-brazil-academic>

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

**Kentucky**

## **Man who plays dead on TikTok gets new life as corpse on TV crime show**

Josh Nalley specialized in pretending to be a lifeless body on social media – then CSI: Vegas came calling



Josh Nalley takes his corpse-impersonating skills to the set of CSI: Vegas.  
Photograph: Sonja Flemming/CBS

**Maya Yang**

Sat 29 Oct 2022 04.00 EDT Last modified on Sat 29 Oct 2022 04.53 EDT

A man from [Kentucky](#) who plays dead on TikTok has finally caught the attention of CSI: Vegas after the crime show decided to cast him as an “unalive body”.

Josh Nalley from Elizabethtown, Kentucky, is the owner of the [TikTok](#) account @living\_dead\_josh where, since last October, he has featured hundreds of videos in which he mimics a corpse.

With nearly 125,000 followers and 4.3m total likes, the 41-year-old restaurant owner poses for a few seconds at a time in various settings – on river banks, roads, bridges and in forests.

“I figured that was the easiest way that I could actually get on to a TV show or movie, you know, without actually having to audition or move out of Kentucky,” [he told](#) the Washington Post. “Laziness is part of it.”

Playing dead is not as easy as it looks, Nalley came to learn: in his initial performances he noticed his chest moving and other [“involuntary movements”](#) that gave away his aliveness.

He told the Post he has since learned how to gain better control over his breathing and other subtle movements.

He has cast himself as a dead corpse propped up against a barn door or a car, or slumped face down [outside](#) a CBS office and Hollywood’s Ripley’s Believe It or Not [museum](#).

Other videos show Nalley playing a dead body as his dogs sniff and prance around him.

In July, Nalley finally got the call he had been waiting for and flew to Los Angeles at the behest of CSI: Vegas, where he spent nearly a week playing an unspecified dead person. The episode featuring Nalley is set to air next week.

Hundreds of “unalive” videos and one forthcoming cameo later, Nalley appears to be unbothered by the actual idea of death.

“I can face death and not really have to worry about it because, you know, I’ve seen myself dead so many times,” he told the Post. “It’s a good way to process it.”

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

# Headlines

- Cost of living crisis Price of budget food items in supermarkets soar by 17%
- Energy bills UK homes switching to pre-pay meters to keep bills under control
- Astronomy Partial eclipse of Sun in UK begins
- Live Ukraine invites UN nuclear inspectors after discredited ‘dirty bomb’ claim
- Biden Progressive Democrats urge President to directly engage with Russia

## UK cost of living crisis

# Prices of staples such as pasta and tea soar in UK, hitting poorest hard

Prices of budget food items in supermarket soar by 17% in year to September, ONS figures show



There have been large price increases for everyday staples such as pasta (60%), tea (65%), milk, biscuits and bread. Photograph: Matthew Horwood/Getty Images

[Mark Sweeney](#)

[@marksweney](#)

Tue 25 Oct 2022 04.46 EDT Last modified on Thu 27 Oct 2022 06.25 EDT

The prices of staples such as pasta, tea and chips have surged in the UK in the past year, with cooking oil shooting up 65%, according to figures that highlight how [poorer households are being hit disproportionately](#) by the cost of living crisis.

The overall price of budget food items in supermarkets soared by 17% in the year to the end of September, according to data from the [Office for National Statistics](#) (ONS). This was nearly double the 9% annual increase measured in the 12 months to April.

The figures highlight how the poorer families are bearing the brunt of the cost of living crisis, with prices for some budget grocery items soaring far ahead of the [official 10.1% rate of inflation](#), which is at a 40-year high.

Pasta prices rose 60%, tea jumped 65% and chips went up 39%. There were also large price increases for other everyday low-cost items including milk, biscuits and bread.

#### [Chart. How the prices of 30 everyday items have changed in the last year](#)

The data, which measures the change in price of 30 everyday grocery items across seven supermarkets, also showed that some products such as orange juice and beef mince fell in price over the last year, while the prices of other products, such as yoghurt and pizza, remained stable.

“While the recent spike in inflation began with energy prices, today’s fresh insights using a new innovative data source show they are now filtering through to other important items, with the cheapest price of some staple food items rising by around two-thirds in the last year,” said the national statistician, Sir Ian Diamond.

He said data from the ONS near real-time survey of people showed that those who are disabled, from certain minority ethnic backgrounds and renters were among groups struggling the most with the increases.

“With rises in the cost of living at the forefront of many people’s minds, our new, almost real-time, data showing just how prices are changing and shining a light on how different groups are affected have never been more important,” Diamond said.

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Earlier this year, the campaigner Jack Monroe [called on the ONS to update the way it measures inflation](#) to better understand what impact rising prices of basic goods have on the poorest households.

The ONS said that while not directly comparable, the rise in prices for the lowest-cost grocery items were similar to the 15% rise in the official measure of inflation for food and drink.

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## Energy bills

# Energy crisis pushing 10,000 homes a month on to prepayment meters

Experts say people who are switched to pay as you go will self-disconnect when they cannot afford to top up



Consumers most likely to switch to pre-paying their energy bills are those least able to afford rising costs. Photograph: Rui Vieira/PA

*[Mark Sweeney](#)*

*[@markswenney](#)*

Tue 25 Oct 2022 12.01 EDTFirst published on Tue 25 Oct 2022 04.45 EDT

Cash-strapped households unable to afford their monthly energy bills are being pushed on to prepayment meters in record numbers, with 10,000 a month forecast to be installed this winter as the cost of living crisis deepens.

The price comparison website Uswitch said the startling trend – after more than two years when the number of meters has been falling as more homes

moved to direct debit – was a worrying sign, as customers could disconnect when usage and bills were likely to be highest at the coldest time of the year.

“The rise of prepayment meter numbers is a worrying reversal of a trend after nine consecutive quarters falling, suggesting households are becoming increasingly at risk this winter,” said Richard Neudegg, director of regulation at Uswitch. “Families and individuals on prepayment meters will be plunged into darkness as they self-disconnect when they can’t afford to top up.”

The vast majority of suppliers put struggling customers on prepayment meters rather than disconnecting them. However, many of those customers then effectively disconnect themselves by not topping up the meter. Prepayment meters also cost the average household about £50 more a year in standing charges compared with an equivalent direct debit customer.

Using Ofgem data, the comparison site found that 7.38m homes were using pre-paid meters in the first quarter, up from 7.35m in the final three months of last year, which it estimated equated to almost 60,000 new meters being installed across the six-month period.

Uswitch said that based on current trends it expected 10,000 more homes a month to turn to pre-payment meters this winter. It said consumers who were most likely to have to switch were those least able to afford [rising energy costs](#), making them the most at risk of stopping top-up payments as costs continued to rise.

Last week, the chancellor, Jeremy Hunt, rolled back former prime minister Liz Truss’s pledge to [freeze energy bill rises](#), reducing support from two years to six months.

The plan, which could change again with Rishi Sunak as prime minister, now offers a [£2,500 cap on the annual price of the typical dual-fuel bill until the end of April](#). After that point, support will only be offered to the most vulnerable people, with forecasters predicting that a typical household would face a rise in energy costs [to more than £4,300 annually](#).

“With energy prices set to rise again in April, this is a warning of things to come and we will most likely see more and more households moved to prepayment meters in the coming months and years,” said Neudegg.

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The Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy said the government's energy price guarantee would reduce bills this winter by “roughly a third” of what they otherwise would have been. It added that the most vulnerable households were receiving £1,200 in additional direct payments.

A spokesperson said the Treasury's review of energy support from next April would focus help on “those in need” while reducing costs for the taxpayer.

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## Solar eclipses

# Partial eclipse of sun by the moon takes place over UK

Skygazers able to see phenomenon on Tuesday morning, with best views in most northerly areas



A partial solar eclipse visible over Cullercoats Watch House in North Shields. Photograph: Owen Humphreys/PA

*PA Media*

Tue 25 Oct 2022 07.47 EDTFirst published on Tue 25 Oct 2022 04.28 EDT

A partial eclipse of the sun has ended after the sun was blocked out on Tuesday as the moon passed between it and the Earth.

Skygazers across the UK were able to see the phenomenon, with those in northern Scotland expected to enjoy good views.

Dr Robert Massey, of the Royal Astronomical Society, said the eclipse caused the moon to block the view of “some or all of the bright solar surface”, and that the sun would “appear to have a bite taken out of it”.

Observers in western Siberia, Russia, were able to get the best view of the eclipse, with the moon obscuring a maximum of 85% of the sun, Massey added.

In London, the eclipse began at 10.08am, with the maximum eclipse occurring at 10.59am, when the moon obscured close to 15% of the sun.

Lerwick in Shetland was expected to have had a better view, with 28% of the sun obscured at mid-eclipse.

Jake Foster, an astronomer at Royal Observatory in Greenwich, said: “The eclipse will be visible across the whole of the UK, as well as large parts of Europe and central and south Asia. The amount of obscuration you’ll see will depend on where you are on the Earth.”

He added: “Even though a portion of the sun’s light will be blocked, it will not get noticeably darker in the UK during the eclipse.”



The partial solar eclipse visible over Stoodley Pike, West Yorkshire.  
Photograph: Danny Lawson/PA

The partial eclipse ended at 11.51am in London.

Massey said looking directly at the sun could cause serious damage to the eyes, even when a large fraction of it is blocked out. It is also not wise to look at the sun through binoculars, telescopes or a telephoto lens on an SLR camera.

He added: “The simplest way to watch an eclipse is to use a pinhole in a piece of card. An image of the sun can then be projected on to another piece of card behind it (experiment with the distance between the two, but it will need to be at least 30cm).

“Under no circumstances should you look through the pinhole.”

Massey said another popular method used to view an eclipse was the mirror projection method. He said: “You need a small, flat mirror and a means of placing it in the sun so that it reflects the sunlight into a room where you can view it on a wall or some sort of a flat screen.

“You may also have eclipse glasses with a certified safety mark, and these are available from specialist astronomy suppliers. Provided these are not damaged in any way, you can then view the sun through them.”

Binoculars or telescopes can also be used to project the image of the sun. Massey said: “Mount them on a tripod, and fit one piece of card with a hole in it over the eyepiece, and place another between 50cm and a metre behind it.

“Point the telescope or binoculars towards the sun and you should see its bright image on the separate card.”

The Royal Observatory Greenwich livestreamed the eclipse on its website and YouTube channel.

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**Ukraine war liveUkraine**

# **Ukraine fears Russia planning false flag attack amid Kremlin's 'dirty bomb' claims – as it happened**

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## US news

# Progressive Democrats urge Biden to shift strategy and engage with Russia

Letter signed by 30 leftwing representatives from puts pressure on US president's Ukraine strategy two weeks out from midterms

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



Pramila Jayapal was among the signatories of the letter, which called on Joe Biden to consider direct engagement with Russia to end the Ukraine war.  
Photograph: Chip Somodevilla/Getty Images

*Guardian staff and agencies*

Mon 24 Oct 2022 23.10 EDT Last modified on Tue 25 Oct 2022 12.39 EDT

A group of US congressional [Democrats](#) have urged president Joe Biden to pursue direct engagement with Russia to end the war in Ukraine, while still maintaining current military and economic commitments to Kyiv.

“Given the destruction created by this war for [Ukraine](#) and the world, as well as the risk of catastrophic escalation, we ... believe it is in the interests of Ukraine, the United States, and the world to avoid a prolonged conflict,” the 30 Democratic members write in the letter to Biden.

“For this reason, we urge you to pair the military and economic support the United States has provided to Ukraine with a proactive diplomatic push, redoubling efforts to seek a realistic framework for a ceasefire”.

Among the 30 signatories to the letter are Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, Ilhan Omar, Rashida Tlaib and Ayanna Pressley, from the most progressive wing of the party, collectively known as “the squad”.

The letter was led by Representative Pramila Jayapal, who chairs the congressional Progressive Caucus.

“As legislators responsible for the expenditure of tens of billions of US taxpayer dollars in military assistance in the conflict, we believe such involvement in this war also creates a responsibility for the United States to seriously consider all possible avenues, including direct engagement with Russia,” they write.

Asked for comment, state department spokesperson Ned Price said: “Right now, we have heard from Ukrainian partners, repeatedly, that this war will only end through diplomacy and dialogue. We have not heard any reciprocal statement or refrain from Moscow that they are ready in good faith to engage in that diplomacy and dialogue.”

Washington has committed about \$66bn for Ukraine since Russia invaded in late February, providing Kyiv with weapons and other military assistance, humanitarian aid and economic support.

The letter comes with just two weeks to go before the 8 November US midterm elections that will determine which party controls Congress.

Some Republicans have warned there could be tighter control of funding for Ukraine if their party wins control of Congress.

House Republican leader Kevin McCarthy recently said there will be no “blank check” for Ukraine if Republicans win control of the chamber from Biden’s fellow Democrats, raising concerns that Republicans might choke off Ukraine aid.

However, analysts said the party was more likely to slow it down or pare it back.

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

## 2022.10.25 - Spotlight

- ['You have to be thick-skinned' What is it like to lose the status of a top job?](#)
- ['A lot of my work has this insane anxiety about it' David Shrigley on worrying, God and drawing like a five-year-old](#)
- [My small, doomed stand One writer's front row seat to Thatcher's war on truth](#)
- [Long Covid 2,000 Guardian readers told us about their experiences. Here are their stories](#)

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## ‘You have to be thick-skinned’: what is it like to lose the status of a top job?



‘These changes are tough’: (l-r): Liz Truss; John Sauven; Alexandra Shulman; Vince Cable; and Jennie Formby. Composite: Tayfun Salci/Shutterstock/Oli Scarff/Getty/Rex Features/Peter Nicholls/Reuters/Alamy Live News

After just 45 days as prime minister, Liz Truss has abruptly lost power. How have others such as Lib Dem leader Vince Cable and Vogue editor Alexandra Shulman coped with life after a high-level role – and can they offer any advice?



[Michael Segalov](#)

Tue 25 Oct 2022 05.00 EDT

On the evening of 7 May 2015, Vince Cable watched coverage of the general election at home. For more than two decades, he had been a Liberal Democrat MP for Twickenham; since 2010, a member of the cabinet, too. In the coalition government he was a long-serving business secretary, president of the board of trade and a privy councillor. Cable ran a constituency office, one in parliament and a major Whitehall department. He was responsible for thousands of staffers, plus a whole host of junior ministers.

Then, quite suddenly, he was not.

By the early hours of 8 May each of these roles and responsibilities had been swiftly removed from the former right honourable member. The general election results deftly demolished the coalition, leaving sweeping losses for

the Liberal Democrats in their wake. Cable's 12,000-majority seat was won by a Conservative party challenger.

The cut and thrust of the democratic process does little to ease this experience for those who hold top-tier public office. In a matter of moments, one can go from wielding the highest levels of political power and influence to almost none. Just a few fateful weeks ago, Liz Truss's decade-long rise through ministerial ranks culminated in her becoming prime minister. Now, [after 45 days, it's all over](#). Cable may well know how she feels. His long career also came to an abrupt and unwelcome end. "That night was incredibly difficult on a personal and political level," Cable says now, firmly retired from frontline politics. "We'd assumed the Lib Dems would do badly, but Twickenham was thought to be one of those that we would hold on to."

Anyone who leaves a job – whether on their own terms or otherwise – may find themselves in a similar situation. For many, work doesn't just dictate how we spend our time, it's a defining feature of our personalities; a core facet of our identity. This is certainly true for those at the top of institutions or organisations where their names are so closely connected with their place of work. So, when titles we have held are suddenly stripped away and consigned to the past, it can feel a little disorienting; exposing, even. How do we begin to navigate that?

According to the psychologist Linda Papadopoulos, whether grappling with retirement, redundancy or resignation, it can be a struggle to adapt. "These changes are tough for humans," Papadopoulos says, "especially when we're in jobs where it's bound up with our identity, and those on a treadmill of positions of power. There's a shift in how we see ourselves, but how others see us as well."

Humans aren't good with things we didn't see coming

Moving on from such a public defeat, Cable adds, wasn't easy: "It was tough walking through Twickenham to have people commiserate you. It was a constant reminder of my loss."

Seeing so many of his fellow Liberal Democrat peers find similar fates was reassuring, though. “What made things easier is we all went down with the ship,” he says. “Had we been 56 Lib Dem MPs and only three had lost? I’d have felt it personally. But we were nearly all defeated – those few who survived were in fairly unique situations.”

Finding comfort in these comparisons, Papadopoulos suggests, is human nature. “Basic evolutionary psychology tells us we are status-driven creatures,” she says, “programmed to check out how happy we are in relation to others. It’s why it’s so difficult sometimes to feel good about yourself without looking to see if we’re running faster or jumping higher than someone else.”

For Jennie Formby, Labour’s general secretary for two years under Jeremy Corbyn, focusing on the challenges of the job after her departure was vital. In April 2020, when Keir Starmer won the Labour leadership election, Formby found herself on a call with the new leader of the opposition. “I congratulated him on his mandate, and explained we’d been preparing for the handover,” she recalls. “Immediately, he told me he wanted me to announce I was stepping down.”



‘I was ready to move on’: former Labour general secretary Jennie Formby speaking at the party’s annual conference in 2018. Photograph: Christopher

## Thomond/The Guardian

“Of course it was a privilege,” she says, “but it’s not a great job. It’s tough. There are so many elements, competing interests and responsibilities. I’d been working every evening. Every weekend. Every holiday. Something was always happening. In 2018, I was on holiday in Turkey, and there was only one place in the villa that got a phone signal. I spent hours standing in that spot. I was ready to move on.”

For those more attached to their positions, however, this approach might offer little consolation. While [Lord John Browne's resignation](#) as chief executive of BP in 2007 – after 12 years in the job and more than four decades with the company – was voluntary, it came after a messy legal battle that saw him ultimately ousted in a kiss’n’tell story running in a Sunday tabloid. In the aftermath, he attempted to detach himself from his previous professional life entirely. “I suddenly had a clean sheet of paper,” Browne says. “I thought to myself: you have to look forward not backwards, as my late mother – a survivor of Auschwitz – always told me. So I did. I built a new career and a completely new life, nothing in common with that which came before. That certainly helped.”

Of course, the media continued to report on his case. “I was strongly advised by a journalist friend of mine not to read a single article in the papers about BP or myself for an entire year,” Browne recalls. “This friend kept them all for me, and said if I was still interested a year later I could have them. That was great advice. I quite literally started again, which was refreshing.”

Adjusting to a life without the trappings of the top job, Browne says, was trickier. “When you’re CEO of a big company there are all sorts of people looking after you and doing things for you,” he says. From reservations to research, every need catered for. “Then you’re all alone. I had no secretary, no staff, no support. I had to build that all up for myself.”



‘I quite literally started again, which was refreshing’: Lord John Browne, formerly of BP. Photograph: Luke MacGregor/Reuters

Emma Reed Turrell is a psychotherapist, author and podcaster. How we respond to these endings, she suggests, often depends on how prepared we are for that event coming round. “Humans aren’t good with things we didn’t see coming. If we expect something to end,” she says, “our nervous system can prepare for it in advance. Either way, we have a set of reactions and we’ll grieve: there’s still a transition cycle of shock, resistance, sadness then finding new meaning. But being ready for such a change means we likely won’t face the trauma of an unexpected loss.”

This is precisely how Alexandra Shulman explains [her departure from British Vogue](#), where until 2017 she had been editor-in-chief for 25 years. “I decided to leave Vogue of my own volition,” Shulman says, “which meant the process wasn’t painful but exciting. And I didn’t leave feeling I had unfinished business, having been there for such a long time.”

Still, that’s not to say leaving such a career-defining, high-profile gig was straightforward. For decades, Shulman had been synonymous with the magazine she edited. “When you leave a job that’s more than a job but a role,” she says, “you have to be sure it’s the right decision.” As soon as you leave, Shulman says, all that comes with it disappears. “Anyone who thinks

it'll stick to you is wrong," she says. You realise the invitations, access and status don't come with you. "It really is: 'The king is dead, long live the king.' People are often shocked by the suddenness with which that happens."

It's odd for your caption to always be 'former' something, rather than a present or actual something

"It's odd for your caption to always be 'former' something," Shulman adds, "rather than a present or actual something. It amuses me, but one could find it annoying. I've accepted that's what people will think of me as."

And then comes the challenge of your replacement defining their new leadership, which often means contrasting it in opposition to what came before. "You don't realise how quickly people are going to want to reposition what they're doing as the important thing, rather than what you did," Shulman suggests. There were reports of a rift between Shulman and her successor, Edward Enniful; in a 2020 interview, Shulman said she was made 'persona non grata'... "And that's tough," Shulman says. "Obviously, you think you've done a good job. You have to be prepared to be thick-skinned."

Formby describes a deep sense of frustration with the Labour party's new leadership ("there's a lack of honesty now at the top of the party, a selling out"); Cable laments the dismantling of his legacy – the sale of the Green Investment Bank; the scrapping of his industrial strategy – with similar anguish. "After the defeat I had coffee with Sajid Javid who was at the time, briefly, business secretary," says Cable. "Javid told me that [the industrial strategy] had my name and my party's name all over it, so the Tories wanted to bury it. Cynical, yes, but that's how they were. It was difficult to see legacy issues being trashed."

Ultimately, it's pragmatism that prevails for most; accepting that change is inevitable. "Humans come unstuck when we don't change," says Reed Turrell. "We are meant to move and evolve. Society has created a negative connotation that something ending is a loss and a bad thing, but there's no reason why it shouldn't be the beginning of a new chapter instead."

Sometimes, that's not limited to the person stepping down. After 14 years at the helm of Greenpeace UK as executive director, John Sauven saw his resignation as a positive step forward and a necessity – for his future and that of Greenpeace.

I think about Arsène Wenger – he should have left a few years earlier on a high, rather than being forced out

“It’s a privilege to run an organisation like Greenpeace,” he says, “with access to those people and resources. When you step aside you lose that ability for impact. But there are also a new range of experiences open to you, whether advising your successors or starting things afresh.”

When weighing up his future, this lifelong Arsenal fan looked to Arsène Wenger for guidance. “He did a great job, of course, as manager,” Sauven says, “but really I think a lot about how he should have left a few years earlier on a high, rather than being forced out, and having fans chanting in the stands for him to leave. It’s all about timing. Staying around until you’re pushed out, or the organisation goes into decline, is never a good idea.”

At his leaving party, Sauven reflected on his years in the NGO top job. “I gave a speech at the end,” says Sauven. “I said I was leaving Greenpeace and my wife was, too. It was tongue in cheek, but you’re married to the job. There were three of us, really in our marriage. When you run any sort of organisation, it can become all-consuming. Going from full throttle on the accelerator to being still – as you do the day you leave – was a major change. You take a breath, and step back to look around in a way you don’t otherwise have the time to.”

In 2017, Cable returned to Westminster as Twickenham’s MP – and soon became his party’s leader. In 2019, he stood down from both positions of his own accord. Perhaps Boris Johnson had this in mind when he considered a rapid return to Downing Street last weekend.

“Retirement can be a deadening experience,” Cable says. Trying to have a positive mindset from the outset at the end of his career was essential in

offering him direction and solace in the days after that transformative defeat, Cable says. “We went off to my wife’s farm in the New Forest, and plotted a nice holiday in Corsica, and the things we’d do next. You can’t just sit around and be an old man waiting to pass on into the next world.” Years on – and a world away – from that night in May 2015, he’s sure that “having a forward project” kept him going. What did that look like for Cable? He got to work writing a political thriller and “started dancing lessons”. We’ve all got to start again somewhere.

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## ‘A lot of my work has this insane anxiety about it’: David Shrigley on worrying, God and drawing like a five-year-old

[Jonathan Jones](#)



‘Just being in this room makes me really happy’ ... David Shrigley in his Devon studio. Photograph: Karen Robinson/The Guardian

He has been shortlisted for the Turner prize for his acerbic, often hilarious images. Now living in the countryside with his wife and dog, the artist has produced a new book – and his work is as tense and restless as ever



Tue 25 Oct 2022 01.00 EDT Last modified on Tue 25 Oct 2022 05.53 EDT

Cool young artists are talking about their work. “I don’t actually do the paintings myself,” says a man in a stripy jumper. He gets a bunch of kids to do them for him. A woman wearing thick lipstick and holding a cigarette describes her practice: “I use a lot of found materials in my work. My latest piece is 50 identical pairs of children’s shoes which I found in a charity shop.” Another artist tells how he bought soiled underpants from “dossers” for his latest show, while a battered youth goes around bars at the weekend and starts fights to “get my head kicked in while a friend of mine videos it”.

[David Shrigley](#) drew this in the mid-1990s. It is a devastatingly precise satire of the Young British Artists scene. It was funny then and still is. When he drew it, Shrigley had recently graduated from Glasgow School of Art with a 2:2 degree – a humiliation he can’t forget – and was working as a guide and art handler at Glasgow’s Centre for Contemporary Arts.

“I saw all these other artists who were able to chat up Hans Ulrich Obrist [the renowned supercurator] when he came to town. I just couldn’t do that, and I guess I was a bit bitter about that – too shy. I thought I would never have any success as a result.”



Shrigley’s Untitled (Bad Habits), a new, previously unseen work.  
Photograph: © David Shrigley. All Rights Reserved, DACS/Artimage 2022

A quarter of a century on, who is having the last laugh? Many of the young artists who were hot then are struggling now. Meanwhile, Shrigley, 54, has become an “industry”, as he puts it, selling his acerbic, hilarious, badly drawn philosophical cartoons in books and on posters and other merchandise; his latest book, *Get Your Shit Together*, is the first full-colour anthology of what he calls his “paintings”. Shrigley reaches people outside the narrow, money-ruled art world. Who are his fans, I wonder. Instagram analytics enable him to give an unexpectedly precise answer: “My audience is women aged between 25 and 34 in London.”

Yet the art world loves him too. He was shortlisted for the Turner prize in 2013, causing perhaps the competition’s last real scandal, with a naked urinating statue.

To find out what drives this artist, at once conceptual joker and accessible cartoonist, I head for east Devon, where he has recently moved in search of pastoral peace. Meeting me at Honiton station in a car crammed with dog toys, he drives me to the seaside town of Sidmouth, past a billboard he has set up for local artists to use, to his studio, a converted flat above a shop in the high street.

Shrigley lives in the countryside in the East Devon Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty and drives into town to work here, at a simple drawing table. The furnishings are as spartan as one of his sketches: a table and chairs where we sit; a fridge where he is chilling a four-pack of another new Shrigley product, a beer called Toad Licker with a picture of someone licking an impassive green toad on the can; and a homemade guitar.



Untitled (Plane Can Still Fly : It's OK). Photograph: Artwork © 2022 David Shrigley. Published by Chronicle Chroma

It is quite hard to define the essence of Shrigley's art – until you visit his studio and realise he draws and paints all day long. Everything else is just about distributing the results – including in books. To my surprise, he didn't edit *Get Your Shit Together* himself or select its images: even its title was chosen by the publisher. "Shit" wasn't a word he expected a US publisher to put on the cover.

The reason he now “delegates” the selection of his art for books or exhibitions is, he says, that his own choice never seemed to match what people want: “The gallery would send me an inventory of all the works that were unsold and I would look at them and think: ‘I can’t believe that that painting didn’t sell. I can’t believe that that one didn’t sell ... That’s brilliant, that one!’ Things that were just perfect, that represented everything I wanted to say about my existence – and the meaning, and irony thereof. But did anybody agree with me? No. No. They just wanted the ones of the cat.”

So, now, he lets other people riffle through his art and choose what they want to publish or exhibit. Including the cats.

The way Shrigley stands back from the circulation of his own art could almost make him seem cynical. But this lack of interest in its fate is the very opposite. It reflects his single-minded dedication to what really matters to him: putting pen or paint to paper.

Shrigley grew up in Leicestershire, where his dad was an electrical engineer and his mum a computer programmer. He describes it as a “modest” background, but his parents had high educational expectations. “They were probably quite unhappy when I went to art school.” He started his career in urban Glasgow and later lived in bohemian Brighton, but feels happy to have moved far from the madding crowd: “I live in a place where other people go on holiday, so that’s got to make me happy, right? And I’m married: if you can remain married that’s usually a source of happiness.” He and his wife, Kim, have been together 26 years; he portrays her as too down to earth to let him indulge in the £4,000 Rickenbacker guitars he used to “lust for”, which is why he makes his own. “And I’ve got a dog and I get on really well with my dog. So, yeah, I’m pretty content.”



Untitled (I Left My Purse on the Bus). Photograph: Artwork © 2022 David Shrigley. Published by Chronicle Chroma

It's not like he is trapped in the English countryside either. He frequently visits Copenhagen where he has the Shrig Shop (inspired by Keith Haring's Pop Shop), which, even though it's "around the corner and up the alley", acts as the physical focus of his online business. I can't help asking if he has sampled Copenhagen's food scene. It turns out the legendary restaurant Noma gives departing staff a Shrigley print – and in return he gets free meals there. Yes, he confirms, it is as good as people say.

He is clearly someone with good reasons to be content. Yet Shrigley's deepest happiness appears to lie in his creativity. His drawing and painting skills are, he freely confesses, "limited". But he loves making his marks on paper, can't stop doing it, and has organised his life so he can sit here undisturbed, drawing and painting away.

"Just being alone in this room makes me really happy, with my paper and my paints and my pens."

It is, in fact, a bit like being a child for ever. He sees a real analogy between what he does now and the paintings he made on sugar paper when he was five years old.

“Your attitude was: what am I going to paint right now? Dinosaur. So you paint the Tyrannosaurus rex, and then you attach some text to the image of the Tyrannosaurus rex, and usually the Tyrannosaurus rex is saying something either violent or stupid. And that’s what I did when I was five. In my mind, it’s a similar format and attitude, albeit now I’m a middle-aged man who’s read some books and stuff. Inevitably, there is some craft that seeps in there but the work isn’t going to be any better if I could draw.”

Yet there seems to be a darker edge to Shrigley’s work. Take the giant hand making an exaggerated thumbs up gesture that he put up on Trafalgar Square’s Fourth Plinth in 2016. It elicited bizarre feelgood responses, even winning praise in some quarters as a positive, can-do image of Brexit. He remembers a Women’s March being photographed by it – but also an English Defence League gathering. Surely it was a desperate, hysterical image that implied its despairing opposite? There is plenty of insidious anger or irony in his new book, too. Under a painting of different-coloured designer chairs he has written: BURN THEM ALL. On another page he has a painting of a green purse with the message: “I left my purse on the bus. If you find it please return it to me. It contains one million pounds.” A sleeping pig is offered as a role model: “Witness my contentment that you too may be content.”



Shrigley's Really Good, installed on the fourth plinth in London's Trafalgar Square in September 2016. Photograph: David Levene/The Guardian

Shrigley prefers to point to the formal structure of his work, and the philosophical humour it embodies. He likes to think he has a lot in common with a friend, the conceptual artist [Martin Creed](#). Imitating him, he puts on a deliberately bad Scottish accent: "Aye, so I've got this hat, right, and it's a square hat because hats aren't square most of the time. And that's why I wear the square hat."

When he says he still paints as he did aged five, he doesn't only mean he has avoided being ruined by craft skills. He is also referring to the "stupid or violent" words he would put in the creature's mouth.

"When I'm seeing how word and image fit together – which is my thing, right? – it's a bit like a child learning how to speak."

Francis Picabia, Marcel Duchamp: they were the artists I wanted to be.  
It was the otherness of that thought process

One early word a child might say is "dada" – at least the poets and artists who created the 20th century's most subversive art movement thought so. Dada, invented by the generation massacred by the first world war, rejects art itself and replaces it with brutal, sick humour. For the young Shrigley in the 70s and 80s, this was the art that mattered – or rather the anti-art: "That's always been my influence throughout my life, ever since I first started reading about art movements when I was a teenager. I think it was the Thames & Hudson book of dada – this is probably in about 1979 – with little black and white illustrations. Francis Picabia, Marcel Duchamp: they were the artists I wanted to be. It was the otherness of that thought process that I was interested in."

Otherness: maybe that's what his drawings and their discombobulating captions really create. Leafing through his books, you encounter the grotesque, absurd and macabre and, every so often, something it is impossible to resist laughing at. It's an estrangement of normality.



Untitled (God Sees You). Photograph: Artwork © 2022 David Shrigley.  
Published by Chronicle Chroma

Yet my morbid desire to find the darkness in this happy character is gratified when he does finally admit to a more hidden, personal drive to his art.

“Part of the joy of doing it is the therapeutic thing: I guess I’m quite an anxious person at different times. Whilst I say I’m a pretty happy person, I’m also an introvert, and introverts often tend to be quite anxious, I think. I worry about stuff – I worry that I’ve upset people and I worry about things that are irrational. So I guess that’s the thing that I grapple with in my life, in terms of my emotional makeup, that’s something I have to deal with. I mean, I’m not a depressed person, but I think I am quite an anxious person. And a lot of the work just has this insane anxiety about it.”

In his new collection there’s a snake: “Actual size in your sleeping bag.” Another painting shows a passenger jet with a wing broken off, with the reassurance: “Plane can still fly: it’s OK.” A crowd of green eyes stare at you with the message: “Don’t be paranoid.”



Legal licker ... Shrigley's grapefruit pale ale, produced with Hand Brew Co.  
Photograph: Rhiannon Fletcher-Towler

I think this underlying hum of stress and fear, rather than the art theory of a century ago, is what gives his art its double-edged tension and restless energy. It is also what speaks to so many of us. Living in a chaotic world, in scary times, it's great and joyous to have our dread reflected in art, yet also transformed into hilarity.

There's a striking ethical turn in *Get Your Shit Together*, in a section where animals talk back to their human oppressors. "Deer says fuck you all," reads the caption by a painting of a deer. "Fuck you," it says on a cat's tail. Shark and otter agree: "Fuck you all." A tiger, a giraffe, a sea lion, a bee and a polar bear are more specific: "I hate human beings."



Untitled (Lots to be Happy About). Photograph: Todd-White Art Photography/Artwork © 2022 David Shrigley. Published by Chronicle Chroma

“In recent years, I’ve become a vegetarian,” Shrigley says. “I’ve become quite militant about the natural world. I’ve gone from being an arch-meat-eater – kidneys in the Chelsea Arts Club – to bordering on a vegan. That’s happened as I’ve moved to a rural location and had a dog. Something happened in my middle age where I suddenly couldn’t face the idea of animals dying so I could eat my dinner. Not that I have any particular feelings towards sea lions.”

His vegetarianism is also reflected in a picture of a big bowl of beans (he eats lots of them). “God sees you eating your beans,” it warns. Shrigley tells me it shows “the inner monologue of the Almighty seeing you – but does he approve of you, eating your beans?”

Does he believe in God?

“Yeah. I mostly believe in God. I realise there are lots of gods. I was brought up in a Christian household. I’m not a practical Christian, but I’m from that background. I am not an atheist. Then again, I have some sympathy for Richard Dawkins. I just think that he’s sort of extracting all the interesting

stuff out of life by trying to rationalise it. Existence shouldn't be entirely rational. If all your beliefs are rational, it's just dull. I'd love to hang out with Richard Dawkins and I'd say" – he puts on a gnomish voice – "God sees you eating your beans."

He gives me some ice-cold Toad Licker for the train home. As the Devon countryside speeds by, he has me wondering: does God see me, sipping my grapefruit-flavoured beer?

***Get Your Shit Together*** by David Shrigley (*Chronicle Chroma*, £26) is out on 3 November

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

# My small, doomed stand against Thatcher's war on truth

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**Over 2,000 Guardian readers told us about their long Covid fight. Here are their stories**



Protestors march outside the White House this September to call attention to those suffering from myalgic encephalomyelitis and long Covid.  
Photograph: Anadolu Agency/Getty Images

The chronic condition has an array of physical and neurological symptoms, but most remain misunderstood

*[Guardian readers](#), as compiled by [Clea Skopeliti](#)*

Tue 25 Oct 2022 03.00 EDT Last modified on Tue 25 Oct 2022 10.41 EDT

From overwhelming fatigue to brain fog that makes it impossible to complete daily tasks, long Covid is having a devastating impact on people's lives around the world.

But with no test for the chronic condition, it has proven difficult to measure how many people are living with the syndrome weeks, months and even years after contracting the virus. It is an umbrella term describing an array of physical and neurological symptoms, including ones like memory issues.

A recent callout asking Guardian readers for their experience with long Covid received nearly 2,000 responses from people in the Americas, Asia, Africa, Europe and Oceania.

Many respondents described their struggle to have their condition taken seriously by doctors, family and friends; others spoke of difficulties getting an official diagnosis and being recognized as disabled by their workplace or government. Some also said they had been financially affected after having to take significant time off work, reduce their hours or stop working entirely, [reflecting a survey that found](#) one in five workers were not working as a result of illness, while almost half of those had reduced their hours.

Here, seven people from around the world share their experiences of living with long Covid, and the impact it has had on their physical and mental health, ability to work and relationships.

**'A year on, I'm still bed bound in a dark quiet room'**



Kelly Meiners.

“Before Covid I ran five to 10 miles and lifted weights six days per week. When I tested positive in October 2021, it was mild, I was able to work remotely all week. A few days later, I noticed involuntary muscle twitching, confusion, aphasia, dizziness, poor balance, difficulty waking and fatigue. We went to the ER because my husband thought I was having a stroke.

“It became much more severe over the next few months, having seizures, migraines, hallucinations and severe cognitive issues. I received my long Covid diagnosis from a neurologist at Mayo [Clinic] in April 2022. Even with the visible seizures and inability to walk, my local hospital listed psychosomatic causes in my medical records.

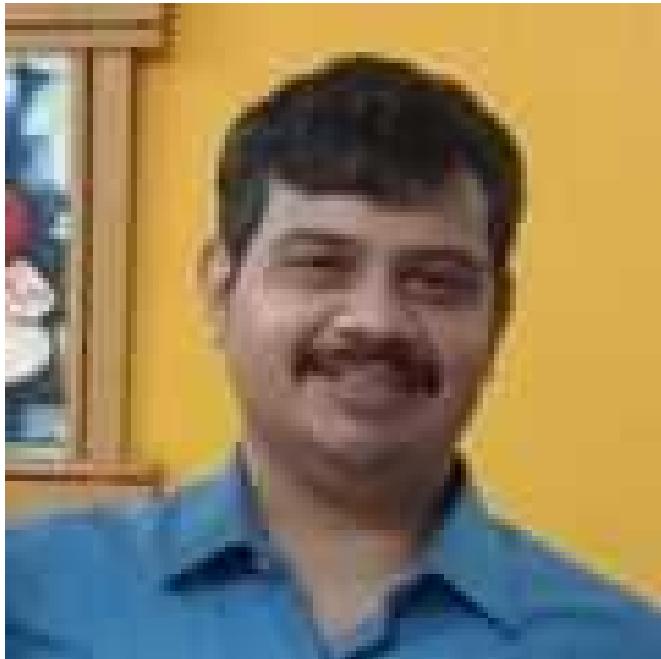
“I’m still bed and sofa-bound in dark quiet rooms and I’m unable to perform any activity longer than 10 minutes. I only leave the house for medical appointments because the stimulation causes severe fatigue that lasts for days to weeks. When I leave I use a wheelchair and use a walker in the house. I shower just every four days because [exertion] knocks me down for a full day afterwards.

“My job terminated me in June and I’m a shadow of my former self. My cognition is slowly improving and over the past month I have more clear-

minded moments. Unfortunately I'm now acutely aware of missing out on life. I've been told that I need to grieve my former self but I refuse to give up hope."

*Kelly Meiners, 46, Missouri, former associate professor and physical therapist*

## **‘Covid destroyed two years of my career’**



Madan Mohan.

“I had my first Covid infection in December 2020. It was a mild infection, but after a particularly hectic week working late in March 2021, I developed fatigue and shortness of breath. It was like my body responded by just snapping. I used to participate in tennis tournaments; I don’t think I could do that for 10 minutes now.

“I got reinfected in January 2022. This time I began to face difficulty in concentrating or processing large chunks of data. I had several months of leave [over the course of a year]. It was not possible to carry on in an intense role so I had to leave the job in August. Covid destroyed two years of my career but mercifully I had adequate savings. I’m now trying to rebuild my skills.

“I was diagnosed with long Covid in March 2021 but I have seen five doctors in this time while looking for treatment for my symptoms, and I have felt gaslit [at times]. A neurologist I consulted recommended cognitive exercises like playing sudoku for the brain fog, which appears to have helped. I’m not completely back to where I’d like to be but my symptoms are improving.”

*Madan Mohan, 37, India, chartered accountant*

## ‘It’s like my imagination has been turned off’

“I got sick in March 2020 and I’ve been sick since then. It has changed over the course, going from more cough and breathing problems to profound neurological issues and nerve pain. A reinfection in March 2022 set me back in my recovery.

“Throughout, though, the brain fog has been present. There was a period where I had trouble speaking – I’d end sentences in the middle. My neurological symptoms worsened around January 2021 after I tried to start exercising again. Painkillers help with managing my nerve pain: it’s a burning sensation like I took a can of hairspray, lit and breathed in the flame.

“I was referred to the long Covid clinic for five weeks by my physical therapist – my GP didn’t know what to do about my diagnosis. The cognitive therapy I had there was helpful in teaching me to pace myself better but physical therapy didn’t help. I’m on an antidepressant for energy and mental clarity, but I’m also depressed, so it is for that too.

“I used to make music as a hobby, but now the creative part of me is very diminished. It’s like my imagination has been turned off and listening to music causes me mental fatigue pretty quickly. I feel not quite here, like everything’s not quite real.”

*Katherine Blohm, 53, Sweden*

## ‘My life has totally changed’



John Willmott.

“I caught Covid in spring 2020 and still have chronic fatigue. I cannot stand long or walk far. I think I have learned to live with this and be as productive as I can with limited abilities.

“My life has totally changed. I had a productive smallholding but had to move to a home that was easier to look after. I stopped a lot of driving and traveling and doing things with friends, as they became frustrated with my lack of ability and energy. I see very few people now. I sleep a lot more; at first I was sleeping 18 hours a day, now that is down to 12 hours a day. You cannot fight tiredness with this condition as that is dangerous and devastating.

“The health service has been of very little help. Most of the time they tell me I am making it up and that it is just old age creeping up on me. It did not creep up on me. I was fit and active, had Covid, then it was all gone.”

***John Willmott, 72, Ireland, retired writer and tour guide***

**‘I’m trying to get help’**

“In August 2021 I was in hospital for 21 days with Covid. When I got home I realized I couldn’t do anything, I struggled to get up the stairs, struggling with my memory. I live alone but my friends rallied around me.

“I used to be a glass-overflowing kind of person. After Covid I’d just sit in a chair and fall asleep. I went and stayed with my best friend who took care of me – she’d phone the doctor up but it was virtually impossible to get an appointment and they weren’t able to help much.

“I was signed off on my company’s sick pay until November, but then I had to go back because otherwise I’d have to go on statutory sick pay [£99.35 or \$112 a week] – I can’t afford that, I have a mortgage.

“I really struggled at first – I couldn’t physically lift half the stuff. I’d be falling asleep in the lorry while the other guy [I was out with] was driving; we might be in Leeds one minute and in Hull the next. I used to do 12- to 15-hour days before – now I can just about do eight-hour days. On my days off I sleep the whole day, 15 hours.

“There are big gaps in my memories; I can’t remember my parents’ funerals or getting married. After a long day my speaking becomes slurred like I’m drunk.

“I’ve stayed in touch with some of the guys from the hospital and I’m in a long Covid Facebook group. They’re all saying the same thing: depression, everything falling apart. I’m trying to get help but I can’t remember half the time what I did and didn’t do. This is not me – I feel like I’m slowly disappearing.”

***Chris Le Couteur 54, UK, heavy goods vehicle driver***

**‘There hasn’t been much recognition of long Covid here’**



Mtinkheni Agness Munthali.

“I went to six doctors before I was diagnosed with long Covid in July. I contracted the virus at work in April and two weeks later, I developed symptoms including nerve pain, brain fog, leg swelling, vertigo, heart palpitations and shortness of breath.

“I have a diagnosis now but the doctors don’t know what is making me so sick – the tests always come back clear but I feel so sick daily. I’m trying to figure it out on my own. I joined a long Covid Facebook group that has been helpful, as people share what’s worked for their symptoms.

“I have not stopped working completely but I am constantly on sick leave. I can’t do an eight-hour day – it takes me a lot longer to do things, people at work don’t understand and still want the same outcomes.

“I have already depleted my health insurance for the year so I’m using my personal savings for medical expenses. There hasn’t been much recognition of long Covid here – you’re not declared disabled, and are still expected to perform like a normal person but I can’t. Every time I relapse I have to take more leave. It has been such a lonely, humiliating, painful experience.”

***Mtinkheni Agness Munthali, 37, South Africa, project coordinator***

## **‘I am impatient to get back to normal’**



Jarrah Gurrie.

“I have not been the same since I caught Covid in January 2022. I think I may have experienced further infections since then [despite being] careful in public – still masking and taking all the precautions I can. But I don’t want to be a hermit. Life is for living! I have been suffering long Covid symptoms since January with only a couple of days reprieve here and there. It has gradually eased since January but I took a battering during cold and flu season. Just when I think I have a handle on it, something will set me back 100 steps. Mostly it is fatigue, very poor immunity, brain fog, tingling and body aches.

“Getting an official diagnosis has been a bit frustrating and I only got one last month. I [previously] tried other holistic and Chinese medicine treatments – I’m not sure if they helped or not. I feel like Australia is a little slower than the rest of the world to acknowledge long Covid – which goes hand in hand with our ‘she’ll be right’ culture and because the pandemic hit hard here later.

“I’m at about 70% now. Exercising is still a problem for me. It’s super frustrating when the guidance from my GP is to exercise and lose weight. I

don't think this will go forever but I am impatient to get back to normal.”  
***Jarrahd Gurrie, 41, Australia, film editor***

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

## 2022.10.25 - Opinion

- Rishi Sunak will leave the economy in a hole – Labour will have to think big to dig it out
- I had to fight for Bosnia. That's how I know Ukrainians can win, and they will rebuild
- Loneliness is a struggle for new parents – can we all stop pretending everything's ok?

[Opinion](#)[Conservatives](#)

## Rishi Sunak will leave the economy in a hole – Labour will have to think big to dig it out

[Owen Jones](#)



If Starmer wins, he will face a choice: pursue austerity with a red rosette, or find some game-changing new ideas



Rishi Sunak with MPs at the Conservative party headquarters in London, 24 October 2022. Photograph: Guy Bell/Rex/Shutterstock

Tue 25 Oct 2022 01.00 EDT Last modified on Tue 25 Oct 2022 09.26 EDT

Nearly 30% of all Britain's postwar prime ministers will have been in office in the past six years, all from the same party. But the cause of this chronic political instability is not just Tory psychodrama: it's an economic model that has failed to deliver rising living standards.

David Cameron's political career was consumed by a referendum result in which resentment over stagnating incomes played a key role: as one detailed [academic study](#) found, "Dissatisfaction over austerity measures was significant enough to give the leave campaign its majority." When Theresa May's premiership was fatally wounded by the snap election of 2017, voters' rage at years of financial struggle – and a belief that Labour was best placed to do something about it – proved pivotal. While Boris Johnson was felled by deceit over illicit partying, public anger at an escalating cost of living crisis – and the Tories' failure to address it – was crucial in suppressing Tory polling, leading his MPs to conclude he was no longer an electoral asset and could therefore be discarded. As for Liz Truss: well, no further explanation is necessary.

Even before the surge in inflation and Truss's move to crash the British economy with a series of lethal rightwing policies, wages were set to be [lower in 2026 than back in 2008](#). There was once talk of the financial crash and the subsequent Tory austerity triggering a lost decade in people's living standards, but the reality we now face is a lost generation. Too often, political reporting reduces British politics to soap opera, to personality-driven machinations: to do so strips away the much more profound drivers of political turmoil.

What, then, does the ascent of Rishi Sunak mean for all this? That he has been widely painted as a relative Tory moderate is a political travesty: Sunak is easily to the right of Johnson on economic policy. The [anonymous briefing](#) of one senior Sunak ally underlined why so many Tory MPs were uneasy with Johnson, and it wasn't because of his addiction to deceit: "There is no evidence that during his time as prime minister he grasped the need for restraint in spending or had any understanding of how the public finances worked." Johnson, they believed, was opposed to a renewed bout of austerity and lacked a true-blue ideological commitment to rolling back the frontiers of the state. Sunak, on the other hand, will gleefully wield the scalpel, from real-terms pay cuts for the key workers who were hypocritically applauded by Tory ministers in the pandemic, to the core services that a healthy society depends on to function. Sunak must believe that he will escape the same fate as his four predecessors – three of whom were more experienced than him – even as he is likely to oversee a more dramatic plunge in living standards than any of them.

Sunak is likely to be the fifth and final Tory prime minister of this era whose career will end in humiliating failure, in his case an electoral rout at the hands of the Labour party will probably be his final chapter. As far as many of Keir Starmer's cheerleaders are concerned, this will mark the end of Britain's Age of Chaos. The post-2016 turmoil, they believe, was driven by the Tories' infantile ideological zeal: now a supposed "pragmatist" and "grownup" will be running the show, and so stability will return and politics will become boring again.

Labour's rhetoric is about "sound money", "tough choices" and "balancing the books", and the fear must be that this will translate into austerity, albeit with a [Labour](#) rosette attached to it. If so, do not expect political turmoil to

abate – quite the contrary. This would be unlike the New Labour period – after all, Tony Blair's landslide was in the context of surging economic growth and rising living standards, hence the Tory slogan: “Britain's booming: don't let Labour ruin it.” This proved to be driven by an unsustainable financial bubble, but it bought a long period of relative social peace. If Labour comes to power in an age of acute social crises and fails to offer transformative policies to deal with them – and even relies on cuts – then more political tumult beckons, as Ramsay MacDonald's and James Callaghan's governments discovered in the 1930s and 1970s respectively.

The obvious response here relies on a regurgitation of Margaret Thatcher's “[There is no alternative](#)”: that as Truss' government was crushed by a market revolt over uncosted tax cuts for the rich, a Starmer administration wedded to unfunded public spending will suffer the same fate. But what it really means is Labour must commit to sweeping tax rises for Britain's thriving rich to support ambitious spending commitments. It is notable that the markets were convulsed by plans to scrap tax hikes on big business: increases in corporation tax can now objectively be described as “market-friendly”. If [advance briefings](#) about Jeremy Hunt's upcoming Halloween budget are to be believed, even the Tories are now examining the case for wealth taxes.

That gives Labour space to offer far more ambitious proposals. There is already a [ready-made blueprint](#), developed by tax experts in 2020: a one-off wealth tax on millionaire couples paid at 1% a year for five years, they found, would raise more than £260bn. One of the architects was a tax expert whose job was to help wealthy clients navigate around tax law; their entire plan was developed by trying to prevent the rich seeking out loopholes. Should Labour, in two years, finally bring Tory turmoil to an end, it will face a choice: impose real terms cuts, and provoke further chaos; increase public spending without proper costing, and suffer market retribution; or address the country's multiple social disasters with game-changing policies funded by tax hikes on those who have profited from these 14 bleak years. To coin a phrase, there really is no alternative.

- Owen Jones is a Guardian columnist

- [Crisis at No 10: How long can the Tory government hold on?](#) Join Hugh Muir, Polly Toynbee, John Crace and Jessica Elgot discussing another failed Tory prime minister and what the future holds for the government, in this livestreamed event. On Wednesday 26 October, 7pm–8pm BST. Book tickets at [theguardian.com/guardianlive](https://theguardian.com/guardianlive)
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| [Section menu](#) | [Main menu](#) |

## In the shadow of Putin's RussiaBosnia-Herzegovina

# I had to fight for Bosnia. That's how I know Ukrainians can win, and they will rebuild

[Faruk Šehić](#)

In this, one of a [series](#) of essays from countries in or bordering the former Soviet bloc, a Bosnian poet warns that Europe will have to leave its comfort zone



Pictures of people killed by Serb forces in the Bosnian city of Prijedor displayed as part of a 2019 ‘white ribbon’ commemoration in Sarajevo. Photograph: Anadolu Agency/Getty Images

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Stop a person on the street in Sarajevo and ask them what they think about the war in Ukraine, and they’ll tell you they think that almost everything that happened in the war in [Bosnia-Herzegovina](#) is happening in Ukraine.

In April, we commemorated the [30th anniversary](#) of the war against Bosnia-Herzegovina. We consider early April 1992 the moment a new era began: we have the before, during and after the catastrophe.

A month into the war in [Ukraine](#) I saw Ukrainians starting to use the phrase “before the war”. We went through everything that’s happening to them, but no one asks us about it or wants us to help.

War leads you to start looking at life and death with different eyes. Before our “smallish war” (an ironic phrase I use in literary works), I wanted to be a poet and wrote ultra-metaphorical and incomprehensible poems. After the war, I was determined to write as clearly and precisely as possible, especially about the events of the war. That is when I became a writer. The war was a giant catalyst in that process.

In a recent [article for the Paris Review](#), Ilya Kaminsky quoted the Ukrainian poet [Daryna Gladun](#) on how events in Ukraine had changed her writing: “I set aside metaphors to speak about the war in clear words,” she said, “so that readers around the world will be struck by the cynicism, cruelty, and inevitability of the war that Russia brought to Ukraine.” A number of Sarajevo poets found the same thing happen during the siege of this city – the longest in the history of modern warfare. The famous Slovenian poet Tomaž Šalamun once said that he stopped writing poetry entirely during the war in Bosnia.

On 21 April 1992, the attack began on my home town in far western Bosnia. I was studying in Zagreb at the time but returned to Bosanska Krupa because I knew the war would soon begin; regular and irregular Serb formations had begun attacking towns in eastern Bosnia in early April.

You could see towns burning along the river Drina, the natural border between Bosnia-Herzegovina and Serbia, even though the country was still called the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia. But not even the letter Y remained of Yugoslavia because Slovenia, Croatia and Bosnia-Herzegovina declared independence and seceded from it.

I was drinking beer and listening to music on the terrace of the Casablanca cafe in Bosanska Krupa when the attack came. I remember I was wearing Levi's, a down jacket and Adidas trainers. It was a lovely day, but shortly after 6pm an artillery attack began. That's when I realised what the expression "in mortal terror" means. Militants of the Serb Democratic party, aided by forces of the former Yugoslav People's Army, shelled the city from the surrounding hills.

I neither volunteered nor was I conscripted. We were surrounded by enemy forces and there was no way out of the area (later called the Bihać pocket or Bihać district) unless you could fly. I took up arms because I was driven out of my flat, my street and my neighbourhood. My conscience demanded that I fight.

For 44 months I fought as a soldier and later as an officer leading a unit of 130 men in difficult combat operations at the very end of the war. Once I was badly wounded in the left foot and needed crutches to walk for six months. The pain was more or less bearable because I was young and my body had the strength of steel. We didn't have time then to think about the transcorporeality of pain, nor about infatuation with our own.

I remember having to go to the toilet in a special wheelchair, which had a hole in the seat. But I recovered quickly, I returned to the unit and to the same duties I had before the injury, as a platoon commander of 30 men.

Chronological time stops ticking during war. We wore watches on our wrists but they showed a meaningless time. We were cut off from the rest of our country and the civilised world. We were five hours' drive from Vienna, at least before the war. Now we lived as if we were at the end of the world, so time was irrelevant. A new time was ticking inside us – the one you count from the moment your idyllic, civic life collapses and you become a refugee. After the first moments of shock, we were quick to embrace the apocalyptic way of life.



Sarajevo residents collect water from a stand-pipe during the 47 month-long siege between the spring of 1992 and February 1996. More than 10,600 people were killed with a further 56,000 wounded or maimed. Photograph: Krause, Johansen/Getty Images

The experience of war is not something you want. No sane person wants it. It's a return to the stone age and the time of commodity-money exchange. In the war, you could sell a toothbrush, a tube of toothpaste or a pocketknife and then get tanked up with the money. We did that once: we went to a town far behind the lines, drank beer and listened to Whitney Houston singing I Will Always Love You on MTV. It's not as if we were Whitney Houston fans. We preferred grunge, and before that we listened to new wave, but no one asked us about our musical or any other identity.

We didn't even know that the Serb nationalists saw us as the Others, to be expelled from "Serbian lands", [killed, raped and imprisoned in concentration camps](#). In the summer of 1992, when the Serb army and police occupied the town of Prijedor, all non-Serbs had to wear white armbands and hang white sheets out the windows of their houses and flats. The genocide began there, and it ended with the court-proven genocide in Srebrenica in July 1995. The phrase "never again" was repeated in the [Prijedor concentration camps](#) in the summer of 1992 and is now being repeated in Ukraine.

Although I and my family, comrades-in-arms and fellow citizens went through the worst possible suffering (as refugees, soldiers and civilians), I've never allowed myself to hate an entire people. I've only hated ultranationalists and war criminals, not other Serbian people.

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We had to fight for our sheer survival. And when you fight like that, you can never be defeated because no idea is stronger than the idea of your own life. Right now, Ukrainians are fighting a life-or-death struggle. Having nothing to lose but your own life is when you're strongest.

In the autumn of 1995, we finally managed to retake our town. It was in ruins, but we rebuilt it. Years after the war, you realise that life will never be the same as it was before. Once you lose that Arcadian life it can never be renewed.

All this is not what concerns the people of Ukraine at the moment. They hope the war will end as soon as possible, but war has a logic of its own that is nothing like human logic. The aggression against Ukraine has all the characteristics of a long war of attrition.

The day the war in Ukraine began, I wrote on Twitter that the Russians would commit war crimes, even though they hadn't yet occurred. It was clear to anyone who watched and listened to Vladimir Putin that war and atrocities would soon follow. He referred to Ukraine as a fake state and the Ukrainians as a fake people.

Slobodan Milošević and Radovan Karadžić said the same things about Bosnia-Herzegovina and Bosniaks – that they were fake and didn't deserve to exist. Those words were later turned into the worst crimes in [Europe](#) since the second world war. I hope the crimes of the Russian army will not surpass those committed in my country.

We will discover the full extent of atrocities and crimes of the Russian invasion of Ukraine when the war is over. The most important thing is for the Russian war machine in Ukraine to be broken and brought to a halt. The dictator understands only the language of force, while the politics of appeasement bolster his power. People in the EU will have to leave their comfort zone because that is the sacrifice required of them while Ukrainians are fighting and dying to maintain peace and prosperity in the EU. If Ukraine is defeated, we will never again live in the peace that currently prevails.

The cities of Ukraine will be rebuilt from the ashes. The whole country can rise again. What cannot be brought back are the dead. These wounds never heal, but you can live with them, and you have to. The trauma of loss marks you and never leaves you. But I believe in the grit and courage of the Ukrainian soldiers and citizens, just as I believed in us. I believe in the victory of life over death.

- Faruk Šehić is a Bosnian poet, short story writer and novelist
  - This essay is part of a [series](#), published in collaboration with [Voxeurop](#), featuring perspectives on the invasion of Ukraine from the former Soviet bloc and bordering countries. Translation by Will Firth
  - ***Do you have an opinion on the issues raised in this article? If you would like to submit a response of up to 300 words by email to be considered for publication in our [letters](#) section, please [click here](#).***
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| [Section menu](#) | [Main menu](#) |

**Republic of ParenthoodFamily**

# **Loneliness is a struggle for new parents – can we all stop pretending everything's ok?**

[Rhiannon Lucy Cosslett](#)



Isolation, exacerbated by social pressure and cuts to services, can lead to postnatal depression. Being open would help



‘Cuts to services mean free support groups are harder to find.’ Photograph: Bill Cheyrou/Alamy

Tue 25 Oct 2022 03.00 EDT Last modified on Thu 27 Oct 2022 03.32 EDT

I experienced a moment of pure, unadulterated joy this week. In St Pancras Old churchyard, watching my son discover a blustery autumn morning for the first time, the wind in the trees causing him to wiggle his head and smile his wide gummy smile, I felt the magic of childhood again, a feeling I thought I'd lost for ever. It was just he and I, together, discovering the world, and for a few minutes it seemed as though I'd never feel lonely again.

Parenthood involves a mix of emotional highs and lows. For every moment like this, there has also been a contrasting one – standing in a different park and feeling an almost physical loneliness. As a writer, I am used to spending many hours happily alone, but for some reason there's nothing like the company of a small child to underscore a feeling of solitude. A [study by the British Red Cross](#) found that more than eight in 10 mothers (83%) under the age of 30 had feelings of loneliness some of the time, while 43% said they felt lonely all the time. Another survey found that 90% of new mothers felt lonely since giving birth, with over half (54%) feeling they had no friends.

The process of becoming a mother – matrescence, as it's increasingly known – involves huge hormonal changes and a major shift in identity, as well as

the uprooting of our usual support structures and routines. This is why, we are told, having “mum friends” who are experiencing these same changes is so important, and those relationships, between both mothers and their respective babies, can last for life. But cuts to services mean free support groups are harder to find in many areas, and prenatal courses such as those delivered by the NCT can be expensive for people on low incomes. And just because you share one life experience doesn’t mean that you’ll have much else in common (which is one reason why I think it’s so important to keep spending time with your child-free friends and not abandon them, as some do). Sometimes other mothers can be standoffish and competitive, or simply too exhausted to engage beyond a few polite hellos. Women who have migrated here also face linguistic and cultural barriers, as well as being separated from their own family networks, exacerbating their potential social isolation.

In a [recent interview](#), the comedian and writer Daisy May Cooper spoke of how hard she found it to befriend other mothers when she had her baby. “If I see your vulnerability, then I’m there, like a moth to a flame,” she said. “But I’ve never been able to connect with, for example, the women that I met in my neonatal group who were trying to pretend everything was all right. And you’d go, ‘Come on, let’s have a glass of wine, tell me what’s really going on.’ ‘Oh no, everything’s fine! Let’s just talk about the kids!’ The WhatsApp group was just thousands and thousands of messages about mashing up avocados. I thought, if I can’t penetrate that surface then I’m out, I’m just not interested.”

I agree. I’m more interested in befriending the women to whom you can complain about your bruised breasts or who tell you how much they miss smoking a joint in the bath, than the ones who – as brilliantly satirised in the Australian comedy [The Letdown](#), which revolves around an antenatal group – eye your coffee suspiciously and say: “Not breastfeeding, then?” Thankfully I’ve only met a couple of judgy types, one of whom asked me what my baby’s birth had been like as an opening gambit and followed it up with a pass-agg “never mind, he’s here now” before telling me all about her own birthing-pool floating, carrot-juice drinking, house-music listening experience.

I've been incredibly lucky that the women I have met and befriended in neonatal groups have been frank and funny about the challenges of motherhood, and a WhatsApp group of university friends with young children provides crucial moral support. When I was pregnant, I joined Peanut, a social networking app that aims to connect pregnant women, but I was almost instantly put off by the girlboss "you've-got-this-babe tone" of the Q&A profile prompts ("You're a woman! You're already a superhero!" "If an actress would play me it would be ... Jennifer Aniston"). A friend that I met at a free parenting group run by the council recently mentioned that she'd messaged me and I'd not responded, so perhaps I should have given it more of a chance. As for Mumsnet, Daisy May Cooper's darkly funny [Am I Being Unreasonable](#) is named after the website's famous discussion board, to which she was addicted when her marriage was falling apart. The site doesn't feel aimed at my demographic (and like any social media platform it has its proportion of unhinged members), but it provides many women with a vital support system at a vulnerable time in the same way that previous generations had the National Women's Register or [Sure Start](#).

We know that, for new mothers, loneliness can exacerbate postnatal depression – just one reason why Conservative cuts to Sure Start are such a desperately sad scandal. Living in Islington, which has retained [early years centres](#) under the "Bright Start" banner, has been a privilege because of the sheer range of groups and activities available to parents free of charge. All parents should have access to these services (postnatal depression and loneliness affects dads, too). Sadly, until we have a Labour government, things are unlikely to change, but at least there are small comforts – the friendliness of strangers has been amazing to me. Every day, someone reaches out to me and my son with a kind word, a smile, or a question. Perhaps they have been there themselves, and are paying it forward, as I will, too, if I see a new mum or dad at the playground, looking lonely or lost.

## **What's working**

It feels as though the baby has been teething forever, so I'm grateful to the many, many parents who have recommended Ashton & Parson's teething gel. It's cheap, lasts a while, and puts an almost instant smile on his face.

## What's not

As well as teeth, I suspect the baby is waking in the night due to cold hands, but most sleepsuit brands stop including mitts at around the six-month mark, and I don't want to use gloves, which may come loose. If anyone knows of a solution, please let me know, for the sake of my sleep-deprived self.

- Rhiannon Lucy Cosslett is a Guardian columnist
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| [Section menu](#) | [Main menu](#) |

## 2022.10.25 - Around the world

- [West Bank Four Palestinians killed in firefight with Israeli forces, health ministry says](#)
- [Huawei Chinese spy duo charged in case as US condemns ‘egregious’ interference](#)
- [Kanye West Chorus of outrage grows as antisemitic incidents rattle LA](#)
- [China Xi Jinping’s party purge prompts fears of greater Taiwan invasion risk](#)
- [Myanmar Airstrike kills 60 people at concert, says Kachin separatist group](#)

## Palestinian territories

# Five Palestinians killed amid mounting violence ahead of Israeli elections

21 people also wounded in one of deadliest operations this year by Israeli forces in West Bank



Palestinian men carry a body through the streets of Nablus after a raid by Israeli forces on Tuesday morning. Photograph: Jaafar Ashtiyeh/AFP/Getty Images

*[Bethan McKernan](#) in Jerusalem*

Tue 25 Oct 2022 13.59 EDTFirst published on Mon 24 Oct 2022 20.13 EDT

Five Palestinians have been killed and 21 wounded in a huge raid by Israeli forces in Nablus, one of the deadliest operations so far during a year of mounting violence in the occupied West Bank.

Snipers, soldiers with shoulder-launched missiles and members of Israel's Shin Bet intelligence agency attacked the old city in the early hours of

Tuesday, the Israeli military said, blowing up what it said was a bomb lab and killing one of the leaders of an increasingly popular Palestinian militant group in a gunfight.

Smoke and flames rose above the Ottoman buildings of the Nablus casbah overnight, while residents reported hearing a large explosion that rocked several neighbourhoods.

On Tuesday morning, shopkeepers cleared glass, twisted metal and other debris in the aftermath of the raid. Thousands of people attended a funeral procession for the five men, while businesses across the territory and the Gaza Strip observed a general strike.

Palestinian media said two of the men killed on Tuesday were unarmed barbers on their way home from work. The other three reportedly belonged to the Lion's Den, a newly formed militia operating independently of established Palestinian factions taking on both Israeli soldiers and illegal settlers in the Nablus area.

A sixth man was killed overnight in a protest near Ramallah, Palestinian health officials said. Several members of the Palestinian Authority (PA) forces were among the injured, Mahmoud al-Aloul, deputy chairman of the ruling Fatah movement, told Palestine TV. His comments suggested that the raid was carried out without the cooperation of the PA, which relies on Israel for security coordination.

The Lion's Den is immensely popular across the West Bank, where three million people chafe under the open-ended Israeli occupation and the oppressive rule of the Palestinian Authority.

Organised armed resistance has been steadily growing since the unrest in Jerusalem last May that culminated in an 11-day war in Gaza and scenes of intercommunal violence on Israel's streets. The Lion's Den has also clashed with PA forces.

Cities across the West Bank have suffered near-nightly Israel Defence Forces (IDF) raids since March, part of a major Israeli military operation

launched in response to a wave of terror attacks in Israel this spring.

Nablus, the second biggest city in the occupied territory, and nearby Jenin, which hosts a huge poverty-stricken refugee camp, are the centre of the fighting. Nablus has been under an Israeli military blockade for the last several days, severely restricting movement, and locals have also faced a spike in attacks by settlers.

The violence appears to be worsening: more than 100 Palestinians from the West Bank have been killed this year, a seven-year record, while terrorist attacks by Palestinians have killed 20 people in Israel and Israeli settlements. Four soldiers have been killed, including one shooting for which the Lion's Den claimed responsibility.

Israeli forces are believed to have carried out a targeted assassination in Nablus last week, which would be the first since the second intifada in the 2000s, and have not ruled out introducing armed drones in West Bank operations.

In a statement, Nabil Abu Rudeineh, spokesperson for PA president Mahmoud Abbas, said his office is establishing “urgent contacts in order to stop this aggression against our people”.

“All of this will have dangerous and destructive consequences,” he told Palestinian television.

The increasing tensions come ahead of Israeli elections on 1 November. Prime minister Yair Lapid, who is unlikely to win a stable majority, said that Israel would continue its campaign against militant targets in Nablus and other cities. “We will not relent even for a moment,” he said.

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[\*\*China\*\*](#)

## **Chinese spy duo charged in Huawei case as US condemns ‘egregious’ interference**

Pair allegedly tried to bribe top US official as attorney general says DoJ ‘will not tolerate attempts to undermine the rule of law’



Merrick Garland with the FBI chief, Chris Wray. ‘This was an egregious attempt by PRC intelligence officers to shield a PRC-based company from accountability,’ Garland said. Photograph: Jim Lo Scalzo/EPA

*[Hugo Lowell](#) in Washington*

Mon 24 Oct 2022 15.57 EDTFirst published on Mon 24 Oct 2022 14.33 EDT

Two Chinese intelligence officers tried to bribe a US law enforcement official as part of an effort to obtain inside information about a criminal case against the Chinese telecommunications company [Huawei](#), federal prosecutors alleged in an indictment unsealed on Monday.

The announcement of charges against the two alleged agents came as the attorney general, Merrick Garland, detailed two other cases in which Chinese intelligence operatives harassed dissidents inside the United States and pressured US academics to work for them.

Garland said that the cases showed that [China](#) “sought to interfere with the rights and freedoms of individuals in the United States and to undermine our judicial system that protects those rights.

“The justice department will not tolerate attempts by any foreign power to undermine the rule of law upon which our democracy is based,” he said.

Washington has long accused Beijing of meddling in US politics and attempting to steal intellectual property. But the move to unmask the espionage operation marked an escalation by the justice department after it accused Huawei in February 2020 of [conducting racketeering and conspiracy](#) to steal trade secrets.

“This was an egregious attempt by PRC intelligence officers to shield a PRC-based company from accountability and to undermine the integrity of our judicial system,” Garland said at a news conference unveiling the indictment.

The Chinese intelligence officers Guochun He and Zheng Wang attempted to orchestrate a scheme to steal the prosecution strategy memo, witness lists, and other confidential evidence from the US attorney’s office for the eastern district of New York, the indictment said.

The charging papers against He and Wang referred only to an unnamed telecommunications company based in China, but the entity in question is understood to be [Huawei](#), according to a source familiar with the matter.

According to the indictment unsealed in Brooklyn, the Chinese agents paid about \$61,000 worth of bitcoin in bribes to a US government official whom they believed had been recruited to work for the Chinese government but in fact worked as a double agent for the FBI.

The FBI double agent provided some documents to the Chinese agents that appeared to present some of the information they sought – though the documents were actually prepared by the justice department and did not reveal actual meetings or trial strategies.

Starting in September 2021, the indictment said, He and Wang asked the FBI double agent about what he learned from the US attorney's office in New York, and which Huawei employees had been interviewed by federal prosecutors as a way to gain insight into the case.

The following month, the FBI double agent sent them a document made to look like an internal strategy memo that was labelled “Secret” and discussed a plan to charge and arrest two Huawei employees living in China, for which He is alleged to have paid \$41,000 in bitcoin bribes.

The initial bribe was followed with a second payment of \$20,000 in bitcoin from He as a “reward” in September 2022, the indictment said.

US law enforcement officials have long warned about national security threats posed by China, including through human and cyber espionage, as part of increasingly brazen attempts to steal corporate intellectual property, trade secrets and influence US policy.

“The cases unsealed today take place against a backdrop of malign activity by the People’s Republic of China that includes espionage, harassment, obstruction of our justice system and unceasing efforts to steal US technology,” the deputy attorney general, Lisa Monaco, said.

“China seeks to be a major power on the world stage and challenge the United States in multiple arenas. Today’s cases make clear that Chinese agents will not hesitate to break the law and to violate international norms in the process,” Monaco said.

Arrest warrants were issued for the two men, but it is unlikely they will ever be taken into custody.

The Chinese embassy in Washington did not immediately respond to a request for comment, though China and Huawei have both previously denied

such allegations. He and Wang, understood to be based in China, could not be reached.

At the news conference on Monday, Garland also announced a second indictment newly unsealed in New Jersey that charged three Chinese intelligence officers with conspiring to act as illegal agents between 2008 and 2018 under the cover of an academic institution.

That indictment alleges the three intelligence officials had attempted to illegally ship US technology to China, as well as to undercut protests in the US that would have probably been embarrassing to the Chinese government.

Separately two people were arrested and five others charged with harassing a US resident in order to force them to return to China.

Part of the plot, prosecutors allege, involved having the person's nephew travel to the US as part of a tour group to deliver threats that included, "Coming back and turning yourself in is the only way out."

Chinese agents have pursued hundreds of Chinese nationals living in the US in an effort to force their return, as part of [a global campaign](#) against the country's diaspora, known as Operation Fox Hunt, the FBI has said.

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## [Los Angeles](#)

# Chorus of outrage against Kanye West grows as antisemitic incidents rattle LA

Sports brand Adidas is also facing pressure to cut ties with the rapper over his hateful comments



Kanye West smiles during a meeting with Donald Trump in October 2018.  
Photograph: Kevin Lamarque/Reuters

*[Dani Anguiano](#) in Los Angeles*

*[@dani\\_anguiano](#)*

Mon 24 Oct 2022 20.59 EDTFirst published on Mon 24 Oct 2022 17.02 EDT

Kanye West is facing a growing backlash among California political leaders, entertainment industry figures and members of the Jewish community – who have called on Adidas to cut ties with the star – following several antisemitic incidents in [Los Angeles](#) that came after the artist made bigoted comments about Jewish people.

The fashion designer and rapper now known as Ye has been spreading antisemitic conspiracy theories for weeks in interviews and on social media. He generated further outrage for wearing a “white lives matter” T-shirt during his runway show at Paris fashion week earlier this month.

On Monday, several politicians – including congresswoman and LA mayoral candidate Karen Bass and Scott Weiner, a [state senator](#) and vice-chair of the California Legislative Jewish Caucus – condemned Ye’s behavior and urged the sportswear brand to sever ties with him.

They referenced [an incident](#) over the weekend in which protesters on a freeway overpass were photographed giving Nazi salutes with banners referencing antisemitic comments made by Ye. In addition, Los Angeles police are investigating [a recent distribution](#) around the city of flyers spreading antisemitic conspiracy theories.

“We must all condemn the hate spewed by Kanye West, which has real consequences that we saw in Los Angeles this weekend,” Bass [said on Twitter](#). “Until they sever ties, Adidas is enabling and financing his hate – they must act now.”

Ye has a history of courting controversy, including his 2020 run for president and [claims that slavery](#) was a “choice”. But Ye, who is bipolar, has experienced relatively few repercussions from past comments.

His latest comments however have sparked widespread backlash, including calls for a boycott of Ye, and led Instagram and Twitter to suspend his accounts.

“In a short period, Ye’s made himself the most well-known, widely heard, brazen antisemite on the planet. Where is the outrage?” [said](#) Jonathan Greenblatt, the CEO of the Anti-Defamation League. “This will have real world consequences for the Jewish people.”

Greenblatt also called out the sports brand tweeting: “Thousands of signatures, and still no word, @adidas ? Your silence is a danger to Jews.”

The chorus of outrage over Ye's comments does appear to be gaining traction. The heads of Hollywood's top agencies have called for a boycott of Ye. In a memo to staff, Jeremy Zimmer, the chief of UTA, which previously represented the rapper, wrote that his comments "embolden others to amplify their vile beliefs", according to the [Hollywood Reporter](#).

On Monday a source told the Los Angeles Times that CAA, Ye's talent agency, will no longer represent him. Ari Emanuel, the CEO of the entertainment agency Endeavor, wrote in the Financial Times: "Those who continue to do business with West are giving his misguided hate an audience. There should be no tolerance anywhere for West's anti-Semitism."

Balenciaga, the Gap and JP Morgan have also ended their relationships with Ye, the newspaper reported. A documentary about the star [was also shelved](#).

Kim Kardashian, Ye's ex-wife whom he has been accused of [publicly harassing](#) this year [in the wake](#) of their divorce, condemned antisemitism on Monday, in what appears to be a reference to the artist's comments.

"Hate speech is never OK or excusable. I stand together with the Jewish community and call on the terrible violence and hateful rhetoric towards them to come to an immediate end," she said on [Twitter](#).

Adidas announced several weeks ago that it was reviewing its relationship with Ye after he reportedly became disgruntled with how the brand was marketing his products.

"After repeated efforts to privately resolve the situation, we have taken the decision to place the partnership under review," Adidas said in a statement in early October. The artist was associated with Nike for years but broke away in 2013, lending his name to Adidas as they launched their first Yeezy shoe together in 2015 – a partnership that went on to make him a billionaire.

*Reuters contributed reporting*

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

[China](#)

## **Xi Jinping's party purge prompts fears of greater Taiwan invasion risk**

Observers wonder whether there is anyone left in CCP to stop Chinese president making a rash move



Official reports and constitutional amendments have enshrined China's hardening official stance towards Taiwan. Photograph: Vyacheslav Oseledko/AFP/Getty Images

*Helen Davidson in Taipei  
@heldavidson*

Mon 24 Oct 2022 22.24 EDT Last modified on Mon 24 Oct 2022 23.05 EDT

Xi Jinping's purging of political rivals and elevation of loyalists to the top ranks of the Chinese Communist party has raised fears that his now unfettered and unquestionable power could increase the risk of an attack on Taiwan.

Beijing has pledged to annex Taiwan under a disputed claim that it is a Chinese province, and in recent years has increased its [military activity](#) and other forms of harassment and coercion. No timeline has been set, but senior defence figures have said China could be capable of invasion as early as 2027. Others point to Xi's pledge of "national rejuvenation" by 2047 – the centenary of the People's Republic of China – as a potential goal.

But with the events of last week's CCP congress, which [consolidated power around Xi at levels not seen for decades](#), some are now questioning whether there is anyone left in the party who could stop him from making a rash move.

The 20th party congress – the most important meeting of China's political cycle – ended with [Xi's reappointment for a precedent-breaking third term](#), and a reshuffle of officials.

The central committee, the politburo, the seven-member standing committee (PSC) and the Xi-led central military commission (CMC), which is in charge of the People's Liberation Army (PLA), are now dominated by loyalists and cleared of potential objectors and people from rival factions.

Official reports and constitutional amendments also enshrined its hardening official stance towards Taiwan that had escalated as recently as August with the release of [a white paper](#).

Analysts and Taiwanese decision-makers are studying the changes to assess whether Xi's timeline for [Taiwan](#) is any shorter, or the same. After a week of watching the congress – an exercise sometimes compared to reading tea leaves – most agreed it definitely had not slowed.

Prof Steve Tsang, the director of the Soas [China](#) Institute, said the changes made last week unquestionably increased the risk of China using force against Taiwan.

There was already a low appetite for raising objections among the previous CCP leadership ranks, said Tsang, but "by replacing non-loyalists by

protégés and loyalists in the party [including the PLA], Xi has made sure that no one will ever contradict him”.

“The risk of one man making a bad judgment and starting a war is always greater than a group of them doing so,” he added.

Among the new CMC appointments is Gen He Weidong, a rising star who has overseen the the PLA’s eastern command since 2019. He was reportedly an architect of the massive military drills staged after the speaker of the US House of Representatives, Nancy Pelosi, [visited Taiwan](#) in August. He, who was not even in the 200-member central committee at the last congress, is now the second-ranked official of the CMC.

The South China Morning Post also reported that other appointments, including Gen Zhang Youxia, and Adm Miao Hua, have similarly Taiwan-focused backgrounds.

Taiwan’s defence minister, Chiu Kuo-cheng, said the CMC appointments suggested the CCP was “boosting its preparedness” for an invasion, Taiwanese media reported.

Victor Shih, an associate professor of political science at the University of California, said the new makeup of the PSC and CMC ensured Xi’s orders would be implemented, “however extreme”. “This may include a decision to invade Taiwan. Of course, preparing for something doesn’t mean it will happen,” Shih said.

Xi’s continued commitment to “reunification” was first confirmed last week in his 104-minute opening speech, which made early and numerous references to Taiwan.

In the longer “work report”, of which the speech was an excerpt, a key phrase defined reunification as a “requirement” for this promised “rejuvenation of the Chinese nation”. Analysts had said the absence of such phrasing could have signalled a de-escalation.

The amendments to the CCP’s guiding constitution also cemented Beijing’s more aggressive stance on Taiwan. Where it previously listed Taiwan

alongside Hong Kong and Macau as a place with which to “build solidarity”, it now swore to “resolutely oppose and constrain Taiwan independence”.

The propaganda apparatus played along. According to the Xinhua news agency, a Chinese state mouthpiece, when Xi declared the wheels of history were rolling towards reunification, the people of Taiwan “deeply felt the harmony and warmth” of his words.

Across the Taiwan Strait, the large and growing majority of Taiwan’s 23.5 million population who oppose annexation beg to differ, but in Xi’s China what the Taiwanese public wants is no real consideration.

Analysis by the International Crisis Group (ICG) noted that the Chinese work report made the particular point in blaming “foreign interference and Taiwan separatists” for the tensions, suggesting the CCP may be seeking to drive a wedge between the Taiwan’s pro-independence majority and its pro-unification minority while resisting [international pushback](#).

“By emphasising that it maintains the option to use military force specifically to deter foreign and independence-seeking forces, Beijing may be trying to limit backlash among Taiwanese who have reacted negatively to its shows of military force in Taiwan’s air defence identification zone and in the middle of the Taiwan Strait,” the thinktank said.

Drew Thompson, a visiting senior research fellow at the National University of Singapore’s Lee Kuan Yew school of public policy and a former US state department official, said the political dynamic in Beijing had changed as Xi was “without rivals, a designated successor or moderating voices” to act as a check on his impulses.

But knowing the Chinese president’s innermost thoughts and plans is a near impossible task. “We can ask endless questions why Xi and the party make particular decisions, but we can’t definitively answer any of them,” Thompson said, noting that even Beijing insiders were left guessing as to the final makeup of the PSC until Sunday.

Bonnie Glaser, a China expert at the US-based German Marshall Fund thinktank, warned against speculation, saying she saw no evidence of

“increased urgency” in the congress work report. “I think the risks are growing, but I believe that Xi is mindful of the potentially high costs of an attempted military takeover of Taiwan and he likely knows the PLA is not ready,” she said.

Amanda Hsiao, an ICG analyst and co-author of the thinktank’s report, said things may become clearer when the current head of China’s Taiwan affairs office – who was removed from the central committee – is replaced.

But she said it was clear from the work report and the August white paper that there was “a lot of continuity in the basic principles that have undergirded China’s approach to Taiwan”.

“China will likely stepping up pressures on Taiwan in the coming years and will more or less follow the playbook they’ve been employing in the last couple of years,” she said.

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## [Myanmar](#)

# Myanmar airstrike kills 60 people at concert, says Kachin separatist group

Reported attack by military comes days before Asean meeting to discuss widening violence in country

Myanmar: aftermath of fatal airstrike on music concert – video

*[Oliver Holmes](#) and agencies*

Mon 24 Oct 2022 11.54 EDTFirst published on Mon 24 Oct 2022 08.58 EDT

Myanmar's military has killed 60 people, including musicians, in a devastating airstrike that targeted a concert held by a rebel faction of the country's minority Kachin ethnic group, according to organisers and a rescue worker.

The reported attack came three days before south-east Asian foreign ministers were due to attend a special meeting in Indonesia to discuss the widening [violence in the country](#).

The number of casualties at the celebration in the northern state of Kachin appeared to be the highest in a single air attack by the military since it [seized power in a coup](#) in February last year, overthrowing the elected government of Aung San Suu Kyi.

It was not possible to independently confirm details of the incident, although media sympathetic to the Kachin people posted videos that showed what was said to be the attack's aftermath, showing splintered and flattened wooden structures. Footage showed damaged motorcycles, plastic chairs and other debris scattered on the ground.

There was no immediate comment from the military or government media.

For decades, Myanmar's minorities have sought autonomy through uprisings, but anti-government resistance has increased markedly nationwide with the formation of an armed pro-democracy movement opposed to last year's military takeover.

Swathes of the country have been engulfed by fighting. Nearly 2,300 civilians have been killed in the crackdown on dissent and 15,000 people have been arrested, according to a local monitoring group.

Sunday's celebration of the 62nd anniversary of the founding of the Kachin Independence Organisation (KIO) was held at a base also used for military training by its armed wing, the Kachin Independence Army (KIA). It is located near Aung Bar Lay village in Hpakant township, a remote mountainous area 600 miles (965km) north of Yangon.

A spokesperson for the Kachin Artists' Association told the Associated Press that, according to its members who performed at the celebrations, military aircraft dropped bombs at about 8pm. Between 300 and 500 people were in attendance and a Kachin singer and keyboard player were among the dead, said the spokesperson, who asked not to be identified because of fears of reprisals by the authorities.

Those killed also included KIA troops, cooks, jade mining business owners and other civilians, the spokesperson said, adding that at least 10 Kachin military and business VIPs were among the dead.

The Kachin News Group, a media outlet sympathetic to the KIO, reported the same number of casualties and said government security forces blocked the wounded from being treated at hospitals in nearby towns.

The UN office in Myanmar said it was "deeply concerned and saddened by reports of airstrikes" while Amnesty International warned that the strike showed a pattern of escalating repression by the government.

"The military has shown ruthless disregard for civilian lives in its escalating campaign against opponents. It is difficult to believe the military did not know of a significant civilian presence at the site of this attack," said Hana Young, Amnesty's deputy regional director.

“We fear this attack is part of a pattern of unlawful aerial attacks by the military which have killed and injured civilians in areas controlled by armed groups,” Young added. “The military must immediately grant access to medics and humanitarian assistance to those affected by these airstrikes and other civilians in need.”

Amnesty has accused the junta of committing widespread atrocities since the 2021 coup, including unlawfully killing, arbitrarily detaining, torturing and forcibly displacing civilians. “It has been able to carry out these crimes in the face of an ineffective international response to a human rights crisis that is only worsening,” Young said.

The Association of Southeast Asian Nations (Asean) foreign ministers meeting this week is seeking to resolve the crisis, but the bloc has failed to make meaningful progress so far. Last month, an airstrike in the Sagaing region in the country’s north-west [killed at least 11 schoolchildren and two others](#), according to the United Nations.

The office of UN secretary general, António Guterres, strongly condemned the attack and offered his condolences to the victims’ families.

Such attacks on schools in contravention of international humanitarian law constitute “grave violations against children in times of armed conflict strongly condemned by the security council”, said Guterres’ spokesperson, Stéphane Dujarric, calling for the perpetrators to be held accountable.

Video footage obtained from a local community group showed a classroom with blood on the floor, damage to the roof and a mother crying over her son’s body.

The junta claimed the deadly attack was targeting rebels hiding in the area, which has experienced some of the fiercest fighting and clashes between anti-coup fighters and the military.

*The Associated Press and Agence France-Presse contributed to this report*

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

## Headlines thursday 27 october 2022

- [Live Suella Braverman deserves ‘second chance’, says Nadhim Zahawi](#)
- [Suella Braverman Senior Tories split over appointment](#)
- [Jake Berry Ex-Tory chair accuses Braverman of ‘multiple breaches of ministerial code’](#)
- [Analysis From the economy to Rwanda, Rishi Sunak inherits a hefty in-tray](#)

## [Politics](#)

# Civil service chief won't investigate Braverman appointment amid doubt over her version of resignation events – as it happened

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[Suella Braverman](#)

## Doubts arise over Braverman's claim to have come forward about code breach

Former intelligence select committee chief warns issue threatens to undermine confidence in sharing sensitive information

Jake Berry: Suella Braverman responsible for 'really serious breach' of ministerial code – video

*[Aubrey Allegretti](#), [Jessica Elgot](#), [Pippa Crerar](#) and [Rajeev Syal](#)*

Thu 27 Oct 2022 14.16 EDTFirst published on Thu 27 Oct 2022 04.41 EDT

Suella Braverman is under pressure to answer fresh questions about alleged "security breaches", as a former head of parliament's intelligence and security committee warned the row threatened to undermine officials' confidence in sharing sensitive information with her.

The account given by the home secretary and backed up by the prime minister, [Rishi Sunak](#), when he defended reappointing her just six days after she was found to have broken the ministerial code were challenged by government insiders and a senior Conservative MP.

Sources told the Guardian that Braverman was confronted by the cabinet secretary, Simon Case, about the leaking of a sensitive document, rather than coming forward herself about what had happened. One said: "She only owned up to it when she was confronted with the evidence."

A similar accusation was made by Jake Berry, the former Conservative party chairman, who said [the issue was "really serious"](#) and added: "As I understand it, the evidence was put to her and she accepted the evidence, rather than the other way round."

The account appeared to contradict what Sunak said during his first prime minister's questions on Wednesday.

While justifying the reappointment of Braverman as home secretary just six days after her departure, he insisted: "She raised the matter and she accepted her mistake."

The sensitive government information, which Berry said related to cybersecurity, was sent by Braverman using a private email address to a fellow Tory MP, John Hayes, and while trying to copy in Hayes's wife, she mistakenly sent it to a staff member working for another backbencher, Andrew Percy, who informed the chief whip of the breach.

Case then spoke to the [Home Office](#) permanent secretary, Matthew Rycroft, and advised the then prime minister, Liz Truss, that the ministerial code had been broken.

On Thursday night the Sun reported that Braverman had leaked top secret plans to cut Britain's deficit by £14bn with a new "growth visa". A source told the paper: "Suella has tried to play down the scale of the cock-up but it was incendiary, market sensitive information."

There are also questions over the version of events Braverman gave to officials, in which she claimed not to have had her government phone on her because she was taking part in a police operation.

Sources said the timestamp on the email showed it was sent several hours after the police raid. They added that at no point did Braverman notify Case of her mistake.

On Thursday, Downing Street defended Sunak's version of events. "He said she had raised it, but we are not going to get into conversations and timelines around this. As we have said before, the home secretary made an error of judgment and took accountability for her actions."

Asked if the prime minister's words were accurate, the spokesperson said: "Yes."

Case is understood not to be launching an investigation into Braverman's resignation or whether her suitability to be reappointed as home secretary has been brought into question by the latest claims.

However, Sunak has been urged to appoint an ethics adviser by Angela Rayner, Labour's deputy leader. She said he had failed to fulfil his pledge to do so and added: "This farcical lack of scrutiny, transparency and accountability does diddly squat to deliver on the new prime minister's promise to restore standards in public life after years of Tory sleaze and scandal."

Braverman has not addressed the controversy since her resignation letter last week, in which she said: "As soon as I realised my mistake, I rapidly reported this on official channels, and informed the cabinet secretary."

She admitted to a "technical infringement of the rules" but insisted much of the contents of the document she leaked "had already been briefed to MPs".

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Braverman also came under fire after the Daily Mail reported she was part of a leak inquiry that raised "concern" in MI5 when she was attorney general.

Several Tory MPs suggested they were not satisfied by the reassurance offered by ministers.

Mark Pritchard said MI5 needed confidence in the home secretary and any breakdown in that relationship was bad for the government and the security

services. “It needs to be sorted ASAP,” he said. Caroline Nokes added that there were “big questions hanging over this whole issue”.

Dominic Grieve, the former chair of parliament’s intelligence and security committee and an MP until 2019, said it was “frankly disgraceful” that Braverman had passed on secret material through “unauthorised channels”.

He told the Guardian it would “undermine” officials’ confidence to share further sensitive information with her, and “called into question” Sunak’s judgment, given that he reappointed her so quickly.

Opposition parties are seeking to maintain the pressure over the issue. Labour is pushing for any advice that Case gave on Braverman’s reappointment to be made public, with the shadow Home Office minister Sarah Jones claiming that multiple “security breaches” warranted a better explanation from the government.

Meanwhile, the Liberal Democrats have written to Rycroft to urge him to ensure Braverman’s texts, WhatsApp messages and emails are handed over to the Cabinet Office.

Sunak was [accused](#) earlier this week of hatching a “grubby deal” to give Braverman her job back in exchange for her supporting his Tory leadership campaign.

However, the new prime minister said Braverman accepted she had made an error of judgment and he was “delighted to welcome her back into a united cabinet that brings experience and stability to the heart of government”.

Two sections of the code are thought to have been broken: one on the “security of government business” and another ensuring the internal processes that lead to a collective cabinet decision being made stay secret.

Nadhim Zahawi, the new Conservative party chair, [disputed suggestions](#) Braverman tried to cling on to her job when the breach arose and said he believed in “redemption”.

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

## Suella Braverman

# **Ex-Tory chairman alleges Braverman responsible for ‘multiple breaches of ministerial code’**

Opposition call for inquiry as Braverman is reappointed home secretary six days after resigning over security breach

Jake Berry: Suella Braverman responsible for 'really serious breach' of ministerial code – video

*[Rajeev Syal](#) , [Jessica Elgot](#) and [Kevin Rawlinson](#)*

Wed 26 Oct 2022 17.57 EDTFirst published on Wed 26 Oct 2022 05.11 EDT

Rishi Sunak’s decision to reappoint [Suella Braverman](#) six days after she was forced to resign for a security breach is facing fresh questions after a former chairman of the Conservative party claimed the home secretary was responsible for “multiple breaches of the ministerial code”.

Jake Berry, who sat in the cabinet alongside Braverman at the heart of Liz Truss’s government, said she was responsible for a “really serious breach” after sending confidential information to a private address, sending it to an MP, attempting to send it to the MP’s wife and then accidentally sending it to a member of parliamentary staff.

He also indicated that the UK’s most senior civil servant, Simon Case, had been consulted and ruled that it had broken the rules.

Sunak told MPs on Wednesday that Braverman had made an “error of judgment” and had recognised her mistake, adding: “That’s why I was delighted to welcome her back into a united cabinet that brings experience and stability to the heart of government.”

Asked during prime minister's questions if officials had raised concerns about the appointment – given Case was said to have been furious – Sunak simply said he had already “addressed the issue”.

Speaking to Piers Morgan Uncensored on Wednesday night, Berry said there had been “multiple breaches of the ministerial code” after Braverman had sent the document to her confidante and fellow MP Sir John Hayes.

“It was sent from a private email address to another member of parliament,” he told TalkTV’s Kate McCann. “She then sought to copy in that individual’s wife and accidentally sent it to a staffer in parliament. To me, that seems a really serious breach, especially when it was documents relating to cyber security, as I believe. That seems a really serious breach.

“The cabinet secretary had his say at the time, I doubt he changed his mind in the last six days but that is a matter for the new prime minister.”

The shadow home secretary, Yvette Cooper, said Berry’s intervention was “extraordinary” and “very serious”, and highlighted Berry’s comments about “cybersecurity breaches”.

Yvette Cooper calls for Suella Braverman to be investigated for security breaches – video

Tweeting at the prime minister, she wrote: “What security warnings did you ignore when you reappointed home secretary?”

Braverman’s short time at the [Home Office](#) was marked by a hardline approach to a multitude of issues, including proposing to ban people entering the UK via small boats from claiming asylum.

It emerged on Wednesday that more than 38,000 people have arrived in the UK after crossing the Channel in more than 900 boats in 2022 to date, compared with 28,526 last year.

The clandestine Channel threat commander, Dan O’Mahoney, told the Commons home affairs committee during the hearing that in 2021 the interception rate for French police stopping people trying to cross the Channel was 50%, but this year it has dropped to 42.5%.

He accepted this was a lower percentage but stressed it was a “much, much bigger number”, telling how French authorities had stopped 28,000 migrants crossing the Channel and intercepted and destroyed 1,072 boats so far this year.

The disclosure comes after Labour and the Liberal Democrats called for a Cabinet Office inquiry into national security concerns after Braverman was reinstated. No 10 refused to deny officials advised against reappointing her to a great office of state.

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Cooper wrote to Case demanding an investigation , a request echoed by the Lib Dems’ home affairs spokesperson, Alistair Carmichael.

The head of the FDA senior civil servants’ union, Dave Penman, told the Guardian the reappointment was a clear example of “double standards” given that his members would face severe punishments for similar behaviour.

“If a civil servant had acted in the way that Suella Braverman was alleged to, using private email accounts to send confidential government business to personal contacts, they would rightly be expected to face the harshest of penalties and lose their security clearance.

“Standards matter, and the clear signal from her appointment is that ministers can act with impunity if it suits the prime minister.”

The Labour leader, Keir Starmer, replied during PMQs that a deal had been struck to shore up support from hard-right MPs who support Braverman. “He’s so weak, he’s done a grubby deal trading national security because he was scared to lose another leadership election,” Starmer said.

Braverman left the chamber just minutes before a debate on her conduct after Labour was granted an urgent question.

Cooper said there were many unanswered questions regarding Braverman’s conduct. “Is this the only time she has done this or has she shared other documents? Or other sensitive information?

“What security clearance has the home secretary been given? Does she still have access to the most sensitive documents and information? Did the cabinet secretary warn against her reappointment?”

Replying for the government, the paymaster general, Jeremy Quin, was unable to say whether the home secretary had been given full security clearance. He did, however, say that the government would appoint a new independent ethics adviser.

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## Rishi Sunak

### Analysis

# From the economy to Rwanda, Rishi Sunak inherits a hefty in-tray

Guardian staff

As crises and party management problems loom, PM must act quickly to try to reverse Tories' poor poll ratings



Sunak has been out of government and has not been privy to ministers' pressing issues. Photograph: Steve Taylor/Sopa Images/Rex/Shutterstock

Wed 26 Oct 2022 16.17 EDT Last modified on Thu 27 Oct 2022 00.13 EDT

Rishi Sunak is inheriting a hefty in-tray of issues, with several looming crises and party management problems piling up as he takes the reins as prime minister.

Given he was out of government for about three months, Sunak has not been privy to some of the day-to-day issues filling ministers' red boxes. So he

will have to act quickly if he stands a chance of reversing the Conservative party's deteriorating poll ratings, and prove he can deliver.

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## Economy

Calming jittery financial markets after the chaos of the mini-budget will be high on Sunak's list of immediate priorities, and the government will use its 17 November autumn statement to set out debt-cutting plans. Economists expect about £40bn of savings could be needed. [Swingeing cuts](#) would be politically difficult after a decade of austerity, and amid a cost of living emergency.

Whether Sunak approves an inflation-matching rise for pensions and benefits is a vital consideration.



A painted sign directs people to a food bank in Leeds as inflation hits 10.1%.  
Photograph: Christopher Furlong/Getty Images

Sky-high energy bills have pushed inflation to a 40-year high, with households expected to face a further increase in living costs next spring after the government cuts short its energy price freeze.

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## Home Office

The Home Office must decide whether to press on with the flagship policy to send people seeking asylum to Rwanda. The deal has cost £120m, with more money yet to be paid to a country with a poor human rights record.

The [threat of Rwanda](#) has failed to stem the flow of migrants coming to the UK and overwhelming the asylum system. The government is spending about £4.7m a day housing asylum seekers in hotels.

Sunak must also negotiate with Suella Braverman over immigration policy. Despite being urged to ease access to work visas to counteract labour shortages and improve growth, Braverman is keen to limit net migration to “tens of thousands”.

Police funding and pay is also on the agenda but is expected to face further budget cuts. Crime figures continue to soar to record levels, particularly those of fraud, rape and violent crime.

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## Foreign policy

Sunak’s pre-eminent task is to reassure Ukraine and Washington that his leadership will maintain continuity in the British support for the removal of Russian forces from Ukraine. But he will also have to decide whether, in the interests of party unity, he has to confront Brussels or instead expand on the tentative signs that a new relationship can be established using the European Political Council.

His [Hindu heritage](#) has led to glowing coverage in the Indian media, but a trade deal might still prove difficult with the return of Braverman to the Home Office.

On China, Sunak said in the first leadership election that he was willing to close all Confucius Institutes in the country. He is also under pressure from his backbenchers over exports to Xinjiang, and the behaviour of the Chinese consulate towards protesters has inflamed the mood.

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## Defence

Sunak may have promised Ukraine's Volodymyr Zelenskiy that Britain's support for Ukraine will remain "as strong as ever" under his premiership in his first call to an overseas leader on Tuesday, but the reality is that such rhetoric is the easy part. A row over defence spending could yet loom.

Truss's pledge to sharply increase defence spending to 3% of GDP was not yet reconfirmed by No 10 on Wednesday. Lifting defence spending to 3% from the current 2.1% would cost an extra £23bn in real terms and is not obviously necessary, given other spending priorities and wider pressures on the public finances.

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## Brexit and Northern Ireland

Talks to end the row over the Northern Ireland Brexit protocol are at a delicate stage and Sunak's decision to keep the Northern Ireland team in position may help around the negotiating table.

Both the EU and the UK have said they are determined to find a negotiated solution to the dispute before Easter, the 25th anniversary of the Belfast Good Friday agreement, and Sunak will not want to trigger a trade war with the EU by taking unilateral action on Northern Ireland.

But with the DUP's repeated warnings that they will not [return to Stormont](#) unless their red lines in Brexit talks are met, Northern Ireland has the potential to create unexpected booby traps for Sunak.



The union flag flying at half mast at Stormont after the death of Queen Elizabeth II. Photograph: Liam McBurney/PA

If the Stormont executive is not restored by Thursday there is the prospect of an assembly election in December that could entrench polarisation and further erode the power-sharing institutions established by the 1998 Good Friday agreement.

The short-term solution is to [persuade the DUP to end a boycott](#), which means addressing the party's objections to the post-Brexit Irish Sea border. That complicates the UK's negotiations with Brussels over the protocol.

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## Scotland

Sunak has stressed that he wants to “work constructively” with Nicola Sturgeon’s Scottish National party “on our shared challenges” – but the gulf between them is likely too great.

Both await a supreme court ruling expected next year on whether Holyrood can hold a Scottish independence referendum in 2023 without Westminster’s approval: there is no guarantee judges will agree with the UK government that Holyrood cannot do so. The UK may face that divisive vote next October after all.

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## **Education**

Headteachers in England are grappling with the sharp rise in energy costs and inflation, along with the 5% rise in teachers' pay that is wreaking havoc with their budgets. Many heads are already [warning of major cuts](#) needed to balance their books.

Teacher retention and staff shortages are also becoming a problem, while schools and [universities across the UK are expected to face industrial action](#) this winter over pay or pensions.

Students in further and higher education also face cost of living pressures, meaning that more students may be forced to drop out. Councils fear that cuts in government spending may further imperil special needs and disability provisions already under huge stress.

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## **Health**

Sunak inherits an NHS at breaking point, and one experts agree cannot survive further cuts.

How to deliver a “stronger” NHS, as he promised, while slashing funding across Whitehall – including the Department of Health and Social Care – remains unclear.

But urgent action is required to prevent the NHS from collapsing this winter.

There are now more than 132,000 vacancies across the NHS, the number of patients on the waiting list for treatment has topped 7 million in England alone, and emergency care services are alarmingly overstretched. Underfunded social care needs more support, too.

Meanwhile, hundreds of thousands of health workers will vote over the next few weeks on whether to strike over pay. Some are really struggling with the cost of living crisis, and many are jumping ship to better paid jobs in the retail sector and elsewhere.

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## Environment

Sunak has a lot on his plate when it comes to the environment. First up is the promised review of the nature-friendly farming payments scheme, which was expected this week.



The dormant Cuadrilla shale gas extraction (fracking) site at Preston New Road, near Blackpool. Photograph: Christopher Furlong/Getty Images

Sunak has confirmed that the [fracking ban would remain](#) as per the 2019 manifesto. This was an easy way for him to win plaudits from backbenchers over the divisive issue.

But he will have to decide his approach to renewables. He criticised solar farms on farmland during the summer's leadership race but there is a train of thought that he was trying to match the more militant Truss on the issue in order to appeal to Tory voters.

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## Levelling up

On the face of it, Sunak's appointment will be welcomed by those who think levelling up is key to fixing Britain's imbalanced economy. But any enthusiasm comes from a low base: the project stalled for three years under Johnson, despite being his defining policy, and then appeared to be quietly binned by Truss.,

Michael Gove's return to the department is promising, although tempered by the fact that its key adviser – former Bank of England chief economist Andy Haldane – has decided instead to work with Labour. The most pressing issue facing Sunak here is transport: a truly levelled-up country cannot run on Britain's juddering, unreliable train lines.

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## Party unity

After a bitterly divisive leadership race over the last few months, Sunak will have to be wary of making any missteps that risk fracturing party unity too much. Doing so will probably only make the [Conservatives](#) poll rating tank further and lead to another break down of discipline in the party's ranks.

His careful reshuffle, which kept on many of the same ministers who were in Truss and Johnson's cabinet, was the first step, and reinstating the ban on fracking was a shrewd move designed to stop any further inter-party splintering.

Potential flashpoints Sunak will need to watch out for rebellions on include keeping international aid spending below the 0.7% of GDP target, amendments to the Northern Ireland protocol bill and any threat to the triple lock on pensions. Concerns about his leadership could also build depending on how the Conservatives do in two forthcoming by-elections in the City of Chester and West Lancashire, as well as at local elections next May.

**Reporting team** Aubrey Allegretti, Rajeev Syal, Richard Partington, Patrick Wintour, Dan Sabbagh, Lisa O'Carroll, Rory Carroll, Severin Carrell, Richard Adams, Andrew Gregory, Helena Horton and Josh Halliday

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

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- [The long read Megalopolis: how coastal west Africa will shape the coming century](#)
- ['It's become a real monster!' How Britain fell for Halloween](#)
- [Fantastic plastic? Is there a future for the wonder material turned existential threat?](#)
- ['It is the memory of the people' Unpacking Iraq's artistic heritage](#)

# Megalopolis: how coastal west Africa will shape the coming century

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## **‘It’s become a real monster!’ How Britain fell for Halloween**



‘It was a bit gruesome, but then that’s Halloween for you.’ Composite: Getty

It used to be a very American tradition, but love it or loathe it, fright night is bigger than ever in the UK – and consumers are spending a scary amount



[Tim Dowling](#)

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‘It started with the Coffin of Doom,’ says Jeremy Hayward, of the year he first decided to create an experience for children ringing his bell on [Halloween](#). Just beyond his threshold was a coffin, with a dressed-up Hayward daring brave trick-or-treaters to open the lid. “And inside there were treats, but there was also a baby on a cross. No one complained.”

In fact, the Coffin of Doom was a success. “It was a bit gruesome,” says Hayward, “and slightly irreligious, I guess, but then that’s Halloween for you.” There were additions and improvements over the next few years – spooky music, lights, the front door rigged to open automatically – but it wasn’t enough for him. “You have to keep reinventing. It’s great for the little ones, but as soon as they’ve done it a couple times, it’s: ‘Ah, it’s the Coffin of Doom; there’s just a baby inside.’”

Hayward, 54, who lives in Nunhead, south London, progressed to the more elaborate Wall of Doom, which was so popular that it had kids queueing down the road. It had various holes into which participants stuck their hands; some contained treats, others tricks. Hayward wore a fake hand, so he could

use his free hand to grab people's fingers from the other side. For 2020, he developed an outdoor experience that included large spiders mounted on remote-control cars that chased children down the road. "I had a lot of appreciation that year," he says. "A lot of parents saying: 'Oh God, you saved Halloween.'"



Jeremy Hayward's house in London, decorated for Halloween

When I first took my children out trick-or-treating in London – about 20 years ago – nobody was making that kind of effort. As an American, I was disappointed; there were a few pumpkins on doorsteps, but the lack of enthusiasm for the whole enterprise was palpable. Most people seemed to have no idea it was Halloween. I watched one man chase the children who rang his bell down the road with a stick. It was the wrong sort of scary.

Two decades later, Halloween is a very different holiday. In one poll, 68% of respondents said they would buy sweets for trick-or-treaters, up from 58% in 2021. Pumpkin sales have increased every year, even during the pandemic. Walking around my neighbourhood last year, I noticed more and more houses aspiring to Hayward's level of engagement.

One of the bestselling innovations for this Halloween is an outdoor display consisting of a giant black spider – 1.2 metres (4ft) wide – hanging from a 6

metre web that hooks on to your guttering. Stretchable cobwebs – sufficient to cover 20 sq m – can be had for as little as £5.99, to accompany rolls of crime scene tape and Keep Out signs. “Make your house an abandoned and creepy place,” reads one Amazon blurb. Ironically, it is now customary to announce your participation in the ritual of trick-or-treating by disguising your home as a condemned property.

Still, a significant proportion of the population refuses to join in, dismissing Halloween as a crass American import while simultaneously claiming it as an ancient British custom, one they seem to feel is more honoured in the breach than the observance. Where does the UK’s love/hate relationship stand in 2022?



A home in Rainham, Kent, decorated as a fundraiser for Demelza Hospice Care for Children. Photograph: James Bell/Alamy

When *Guardian* readers were asked how they intend to celebrate Halloween this year, their responses ran the gamut. Like Hayward, some people have elaborate plans for scaring trick-or-treaters. “This year I’ve bought an antique dentist’s chair off eBay,” says one, “along with a few well-chosen rusty tools.”

Many horror fans seem to consider Halloween their personal holiday – a time to indulge ghoulish tastes and a dark sense of humour – and its increasing popularity is, for some, a disappointment. “I do have mixed emotions about it being so mainstream now,” writes Hannah Turner, 40, from Brighton. “It used to be a lot more of a subculture.”



Emily Lawler and her family in costume.

Anecdotally, how you feel about Halloween seems to depend on how old you are, and where you grew up. Some of our readers from Scotland, Wales, Northern Ireland and Ireland have a pretty uncomplicated relationship with Halloween. “We decorate the house in late September, go pumpkin picking in October, dress up in costumes as a family group, give treats to trick-or-treaters on the day itself and have a special spooky meal,” says Emily Lawler, 38, from Glasgow.

“I’m Irish, so Halloween is bigger than Christmas!” writes Anna, 39, who has plans to go to a club night in east Belfast, dressed as the builder from the Village People.

But some English people find the idea of trick-or-treating threatening: more than one respondent used the phrase “with menaces”. Others have seized on

the open-ended nature of Halloween to create alternative, community-based events.

In 2016, Northfields allotments in Ealing, west London, were threatened by development, and, in a bid to raise awareness, plot-holders inaugurated a pumpkin trail for Halloween. “Everyone sort of spookified their plots and invited the local community to have a look around,” says committee member Richard Ashcroft, 44. “And it’s grown from there, really. It’s become a real monster – excuse the pun.”

Not every plot-holder participates, but the ones who do are competitive. “Me and a mate have been constructing our rig for at least a month,” says Ashcroft. “It’s going to be a series of bicycle wheels, with very strong cabling to attach ghosts that will float around and over the path.”



‘It’s become a real monster’: Halloween at Northfields allotments in west London. Photograph: Mark Kehoe

Last year, the pumpkin trail was so popular that 8,000 people turned up. This year, it’s a [ticketed event](#), with restricted numbers. “I mean, it’s £1, plus a 25p booking fee,” says Ashcroft. “But the ticketing allows us to manage the flow.” The original reason for the event has evaporated – development of the

site has been ruled out – but the pumpkin trail is too popular to give up. “It’s a labour of love now.”

A significant proportion of respondents plan to stick to the tradition of ignoring Halloween altogether. “As every year – put out all the lights and retreat to the back of the house,” says retiree Martin Ross from Devon. “Front door never answered to Halloween callers. Really dislike this tacky US-style commercialisation of what used to be called All Souls’ Night.”

Actually, All Souls’ Night is the evening of 1 November; 31 October is the day before All Saints’ Day – All Hallows Eve, hence Halloween. But the idea of the occasion as a retail opportunity has become increasingly prevalent. In 2001, Halloween consumer spending in the UK was about £12m. This year it’s estimated to reach £687m.

This year, it’s happening on a Monday night, which gives you the whole weekend from a partying perspective

Jim Hawker, co-founder of the marketing agency Threepipe Reply, describes Halloween as “a rising consumer trend”. In addition to sweets and pumpkins, people now also buy lights, smoke machines, Halloween tree decorations and costumes for dogs. Once largely a kids’ thing, Halloween is increasingly celebrated by young adults. “The thing to think about this year is, obviously, it’s happening on a Monday night,” says Hawker, “which gives you the whole weekend from a partying perspective, which is probably quite good for the millennial audience.”

[A report that Hawker’s firm](#) produced in October 2021 contains some compelling stats. Halloween is now the third biggest annual shopping event for supermarkets, after Christmas and Easter. The percentage of people who celebrate it is higher in the north (56%) than in the south (45%). Four in 10 Halloween costumes are worn just once before being binned, generating an estimated 2,000 tonnes of plastic waste.

It is difficult to make solid spending predictions for this year in the face of a cost of living crisis. “People are going to be more concerned about saving for Christmas than perhaps spending money on Halloween,” says Hawker. “I

think there's a little bit of nervousness in retail anyway, in terms of retailers not wanting to take the risk of having lots of stock they can't shift." Few things are as worthless as a pumpkin on 1 November.

Still, as a trend Halloween remains buoyant. Spending continued to rise through the pandemic. Certain brands have managed to identify themselves with the day: Fanta, for example, mounts an annual effort combining special Halloween branding and a social media campaign. Others have developed promotional ranges – toffee flavours, autumnal packaging – designed to span the period between Halloween and bonfire night.



A spooky garden in Ipswich, Suffolk. Photograph: Chris Archer/Alamy

Where did Halloween as a retail extravaganza spring from? Is it just an American export? "I think there's a little bit of a globalisation aspect to it," says Hawker. "But if you know history, apparently Halloween started in Scotland."

It's a well-regarded assumption that modern Halloween traditions are derived from rituals associated with the Celtic festival of Samhain – marking the end of harvest and the start of winter – but it's just as possible the influence was the other way round. What we do know is that at some point in the ninth century, a Christian holiday commemorating saints and martyrs

was shifted from May to the end of October, a time when pagan rituals were also conducted, including the lighting of bonfires and guising (going door to door, in disguise).

Divination was also part of the tradition: people burned nuts and poured molten lead into cold water to predict the future. It was a time of year when the barrier between the living and the dead was said to thin. Sometimes, according to folklore, ghosts appeared from the other side. Sometimes, they took people back with them.

Over time, in England at least, certain traditions became more strongly associated with Guy Fawkes and the fifth of November, and the importance of Halloween diminished. British newspaper references to Allhallowtide traditions in the 19th century are largely, if not exclusively, concerned with practices in Scotland, Ireland and Wales. In 1842, the Bristol Times and Mirror noted that the urge to keep up “old customs” in Merthyr Tydfil, Wales, drove up the price of geese and apples as the 31st neared.

It is said that Scottish and Irish immigrants brought their traditions to the US and Canada, where they evolved into their present, highly exportable form. When I was a child growing up in Connecticut, Halloween was a big deal. The suburban town I lived in was perfectly suited to trick-or-treating – you could hit a lot of houses without having to walk too far – and local participation was close to 100%.



Tim Dowling (right) on Halloween 1968, with his sister Lynn. Photograph: Courtesy of Tim Dowling

Kids dressed as ghosts, witches, superheroes or Snow White. There were horror-based costumes – Frankensteins, Draculas, Egyptian mummies, etc – but these were the days before the “lifesize severed head” became an acceptable holiday decoration. From a young age – eight or nine – we went out unsupervised, and returned with pillowcases full of sweets after a couple of hours. For all I knew, it was a tradition stretching back centuries.

In fact, the phrase “trick or treat” did not appear in print anywhere until the 1920s, and the practice, though it has its roots in old-world door-knocking customs such as guising, wasn’t widespread in America until after the second world war. It has even been suggested that the ritual emerged as a civic fix, imposed to turn Halloween – traditionally a time for pranks and minor criminal damage – into something more law-abiding. In the Halloween scenes in the film *Meet Me in St Louis* – made in 1944 but set in 1903 – the children dress up, terrorise householders and run away. No sweets change hands.

When I was a child, Mischief Night (which has 18th-century British roots and is still marked in the north of England on the night before Bonfire Night) was unofficially celebrated on the night before Halloween. We spent

that evening soaping windows, draping toilet rolls over power lines and throwing eggs at passing cars. A lot of the vandalism was still evident the next night, which lent a little menace to the atmosphere.

But on Halloween, the menace – or at least the perception of it – flowed in the other direction. Rumours circulated about evil householders putting razor blades inside toffee apples, or poisoning candy by injection. Part of the ritual was combing through your sweets at the end of the night, looking for evidence of tampering. Somehow, the balance between fun and fear that characterises Halloween always manages to restore itself.

Whatever your feelings about it, Halloween in its present form appears to be here to stay. To a great extent, one's attitude to it is formed by childhood experiences, and the UK trick-or-treaters of 20 years ago are now old enough to have children of their own.

But some of the people who make the biggest deal of it have no history of celebrating. Ashcroft grew up in Lancashire. "I lived in the middle of nowhere, so we didn't really have much going on," he says. In response, his mother and aunt made up their own Halloween ritual, placing seasonal decorations – pumpkins and plastic bats – in the oven. "We'd go off dunking apples or something like that, and then come back to the oven. And that had magically turned into all sorts of cakes and treats and stuff," he says. "I still believe to this day that it was magic."

Hayward comes from Devon, with almost no Halloween rituals to speak of. "I remember one year we did mobile apple-bobbing," he says, "bringing Halloween to people's houses. But we didn't have trick or treat. That wasn't the culture at all."

For 2021, Hayward built a fake door in front of his own front door. This year the same theme will feature minor improvements, but with his children grown he requires volunteers to help run the evening. Halloween equipment now takes up a third of his loft, and his partner is nowhere near as keen on the holiday as he is.

“I don’t know how it ends,” he says. “My worry is if I didn’t do it, I’d just get egged.”

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## Fantastic plastic?: is there a future for the wonder material turned existential threat?



‘The material of a thousand uses’: Bakelite leaflet, 1930s. Photograph: [amsterdambakelitecollection.com](http://amsterdambakelitecollection.com)/Reindert Groot

A Dundee exhibition traces the strange history of plastic from imitation ivory billiard balls to polluting particles – and asks if it can be rehabilitated

Nicholas Wroe

Thu 27 Oct 2022 03.00 EDT

In one sense the story of plastic is a straightforward cautionary tale. What was initially hailed as a wonder material that would solve so many of the world's problems turned out to be a potentially existential threat to planetary health. But how did one thing lead to the other? And is that narrative arc quite as smooth and quite as depressing as it appears? A [new exhibition](#) at the V&A Dundee seeks to interrogate the history of the material through its inventors and industries, designers and advertisers, consumers and protesters. Perhaps more urgently, it also asks what is the future of this now ubiquitous substance.

“Up until the middle of the 19th century, people had looked to the natural world for the sort of materiality that we now associate with plastics,” explains curator Charlotte Hale. “Materials such as shellac, ivory, tortoise shell and horn could be subjected to heat and pressure to make them malleable and durable and capable of being shaped into coveted and luxurious household items.” But with industrialisation and rising demand came attempts to synthetically mimic these properties, though early scientific advances were habitually undermined by commercial failure. Perhaps surprisingly, imitation ivory billiard balls were one success, despite early examples having the unfortunate effect of making colliding balls sound like a gunshot, laughs Hale, “prompting bar owners in America to complain that customers were actually drawing their weapons in response”.

The big breakthrough came via Belgian chemist Leo Baekeland in the early 20th century. His Bakelite was light and malleable yet hard and strong, was heat resistant, a good insulator and could provide an appealing finish. It was used for luxury goods in the 1920s and 30s, but during the second world war Bakelite’s adaptable and comparatively inexpensive characteristics were adopted wholesale by the military. With a shortage of natural materials the

same was true of other synthetic materials – nylon, polyethylene – and between 1939 and 1945 the production of plastics nearly quadrupled.

We need a fundamental revaluing of plastic in a world in which there is no silver bullet

Following the war, huge marketing campaigns, aggressively financed by petrochemical companies, saw these new products and materials adapted for mass domestic use. Kitchens became wipe-clean rather than scrubbable. Radios, lamps, clocks and telephones adopted sleek curves and increasingly vibrant colours. Chairs and tables were moulded into futuristic new shapes and baths and basins appeared in colours other than white as plastic made its unstoppable progress through the home.

Many of these products would become collectors' items, but their mass accessibility, and the explosion of cheaper objects and plastic packaging, marked a change: the era of plastic as something disposable rather than precious had begun. But it was during the next big boom – in the 1960s space age when 20 of the 21 layers of Apollo astronauts' suits were made by chemicals company DuPont, a trend quickly picked up on by clothes designers back on Earth – that marine biologists first published articles on plastic particles found in the sea.

Since then, the understanding of its environmental impact has only become more alarming. But, as Hale points out, the rewards of plastic are still there, and in many ways it remains the wonder material it always was. It is integral to modern telecommunications and medicine and so many other essential aspects of life. Something as simple as a light, cheap, easily transportable plastic tent has saved maybe millions of lives. And cotton or paper carrier bags have significant environmental costs attached to them, too.

The exhibition also looks at initiatives to clean up the oceans and the efforts to control the excesses of plastic, in particular in eradicating single-use products. There are sections on repairing and recycling. “Ultimately, plastic has run unchecked and unregulated for 150 years,” says Hale. “Many good things are happening, but it’s only with stringent regulation – through the entire product life cycle from concept through production, distribution and

disposal – that real change will come about. We don't advocate a zero-plastic strategy. Instead, we ask when and how plastic can be used to maximise its incredible properties. We need a fundamental revaluing of plastic in a world in which there is no silver bullet.”

## Mould-breaking: Four pieces from the V&A exhibition



Charles Rennie Mackintosh's wooden cabinet, 1916. Photograph: © Victoria and Albert Museum

### Smoker's cabinet, 1916

Charles Rennie Mackintosh's wooden cabinet was one of the first pieces of furniture to utilise plastic as an inlay. The pieces of yellow casing are made from a material called Erinoid, produced by drying curds of milk into a powder that was then combined with water, heated and extruded. “It could be seen as a precursor to Formica,” explains Hale. “Unfortunately, the product was prone to shrinking, which meant it wasn't a viable long-lasting development.”

### Bakelite leaflet, 1930s (main image)

Where previous plastics had used plant materials such as cellulose, Bakelite was the first truly synthetic product. A market trajectory from luxury goods

to battlefield weapons to household devices lived up to the company's marketing of it as "the material of a thousand uses".



John Bates wedding ensemble, 1966. Photograph: Richard Davis/© Victoria and Albert Museum

### **John Bates wedding ensemble, 1966**

Bates was best known in the 60s for designing Diana Rigg's outfits for *The Avengers*. This is the wedding ensemble he made for Marit Allen, then fashion editor of *Vogue*. Drawing on the influence of 60s sci-fi, with its silver buttons and shiny trim, it incorporates an early usage in clothing of PVC.



Still from The Ocean CleanUp/Everwave/Sungai Watch video.

### The Ocean CleanUp/Everwave/Sungai Watch

This image is from a video of the Ocean CleanUp project “harvesting” plastic from the sea. The organisation also works to intercept plastic in rivers before it reaches the ocean. “Both elements are extremely difficult and essential,” explains Hale. “But it becomes a much more resource-efficient strategy to clear plastic before it has broken down to microplastics.”

*Plastic: Remaking Our World* is at [V&A Dundee](#) from 29 October until 5 February.

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## Iraq

# ‘It is the memory of the people’: unpacking Iraq’s artistic heritage

Culture ministry puts artworks on display once again after destruction and theft wrought by successive conflicts



A wooden statue by Jawad Salim titled Motherhood on display at Iraq's culture ministry. Photograph: Ahmad Al-Rubaye/AFP/Getty Images

*[Simona Foltyn](#) in Baghdad*

*[@SimonaFoltyn](#)*

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Upon entering the drab building housing Iraq's culture ministry, visitors unexpectedly stumble upon some of the country's greatest treasures. In a newly refurbished hall that used to be the cafeteria, 76 precious paintings and sculptures from Iraq's foremost artists are on display for the first time since the National Museum of Modern Art was pillaged in the aftermath of the 2003 [Iraq](#) invasion.

“Art is the memory and conscience of the people,” said Fakhir Mohammed, head of the ministry’s “plastic arts directorate” that deals with contemporary paintings and sculptures. During a tour of the recently opened but sparsely visited exhibition hall, Mohammed said the return of artwork “to these walls is just part of our ambition”. He added: “Now there’s a real will to restore Iraqi culture to the previous level.”

Roughly 11,000 works of art were at the museum when the US invaded Iraq, a country that was once considered to be among the Arab world’s greatest cultural centres. In the ensuing chaos, looters ransacked museums and other institutions as American troops stood by. “What happened in 2003 was a painful blow to Iraq’s heritage and the plastic arts movement,” said Mohammed. “We suffer from it until today.”

Some pieces were hidden away by museum staff. Others were later found in local antique markets, including a sculpture by the renowned artist Jawad Salim. The wooden statue depicting a woman, entitled Motherhood, was worth \$300,000 but was bought back from an unsuspecting dealer for \$200. Still, the bulk of the pieces remain unaccounted for, with many likely to have been smuggled out of the country by international criminal networks to disappear into private collections.

The museum’s inventory today is a quarter of its original size. Fewer than 600 works have been officially returned, mostly by well-meaning private collectors. But Iraq has few legal channels to enforce restitution. The landmark 1970s Unesco convention on the illicit trafficking of cultural property is toothless unless destination countries agree to sign binding bilateral treaties that commit them to returning cultural objects.



Paintings by Iraqi artists Suad al-Attar, left, and Rafa al-Nasri, right, on display at Iraq's culture ministry. Photograph: Ahmad Al-Rubaye/AFP/Getty Images

“If the two parties do not agree, the convention remains valid, but it cannot be enforced,” said Junaid Sorosh-Wali, chief of culture at Unesco’s Iraq office. “Conventions provide a legal framework, but the goodwill should come from the parties.”

The process is further hampered by the lack of a comprehensive database of stolen works, and of funding for re-acquisition and upkeep. Across the hallway from the exhibition hall, more than 2,300 other paintings are crammed into storage. One-third are in dire need of restoration as a result of improper storage, but the ministry’s workshop has no equipment to carry out basic repairs.

Still, the returned artworks are a source of national pride and a priceless depository of collective memory for a nation that has suffered immeasurable loss. Spanning more than a century, they tell stories of occupations, uprisings and wars, taking visitors on a historical journey from Ottoman and British rule, to the monarchy, to the Baath era, until the first Gulf war.

Among the oldest paintings are the idyllic landscapes of Abdulqader al-Rassam, who travelled across the country in the service of the Ottoman empire, which ruled Iraq from the 16th century until it passed into British hands after the first world war. Rassam became part of a group of artists who spearheaded an awakening of Iraqi national identity at a time when the country yearned for self-determination.

Many of these “pioneer” artists were trained in Europe or the Ottoman empire and returned to Iraq to launch a new art movement, using modern techniques to popularise symbols of Iraqi folklore. Exemplary of this style is a mid-20th century colourful painting by Hafidh al-Droubi, a painter and art educator who studied in Rome and London and is most famous for using cubism to depict Baghdad life.

Alongside these peaceful scenes from Iraq’s heyday as a rising Arab nation are more unsettling paintings that recount – and at times foretell – its darkest days.

A 1958 painting by Tareq Madhloum commemorates the 1948 Wathba uprising, when throngs of students flooded Baghdad’s streets to reject British control and rising inequality. Titled The Eternal Bridge Battle, the painting fluidly overlays powerful scenes of the revolt, many of which evoke comparisons with the 2019 October Revolution. At the centre of the painting, security forces open fire at crowds attempting to cross Martyr’s Bridge, named after those killed in 1948. Both movements faced brutal repression, leaving hundreds dead.



Visitors look at paintings by renowned artist Faiq Hassan. Photograph: Ahmad Al-Rubaye/AFP/Getty Images

Other works appear to portend violent events well ahead of their time. A 1976 painting by Faiq Hassan immediately rouses memories of the US bombing of a civilian air raid shelter during the first Gulf war. The large oil painting shows women and children, eyes and mouths open wide in terror, fleeing what appears to be an explosion. Remarkably, it was painted 14 years prior to the 1991 Amriyah shelter bombing that killed more than 400 civilians.

To the right of the entrance hangs another ominous piece by Layla al-Attar, Iraq's most famous female artist, who once served as the museum's director. Peering through the dark trunks of a palm grove, the observer's focus is drawn towards the centre, where a fire is raging over a distant residential area. Upon closer examination, the outline of the blaze resembles the map of Iraq, an allusion to the far-reaching impact of war. From the safety of the palm grove, a woman – possibly the artist – watches the inferno as though it is a premonition of her own death: al-Attar was killed by a US missile strike in 1993.

The successive conflicts that have plagued Iraq since the 1980s precipitated a decline in the culture scene long before 2003. While the mid-century

pioneers had thrived during a period of upswing, by the 1990s their successors fled the stifling climate of wars, sanctions and Saddam Hussein's dictatorship, leaving the art movement rudderless and the public deprived of its legacy.

Although the wars have since subsided, the country's recovery is hamstrung by internal strife, corruption and mismanagement, all of which have eroded public attention towards art. Veteran artists reminisce about the days when exhibition halls were heaving with visitors and the government invested in the arts, often purchasing artworks to encourage burgeoning painters.

"The government is removed from the arts. We are frustrated because of that. They only care about themselves, not about the artists," said Saad al-Tai, a 78-year-old artist whose painting is exhibited at the ministry. Dozens of Tai's other works were lost in the 2003 looting. The artist maintains little hope that his paintings – or the golden age of the pioneers – will ever return.

"Iraqi society is still headed towards an unstable direction," Tai said. "The conditions have forced people to retreat inwards. The artistic spirit is gone."

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## 2022.10.27 - Opinion

- With Rishi Sunak, the City's takeover of British politics is complete
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- Sunshine and tears: here's what my day in a struggling nursery system looks like
- We can go to the moon – so why can't we stop my glasses sliding down my nose?

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[\*\*Opinion\*\*](#)[\*\*Rishi Sunak\*\*](#)

## **With Rishi Sunak, the City's takeover of British politics is complete**

[Aeron Davis](#)

Never mind Tufton Street, our first investment banker prime minister shows that the Square Mile truly rules Westminster



Skyscrapers in the City of London in London, October 2022. Photograph: Tolga Akmen/EPA

Thu 27 Oct 2022 01.00 EDT Last modified on Thu 27 Oct 2022 09.45 EDT

It has been a week of firsts in British politics. The country has [rightly celebrated](#) the fact that it has its first Asian-heritage and Hindu prime minister. A rather less noted milestone, however, is that Britain also has its first investment banker PM.

Rishi Sunak's first job was at the US investment bank Goldman Sachs. He went on to spend 14 years in the sector before becoming an MP. In many

ways, his unelected appointment marks the highpoint of big finance's takeover of Britain's political and economic system – a quiet infiltration of Westminster and Whitehall has been taking place over several decades and gone largely unremarked.

Historically, the Square Mile [played](#) a big part in British politics, economics and empire. It's well known that Thatcherism later tore up the corporatist model of economic management. The role of unions, British industrialists and the UK state was to be significantly rolled back. What was unclear was what would replace them. Looking back now, it's clear that big finance stepped in.

This was because many of the key players in Conservative cabinets of the 1980s came from the financial sector. Norman Lamont spent years at the investment bank NM Rothschild and Sons. Cecil Parkinson, who engineered the "Big Bang" that paved the way for the huge expansion of the London Stock Exchange in the 1980s, had been a chartered accountant in the Square Mile. And Nigel Lawson cut his teeth as a financial journalist at the Sunday Telegraph and the Financial Times. Each has spoken of their City careers as being more significant influences on their thinking than any academic economists. Many other Conservative ministers also went from finance careers to either the Treasury or the Department of Trade and Industry.

This was a key reason why most nationalised industries weren't simply sold off to the private sector but floated on the London Stock Exchange and transferred into the hands of City investors. It also explains why a series of tax changes and financial regulations favoured big finance over manufacturing, and changes to corporate governance privileged "shareholder value" over all else. Tax breaks and support were removed from industry and used to cut taxes on dividends, share and bond sales.

When New Labour arrived, it didn't have the same former financial networks to call upon. But Gordon Brown and co also realised how fundamental the lucrative taxable income of the City was for funding its spending plans. They also needed its nous to continue privatising and, of course, enacting PFI contracts. Thus, ["light-touch" regulation](#) was rolled out

to keep the sector expanding. A steady trickle of financiers were lured into government to facilitate all of this.

Looking at the coalition government, every senior figure who managed Treasury economic policy – George Osborne, Danny Alexander, David Cameron, Rupert Harrison, John Kingman and Nick Macpherson – later gained well-paid positions in the financial sector. And three of the last five chancellors have come from the sector. Jeremy Hunt's [current advisers](#) all come from investment banking.

This matters because investment bankers have very little to do with the real economy that ordinary people inhabit. They don't run businesses. They don't deal with actual product and customer markets. Their work is confined to financial markets, aiding corporate financial manoeuvres, and trading and managing their own financial assets. Their primary aim is to make profits from such activities, regardless of how it affects the real economy, the national interest or employees. If that means [shorting the pound](#) or breaking up a successful company for quick profits, then so be it.

In other words, what benefits big finance often hinders business and manufacturing generally. [Consequently](#), since the 1980s, Britain's industrial decline and its financial expansion have been as pronounced as in any leading economy. Productivity and levels of R&D spending compare very poorly, too, because investors demand quick returns and rising share prices over long-term investment. Regional and class inequalities have grown ever-larger.

And an overpowered financial sector has certainly not been conducive to good governance, either. There's nothing democratic about extensive public service cuts being used to pay for saving the private banking sector, as in the aftermath of the 2008 crash, or the bond markets [determining](#) the credibility of governments, or the fact that the bankers and hedge funds are the biggest single source of Conservative party donations. Nor is trust in British democracy likely to be enhanced by a super-rich PM who has [allegedly](#) avoided taxes and [made](#) a fortune as a financier at the nation's cost.

During Liz Truss's short premiership, there was much talk about the power and influence of the [Tufton Street](#) network of opaque rightwing thinktanks. But actually, the longer-term driving force of UK economic policy, there in front of us all this time, has been the City of London. It's time to open our eyes and look more closely.

- Aeron Davis is professor of political communication at Victoria University of Wellington in New Zealand. His new book, *Bankruptcy, Bubbles and Bailouts: The Inside History of the Treasury Since 1976*, is available  
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| [Section menu](#) | [Main menu](#) |

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## [Opinion](#)[Wildlife](#)

# I'm going to spend five months with penguins, and no wifi or running water – here's why

[Mairi Hilton](#)

Working in Antarctica is a wildlife enthusiast's dream, but seeing the reality of the climate disaster up close will be brutal



Gentoo penguins form part of Antarctica's astonishingly rich wildlife.  
Photograph: UK Antarctic Heritage Trust/PA

Thu 27 Oct 2022 04.00 EDT Last modified on Fri 28 Oct 2022 06.05 EDT

Antarctica holds an almost mythical appeal. Detached from the rest of the world, its beauty is unique. It is a continent that has never seen a war, and where testing military capabilities is strictly forbidden. It is, as the [Antarctic Treaty](#) reminds us, “a natural reserve devoted to peace and science”.

And this impressive wilderness is the place I will be calling home for the next five months, as I embark on a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to work for the [UK Antarctic Heritage Trust](#) (UKAHT) at Port Lockroy, Antarctica. As a conservation biologist, I'm drawn to Antarctica for lots of reasons, not least my interest in the major role it plays in our climate system, and the opportunity to monitor the [gentoo penguin](#) colony that calls Port Lockroy home.

I'll live and work on this small island on the Antarctic peninsula until March next year. It is a place with astonishingly rich wildlife. Here, the gentoos are kept company by numerous species of sea bird, seals and visiting whales. It's the stuff of dreams for wildlife enthusiasts like myself.

My love of wildlife and exploration began years ago, cemented while studying geography at Glasgow, where I was able to travel to far-flung destinations to conduct wildlife research. Since then, my work has taken me to Peru, Australia and the Caribbean. But until now, opportunities to work alongside spectacular wildlife in the white expanse of Antarctica have been few and far between.

The continent's desolate, challenging landscape has a rich history offering heroic tales of exploration, jeopardy, discovery and scientific advancement. These tales include the first-hand experiences of those that lived and worked on the Antarctic decades ago; these now sit at the heart of UKAHT's work.

Working with the other members of this year's [Port Lockroy team](#) – base leader Lucy Bruzzone, postmaster Clare Ballantyne and shop manager Natalie Corbett – I'll spend the season welcoming visitors to this tiny spot on the world map. Now a historic site and museum, and home to the world's most remote public post office, the site is completed by a small gift shop. Here, visitors can buy a souvenir to take home, their purchases directly supporting the trust's important work in heritage conservation in one of the most challenging environments on the planet. A [Nissen hut](#) completes the site and will play bunkhouse for our small team during the austral summer. The site has no running water, flushing toilet or wifi, but forgoing these basic facilities seems like a fair trade, to me at least.



Port Lockroy, Antarctica. Photograph: UK Antarctic Heritage Trust/PA

Aside from the penguins, museum and post office, as a conservationist, climate change is always on my mind. Certainly no more than when I'm about to relocate to the continent that gave birth to climate science. Why is Antarctica such an important piece of the climate jigsaw puzzle? Antarctica's vast white surface helps to reflect the sun's rays, reducing the amount of heat that is absorbed, known as the albedo effect. The Southern Ocean around Antarctica absorbs a significant amount of carbon dioxide, and so Antarctica plays an important part in regulating climate change. The melting of the Antarctic ice sheets could also have devastating consequences for coastal communities across the globe. Antarctica reminds us all of the urgent need to take action to limit and mitigate climate change.

If you caught the most recent episode of [Frozen Planet II](#), you'll have seen the consequences of climate inaction on the wildlife in polar regions. Warming temperatures means more rain instead of snow, with deadly consequences for penguin chicks whose downy feathers only provide protection against dry cold. Penguins are a bioindicator species, which means that changes to their population indicate changes to the broader health of the environment. During my time at Port Lockroy, I'll be working on a long-term penguin study of the gentoo colony. The information collected

will help us better understand environmental changes and the potential broader impact on both wildlife and the environment.

As I make my final preparations ahead of the long journey, my mind races thinking of the wonderful sights I'll see, the history I'll encounter and the wildlife I'll observe first-hand. The chance to live alongside charismatic, unique species in such an awe-inspiring natural habitat overrides any concerns of being far from home with no shower or flushing toilet for weeks on end. How bad can it be?

David Attenborough once said that Antarctica “is the loneliest and coldest place on Earth, the place that is most hostile to life. And yet, in one or two places, it is astonishingly rich”. I can only hope to be as captivated by Antarctica, its heritage and by my 1,000 or so new neighbours, smelly as they may be. I of course won’t truly know what awaits me at the bottom of the world, until I step foot on the snow covered rocks of [Goudier Island](#). I’ll let you know.

Dr Mairi Hilton is a conservation biologist and researcher. Follow Mairi and team throughout the season via the [Port Lockroy blog](#)

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## OpinionEarly years education

# Sunshine and tears: here's what my day in a struggling nursery system looks like

Anonymous

These children are our future. Instead of mealy-mouthed, cost-cutting exercises, we should be investing in them



‘Thanks to a freedom of information request, we now know the government was well aware it was short-changing nurseries.’ Photograph: Roger Askew/Alamy

Thu 27 Oct 2022 03.00 EDT Last modified on Thu 27 Oct 2022 15.12 EDT

“It’s everywhere! It’s everywhere!” the little girl cried with delight as she threw the bubbles up into the air, washing the mud off her hands.

An hour earlier, she had been forlornly sitting on a chair, disengaged with her surroundings, and not speaking. So we’d made mud by mixing dry red earth with water, and she had begun to paint with it, becoming totally

immersed. (This state of immersion or “wallowing” is crucial to a child’s learning, forming neural links in the brain.)

Moments like this are why I love working with young children: tuning into them, giving quality attention and creating fun new play activities that capture their imaginations. Yet giving children this kind of attention is only getting harder. Since Covid there has been an increase in the number of children with special educational needs and language delay. With the continuing shortfall in early-years funding, it is a greater challenge than ever to meet all the children’s needs and keep them safe.

It is costing many parents a small fortune to send their children to nursery. Our nursery charges £60 a day for 8am to 5:30pm, or £300 a week. The government’s answer? It has been consulting about changing the “childcare ratio” in early-years settings from four children to an adult to five – with some reports that the government might remove the ratio altogether.

The coalition government increased the ratio for two-year-olds in 2015 from 1:3 to the current level of 1:4, which has been putting pressure on staff ever since. In surveys of nursery managers, parents and staff, the findings are clear. Nobody wants this legislation. What they do want is for the government to pay the full price for the places they provide, and not to leave it to those who don’t get free places to make up the shortfall.

Thanks to a freedom of information request submitted by Neil Leitch of the Early Years Alliance, we now know that the government was well aware it was short-changing nurseries when it created the scheme, and that so-called “free” places would have to be subsidised by other parents. The resulting exorbitant cost is forcing mothers out of the workforce and back into the home. Meanwhile, a lot of private nurseries can’t keep their staff because hours are long, and pay and conditions not good. This means they have to use agency staff, which is unsettling for the children.



Children at a kindergarten in Sweden. Photograph: Folio Images/Alamy

Will Quince (recently minister for children and families) visited Sweden in the summer on a “fact-finding” mission to see how nurseries there work to higher ratios than in England. It’s a shame he couldn’t learn from their other policies, for example Sweden’s [universal system of early childhood education](#) for children aged one to six, in which preschools provide 525 hours of free service, with capped and affordable costs for additional hours. Or the 13 months of well-paid and very flexible parental leave.

Swedish experts took four years to research what would work best for children, families and the workforce and came up with the current system. It transformed the previous fragmented “childcare” provision into an integrated universal education system. In the UK, we have many experts desperate to transform our broken system, but they are simply not being listened to.

Two-year-olds are famous for their tantrums. Helping children learn to self-regulate, or self-calm, is the goal in early years – when an upset individual, instead of hitting out, snatching, screaming and crying, shouting and throwing things, learns through patient interventions with trained staff to manage their emotions and to ask for help. Not so easy when you haven’t

learned to speak yet, or when English isn't spoken at home, or when you have a learning disability, or when you've been affected by trauma.

When I arrived at work recently for my shift, a colleague was in the bathroom, struggling to remove the many layers of soaking-wet clothing from a small child who was furiously wriggling, crying, tired and hungry, as she tried to calm him, singing "You are my sunshine" on a loop while being sprayed with water as another child put her hand flat under one tap and a third child was ramming a toy banana up another tap.

The current ratio is 1:4 – she should have had another child in there, if this really was just a numbers game. But it's not, is it? It's children's lives. And we should be respecting them and giving them the very best beginnings possible. And the stress on the 98% female workforce is not sustainable, not fair and not healthy. Changing the ratio to 1:5 will be unsafe for children and adults alike and further challenge the quality of the child's experience.

I first started working in a community nursery in the late 1970s, went on to start a community nursery in the 80s, and was part of an expanding under-fives campaign movement for better pay, and more and better provision. In 1983, we argued for £4.15 an hour. Now, nearly 40 years later, working in the two-year-olds room of a state nursery school, I earn £9.50 an hour, an increase of £1.27 a decade.

The staff are so dedicated, and the quality of care is outstanding. Most of my colleagues work five days a week, full-time or part-time. While it is challenging and exhausting, there are many rewarding moments. Just recently I celebrated with a child how far he'd come in a year. I reminded him how difficult he had found things 12 months earlier – he was lashing out, unable to share, unable to articulate his needs, flying into a rage – and now, here he was, coming to me and saying what he wanted rather than grabbing it off another child.

Two is a very special age. Children transform physically, going from toddling to tearing around at speed, climbing, balancing and riding bikes. They transform socially and emotionally, moving from playing alongside other children, with all the friction that entails, to making friends and

creating imaginary games together. They develop their ability to listen and understand, acquiring language (sometimes two). Their confidence grows. Watching these transformations is why the work is so rewarding – but also why it is demanding and skilled work that must be properly resourced and properly paid.

These children are our future. Instead of mealy-mouthed, cost-cutting exercises that deny the children the care and attention they need and deserve, we should be investing in them at this critical stage of their lives. All the indicators show that their futures, and ours, depend on it.

- The author is an early years worker at a state nursery
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[Opinion](#)[Health & wellbeing](#)

# We can go to the moon – so why can't we stop my glasses sliding down my nose?

[Adrian Chiles](#)



I've tried everything, from Pritt Stick to antiperspirant, but they refuse to stay put



‘Scant attention is paid to whether specs will stay perched in the correct position’ ... (posed by model). Photograph: MangoStar\_Studio/Getty Images/iStockphoto

Thu 27 Oct 2022 02.00 EDT

My spectacles keep slipping down my nose. They’ve been doing so roughly every 10 minutes since the dark day in 1980 when an optician in Stourbridge lodged some specs on this 13-year-old and blighted his life for ever.

Indoors or out, whatever the ambient conditions, down they slip. I’m writing this in my cool, calm, air-conditioned dressing room as I wait to appear on *Loose Women* on ITV. And down my specs are slipping. I push them back up, and back down they go. Up down up down up down, all day every day, for nearly half a century.

Opticians aren’t much help. They spend hours faffing around with which line you can read, and which is clearer – red or green – and all that carry on. And lately, they’ve started firing puffs of air at your eyeball to determine something or other. But when it comes to fitting the specs, scant attention is paid to whether the effing things will stay perched in the correct position.

This seems to be something regarded as desirable, but not essential, a bit of a bonus.

I've tried applying antiperspirant to my face and sticking little nose pads to my glasses. Neither of which much helped. I'd all but given up hope when I came across a Pritt Stick-style product promising to be the answer to my prayers. It didn't work. It made things slipperier. Furious with disappointment, I tried actual Pritt Stick, which worked very well, but when I removed my glasses the pads remained attached to my nose.

I met my daughter's friend from college the other evening. A quite delightful bespectacled girl from Shropshire. I saw she too had to keep pushing them up. Barely in her 20s, she has a lifetime of this to come. My heart bled for her. We can put people on the moon, a machine on Mars and have telephones that work without cords. So, please, please, if not for me then for the children, can somebody sort this?

Adrian Chiles is a broadcaster, writer and Guardian columnist

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## 2022.10.27 - Around the world

- [Coronavirus China locks down part of Wuhan, nearly three years after first case emerged](#)
- [Meta Value of Facebook and Instagram owner drops \\$65bn in value as profits halve](#)
- [Donald Trump Will he testify? Lawyers for former president accept subpoena from Capitol attack panel](#)
- [Brazil Bolsonaro's campaign relies on 'secret budget' payoffs to win election](#)
- [Elon Musk Billionaire makes splashy visit to Twitter headquarters carrying sink](#)

**China**

# **China locks down part of Wuhan, nearly three years after first Covid case emerged**

More than 800,000 people locked down in site of world's first Covid outbreak in 2019, as other Chinese cities seal up streets and homes



Security workers wear protective suits outside a residential compound under lockdown in Beijing. Cities across China, including the capital and Wuhan, have imposed controls to tackle Covid outbreaks. Photograph: Thomas Peter/Reuters

*Guardian staff with agencies*

Thu 27 Oct 2022 01.07 EDT Last modified on Fri 28 Oct 2022 00.26 EDT

Chinese cities from Wuhan in central [China](#) to Xining in the north-west are doubling down on Covid-19 curbs, sealing up buildings, locking down districts and throwing millions into distress in a scramble to halt widening outbreaks.

China on Thursday reported a third straight day of more than 1,000 new Covid cases nationwide, a modest tally compared with the tens of thousands a day that sent Shanghai into a full-blown lockdown earlier this year but enough to trigger more curbs and restrictions across the country.

Wuhan, [site of the world's first Covid-19 outbreak in late 2019](#), reported about 20 to 25 new infections a day this week. The city has registered 240 cases over the past 14 days. Local authorities ordered more than 800,000 people in one district to stay at home until 30 October.

Wuhan also suspended the sale of pork in parts of the city, according to images and posts on social media, after authorities said one Covid case had been linked to the local pork supply chain.

Guangzhou, China's fourth-biggest city by economic output and the provincial capital of Guangdong, on Thursday sealed up more streets and neighbourhoods and kept people in their homes as new areas were deemed high-risk in a Covid resurgence that has persisted into its fourth week.

In Xining, capital of Qinghai province, social media posts told of food shortages and price inflation for essential goods as health authorities in the city of 2.5 million people raced to contain a Covid rebound after the week-long National Day holiday in early October.

“To reduce the risk of transmission, some vegetable and fruit stores have been closed and put under quarantine,” said a Xining government official on Wednesday.

China’s coronavirus case load has remained small by global standards, but its ultra-strict containment measures against the highly transmissible Omicron variant have [weighed heavily on the world's second-largest economy](#) and rattled financial markets.

Other large cities across China including Datong and Xi'an have implemented new curbs this week to rein in local outbreaks.

In Beijing, the Universal Resort theme park was shut on Wednesday after at least one visitor tested positive for coronavirus.

In Zhengzhou, there was an outbreak at a factory that employs about 300,000 people and is known as the largest producer of iPhones in the world.

Foxconn Technology Group, which runs the facility, acknowledged the flare-up on Wednesday but said “operation and production … is relatively stable”.

“Health and safety measures for employees (are) being maintained,” the Taiwanese electronics maker said, adding that it was “providing the necessary guarantees for livelihoods, including material supplies, psychological comfort and responsive feedback”.

The company did not specify how many staff were affected by the outbreak but said it was a “small number” and that unsubstantiated online rumours of tens of thousands of infections were “patently false”.

“At present, the epidemic prevention work in Zhengzhou is progressing steadily, and the impact … is controllable,” the statement said.

China has repeatedly vowed to stick to its zero-tolerance response to Covid-19 and implement what the authorities say are necessary measures to contain the virus.

*Reuters and Agence France-Presse contributed to this report*

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## Meta

# \$80bn wiped from value of Facebook and Instagram owner Meta

Sell-off that began overnight continues after Mark Zuckerberg's company reports halving of profits



Shares in Meta dropped on Wednesday after the company announced mixed results in its third quarter earnings report. Photograph: Arnd Wiegmann/Reuters

*[Joanna Partridge](#) and [Kari Paul](#)*

Thu 27 Oct 2022 11.57 EDT First published on Wed 26 Oct 2022 16.44 EDT

Investors wiped \$80bn (£69bn) off the market value of [Facebook](#) and Instagram's owner, Meta, after Mark Zuckerberg's company reported profits had halved during the third quarter as advertisers reined in spending amid the global economic downturn.

The 25% tumble in Meta's share price since Wednesday evening has knocked billions off the personal wealth of Zuckerberg, its chief executive and largest shareholder.

The sell-off began during overnight trading after a downbeat results presentation, and continued when markets reopened on Thursday. It was one of the most dramatic devaluations Wall Street has seen since investor confidence in Silicon Valley stocks began to crumble at the start of the year.

Meta's shares briefly dipped below \$100, taking them to their lowest level since 2016, with investors unconvinced by Zuckerberg's bet that his company's future lies in the metaverse, a virtual reality world that users will experience through its Oculus headsets.

With a 13% Meta stake, Zuckerberg has seen his net worth plummet by \$90bn so far this year because most of his fortune is in the company's shares. His holding stood at just over \$125bn at the start of 2022, according to Bloomberg data, but its value has now fallen to \$35bn.

Reality Labs, the company's metaverse division, made a \$3.7bn loss over the past three months, while the company said it anticipated these losses would "grow significantly year over year" in 2023.

Meta, which also owns WhatsApp, reported \$27.7bn in revenue for the third quarter – higher than analysts' forecasts – as sales shrank by 4% compared with the same period a year earlier. The company reported \$4.4bn profit for the same period, 52% lower than the \$9.2bn it made a year earlier. The company warned of weaker trading ahead.

Amid [growing competition from TikTok](#), Meta is also suffering from a slowdown in advertising spend.

Meta's results were the latest in a series of disappointing earnings reports. The company has invested heavily in new products that have so far failed to bear fruit. It [lost \\$230bn in market value](#) in February in the biggest one-day loss in history for a US company, after its shares slumped by 26%.

Meta's costs and expenses climbed by 19% in the third quarter compared with a year earlier. This was as a result of spending on the metaverse and on its short-form video-content product Reels.

Faced with concern from investors about the losses, Zuckerberg said he was confident that spending on the metaverse and other “experimental bets” would begin to pay off.

“Over time, these are going to end up being very important investments for the future of our business,” he said. “This is some of the most historic work we’re doing. People are going to look back on [this] decades from now and talk about the importance of the work that was done here.”

He added: “While we face near-term challenges on revenue, the fundamentals are there for a return to stronger revenue growth.”

Meta and other tech companies have been hit by fears of recession and rising inflation. Google’s parent company, Alphabet, and Microsoft have also [disappointed investors with third-quarter results](#).

In addition, Meta has struggled with changes to Apple privacy policies enacted in 2021 that undercut its primary advertising model – which the company predicted [would cause](#) it to lose out on a projected \$10bn in ad revenue in 2022.

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Splitting up Facebook’s business from its metaverse project could be one way to restore the company’s share price, said Sir Martin Sorrell, the founder of digital advertising company [S4 Capital](#).

“If you manage to split Reality Labs, where the investment is being made in the metaverse, from the Facebook and Instagram platforms … you might

have a very different market result and you probably would see an accretion in the value of Facebook platforms,” he told BBC Radio 4’s Today programme.

Meta hinted at job cuts, after first announcing a staff hiring freeze and potential restructuring in September.

The company said it would be “holding some teams flat in terms of headcount, shrinking others and investing headcount growth only in our highest priorities”. It added: “As a result, we expect headcount at the end of 2023 will be approximately in-line with third-quarter 2022 levels.”

Meta has also [forecast a drop in revenue for the year](#), its first since it floated on the stock market in 2012.

Its third-quarter losses indicated Meta had focused too intently on new ventures, said Debra Aho Williamson, an analyst with Insider Intelligence.

“Meta is on shaky legs when it comes to the current state of its business,” she said. “To return to stronger growth, Meta needs to turn its business around. It would benefit from less priority on the metaverse and more on fixing its core business.”

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## January 6 hearings

### Analysis

# Will he testify? Trump's lawyers accept subpoena from Capitol attack panel

[Hugo Lowell](#) in Washington

Acceptance of subpoena means former president must settle upon his response to sweeping demand from January 6 investigators



Trump at CPAC in Dallas in August. Whether Trump will follow the advice of his attorneys to ignore the subpoena remains unclear. Photograph: Brandon Bell/Getty Images

Thu 27 Oct 2022 05.00 EDT Last modified on Thu 27 Oct 2022 08.57 EDT

Donald Trump's attorneys have now accepted service of the subpoena issued by the January 6 select committee, setting into motion the countdown for the former US president to inform the panel investigating the Capitol attack whether he intends to cooperate with the congressional investigation.

The acceptance of the subpoena means [Trump](#) must settle on his response to the [sweeping](#) demand from the panel – requesting documents and testimony about contacts with political figures as well as far-right groups that stormed the Capitol – that will set him on a path without room for reversal.

Trump has several options to consider, which range from total noncompliance to some cooperation as he weighs whether to respond to the select committee's subpoena, according to sources familiar with recent discussions circulating around the former president and various lawyers and advisers.

The noncompliance option revolves around the calculation that the subpoena essentially lacks teeth and is probably legally unenforceable, meaning he could simply decide to ignore the summons in its entirety.

Among other things, the sources said, the justice department's internal opinions about current and former presidents having absolute immunity from testifying to Congress would suggest that Trump would not be prosecuted even if the select committee referred him for contempt of Congress.

The former president's advisers have noticed, for instance, that the justice department declined to charge senior Trump White House official Dan Scavino with contempt after he refused to cooperate – and if that was the case for an adviser, it would naturally extend to the principal.

But whether Trump will follow the advice of his attorneys to ignore the subpoena remains unclear, in part because of the former president's reflexive belief that he will always be his own best spokesman and can convince investigators that he should be exonerated, the sources said.

The idea is not merely theoretical: Trump expressed to aides immediately after the select committee [voted to issue him a subpoena](#) earlier this month that he might consider testifying as long as it is live and in public.

Part of the calculus is Trump's desire to dominate people he considers to be inferior or who are his adversaries, an attitude that was on display in a

rambling letter he sent to the select committee that amounted to a deluge of false claims about purported 2020 election fraud that spurred the January 6 Capitol attack.

Still, the former president appears to have become more attuned in recent years to the pitfalls of cooperating in investigations. With the special counsel probe into his ties to Russia, Trump ultimately submitted only written answers despite initially embracing testifying.

The select committee, for its part, issued the subpoena to Trump after its members decided a summons that puts the former president on the defensive from the outset would be advantageous to the investigation, people close to the committee said.

In drafting the subpoena, the panel asked Trump to respond to unresolved issues that the former president could directly shed light upon, and in some cases – such as his account of a January 6 conversation with then vice-president Mike Pence – perhaps only he has the ability to reveal.

Should Trump defy the subpoena, the select committee acknowledged, it might not have the legal recourse to enforce it since there is no legal precedent and probable litigation over immunity would take months as it winds through the courts – and potentially reach the supreme court.

The select committee also recognized that the subpoena would become moot at the end of the current Congress in January, when Republicans are widely expected to take the House majority and at which point they could introduce a measure to withdraw the summons.

But the members of the select committee concluded that if Trump was going to resist anyway, there were only benefits to issuing the summons: the panel could put all its questions in the subpoena letter, and if Trump complied even a little, it would yield some pertinent details for the investigation.

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

## [Brazil](#)

# Bolsonaro's campaign relies on 'secret budget' payoffs to win Brazil's election

The government slush fund, which amounts to about one-fifth of the entire discretionary spending budget, has little or no oversight



As Sunday's run-off ballot approaches, President Jair Bolsonaro has openly admitted he gave money to legislators. Photograph: Eraldo Peres/AP

*[Andrew Downie](#) in São Paulo*

Thu 27 Oct 2022 05.30 EDT Last modified on Thu 27 Oct 2022 10.05 EDT

When historians write books about why so many Brazilians [voted for the far-right](#) they will justifiably focus on ideological, political and social issues. But there is another key reason why President Jair Bolsonaro is still competitive as Sunday's runoff ballot approaches: he's handing out billions from a government slush fund.

The fund is known as the “secret budget” because there is little or no oversight over where the money goes once it is handed to lawmakers.

Worth 19bn reais a year (£3.1bn), the fund amounts to around one-fifth of the government’s entire discretionary spending.

“It is the biggest corruption scandal on the face of the earth,” said Simone Tebet, the conservative senator who finished third in the first-round ballot on 2 October.

With just days to go before Sunday’s run-off between Bolsonaro and leftist challenger Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva, the budget’s workings – and other discretionary outlays – are coming under scrutiny.

The broad front that is campaigning against Bolsonaro’s re-election has made it a centrepiece of their last-ditch assault to guarantee a Lula win. The challenger won the first round by 48.4% to 43.2% and remains slightly ahead in the polls.

“This is a massive communication failure that is only now beginning to be fixed,” said Monica de Bolle, an economist who has produced a series of videos explaining the scheme. “Lots of people are now explaining that the secret budget means embezzlement.”

Government projects are normally put out to tender and the companies who win the bid must pass basic legal checks before being approved.

The secret budget is designed to avoid such transparency; powerful lawmakers can give money to whoever they choose.

That has led to questionable handouts that critics say are flimsy covers for corruption.

Former environment minister Marina Silva said the head of congress, Bolsonaro ally Arthur Lira, had signed off on a R\$26m project to buy robotics for a school in his home state. The school does not have running

water or electricity, but the overpriced equipment came from a firm owned by Lira's acquaintances, Silva said.

A federal police investigation last week revealed that a town of 11,000 inhabitants that was given money for health programs registered 12,700 hand X-rays in one year; another town of 6,700 people got cash for 27,000 prostate exams.

And in one of the most notorious cases, the mother of Ciro Nogueira, Bolsonaro's chief of staff, was given R\$399m for her pet projects when she replaced her son after he took leave of absence from the senate.

Some 198 of the 225 deputies given money from the secret budget were from far-right or centre-right parties, [according to a count](#) in the magazine Piauí.

De Bolle said social programs in next year's budget have been slashed because cash is being diverted to Bolsonaro's allies.

Money for a pharmacy program that provides cut prices on prescriptions for the poor has been cut by 60%; the budget for childcare centres fell from R\$100m to R\$2.5m; the budget for the science and technology ministry was slashed by 87%.

Funding was cut from a free school milk program in the impoverished north-east, for Women's Programs, for fighting cancer and for Aids prevention.

"All this to give money to lawmakers," said De Bolle, a senior fellow at the Peterson Institute for International Economics. "All this so Bolsonaro can get re-elected."

At the same time, the former army captain has sought to buy favours by increasing monthly assistance packages.

His government normally gives R\$400 a month to the poorest families but he upped that to R\$600 in August, the first month of the election campaign.

The number of people who receive the monthly stipend also rose in the months before the ballot. Taxi and truck drivers, two bastions of Bolsonaro support, were also given additional aid.

Bolsonaro has openly admitted he gave money to legislators, which is ironic given his criticism of a similar scandal that almost brought down his opponent in 2005.

The then-president Lula survived a vote-buying scandal called [the Mensalão](#) (or big monthly payment) but it irrevocably damaged the Worker's party's credibility.

The party stresses their scandal involved a tiny fraction of the amount divvied out in the secret budget and Lula has promised that if elected he wants to retake control of spending from congress.

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## Elon Musk

# Elon Musk makes splashy visit to Twitter headquarters carrying sink

Tesla CEO changes his profile to ‘Chief Twit’ as Friday deadline to finalize his takeover deal nears



This image from the Twitter page of Elon Musk shows him entering Twitter headquarters carrying a sink. Photograph: AP

*[Maya Yang](#) and agencies*

Wed 26 Oct 2022 18.19 EDT Last modified on Thu 27 Oct 2022 07.56 EDT

Elon Musk paid a visit to Twitter’s headquarters ahead of an end-of-week deadline to close his deal to buy the company, posting a video of himself in the company’s [San Francisco](#) lobby carrying a sink.

“Entering [Twitter](#) HQ – let that sink in!” he tweeted on Wednesday.

Musk also changed his Twitter profile to refer to himself as “Chief Twit” and his location as Twitter headquarters.

Entering Twitter HQ – let that sink in! [pic.twitter.com/D68z4K2wq7](https://pic.twitter.com/D68z4K2wq7)

— Elon Musk (@elonmusk) [October 26, 2022](#)

A court has given Musk until Friday to close an agreement to acquire the company, which would end months of turmoil after the billionaire agreed to buy the social network, then tried to back out.

Despite Musk’s splashy entry to headquarters, it was not clear yet whether his purchase of Twitter had been finalized. Twitter confirmed to the Associated Press that Musk’s video tweet was real but wouldn’t comment further.

Reuters [reported this week](#) that Musk has notified investors involved in the deal that he plans to finalize the buyout by Friday’s deadline.

One of Musk’s biggest obstacles to closing the deal was keeping in place the financing pledged roughly six months ago. A group of banks, including Morgan Stanley and Bank of America, signed on earlier this year to loan \$12.5bn of the money Musk needed to buy Twitter and take it private.

Solid contracts with Musk bound the banks to the financing, although changes in the economy and debt markets since April have probably made the terms less attractive. Musk even said his investment group would be buying Twitter for more than it’s worth.

Musk’s flirtation with buying Twitter appeared to begin in late March. That’s when Twitter said he contacted members of its board, including co-founder Jack Dorsey, and told them he was buying up shares and was interested in either joining the board, taking Twitter private or starting a competitor.

Then, on 4 April, he revealed in a regulatory filing that he had become the company’s largest shareholder after acquiring a 9% stake worth about \$3bn.

At first, Twitter offered Musk a seat on its board. But six days later, CEO Parag Agrawal tweeted that Musk would not be joining the board after all. His bid to buy the company quickly followed.

When Musk agreed to buy Twitter, he inserted a “420” marijuana reference into his price of \$54.20 per share. He sold roughly \$15bn worth of shares in Tesla to help fund the purchase, then pulled together commitments for billions more from a diverse group of investors including Silicon Valley heavy hitters like Oracle co-founder Larry Ellison.

Inside Twitter, Musk’s offer was met with confusion and falling morale, especially after Musk [publicly criticized](#) one of Twitter’s top lawyers involved in content-moderation decisions.

In July, Musk abruptly reversed course, announcing that he was abandoning his bid, claiming the company had not been straightforward about its problem with fake accounts he dubbed “spam bots.” Twitter sued Musk in Delaware chancery court to force the deal through, accusing him of [inventing an excuse](#) to cover up buyer’s remorse.

Two weeks before a five-day trial was scheduled to begin, Musk changed his mind again, saying that he wanted to complete the deal after all.

Meanwhile, morale at the company appears to be sinking amid [news](#) that Musk plans to cut 75% of Twitter staff if he takes over. In a [report](#) compiled by Greg Larkin and Elizabeth Gafford by the invitation-only business membership network Punks and Pinstripes, around 530 employees have ditched the company in the last three months. The numbers reflect a 60% increase in the number of workers that left the company during the last quarter.

Nearly 30% of them went to work for Google or Meta, Business Insider [reports](#). Others have gone on to work at other companies such as Pinterest, LinkedIn and TikTok.

“The bottom line here is that the uncertainty being generated by the fight between [Elon Musk](#) and Twitter is driving a lot of their top talent to other

social media platforms ... These people have options as to where they can go and they're going," Larkin told Business Insider.

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

# Headlines

- [Live 25,000 have fled Kherson, Moscow says; west denounces Kremlin ‘dirty bomb’ claim](#)
- [Brexit Tory backer says UK economy is ‘frankly doomed’ without renegotiation](#)
- [Homelessness Hundreds more families rehoused outside local area in England](#)
- ['Completely barking' Rees-Mogg move to axe 2,400 laws is 'anti-democratic', say legal experts](#)
- [Live Business: Cost of UK borrowing falls as Sunak poised to become PM](#)

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## No indication Russia has decided to use nuclear weapon in Ukraine, says senior US official – as it happened

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## Economics

# Tory backer says UK economy is ‘frankly doomed’ without Brexit renegotiation

Guy Hands says Conservatives are putting country ‘on a path to be sick man of Europe’

- [\*\*Rishi Sunak to be UK PM - live news updates\*\*](#)
- [\*\*Rishi Sunak wins Tory leadership - full report\*\*](#)



Guy Hands says he is worried about increasing poverty in the UK.  
Photograph: Christopher Furlong/Getty Images

*[Joanna Partridge](#)*

Mon 24 Oct 2022 08.23 EDTFirst published on Mon 24 Oct 2022 04.11 EDT

The billionaire businessman Guy Hands has accused the [Conservatives](#) of putting the UK “on a path to be the sick man of Europe”, as he issued a series of stark predictions about what could lie ahead for the post-Brexit economy, including higher taxes and interest rates and fewer social services.

The founder and chair of the private equity firm Terra Firma, a longtime Tory supporter, called for the government to renegotiate [Brexit](#), stating that otherwise the British economy was “frankly doomed”.

The Conservative party needed to “move on from fighting its own internal wars and actually focus on what needs to be done in the economy”, Hands told Radio 4’s Today programme on Monday.



Guy Hands had called for Britain to remain in the EU before the referendum.  
Photograph: Bloomberg/Getty Images

Hands, who had [called for Britain to remain in the EU](#) before the referendum, accused the Tories of making errors since the 2016 vote.

The Guernsey-based financier said the party needed to start “admitting some of the mistakes they have made over the last six years, which have frankly put this country on a path to be the sick man of Europe”.

Hands said the prime minister, [Liz Truss](#), had attempted to follow the “dream” of Brexit and a “low-tax, low-benefit economy”, but this “clearly isn’t something which is acceptable to the British people”.

He said that despite Truss’s brief attempt at introducing tax cuts through her [ill-fated mini-budget](#), “the British people have never voted or even shown any inclination to vote for the extreme Thatcherism that Brexit needed”.

He continued: “Once you accept that you can’t actually do that, the Brexit that was done is completely hopeless and will only drive Britain into a disastrous economic state.”

Hands quit Britain and [moved to Guernsey](#) in 2009, enabling him to escape the [new 50% tax rate for high earners](#), since reduced to 45%. The Companies House website still lists his residence on the Channel island. At the time of the move he was one of the wealthiest people in Britain, with a fortune estimated at £200m.

On the day that Rishi Sunak is [expected to become Britain’s next prime minister](#), the third in less than two months, Hands called for a Tory leader with “the intellectual capability and the authority to renegotiate Brexit” and turn around the economy. “Without that, the economy is frankly doomed,” he said.

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Asked what this would mean for the country, Hands said that without a renegotiation of Brexit, Britain would face “steadily increasing taxes, steadily reducing benefits and social services, higher interest rates and

eventually the need for a bailout from the IMF [International Monetary Fund] like we were in the 70s.”

The financier, who estimated that 70% of his firm’s investments were in the UK, said he was worried about increasing poverty, including among “middle-class people” who would struggle to meet their mortgage payments amid rising interest rates.

Terra Firma is perhaps still best known for its multimillion-pound buyout of the British music group EMI at the height of the credit boom in 2007, which was subsequently loaded with debt.

The investment ended up in court after Hands brought a lawsuit against the American bank Citigroup, which was an adviser to EMI and lent Terra Firma money to fund the deal. Hands later withdrew the legal action and agreed to pay Citi’s costs.

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## Homelessness

# Hundreds more homeless families rehoused outside local area in England

Figures reveal more than 6,000 households moved more than 20 miles amid concerns over legality



Houses in Sneinton, Nottingham. The council's housing portfolio holder said it had limited options. Photograph: Jason Batterham/Alamy

*[Keith Cooper](#) and [Matthew Weaver](#)*

Mon 24 Oct 2022 01.00 EDT

Hundreds more homeless households across [England](#) are being uprooted and rehoused miles from their jobs and schools amid mounting concern about the legality of the practice and the number of lives it is disrupting.

Figures obtained by the Guardian under freedom of information (FoI) reveal more than 6,000 households were shunted more than 20 miles from their

local neighbourhood in out-of-area placements by 53 councils in the last four years. However, this is probably an underestimate given that the majority did not provide 2021-22 figures.

Nadia, a single mother of three, said she was treated “like cargo” after being moved three times and eventually ending up more than 20 miles from Crumpsall in north Manchester, where she grew up and her children had been thriving in school.

Anna and her three children from Nottingham have been placed in more than 20 B&B rooms across the Midlands including in Derby and Leicester since they became homeless in July. They even spent four nights in a friend’s camper van to avoid being placed in Lincoln – almost 50 miles from her children’s school. “I don’t know when it’s going to end – it feels there’s absolutely no hope,” she said.

Nadia and Anna are at the sharp end of a [practice that began in London](#) but is spreading, involving families being rehoused outside borough boundaries due to the acute shortage of homes.

While the overall number of out-of-area placements by non-London councils fell overall in the same period, the number of long-distance placements has grown.

Half of out-of-council placements outside the capital involved moves of more than 20 miles in 2020-21 compared with only a third in 2018-19. Ninety-seven placements made by non-London councils in 2020-21 were more than 50 miles away and 11 were more than 100 miles away, both up on previous years.

#### Total out-of-area placements of 20 miles or more away from origin council

The housing charity Shelter said the lack of affordable housing was making it difficult for councils to find suitable homes for homeless families. But it warned that out-of-area placements left councils open to legal challenge. Its chief executive, Polly Neate, said: “The law is clear that councils should

always try to keep homeless families within their local areas, and if they can't, they must make sure moving them doesn't cause disruption.

"In practice, we know this doesn't always happen and families are forced to uproot their entire lives and move away from jobs, schools and vital support networks, causing immense trauma."

In all, more than 32,000 outside-council placements have been made by 66 local authorities since 2018-19. However, the figure could be far higher given that dozens of councils did not respond to the targeted FoI requests to those councils known to carry out the practice.

Nadia said her children's mental health and education had suffered after being forced out of their school and local area when they became homeless in April 2018, due to a violent neighbour. "The support they had has just been ripped from them," she said. Nadia said her daughter and oldest son had a "very volatile relationship – there has just been this void and they have taken it out on each other".

She added: "If we had been able to stay in the school in Crumpsall, they would have been nourished children. And that's what hurts the most, I can't take the trauma of homelessness away from their memories."

Nadia said: "I thought Manchester council had a duty of care. But they said 'we can't do anything, you're going to have to change their school'."

Anna also felt her local council should do more to prevent disruption to her children's education. "I thought keeping the children in school would be a priority," she said.

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“The worst part is the extra costs. We’ve been living on sandwiches because there’s nowhere to prepare food in the B&Bs. I’ve lost quite a bit of weight because I’d rather feed my children and make sure they’re full before they go to school. It’s a nightmare,” she said.

“I have always lived near Nottingham city centre. If I am there I can sometimes take the children to my grandma’s for dinner, to ease the pressure on finances. But the council don’t seem to take that into account.”

### Journeys made out of London area

Nottingham city council’s portfolio holder for housing, Toby Neal, said the council was doing all it could to help Anna but it had limited options. He said: “This is a really unfortunate case and sadly it’s not the only one in Nottingham or around the country. Until we get a proper national strategic housing plan and proper funding, it is only going to get worse.”

Joanna Midgley, the deputy leader of Manchester city council, said Nadia had been found suitable permanent accommodation. She said: “We know that leading up to this Nadia was in temporary accommodation out of area, and although this is never ideal, there is an issue with the demands on temporary accommodation which means that sometimes we have to house people further away than we would like.

“Due to her individual circumstances, the concern for the family’s safety, and to mitigate the risks, the assessment was that it was not advisable that the children continue to attend their original school which was close to the home she had to leave.”

Distances were calculated between the location of the council making the placement and either the household’s new postcode or the receiving council’s postcode in the small number of cases where this was unavailable.

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

## [Law](#)

# Rees-Mogg move to axe 2,400 laws is ‘anti-democratic’, say legal experts

Laws that could disappear include ban on animal testing, workers’ rights and environmental protections

- [Rishi Sunak to be UK PM - live news updates](#)
- [Rishi Sunak wins Tory leadership - full report](#)



Laws will be changed on 31 December 2023 ‘without any scrutiny at all’, says George Peretz KC. Photograph: James Hoathly/Alamy

*Lisa O'Carroll Brexit correspondent  
@lisaocarroll*

Mon 24 Oct 2022 03.02 EDTFirst published on Mon 24 Oct 2022 01.00 EDT

Leading lawyers have sounded the alarm over Jacob Rees-Mogg's proposals for post-Brexit legislation that could result in 2,400 laws disappearing overnight – including a ban on animal testing for cosmetics, workers' rights and [environmental protections](#).

Lawyers including one former UK government legal official who designed the concept of EU-retained law for Theresa May branded the move as “anti-democratic” and “completely barking”.

Swathes of laws including equal pay for men and women, pension rights for same-sex married couples, food standards and aviation safety rules could accidentally disappear or be redrafted poorly, they warn.

The retained EU law (revocation and reform) bill will get its second reading on Tuesday. It was designed in such a way that 47 years of laws devised during EU membership will be switched off on 31 December 2023 under a so-called sunset clause.

“A lot of laws are going to be changed without any scrutiny at all by a dying government that few people respect,” said George Peretz KC, a specialist in European law.

The [Unison](#) general secretary, Christina McAnea, said: “This is a countdown to disaster for all working people. It would mean turning the clock back to Dickensian times when workers had no rights.

“In a financial crisis with a headless government, people need stability and support, not a bonfire of numerous employment rights.

“Ministers must act now to reassure everyone that hard-won protection won’t be shredded. A free-for-all giving the green light to unscrupulous bosses is not the route to economic growth.

“All of this is deeply objectionable on two grounds – it is anti-democratic and it is anti-growth,” said Peretz, pointing out that employers need legal certainty on employment laws, technical standards and other matters before expanding or investing.

“We are a democracy and we have a process of making law in parliament. People can write to their MPs, industry gets consulted, we have debates in the House of Commons and in the Lords. This is a completely anti-democratic process,” he added.

Eleonor Duhs, a partner at the City law firm Bates Wells and a former government lawyer who helped design the concept of retained EU law, said the government’s plans were completely at odds with May’s vision to remove EU laws with “full scrutiny and proper debate”.

The concept of retained law was created for a smooth transition, not as a target practice for Brexiters, she argued.

“This bill gives ministers powers to repeal and replace a vast body of what is now domestic law at speed and without proper scrutiny. This is unprecedented, reckless and undemocratic,” said Duhs.

She also raised questions about the use of precious legal drafting resources within Whitehall.

“It took over two years and a vast amount of civil service resource to draft over 600 pieces of legislation to get the statute book ready for Brexit. Those changes were technical and straightforward compared with the complexity of what will be required under this bill,” she said.

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“At a time when civil service resource is falling, the task of rewriting this vast body of law in a few short months appears impossible. Errors,

omissions and gaps in the law are inevitable.”

The notion that 2,400 laws could be expunged in little over a year was “completely barking”, said Peretz, but possible because of the “extraordinary power” the government was giving itself to push laws over the December 2023 cliff.

“There is no requirement anywhere on ministers to consult anybody. Under this bill, ministers can just let vital rights and protections for consumers, workers, the environment and animal welfare fall without parliament having any chance to stop that happening,” he said.

“This is nothing to do with whether you support Brexit or not. You can be a fanatical supporter of Brexit and still think this is not the right thing to do.

“All of this is being done in the most immense rush, and when you do things in a rush there is a risk that mistakes are made.”

The bill also gives ministers the powers to rewrite or “update” the rules, with no requirement to consult and at most only a two-hour debate in parliament to say yes or no, but, despite [promises from Rees-Mogg](#) that Brexit could mean higher standards than the EU’s, it does not confer power to improve standards and protections, but only to reduce them.

Environmental campaigners including Chris Packham have already sounded the alarm on the threat to disapply environmental rules protecting rare flora and fauna in the 38 new investment zones in England to enable “accelerated development”.

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**Business live****Business**

# Economic data shows UK faltering as Sunak set for No 10 – as it happened

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## 2022.10.24 - Spotlight

- Barbra Streisand It's the funniest thing to me that people still can't get my name right
- 'Would I really do cocaine before going on stage?' Lewis Capaldi on anxiety, Tourette's and stupid rumours
- Pan pipes, pinot noir and productivity The hidden power of music
- 'Everyone wants to get involved' Inside Operation Bluestone: a new police approach to tackling rape

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[Barbra Streisand](#)

[Interview](#)

## **Barbra Streisand: ‘It’s the funniest thing to me that people still can’t get my name right’**

[Jim Farber](#)



‘I was always the kid on the block who had no father but a good voice’ ...  
Barbra Streisand Photograph: CBS Photo Archive/CBS/Getty Images

In a rare interview discussing her music, the star details the highs and lows of her early career, the difficult transition into pop and how she rose above jabs at her appearance

Mon 24 Oct 2022 02.02 EDT Last modified on Tue 25 Oct 2022 14.03 EDT

On the night of 9 September 1960, an 18-year-old [Barbra Streisand](#) made her way through Greenwich Village to a tiny club called the Bon Soir to perform the first paid solo show of her career. “I remember walking to the club wearing an antique vest from the thrift shop and antique shoes from the 1920s that I still have in my closet today,” she recalled to the Guardian earlier this month. “On the way, I remember thinking, ‘this could be the beginning of a big change in my life.’”

That’s a mammoth understatement. The impact of Streisand’s performances at the Bon Soir – starting that night and continuing for the next two years – set in motion what would become one of the most successful, sustained, and in a sense, improbable careers in the history of popular music.

In the same time frame that artists like the Beatles and Bob Dylan revolutionized the world with startlingly new sounds, Streisand became their chart rival with albums that somehow made decades-old songs sound like a revolution of their own. Two years into her run at the Bon Soir, Columbia Records, the same company that had recently signed Dylan, had enough confidence in the singer to consent to a gutsy stipulation in her contract that she retain total artistic control. To capture the buzz Streisand had created in the Village, Columbia executives suggested she make her debut album a live recording from the club that launched her. Considering the power of the shows they recorded, she expected to be thrilled by the tapes. But “when I heard them, I was very disappointed”, she said. “I didn’t like the quality. That room wasn’t meant to be a recording studio.”

Consequently, Columbia shelved the album, releasing a studio recording as her debut instead. The result paid off big time, resulting in a top 10,

platinum-selling hit that also earned her two Grammys, including the album of the year award. Even so, dedicated fans have pined for decades to hear the legendary, shelved recording from the Bon Soir. Over the years, shoddy bootlegs have turned up, and in 1991, some of its songs appeared on Streisand's box set, Just for The Record. But even there the instruments bled into each other. Another three decades would pass before innovations in sound mixing would advance to the point where a gifted engineer – in this case, Joachim van der Saag – could achieve the proper balance. “After I heard Joachim’s mixes I was very, very pleased,” Streisand said.

As a result, in November, the Barbra Streisand at the Bon Soir album will finally be released, exactly 60 years after the original shows were recorded. While the new mixes allow the four instruments that backed Streisand on those nights to finally find their rightful place, “Barbra’s vocals were left untouched,” said the album’s co-producer, Jay Landers. “What you hear is exactly what she sang.”



Barbra Streisand at the Bon Soir Photograph: Don Hunstein / Columbia Records

In a nearly two-hour interview, conducted by phone, the singer talked about the motivations behind her early recordings – something she rarely does, in part because she is seldom asked. When you’re a mega-celebrity, people

sometimes overlook, or take for granted, the essential talent that made you that famous to begin with. Despite her stratospheric fame, Streisand was anything but a diva in conversation. She spoke genially and with the casual cadences that betray her Brooklyn roots. Streisand's memory of her early days in Brooklyn, as well as her formative musical inspirations, have been sharpened in the last few years which she has spent writing her memoir. "I never had to analyze my music before," she said. "For the book I had to remember."

Her memories of singing snake back to age five. "I was always the kid on the block who had no father but a good voice," she said. (Streisand's dad died of an epileptic seizure when she was just one). "I loved singing in my hallway in Brooklyn because it had a high ceiling so when I would sing it would echo."

Streisand said she didn't listen to music at all as a kid. "I never even had a Victrola, as we called them back then," she said with a laugh. At 16, she acquired one and began to play jazz albums, prizing work by Billie Holiday in particular. She was drawn as well to the style of Johnny Mathis. "I remember watching him on TV and thinking, 'God, what a beautiful voice he has, and how handsome!'" she said.

Even so, she had no interest in becoming a recording artist herself, instead focusing laser-like on becoming an actor. After seeing The Diary of Anne Frank at age 14 – she was the same age and religion as the title character – Streisand started attending professional acting classes and working in summer stock. "Playing characters was my life, my ambition, my dream," she said.

At the same time, friends began to recognize the size, depth and beauty of her singing voice. Key to that was Barry Dennen, whose Village apartment she would crash in so she wouldn't have to schlep home to Brooklyn after acting class. It's often been reported that they were romantically involved. "That's not true," said Streisand. "We loved each other as people, but we weren't lovers. I was grateful that he had this vast record collection with a lot of Broadway cast albums and older singers. What a gift!"

From his collection, she drew much of the material that would comprise her early set lists. The song that best defined her mission in singing was A Sleepin' Bee, with music by Harold Arlen and lyrics by Truman Capote for the 1954 musical House of Flowers. "The lyrics to that song gave me the three acts of a play that I longed for as an actress," she said. "And Harold was one of those writers who could write these magnificent melodies. That gave me what I needed."



"The lyrics to that song [A Sleepin' Bee] gave me the three acts of a play that I longed for as an actress," Streisand said. Photograph: Don Hunstein / Columbia Records

Small wonder she chose to perform the song in a singing contest that Dennen nudged her to enter at The Lion, a gay bar in the Village. Streisand won and, at the urging of another friend, she tried out for a gig at the Bon Soir that led to a run of dates opening for comic Phyllis Diller. Not that everything clicked for her so easily. The Village Vanguard turned her down when she auditioned for them. Worse, her try-out incurred a rebuke from Miles Davis. A friend of hers who worked at the Vanguard asked the guys in Davis' band to back her for the audition, which angered the jazz great. "He said to him, 'never do that again!'" Streisand recalled. "'You took my guys and had them play for this girl?' I'll never forget that."

At the start of the Bon Soir recording, we hear her strongest champion at Columbia Records, David Kapralik, mispronounce her name in the introduction as Barbra “Strei-zand.” “It’s Strei-sand,” she tartly interjects. “It’s the funniest thing to me that people still can’t seem to get my name right,” she said. “Even today, I had to correct my new assistant.”

The material that follows Kapralik’s introduction demonstrates Streisand’s flair for unearthing rare musical curios, including the 1938 Rodgers and Hart song I’ll Tell the Man in The Street and, from the same year, the Disney ditty Who’s Afraid of the Big Bad Wolf? a children’s song no adult thought to cover before. Some of the songs she tackled in the show, like 1928’s Lover, Come Back to Me, required her to sing at what you could call a breath-defying pace, an early point of distinction. “I never thought about breath control,” Streisand said. “I never thought about anything! I didn’t know technically how to sing from the diaphragm or whatever the hell they talk about.”

She simply seemed to have the innate ability to sustain notes for daunting lengths. “I hold the notes because I want to!” she declared.

Likewise, Streisand said she never gave a thought to her diction, despite phrasings that cut as sharp as a Ginsu knife. “If I do that, it’s probably because of the lyric,” she said. “I want to emphasize the emotion with a sound.” Mainly, her focus fell on the character portrayed in the song. “I was always thinking, ‘what is this person going through?’” she said.

Exhibit A would be the single from the Bon Soir set, Cry Me A River. Seven years earlier, the song had been a smash for Julie London in a deeply sultry version. Streisand’s take leaned into the character’s lust for vengeance, delivering each word like a stab to the heart. “I’m recreating the face of someone who made me cry a river,” she said. “Now I’m saying, ‘you’ll cry a river over *me!*’ It’s very personal.”

Still, the song that earned the most recognition from the audience at the Bon Soir was her full-scale tear-down of Happy Days Are Here Again, a signature piece she performs to this day. Her version transformed the song from a peppy declaration to a slow, sad ballad, rife with irony. She came to

the song through an act of fate – or, as she terms it, “bashert,” the Yiddish word for destiny. It struck when she was preparing to appear on Garry Moore’s TV Show. “Every week they would pick a year and then the singer had to sing a song from it,” she recalled. “They picked 1929. So, I thought why not take Happy Days and slow it down? Then I could talk about the stock market crash through the song.”

To accomplish that, she had writers add a verse about a woman who lost her money in the crash and then goes to a bar to trade her jewelry for a drink. “That made it worthwhile for me to *act* the song,” she said.

One of the most impassioned performances on her debut was a cover of A Taste of Honey, a song the Beatles also recorded one month later. Yet, so focused was Streisand’s attention on her lane that she paid no attention either to the Beatles or Dylan, even though the latter was playing just blocks away from her in the Village at the time. “I appreciate them now, but I didn’t understand it then,” she said. “It wasn’t a part of my life.”

Her tunnel vision paid off when she brought the work of writers like Oscar Hammerstein and Cole Porter to the pop charts at a most unlikely time. “It was so old, it was new,” she cracked.

In that phase of her career, Streisand didn’t only go against the trends in music, she also challenged conventional notions of female beauty in an era when few did. It was her friend, the illustrator and make-up artist Bob Schulenberg, whose drawings of her “made me aware of what was beautiful about my face, which I wasn’t aware of at all”, she said.

Schulenberg wasn’t alone in noticing her allure. When fashion legend Diana Vreeland put Streisand on the cover of Vogue, she chose a shot that focused on the singer’s prominent nose, a watershed moment for many women’s self-image. “I was thrilled about that!” the singer said. Before that, “I was called embarrassing names.” One critic compared her profile to an anteater’s. “Another critic said I looked like the Egyptian queen Nefertiti,” Streisand said, laughing. “I thought, really? Maybe I’m both!”



Streisand didn't only go against the trends in music, she also challenged conventional notions of female beauty. Photograph: GAB Archive/Redferns

Streisand was equally bold in her approach to genre. For her 1973 TV special, *Barbra Streisand and Other Musical Instruments*, she performed with musicians from Africa, Turkey and Spain, helping to pioneer “world music” years before Paul Simon did. By that time, however, the popularity of new rock and pop had become too powerful to ignore, so her label chief, Clive Davis, urged her to start recording songs written by artists like Lennon and McCartney and Paul Simon.

Streisand admits that the transition was “very hard”. After all, everything about songwriting had changed from the era she was used to. Streisand’s first attempt to tackle such things on the 1969 album *What About Today?* was at times “unfortunate” in her words. Her second try, *Stoney End*, fared far better, benefitting from the dramatic sweep of the title track penned by the Broadway-savvy songwriter Laura Nyro. It resulted in one of Streisand’s biggest hits. Though she called getting the hit “a wonderful surprise”, her struggle with new pop continued. When her producer Richard Perry told her to sing on the beat, she shot back, “why do I have to? I never did that! I back phrased. I front phrased. I did whatever the hell I did.”

Even so, she wound up racking up even more hits in her “modern” era than in her earlier, wilder one, reaching a career peak with 1980’s Guilty album, produced by Barry Gibb. It told over 12m copies worldwide. Still, she admits she didn’t understand Gibb’s words in the title song. “It wasn’t a lyric I was used to, that had continuity to it,” she said. “It was abstract. I don’t like abstract.”

She was more comfortable returning to the classics, as she did in 1985 with The Broadway Album. According to the singer, her record company considered the Broadway concept so uncommercial they didn’t even want to count it towards her contract. It wound up selling over 4m copies in the US alone. Gorgeous and graceful as that album may have been, it veered from the sheer radicalism of her ’60s work. As such, those early albums remain perhaps the most adventurous of her career.

More, on works dating back to the Bon Soir recording, we can hear the formation of her process. Not that Streisand herself can tell you exactly what that process is. “So much of what I do is just something I hear in my head,” she said, as if in apology. “I have to get what I hear out. I can’t explain how and why. It comes out of my head or my throat and then, suddenly, it’s just ... *there*.”

This article was amended on 24 October 2022 because “bashert” is a Yiddish, not Hebrew, word. In addition, an earlier version misspelled Garry Moore as Gary Moore, and “Rogers and Hart” has been corrected to Rodgers and Hart.

- Barbra Streisand at the Bon Soir is releasing on 4 November
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## **‘Would I really do cocaine before going on stage?’ Lewis Capaldi on anxiety, Tourette’s and stupid rumours**

[Alexis Petridis](#)



Capaldi: ‘I don’t have this sort of artistic desire to go off and reinvent myself.’ Photograph: Alexandra Gavillet

He’s had No 1s on both sides of the Atlantic, won two Brits and been nominated for a Grammy – but has kept his old friends and still looks for dates on Tinder. The reluctant superstar talks about mental health, fame and his new album



Mon 24 Oct 2022 01.00 EDT Last modified on Fri 28 Oct 2022 06.11 EDT

In March 2020, just before the UK went into lockdown, Lewis Capaldi played the biggest gigs of his career, a string of shows around Britain’s arenas. The tickets had sold out in 60 seconds: sometimes demand was such that he ended up playing the country’s biggest venues two nights on the trot. It was supposed to be the crowning glory of an extraordinary 12 months during which Capaldi had rocketed from the ranks of earnest, dressed-down, acoustic-guitar-toting singer-songwriters who had proliferated in the wake of Ed Sheeran’s success – “[the ordinary boys](#)”, as this publication called them – to become a huge star.

His single *Someone You Loved* entered the charts in 29 countries and spent seven weeks at No 1 in Britain. His debut album, *Divinely Uninspired to a Hellish Extent*, became the UK’s biggest-selling album of 2019, a feat it

would repeat in 2020. He won two Brits and was nominated for a Grammy, *Someone You Loved* having also gone to No 1 in the US, making him the first Scottish artist to top the US charts since Sheena Easton in 1981.

I met him in Chicago at the end of 2019, and he talked about what had happened with the forthcoming shows in a tone of disbelief. “I’ve gone from doing two nights at Barrowlands in Glasgow to 4,000 people,” he said, “to two nights at a 16,000-capacity arena.”

The arena gigs did not turn out as expected. Capaldi had panic attacks on stage, an experience he characterised as suddenly “feeling mental” while performing. He started to develop a twitch that, at its mildest, caused his left shoulder to jerk upwards and, at its most extreme, made his whole upper body twist around. It was subsequently diagnosed as Tourette syndrome.

“When I look back on it, it makes sense,” he says now. “I’m like: of course you were terrified – they were the biggest shows of your life. I was seeing how big things had actually become, and I was like: ‘Oh fuck.’ And the first two nights of the shows were at the [Glasgow] Hydro. It doesn’t get more stressful than that: two home town shows to kick the thing off. If you stand in the middle of the Hydro, it’s a fucking coliseum.”

### Capaldi singing *Someone You Loved*

In fairness, Capaldi had regularly talked about experiencing anxiety before, while he was promoting *Divinely Uninspired to a Hellish Extent*, even setting aside a space at his gigs so that others at risk of anxiety or panic attacks could attend in relative comfort. But perhaps it got overlooked, crowded out by the alternately bluff and self-deprecating persona he projects online and on stage – where what he calls his “blether” between songs can last noticeably longer than the songs themselves.

By common consent, he is the most skilled practitioner of social media among modern pop stars, his Instagram and Twitter feeds unfailingly hilarious subversions of the heavily retouched perfection peddled by influencers (recent posts: Capaldi posing coquettishly on a bed with the trophy you get when your single goes to No 1, naked except for a pair of

underpants and his socks; Capaldi shovelling pizza and beer into his mouth with the caption “hit 20m streams in less than two weeks on Spotify and also lost my virginity so tonight we celebrate”).

This time, however, the Tourette syndrome made his anxiety visible. He struggled to play guitar. A reviewer at Wembley Arena noticed it – “he is deeply weird, a fidgety misfit” – and so did fans online. The general consensus was that Capaldi was off his head on cocaine. “Someone was tweeting: ‘He was definitely on drugs, the way he was moving and the way he was talking.’ I’m like: I’m already an anxious person. Do you really think I’m going to smash loads of cocaine before I go and stand in front of 12,000 people? This isn’t the fucking 70s. I’m not Tommy Lee. I can’t handle that. And people on cocaine are usually bodily quite chilled. They just chat shit.” He laughs. “I mean, I do that a lot as well.”



Capaldi performs at the Irving Plaza in New York in June 2019. Photograph: Larry Busacca/Getty Images for Capitol Records

He says the announcement of lockdown came as a strange relief. After the arena gigs, he was supposed to tour the US, supporting former One Direction star Niall Horan, then play a series of festivals and he “didn’t want to go”. Instead, he returned to his parents’ home in Bathgate in West

Lothian, and started writing songs for his second album, *Broken By Desire to Be Heavenly Sent*, which is due out next May.

On *The One Show*, they apologised for me saying I was ‘chuffed to buggery’. I didn’t even know that counted as swearing

I meet him in an annexe to a plush hotel in Motherwell, where he and his band are already rehearsing the album for the world tour to accompany its release. He is, as he puts it, “cautiously optimistic” about its chances, his mood buoyed up by the fact that the first single from it, *Forget Me*, entered the charts at No 1.

His star shows little sign of waning: he spent the week before our meeting cutting a distinctive swathe through a succession of high-profile live television appearances, a string of apologies from their hosts for his famously robust language trailing in his wake (Capaldi is, by some distance, rock music’s premier swearer, a state of affairs that, it should be pointed out, has nothing to do with Tourette syndrome). “On *The One Show*, they apologised for me saying I was ‘chuffed to buggery’ about the single doing well. I didn’t even know that counted as swearing,” he says with a frown. They got off lightly: the last time I interviewed him, he said the word “fuck” 243 times in 90 minutes.

“I do feel pressure, I absolutely feel it,” he says of his return. “I felt it a lot during the recording and writing processes of the album but, at the end of the day, I think I have to just cut myself a bit of slack: all you can do in this situation is write the best songs you can and kind of remember this is supposed to be fun. I know there’s money at stake now and the label are kind of keen to make money off the record, and there’s people who are watching and waiting for this album. Even people who think you’re shite are waiting for it to come out so they can be, like: ‘I fucking told you he was shite all along.’ I’m trying to go easy on myself a little bit with it.”

He is also bullish about the fact that its contents largely fit with the formula that made his debut such a success: *Forget Me* is upbeat, but for the most part, it deals in big, heart-rending ballads, along the lines of *Someone You*

Loved. “All in all, the album’s the same. I like making this music; it’s done all right in the past,” he says with a shrug.

“I don’t have this sort of artistic desire to go off and reinvent myself. Not at all. I feel like the same person, so why would I be searching for something new? I was very conscious about not writing an album about being famous, being successful. No one wants to hear: ‘Oh, I’m famous and my life’s shit and I’m crying in my big house.’ I don’t want to inflict that on people, especially now, when people are actually going through some real shit: complaining about being famous, ‘Oh, my fucking Bentley has a flat tyre.’



Lewis Capaldi at Usher Hall, Edinburgh, in December 2019. Photograph: Roberto Ricciuti/Redferns

“When I was writing the record, Covid was happening, everyone was in their houses, so my lived experience at that time was the same four walls, with my family, stuck in the same place I grew up – I was quite literally right back where I was on the first record. If anything, getting famous and all the rest of it has made me sort of run back to my home town and my family and friends and stuff, all these sort of grounding things.”

Indeed, Capaldi, 26, looks more or less the same as he did when I met him three years ago: he is a little stockier, his hair is longer, but whatever he has

been spending the proceeds from his debut album on, it visibly isn't a designer makeover. He says his friends are still essentially the same people he hung around with before his success, people who have nothing to do with music: Kyle the joiner, Michael the gravedigger, his flatmate Niall, and Conor, who it turns out is in chart-topping dance duo LF System, but "used to be a roofer".

When Capaldi's career started to take off, Sheeran took him aside and offered a succession of dire warnings about fame. "He said: 'Has your family started getting weird yet? Have there been any sort of fringe members of your family started to get weird with you?' I said no. And he goes: 'What about your friends?' and I said no, and he goes: 'That'll happen.' It was like the most doomsday conversation I've ever had in my life. Cheers, Ed – that's really peped me up. He said: 'Fame doesn't change you; it changes everyone around you.'

"I have experienced that for sure, but it's obviously not been as intense as it was for him. I'm very suspicious of people anyway. It comes from my father." He laughs. "My dad hates *everyone* until they prove themselves: 'Ah, I like him.' If I'm going on a date with a wee girl, he's like: 'What does she do? Why's she going out with *you*?' He's very cautious and protective and it's kind of bled down to me."

In fact, he says, dating is one area of his life that fame has made a bit weird. He got kicked off Tinder because someone thought he was impersonating [Lewis Capaldi](#). "Yeah, they thought I was catfishing. If I was going to catfish any celebrity, it wouldn't be me. You can't get many bites on a Lewis Capaldi Tinder account, and I know that, because I own one. I just try to be as normal as possible with it. Being on Hinge and being on Tinder – a normal 26-year-old guy would be on Hinge. So, for my own sanity, and to meet people, I need to be on these things. But then you have to worry about this sort of power imbalance. I have to assume that most girls my age, in the UK or Scotland at least, have a passing familiarity with who I am, even if they're not into me, so that makes things weird. It's an odd dynamic, where they'll at least have an idea of what I'm like, but I know nothing about them.

I've got medical cannabis, sertraline for my anxiety, I've done therapy. But, so far, none of it has worked

“On the other hand, we’ve seen so many men take advantage of their positions of power and their positions of influence. I don’t want to take advantage of my position in that way. I’m happier being used than using someone, do you know what I mean?”

A tight bunch of old friends, aware of his celebrity but unaffected by it: Capaldi seems about as well-adjusted a twentysomething multimillionaire pop star as you could wish to meet. There is just one problem: his Tourette’s is still visibly raging. He thinks he has always had it, but just didn’t realise. “When I was four being tucked into bed, I would ask my mum if she’d locked the door, over and over again. I don’t know what four-year-old is that concerned with home security. But I never used to go to sleep because I was so worried about it. When I was a wee kid, I used to think I was ill all the time. I was convinced I had a brain tumour all my life. When I look back now and see things I did that kind of came and went, I realise they were tics.”

Recently, he has played a few gigs and they went fine; at the moment, interviews seem to bring it on, “which is strange, because before interviews were fine. After we do this, I’ll probably have a lie down in a dark room for 20 minutes, do some breathing and I’ll be grand.” When it is at its worst, he says, it stops him sleeping “and then when I’m tired, it’s worse, and when I’m stressed it’s worse. Sometimes it’s not stress, but the anticipation of something. When I’m doing TV it’s really bad. Waiting to go on, I’ll think: ‘Fuck, I can’t handle this – I need to leave.’ Then I go on and it’s fine. In traffic: fucking awful – it’s the worst. It’s just the fucking maddest thing.”

He has tried everything, to no avail. “I’ve got medical cannabis, sertraline for my anxiety, I’ve done CBIT therapy [Comprehensive Behavioural Intervention for Tics], where they try to change where your tic is to something less invasive or more obstructing. But for me, so far, none of it has worked. I’m still learning a lot about it: I don’t know too much and that’s on me – I need to do my due diligence a bit. But right now, I don’t want to take on too much about it. Because if learning about this fucking thing is going to make me more stressed about it ... I mean, I’ll tell you what works – eating well, exercising, therapy, not boozing as much. I need to be mindful of that.

“And, to be fair, I go through phases: I’ll do two months, no booze, eating well, going to the gym and I’ll lose a bit of weight, feel grand and then think: ‘This is boring – I need to blow off some steam.’ So I go out at the weekend, and then the week after, think, ‘I don’t feel like I really got it out of my system’ and have four weeks where I go out every weekend. Which is normal, but for my body, it doesn’t work. What I need to do is find some balance in my life.”

There are moments when he has wondered if he would ever get on stage again – “and I still get that from time to time now. I’ve got two shows in Switzerland the week after next and I’m thinking: ‘Fuck, I hope my twitch just doesn’t kick in.’ It’s always at the back of my thoughts.”

Under the circumstances, it’s hard not to wonder aloud if all this – a new album, the expectations around it, interviews, a world tour – is really the best thing for him. The thing is, he says, he would probably be like this even if he weren’t a pop star. “It’s been a big contributing factor with my anxiety, but at the end of the day, it all comes down to the same insecurities, fear of not living up to something, impostor syndrome, which my friends have who work in finance or whatever. So it is to do with success, but you can boil it down to these really human feelings and thoughts.”

Besides, he insists, it is not as if anyone is forcing him. He would have cancelled the US tour in March 2020 even if the pandemic hadn’t happened. If it gets too much, he will do the same thing. “I have no qualms whatsoever about pulling the plug on things like that, and neither does anyone around me. If I’m on stage twitching and having a panic attack, it’s not just a traumatic experience for me – it’s more traumatic for the people around me. So I feel massively supported. I don’t feel obliged to just fucking push through, you know what I mean?”

*Lewis Capaldi’s Broken By Desire to Be Heavenly Sent is out on 19 May 2023 on EMI.*

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## Pan pipes, pinot noir and productivity: the hidden power of music



A variety of listening devices old and new, one of the displays at Turn It Up: The power of music, at the museum of science and industry in Manchester.  
Photograph: Christopher Thomond/The Guardian

What song sounds like strawberries? Can the right playlist relieve pain? And why does classical music make us spend money? A fascinating new show tries to answer all these questions and more



### [Stephen Moss](#)

Mon 24 Oct 2022 05.08 EDT Last modified on Mon 24 Oct 2022 06.48 EDT

I'm always happy to talk about my taste in music, but what about the taste *of* music? A new exhibition at [Manchester's Science and Industry Museum](#) is asking visitors to match certain types of music with tastes. Does this sound sweet, sour, bitter, salty?

Ridiculous, you might think, and as I listen to each of the sounds – screechy, plinkety-plonky, lush, mournful – initially I am reluctant to make my selections, fearing ridicule in front of curator Steven Leech. But then something magical happens: the screechy music does indeed suddenly bring to mind bitter lemons and the lush sounds do conjure up strawberries.

Leech's music-meets-food exhibit is a fun way of interpreting a serious piece of research by [Charles Spence](#), head of the Crossmodal Research Laboratory at Oxford University. It is the model for much of this new exhibition, [Turn It Up](#), which takes the research being done into the effects

of music at universities across the world and tries to make it accessible to a general audience.



Does music affect the way we shop?

“The exhibition is about the way music affects our bodies and minds, and drives us to innovate, create and share,” says Leech. “We did some audience testing and found that the majority of the people, unless they played an instrument or could read music, felt ‘unmusical’ – ignoring the ubiquity of music in their lives and its centrality in our culture.” He aims to show that in fact almost everyone is musical and has an emotional response to what they hear.

The exhibition is in two halves. The first looks at the innate human urge to create music and where our ingenuity and technological innovation have led. This section draws on objects, displaying a weird and wonderful collection of musical instruments, listening devices from ancient gramophones to the iPhone, and new tech that allows disabled musicians to make music. It also charts ongoing experiments with artificial intelligence.

In western music there are associations between major keys and happiness, and minor keys and sadness. But that is not universal

“The homeward-bound half is more reflective, thinking about the effect music has on us as individuals,” says co-curator Emily Scott-Dearing. We are programmed to respond to musical tropes – though whether as a result of cultural conditioning or something innate is far from clear. One exhibit demonstrates that a lullaby has certain musical qualities which are universally felt. Conversely, our brains are programmed to react adversely to dissonance. But Scott-Dearing insists cultural conditioning plays a part too. “In western music there are associations between major keys and happiness, and minor keys and sadness,” she explains, “but that is not universal across all music systems.”



Music doesn't have to be soporific to help cure insomnia.

Music's ability to relax us is well attested – Classic FM has built its entire marketing pitch around it – and Turn It Up looks at ways it is used for medical purposes, not least to treat dementia sufferers. “Manchester Camerata has a project called Music in Mind, which runs group music therapy sessions in care homes,” says Scott-Dearing, “and there was a study that found a significant reduction in medication use.” Music was taking the place of drugs in reducing agitation and distress among patients.

Work is under way to produce an app which would allow this musical immersion treatment to be given remotely. Leech says the aim is to produce

individualised “prescription playlists” that use sensors to track a patient’s mood through the day, and play pain-relieving songs when needed.

Music has other measurable effects on us. One study has shown that supermarkets playing generic French or German music in their wine aisles – think accordions and oompah bands – affects the amount of wine they sell from those countries. Consumers don’t have to know what they are listening to; they subliminally absorb the musical message and buy accordingly.

Playing generic French or German music in supermarket’s wine aisle affects the amount of wine sold from those countries

Other research suggests playing classical music in commercial environments makes consumers spend more money. “We have value associations that we put on music,” says Scott-Dearing, “and classical music is seen as high end.” Professor Adrian North has demonstrated that playing classical music rather than muzak or pop in a cafe can boost sales by 20%. Another study has shown that classical music encourages shoppers to buy luxury items, whereas country music prompts more utilitarian purchases.

Fast music, meanwhile, makes you shop more quickly. That also explains why tunes by marching bands are sometimes played at London’s Waterloo station – to stop commuters lingering on the concourse. Underground stations also play soothing music to boost commuter well-being and encourage calm behaviour in situations that can become stressful.



Does listening to music while we work help or hinder productivity?

Can listening to music combat insomnia? My faith in whether sleep playlists work was somewhat undermined by learning at Turn It Up that one of the most common songs used by insomniacs is the dance track Dynamite by [South Korean boy band BTS](#). But music to fall asleep to doesn't have to be soporific, Leech explains; familiarity can be more important. "If [music] makes you feel more comfortable and takes you to a different place, it can get you more prepared for sleep," he says.

The exhibition draws on the work of sleep researcher Kira Vibe Jespersen, though her findings offer no magic bullet for insomniacs. She has shown that playing music does not objectively improve your sleeping patterns, but can make you *believe* you have slept better, compared with, say, using audiobooks.

Memory is another key theme of the show. Sometimes music triggers personal memories that become more important than the sound itself. [Desert Island Discs](#) demonstrates that week in, week out, playing the pieces that have become signposts in a person's life. And that we set such store by the music played at the funerals of loved ones is no accident: it can encapsulate an attitude to life.

Turn It Up tries to answer many questions. Some are broad and quasi-philosophical. How does the brain process music? Why does it trigger memory? Why does it make us dance? Others are more practical.

What music, for instance, is best for a call centre to use while callers are on hold? Pleasant tunes without lyrics that appear to have no beginning and no end – callers don't like to be reminded of the passage of time while they are hanging on. One experiment showed that they were more likely to stay on the line if the music was a version of Yesterday played on pan pipes, rather than the version with Paul McCartney singing it. His much-loved rendition made callers too attentive; zombification is the key here.

So does listening to music while we work help or hinder productivity? The answer depends on what you are doing: it helps with mechanical tasks but is distracting if you are carrying out complex cognitive tasks.

And what is the safest music to listen to while driving? Heavy metal surprisingly. Just joking – ballads are best.

*[Turn It Up: The Power of Music](#) is at the Science and Industry Museum, Manchester, until 21 May*

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## Rape and sexual assault

# ‘Everyone wants to get involved’: inside a new police approach to tackling rape

Operation Bluestone aims to put suspects at centre of investigations while better supporting victims



‘We need to empower people to feel confident and trust us’: DCI Richard Horsfall at Bridgwater police centre. Photograph: Sam Frost/The Guardian



Alexandra Topping

Mon 24 Oct 2022 02.00 EDT

At 8am, in the glass and steel police centre in Bridgwater, Somerset, DI Richard Horsfall takes a swig from an enormous mug of tea and kicks off the team briefing. “Right then, let’s get going,” he says. “We’ve got a lot to get through.”

Three reports of rape have been made overnight. A man is in custody, and in little more than 12 hours he will have to be charged or released. “The clock is ticking,” says Horsfall. “It’s going to be a busy day.”

This is Operation Bluestone. Its “Al Capone” approach to catching rapists puts suspects – not victims’ credibility – at the centre of investigations, say police, and aims to “disrupt” them by whatever legal means possible.

Over two days, the Guardian was given exclusive insight into the workings of Bluestone, as well access to new data, the academics behind it, the people supporting victims, and the national police lead at its vanguard.

The project – part of a wider police and Crown Prosecution Service (CPS) operation called Operation Soteria, after the goddess of safety and

deliverance from harm – aims to tackle a [crisis in rape prosecutions](#), which fell by 64% between 2016 and 2020 against a backdrop of record reports in England and Wales.

The government's response in its [rape review](#), published last year, resulted in the £6.65m pilot, kicked off in Avon and Somerset and extended to 18 forces. A Home Office report on its first year is due imminently, and a new police model for dealing with rape is expected by June next year.

Eighteen months after the scheme's inception in Avon and Somerset, the force says it is beginning to see “green shoots” of change. Before Bluestone, it ranked 40th out of 43 forces for its performance on tackling rape and sexual assault. Now it has risen to 22nd. Its charge rate has tripled, from 3% to 10%, according to internal analysis from the force. Officers are arresting suspects at twice the rate – an average of 45 a month in 2022, up from 26 a month in 2021.

“It is still rubbish,” Det Supt Ed Yaxley, Bluestone’s research lead, says bluntly. “Let’s be honest, 90% of our cases still don’t end up in court. I don’t think anyone within Bluestone thinks of this as something to be crowing about. But the data is telling us that this is the start of something really important.”

In the police offices, the new way of working is in full swing. Two “disruption officers”, whose job is to focus on the suspect in the case, are about to leave to interview a man. Two women have gone to a sexual assault referral centre, and an “engagement officer”, who interviews and supports victims, has set off to meet them. Details of suspects in all the reports from the previous night have been checked against police databases to see if they have previously been reported or have an offending history.

While that may sound like the type of basic procedures that should happen for every rape allegation, multiple [reports](#), dozens of experts – including the [former victims’ commissioner](#) – and thousands of [rape victims](#) attest that this is very often not the case.



Fiona Datoo and Amanda Truscott, two engagement officers in Avon and Somerset police. Photograph: Sam Frost/The Guardian

As part of Operation Soteria, academics carry out intrusive deep dives into forces' data – as well as case reviews, surveys and endless conversations – to find out exactly what has been going wrong, says Betsy Stanko, one of the operation's academic architects. Their findings across the first five forces to join the pilot were bleak.

"Basically, we found that investigation units were really victim credibility units," she says. "Officers weren't talking to suspects, they didn't know how many repeat offenders they had, their relationships with victims was bad, they weren't using their data and information."

After the deep dive, academics help officers change in six key areas, known as pillars: focusing on suspects, disrupting repeat offenders, engaging with victims, learning and development and officer wellbeing, data and digital forensics.

In Avon and Somerset, academics found that 60% of rape suspects were repeat offenders and a quarter were repeat sexual offenders. Often this was not picked up, and sometimes suspects were not questioned for months.

Now, officers interview suspects at the earliest opportunity and look for evidence of grooming, coercion and exploitation, says Sarah Crew, the Avon and Somerset chief constable and the National [Police Chiefs' Council's](#) (NPCC) lead on rape. If they are deemed a threat to the public, officers try to “disrupt” them through a range of methods such as sexual risk or sexual harm prevention orders or checking for driving disqualifications.

“Otherwise known as the Al Capone approach,” says Crew. “I think all of that is sending a message to a perpetrator that actually this behaviour is not risk-free for you. We’re watching you.”

But disruption is only part of the picture – it has to be accompanied by victim support, says Crew. In April, a Home Office select committee [report](#) said the trauma of investigations and delays ([an average of 706 days](#) for rape cases, more than twice the average for other crimes) contributed to the high proportion of cases (63% between July and September 2021) that were dropped because victims pulled out.

Through the charity [Safe Link](#), which supports survivors of rape and sexual assault, the Guardian meets Rosie (not her real name), who recently reported a historical rape to Avon and Somerset police after a decade of building up her courage.

In the Georgian townhouse that houses the charity in Bristol, she says the experience was traumatic – and surreal – as she had to outline her case in a busy waiting room of a police station. But since meeting her engagement officer a few weeks later, she has felt “safe, heard”.

“Without that, I wouldn’t have stuck with this,” she says. “I knew it was going to be hard, but I didn’t really understand how harrowing it would be.”

Sitting alongside her, often holding her hand, is her independent sexual violence adviser, Tina Decadenet. A woman you might suspect does not suffer fools gladly, Decadenet describes feeling like a “nuisance” for years. “You were constantly trying to get in contact with them [police], constantly emailing and you’d get nothing back – even though you knew they’d read it because you’d put a receipt on it,” she says.

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Now emails are returned, calls answered, she says. “It makes you feel like you’re actually doing a really good job, and helping victims as quickly as possible. That’s worth its weight in gold.”

Police are talking differently, too, says Nicola Shannon, a service manager for [The Bridge](#), a sexual assault referral centre in Bristol. They use “reflective practice” – where colleagues assess each other’s work – and talk about being “trauma-informed”. “I’m really hopeful that with Bluestone there will be a growing understanding that the best outcome should be the wellbeing of the victim. First and foremost,” she says.



One of Avon and Somerset police's 'achieving better evidence' suites.  
Photograph: Sam Frost/The Guardian

At the Bridgwater police centre, Horsfall explains that dealing sensitively with victims isn't just about doing the right thing, but about building better cases. This might mean delaying a victim's first interview, making sure they are picked up in an unmarked car, telling them they are believed.

Is he concerned that critics will argue that a starting point of belief could lead to false accusations (despite the fact that the CPS says false accusations are rare, and data suggesting a man is more likely to be raped than falsely accused of being a rapist)?

"We have to investigate impartially and assess evidence neutrally," says Horsfall. "But we also need to empower people to feel confident and trust us – because that's how we get our best evidence. And, you know, on a human level, just saying 'we believe you' is the right thing to do. I don't think we should be criticised for that."

Avon and Somerset had a specialist rape team more than a decade ago, but it was disbanded during the years of austerity, when police forces lost 20,000 officers, 15% of their number. The same thing happened in dozens of forces across England and Wales.

In Avon and Somerset, much of the post-2020 police uplift has been reinvested in tackling rape, and an additional 119 roles have been created. But other forces are under no obligation to do the same.

Another key element in the uptick in arrests and charges in Avon and Somerset is an improvement in its relationship with the CPS, according to multiple officers. Police sought "early advice" from prosecutors an average of 24 times a month in 2022, up from just three time a month in 2020, according to the force.

The CPS (which saw a 25% budget cut and a 30% reduction in staff during austerity) has been accused of being increasingly risk-averse in its charging decisions in recent years, including by police.

Vicky Gleave, the head of the rape and serious sexual offences unit in CPS South West, says that in her experience there was a “disconnection” between police and prosecutors, not open hostility. “For me, the challenge is trying to have that personal connection between the two teams to generate that level of trust,” she says. “Down here, we’ve been able to achieve that.”

The [rape review](#) ordered police and prosecutors to work together to return prosecutions to 2016 levels before the end of this parliament. In the last quarter, the south-west region hit that target. “I have to accept that I feel pleased,” says Gleave. “But I also think we still know where we’re at and where we need to be – and we have to be better.”

While national statistics are also showing [signs of improvement](#), campaigners such as Rape Crisis fear that the change seen in Avon and Somerset will be difficult to replicate across 43 forces – many of which, it fears, have chief constables less committed to the tackling the crime, or which come up against prosecutors who resist scrutiny. “We absolutely need it to work,” says Amelia Handy, the policy lead at the charity. “There is a risk, without total commitment from all agencies, that it won’t.”

But Crew believes Soteria’s impact will be felt not just in policing but across the criminal justice system. “Everyone wants to get involved,” she says. “And change doesn’t usually happen like that in policing, not that infectious way.”

She pauses. “It’s definitely working. I can see change in the dials – but I can also feel it. You can smell it in the air.”

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## 2022.10.24 - Opinion

- The very last thing the UK needs is more ‘grownup’ politics. That’s what got us into this mess
- Trickle-down economics has had its day. Trickle-down diversity doesn’t work either
- The Tories have one last chance to restore stability and banish Johnson for good
- We face peril because the UK economy relies on house prices. Here are three ways to fix that

**Opinion****Conservative leadership**

# The very last thing the UK needs is more ‘grownup’ politics. That’s what got us into this mess

[Nesrine Malik](#)



Poverty is stalking the streets of Britain – and that’s the big issue the people in charge continue to duck



A sign painted on the side of a house directs people to a local food bank in Leeds. Photograph: Christopher Furlong/Getty Images

Mon 24 Oct 2022 01.00 EDT Last modified on Tue 25 Oct 2022 15.43 EDT

It won't be Boris Johnson, but whoever the new prime minister turns out to be, they will have been dragged into office by "economic orthodoxy" and its henchmen. Their mandate is pre-written in the data you have been deluged with about the impact of unfunded tax cuts, from the depreciation of the pound to rises in interest rates, and the untenable upward effect this has had on mortgages and rents. The charts have spoken – an ideological experiment has gone terribly wrong and must be reversed.

But it is a tale of two crises, and only one is being told. Attracting far less fanfare is another set of statistics about cold and hunger. More than a million people are expected to be pushed into poverty this winter. Their slide into deprivation will test an informal support network already stretched to its limit. Last week, the food bank charity the Trussell Trust launched an emergency appeal for donations because need for food banks has now outstripped donations. Charities like this, private citizens and schools are mobilising to bridge the gap.

The hole is too large to plug. Half of all primary schools in England are trying to feed children in poverty who are ineligible for free school meals because their parents' income does not meet the threshold. But there are [800,000 of them](#). It can be hard sometimes to grasp the scale of the problem through bare statistics, but vivid and haunting details can flesh them out. Children are [eating school rubbers](#) to line their stomachs and dull the ache and nausea of hunger. Others are bringing in empty lunchboxes then pretending to dine on their phantom food away from classmates, too ashamed to reveal that they have nothing to eat.

If these children's families can't afford to eat, they definitely can't afford to keep warm as winter approaches and energy prices rocket. How can children expect to learn with their minds impaired by hunger and cold? Over the past year, reading ability among seven-year-olds from poor families [fell at double the rate](#) of those from affluent families, their future prospects receding before they have even begun.

People burn their utility bills at cost of living protests – video

But my goodness, the scenes in Westminster! Kwasi Kwarteng sacked on a plane, Suella Braverman gone for a data breach, reported manhandling, jostling and shouting outside the voting lobby. And if that wasn't already enough to drown out the rumble of tummies and chattering of teeth, Liz Truss threw in the towel, kicking off another attention-sucking vortex of new leadership speculation and horse-trading.

"I worry," Naomi Duncan, chief executive of [Chefs in Schools](#), told me, two hours after Truss resigned, "that the ongoing political turmoil will divert attention." The solution for her is simple: to give one meal a day to all children based on need, not an income calculation that has long since ceased to be relevant.

It does sound simple, doesn't it? But the sort of government that tackles poverty, hunger and cold is not the government anyone who matters is clamouring for. As the emergency intensifies, politicians and opinion makers are calling not for a firefighter to treat this as the crisis it truly is, but for a "grownup" to make those economic charts read better.

“The grownups are back,” [declared Liam Fox](#), after Jeremy Hunt and Penny Mordaunt’s performance at the dispatch box last week. “If Truss cannot quickly sort herself out,” the Sun (of all papers) told us, “the grownups need to get in a room” and “agree a peaceful transition to a sensible figure”. This trope exemplifies the detachment of both Westminster and Westminster watchers. As the country enters into the winter crisis proper, those at the top are looking for a leader with unspecified technocratic skills who, like a contracted management consultant, will be able to “stabilise” UK plc. It’s not the mouths of children that need feeding, but the markets.

If this new leader must have an ideology, it should be one that aligns with the aim of “fiscal responsibility”, itself a byword for reduced state spending. They must “look like a leader”, and enact whatever callous cuts they have to, preferably while exhibiting suitable regret at having to make “difficult decisions”. The result of this settlement is a chilling absence of politicians able to articulate the exceptional pain the public is going through. Also absent are any policies that would tackle the cost of living and energy emergency through higher taxes on the wealthy, or an economic stabilisation agenda that addresses the goals not only of those who want to prosper, but those who need to survive.

Liz Truss, lettuce and a lectern: 25 hours of chaos in three minutes – video

Even among a fuming opposition there is a sort of bloodless anger. “The damage to mortgages and bills has been done,” tweeted Keir Starmer as if the economic impact is being felt by pieces of paper rather than people. It seems everyone has understood that injecting feeling and channelling the fear and deprivation that stalks people every day disqualifies you from being taken seriously as a politician. The “adult” approach seems to be keeping the markets happy and achieving abstract “growth”, rather than also prioritising the security of those so on the margins they cannot benefit from that growth; those who will suffer most when the next round of soberly dictated cuts arrive.

To include in your economic vision the importance of benefits, subsidies or improvements to public services to the wellbeing of those not able to fully participate in the housing or job market is somehow outside the parameters of acceptable politics.

But it is staying in that lane of acceptable politics that has resulted in our political and social crises. The delusion is that if we try just one more time with someone like Rishi Sunak, a man who flat out complained of funding being “[shoved into deprived areas](#)”, the right or right of centre will crack it. Despite the fact that this is the tribe which over the past two decades pursued the deregulation agenda of big businesses, allowed working conditions and wages to be run into the ground, slashed benefits, and failed to invest any money saved from painful cuts into, to take just one example, any future-proofing green energy that would have mitigated this winter crisis.

I wonder, even with attention constantly yanked back to the Westminster spectacle, just how many more chances the grownups can get away with when every day another adult or child starts to go without food, or another family bundle themselves up at night instead of putting the heating on. Just how much longer can people put up with a consensus that placates the financial system with an “acceptable” number of losers? Grownup politics is literally that: disregarding those who do not “matter”, considering the economically marginalised simply as collateral damage, excluding their passions from the cool halls of power and cultivating resignation to ever more suffering. But with their numbers rising and their pain intensifying, that may be about to become an impossible task.

- Nesrine Malik is a Guardian columnist
- [Crisis at No 10: How long can the Tory government hold on?](#) Join Hugh Muir, Polly Toynbee, John Crace and Jessica Elgot discussing another failed Tory prime minister and what the future holds for the government, in this livestreamed event. On Wednesday 26 October, 8pm–9pm BST. Book tickets at [theguardian.com/guardianlive](https://theguardian.com/guardianlive)

## Black History MonthWork & careers

# Rishi Sunak will be PM, but don't get too excited: trickle-down diversity doesn't work

[Marcus Ryder](#)



The Tories have been feted for having minorities at the top, but that's less of a panacea than you might think. Here's why

- Marcus Ryder is the host of the podcast Black British Lives Matter



Rishi Sunak. Photograph: Andy Buchanan/AFP/Getty Images

Mon 24 Oct 2022 09.15 EDTFirst published on Mon 24 Oct 2022 05.00 EDT

It's a bad time for proponents of trickle-down economics. Joining Liz Truss and [Kwasi Kwarteng](#) in the dustbin of bad ideas is the belief that good fortune, or handouts, for the people at the very top translates to benefits for the majority.

But at the same time, we seem content to press on with the similar notion of "trickle-down diversity". This is the belief that putting people of colour at the top of an organisation will automatically benefit people of colour lower down the scale, changing an organisation's culture, increasing employment of people from diverse backgrounds at every level and creating better policies for a multicultural society. Sounds great, doesn't it? But sorry, it's a dud too.

We've already seen the limits of the idea that people of colour at the top always means positive change. Think of Suella Braverman – the daughter of immigrants from Kenya and Mauritius – sharing her "[dream](#)" of seeing a plane packed with refugees flying off to Rwanda. Think of Rishi Sunak,

soon to be prime minister, boasting that he changed a funding formula that gave more public money to “[deprived urban areas](#)”.

Some argue, reprehensibly, that the explanation when rightwing politicians such as Braverman and Kwarteng say things progressives object to is that they are the “wrong type” of women or black people; or even that they are only “[superficially](#)” black.

But that’s not the problem: the problem is the concept itself. The idea that simply by increasing diversity at the top of an organisation, whether you’re the prime minister or a CEO, this will lead to diversity throughout is not supported by academic literature. In fact, there is a wealth of evidence that the opposite happens.

Two years ago, when I helped establish the [Sir Lenny Henry Centre for Media Diversity](#), one of our main goals was to help media organisations increase their diversity and inclusion by drawing on the best academic research to inform their hiring policies. I have since sat on numerous panels with large media organisations – many of them liberal – all genuinely confused as to why increasing diversity at senior positions has not substantially changed their workplace culture. The one thing I always advise: simply changing the people at the top will not achieve the results they are looking for.

We all know individual women and people of colour in senior positions who fearlessly work to help improve diversity and inclusion. But we also need to know that often that focus comes at a cost: study after study has shown that women and people of colour pay a heavy personal price. In a seminal paper, [Harvard researchers](#) found that when men promoted diversity, they received slightly higher performance ratings. They were perceived as “good guys” creating a better workplace. However, when female executives promoted diversity, they were perceived as biased, and their own performance was then [negatively perceived](#) accordingly.

[Another study](#) has even worse implications. It suggests people from ethnic minorities who have previously demonstrated a tendency to advocate for diversity are less likely to be promoted or get a new job. Those who

included experiences related to their ethnicity on their CVs were more likely to be passed over for jobs – even at companies that openly valued diversity.

The consequences are that quite often “diverse” workers have to choose between personal ambition or helping people of their own background to progress. I know this to be true. Just the other day, I spoke to one newly promoted black executive whose reaction to his elevation was to say: “I am going to fight to get more black people promoted, even if it costs my career.” He saw only binary options.

So what, in [Black History Month](#), can we take from all this? First, there is no doubt that British companies and institutions need to increase the number of women and people of colour in senior positions. But even if progress is made in this important area, the effect will be minimal unless these people are actively given support so they can help without worrying about being penalised for their efforts. Until then, the people most likely to rise will be those who do not believe in diversity, or others who, aware of the chilling effect of being seen to fight for it, resolve to steer clear.

To bring this back to politics: a reality check might help. We cannot expect people of colour or women to rise in any party if their beliefs and values are different from the party in which they are looking to succeed. People of colour and women in senior positions simply reflect the values of the organisation they are in – research suggests it is unrealistic to expect them to climb their way to the top and *then* be agents of change, challenging the culture that enabled them to succeed. Those who do will be the exception to the rule. That’s the reality.

I applaud courageous women and black and Asian executives who promote diversity knowing the risks to their own career. But if we are serious about progress, they shouldn’t have to make that choice, and the burden should not be on their shoulders. Until these actions stop requiring extraordinary courage, real progress will never be made.

Marcus Ryder is the host of the podcast Black British Lives Matter

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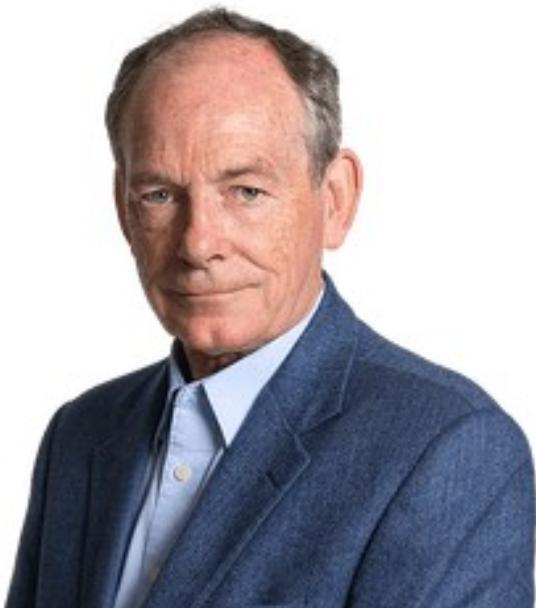
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| [Section menu](#) | [Main menu](#) |

## OpinionConservatives

# Rishi Sunak has won. Now the Tories can restore stability and leave Johnson behind

[Simon Jenkins](#)



The parliamentary party must unite around the new prime minister to end the fiasco of the past six years



Rishi Sunak Photograph: Victoria Jones/PA

Mon 24 Oct 2022 09.13 EDTFirst published on Mon 24 Oct 2022 05.30 EDT

The comedy is over. The clowns have backed off. Boris Johnson raced from his Caribbean beach to revive his political potency, but for once it failed him. Those who knew him best recoiled in horror. He decided in his arrogance that this was “[not the right time](#)”. The money markets shuddered and [this morning recovered](#). Britain is a parliamentary democracy, not a [mobocracy](#). The grownups are taking back control.

Now that the former chancellor [Rishi Sunak](#) will be the new prime minister, a greater question looms on the horizon. Has he the authority required to decontaminate Liz Truss’s brief essay in public finance? That she could do such damage in just six weeks shows the alarming fragility of a modern government. Sunak’s motto of “integrity, professionalism and accountability” could not be clearer. But stability depends on a brutal new round of spending cuts due on 31 October.

That in turn depends on Sunak’s capacity to discipline his Commons majority, while weakened by his caretaker status, his lack of mandate and with just two years to go until an election. His new cabinet must be “of all

the talents” and have one priority. That is not loyalty to him or to Tory election chances but to calming nerves, restoring confidence in the economy and bringing down the cost of living. While the political case for an early election is powerful, instability is the last thing the economy needs. Either way, Sunak’s finest legacy will be not to have played to the electorate.

Britain has spent six months tormenting itself in full worldview. History may now pause its judgment. All democracies make mistakes, not least one currently enjoying Britain’s discomfort, the United States. The test of a democracy is not that it avoids mistakes but that it can correct them. The discrediting of Johnson and the downfall of Truss have taken little more than a year. It took the US four to rid itself of Donald Trump.

History will also note how this fiasco came to pass. There is no question. The narrow outcome of the 2016 Brexit referendum divided the nation, shattered the Tory party and silenced Labour. This fracturing was aggravated by Johnson’s demand for hard Brexit as a ploy to topple Theresa May. His insecurity led to his purging the cabinet of its most experienced and competent ministers. Then, when the parliamentary party tired of him, a whimsical party membership took leave of its senses. It chose Truss.

Most, if not all, Tory MPs have been sceptical throughout this saga: sceptical of Brexit, of Johnson and wholly so of Truss. But they have been hamstrung by the forces of grassroots populism, as expressed in the referendum, two general elections and two leadership elections. Only now has the parliamentary party contrived to reassert itself. British democracy stipulates that the Commons majority and none other should decide who forms a government. The process has been chaotic but it has finally worked. British politics need not be too ashamed of itself.

- Simon Jenkins is a Guardian columnist
- [Crisis at No 10: How long can the Tory government hold on?](#) Join Hugh Muir, Polly Toynbee, John Crace and Jessica Elgot discussing another failed Tory prime minister and what the future holds for the government, in this livestreamed event. On Wednesday 26 October, 7pm–8pm BST. Book tickets at [theguardian.com/guardianlive](https://theguardian.com/guardianlive)

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

**OpinionHousing**

## We face peril because the UK economy relies on house prices. Here are three ways to fix that

[Fran Boait](#)



Despite promises made after the last crash, too much wealth depends on values bloated by an oversized financial sector



An estate agent's window in London, October 2022. Photograph: Andy Rain/EPA

Mon 24 Oct 2022 03.00 EDT Last modified on Mon 24 Oct 2022 09.40 EDT

House prices are predicted to drop next year due to a mixture of financial instability caused by the misjudged mini-budget and the Bank of England accelerating interest rate hikes. This will be disastrous for many households struggling to afford [increased mortgage repayments](#).

At the same time there are many struggling to buy their first home. In 2021, UK house prices grew at their [fastest pace](#) in over a decade, despite the economy still recovering from one of the worst contractions [in 300 years](#). This disconnect between the housing market and the rest of the economy only benefits those who use housing as an asset for accumulating wealth.

The gains of this wealth are unevenly distributed across society. The average [white family gained £115,000](#) in property wealth in the past decade, while the average Black household accumulated nothing, and almost half of housing wealth in the UK is [owned by the over-65s](#). Many people are struggling to put together the large deposits required, and those in the rented sector or social housing face higher housing costs relative to those with mortgages, and greater insecurity of tenancy.

The dominant narrative has been that prices reached all-time highs this year due to shortage of supply, but as many [economists have argued](#) since the crash, it is bank lending, rather than supply of housing, that is a primary driver of house price rises. And high land prices result in even [less social housing](#) being built.

Lending into real estate generates a self-sustaining [cycle of credit supply](#), credit demand and rapid house prices increases. And when fewer people can afford to repay their mortgages, lending dries up, confidence drops and the cycle works in the opposite direction, making prices suddenly drop.

Overnight people can find themselves in negative equity and be forced from their homes, and banks and real estate investors cash in. While this dynamic was understood in great detail after the last crash, memories are short, and the post-crash powers to reduce financial instability from the housing market have done little to [dampen the inflationary effect](#) of mortgage lending, or reduce the attractiveness of homes as financial assets. Government policies, from the stamp duty holidays to the resurrection of “right to buy”, have only exacerbated this problem. This destructive pattern of boom and bust needs to come to an end.

As we’re seeing with the departure of Liz Truss, governments in the UK have been [made and broken](#) on the back of mortgage rate rises, and with mortgage repayments already climbing and [likely to soar](#), regardless of how big the housing downturn is, it is highly likely that the public will boot the Conservatives out of office at the first opportunity. Stabilising house prices is always going to be a difficult political sell, with [65% of England's households](#) being homeowners, or more accurately large debt/mortgage owners, and their [family wealth](#) inextricably tied to house prices.

Even Labour doesn’t want to change course, by targeting [70% home ownership](#) through mortgage guarantees. However, public opinion may have reached a tipping point: in March, when prices grew at their fastest pace since 2004, [more than half of British homeowners](#) said they would be happy if their own home did not rise in value in the next 10 years if it meant houses were more affordable for those who didn’t own property.

The economic turmoil right now is revealing how fundamentally fragile the UK economy is. Escaping our structural dependence on house price rises driven by an oversized financial sector won't be easy. However, there are some [important places to start](#). We need to prioritise policies that protect renters and social housing, rather than treating them as an afterthought. This will entail vastly scaling up social housing, and implementing rent controls and renter protections to ensure high quality homes, with long-term security.

Banks also need to be reined in. Having a concentrated banking sector with [50% of its assets](#) secured against UK property is not a healthy position to be in. We need a diverse ecosystem of banks lending into more productive and socially useful activities. Fairer taxation on property and land would dampen speculation and also unlock much needed funds for social housing.

Finally, we need our regulators to take seriously the task of stabilising house prices, ideally adding it as a secondary objective to the Bank of England's policymaking committees.

The dysfunctional nature of our housing market can't be fixed quickly or overnight, it's intimately connected to our politics and culture. But since the last crash we've had more than a decade of missed opportunities when it comes to housing affordability, and it's time for change.

- Fran Boait is executive director of campaign group Positive Money

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## 2022.10.24 - Around the world

- [Italy Pope prays for ‘unity and peace in Italy’ as Giorgia Meloni takes power](#)
- [Italy Pilgrims to Mussolini’s birthplace pray that new PM will resurrect a far-right Italy](#)
- [Salman Rushdie Author has lost sight in one eye and use of one hand, says agent](#)
- [Big opportunity, little interest New Zealand struggles to fill dream job protecting wildlife](#)

[Italy](#)

## Pope prays for ‘unity and peace in Italy’ as Giorgia Meloni takes power

Country’s first female prime minister leads the most rightwing government since the second world war



Giorgia Meloni receives the cabinet debate bell, a symbol of authority, from her predecessor, Mario Draghi. Photograph: Abaca/Rex/Shutterstock

[Angela Giuffrida](#) in Rome

Sun 23 Oct 2022 09.25 EDT Last modified on Sun 23 Oct 2022 15.36 EDT

Pope Francis offered prayers for “unity and peace in Italy” as Giorgia Meloni, Italy’s first female prime minister, [took the helm](#) of the country’s most rightwing government since the second world war.

Meloni, the leader of [Brothers of Italy](#), a party with neofascist origins, met the outgoing prime minister, Mario Draghi, for a formal handover ceremony on Sunday. “I did not expect this welcome,” Meloni, 45, said as she was

greeted by Draghi, referring to the ceremonial guard. “It’s an emotionally impacting thing.”

The pair held private talks for over an hour before Draghi handed Meloni a small symbolic bell used during cabinet debates.

The new prime minister’s government, a coalition that includes Matteo Salvini’s far-right League and Silvio Berlusconi’s Forza Italia, then swiftly began its first cabinet meeting. “United to deal with the country’s emergencies,” Meloni said.

The coalition [won the general election](#) on 25 September on promises of steep tax cuts, pension increases, cracking down on illegal immigration and defending the traditional family.

But the path towards forming a government was marked by clashes over key ministerial posts and simmering [rivalries between Meloni and Berlusconi](#), the three-time former prime minister, especially after he was recorded telling Forza Italia parliamentarians that he blamed Ukraine for the war with Russia and [had rekindled his friendship](#) with the Russian president, Vladimir Putin.

Before receiving her mandate, Meloni, who has herself praised Putin in the past, reiterated that her government would be ardently pro-Nato and that anyone who rejected that “cannot be part of the government”.

Shielding households from rising inflation and the surge in energy prices brought on by Russia’s invasion of Ukraine are among [the prime minister’s most pressing tasks](#), leaving her significantly short of the financial resources required to fulfil election campaign resources.

According to La Repubblica newspaper, during a meeting last week about Italy’s 2023 budget, which needs to be sent to Brussels for approval by the end of October, Meloni told close officials after realising she doesn’t have much room to manoeuvre on expenditure: “Other than the march on Rome, I will need to march on Gazprom.”

The beginning of Meloni's government coincides with the 100th anniversary, on 28 October, of Benito Mussolini and his armed fascist troops [marching from Milan to Rome](#) "to take by the throat our miserable ruling class". Two days later, King Vittorio Emanuele III handed him power.

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Meloni received congratulatory messages from world leaders after being sworn in on Saturday, including the US president, Joe Biden, the European Commission president, Ursula von der Leyen, who said she had a "a good call" with Meloni after she took office, and the Ukrainian president, Volodymyr Zelenskiy.

Meloni and Salvini, who is deputy prime minister, were also congratulated by their European far-right allies. "This is a great day for the European right!" the Hungarian prime minister, Victor Orbán, wrote on Twitter. French far-right leader Marine Le Pen said: "Patriots everywhere in Europe are coming to power and with them this Europe of Nations that we are hoping for."

The first foreign leader Meloni will reportedly meet, either on Sunday or Monday, is the French president, Emmanuel Macron, who is in Rome for an event organised by the Catholic charity Sant'Egidio. "I am ready to work with her," Macron said on Saturday.

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

[The Observer](#)[Giorgia Meloni](#)

## Pilgrims to Mussolini's birthplace pray that new PM will resurrect a far-right Italy

In Predappio, supporters celebrate victory of their first female prime minister Giorgia Meloni, leader of a party with neo-fascist origins



Mr Pompignoli, owner of the fascist souvenir shop 'Predappio Tricolore' in Predappio, Italy. Photograph: Nicoló Lanfranchi/The Observer

[\*Angela Giuffrida in Predappio\*](#)

Sun 23 Oct 2022 06.00 EDT Last modified on Sun 23 Oct 2022 06.26 EDT

Dressed in a black sweater, with “Propaganda” written in bold white letters across the back, Marco, 32, and his two friends had travelled to Predappio from their home in the Marche region to pay their respects at the grave of Benito Mussolini before the impending 100th anniversary of the fascist dictator’s march on Rome.

The ornate Mussolini family crypt, located in the tiny San Cassiano cemetery of the Emilia Romagna town, has attracted thousands of admirers since it reopened on an all-year-round basis in March, with the daily flow increasingly more consistent since the late September general election victory for a coalition led by Giorgia Meloni's Brothers of Italy, a party with neofascist origins, [which was sworn into government](#) on Saturday.

### Predappio, Italy

Marco and his friends hope Meloni, Italy's first female prime minister, can repeat "the good things Mussolini did" and "make [Italy](#) strong again". "We need a strong, authoritarian figure," said Marco after saluting the white marble coffin, draped with the Italian flag, containing the body of the man known as Il Duce: The Leader.

Meloni, the 45-year-old firebrand politician from Rome who in August said her party had "handed fascism to history" decades ago, will make her first speech to parliament this week and must win votes of confidence in both chambers before a coalition, which includes Matteo Salvini's far-right League and Silvio Berlusconi's Forza Italia, can formally take full power. The path to government has been rocky, amid simmering rivalries between Meloni and Berlusconi, the three-times former prime minister who described her as "arrogant" and last week sparked further tumult after telling Forza Italia parliamentarians that he blamed Ukraine for the war with Russia and had "rekindled" his friendship with Vladimir Putin.

Before receiving her mandate, Meloni reiterated that her government would be ardently pro-Nato and that anyone who rejects that "cannot be part of the government".



The Mussolini family tomb in Predappio. Photograph: Nicoló Lanfranchi/The Observer

Rivalries aside, the full assumption of power for Meloni’s administration will uncannily fall around 28 October, the date on which, in 1922, Mussolini and his armed fascist troops marched from Milan to Rome “to take by the throat our miserable ruling class”. Two days later, King Vittorio Emanuele III handed him power.

Brothers of Italy, which retains the neofascist symbol of a burning flame of the tricolour flag as its logo, also took the biggest share of the vote in Predappio, a town of about 6,000 inhabitants where Mussolini was born. Nestled among the hills of the Apennines, Predappio became a fascist pilgrim site from the moment Mussolini took power. The rustic house in which he was born, which can still be visited today, stood as a testimony to his humble roots and how far he had gone in life, although the prime site for pilgrims even back then was the family crypt, where admirers could pay tribute to his mother, a teacher who died in 1905, for having given birth to him.

Predappio, rebuilt by Mussolini in the 1930s, was liberated from fascism in 1944, but the cult of the dictator lingered despite the town being ruled by leftwing parties in their various guises until 2019, when Roberto Canali, an

independent politician backed by Brothers of Italy and with close ties to Mussolini's descendants, was elected mayor.



Il Duce with Fascist party members in 1922. Photograph: AP

Predappio Tricolore, a souvenir shop teeming with fascist memorabilia, including copies of Adolf Hitler's *Mein Kampf*, has always done brisk trade, especially since Canali maintained his election campaign pledge for the year-round opening of the crypt. He recently sparked controversy after refusing to grant patronage to a march organised by Italy's anti-fascist association, ANPI, to coincide with the 78th anniversary, also on 28 October, of Predappio's liberation from fascism. He argued the event would bring too much disruption to the town on a work day.

"The problem is, when you have thousands of people, as they expect, marching for at least an hour, it will completely block the town," Canali told the *Observer*. "It's not as if I unauthorised it. The march is still going ahead – I welcome Predappio's liberation being celebrated – but not on that day and not in that way."

But Canali has no qualms with Mussolini's relatives hosting a series of events to commemorate the march on Rome, including two masses to be celebrated by Giulio Maria Tam, an ultrafascist excommunicated priest. An

exhibition displaying more than 160 objects, including weapons, uniforms and photos related to the march on Rome, is being held until early November.



Giorgia Meloni bows after the swearing-in ceremony. Photograph: Andrew Medichini/AP

The date 28 October has always been a busy period for Predappio, but because of the milestone anniversary and current attention on the topic of fascism, Canali anticipates 1,000 to 2,000 Mussolini admirers converging on the town this week.

Meloni has tried to moderate Brothers of Italy, presenting the party as a conservative champion of patriotism. But the recent election of Ignazio La Russa, a Brothers of Italy co-founder who collects fascist memorabilia, as upper house speaker; and Lorenzo Fontana, an ultra-Catholic, Eurosceptic, and pro-Russia politician from the League, as speaker of the lower house, has raised concerns.

“Despite keeping the neofascist symbol in its logo, I really hope Brothers of Italy becomes just a normal rightwing party,” said Gianfranco Miro Gori, a local leader of ANPI. “But the initial signs are not good. They are already

saying lots of unkind things about various [civil rights](#). So we need to keep our guard up.”

Meloni will be in charge of steering Italy through one of its most delicate periods, dealing with challenges such as the energy crisis and high inflation while trying to avert a recession. “Italy was in a complicated period when the King gave Mussolini command,” said Franco Moschi, a distant Mussolini relative who collects historical documentation and curates exhibitions about the period. “He was the new soul of Italian politics. Today, with the great difficulties in Italy and [Europe](#), Italians have taken a bet on Meloni.”

The reverberations of that gamble are reflected in some of the messages that have filled the tribute book in Il Duce’s crypt since the elections. “Today the flame of the tricolour burns in the Italian government,” wrote one visitor. Another said: “Duce, 100 years ago you started a glorious period. Today, we can finally remember it freely.”

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## Salman Rushdie

# Salman Rushdie has lost sight in one eye and use of one hand, says agent

Full extent of injuries from ‘brutal attack’ on Satanic Verses author in New York state in August revealed



Salman Rushdie pictured in 2017. The author was stabbed in the neck and torso as he came on stage to give a talk on artistic freedom on 12 August. Photograph: Evan Agostini/Invision/AP

[Sam Jones](#) in Madrid

[@swajones](#)

Sun 23 Oct 2022 06.53 EDT Last modified on Mon 24 Oct 2022 00.14 EDT

Salman Rushdie has lost sight in one eye and the use of one hand after the attack he suffered [while preparing to deliver a lecture in New York state](#) two months ago, his agent has confirmed.

The 75-year-old author, who received death threats from Iran in the 1980s after his novel *The Satanic Verses* was published, was stabbed in the neck and torso as he came on stage to give a talk on artistic freedom at the Chautauqua Institution on 12 August.

Until now, the full extent of Rushdie's injuries had been unclear. But in an [interview with Spain's \*El País\*](#), Andrew Wylie explained how serious and life-changing the attack had been.

"[His wounds] were profound, but he's [also] lost the sight of one eye," said Wylie. "He had three serious wounds in his neck. One hand is incapacitated because the nerves in his arm were cut. And he has about 15 more wounds in his chest and torso. So, it was a brutal attack."

The agent declined to say whether Rushdie was still in hospital, saying the most important thing was that the writer was going to live.

Wylie also said he and Rushdie had talked about the possibility of such an attack in the past. "The principal danger that he faced so many years after the fatwa was imposed is from a random person coming out of nowhere and attacking [him]," he said.

"So, you can't protect against that because it's totally unexpected and illogical. It was like John Lennon['s murder].

Elsewhere in the interview, Wylie said the world was going through "a very troubled period" – not least in the US. "I think nationalism is on the rise, a sort of fundamentalist right is on the rise ... From Italy to ... Europe, Latin America and the US, where ... half the country seems to think that Joe Biden stole the election from Donald Trump. And they admire this man who is not only completely incompetent and a liar and a crook, but just a farce. It's ridiculous."

Asked how he felt about the fact that [Maus – the Pulitzer-prize-winning graphic novel](#) by another of his authors, Art Spiegelman – had been banned in some US schools, Wylie said: "You know, that's the religious right

behaving as they behave. It's ridiculous. It's ludicrous. It's shameful. But it's a big force in the country now."

The man accused of stabbing Rushdie pleaded not guilty to second-degree attempted murder and assault charges when he appeared in court on 18 August.

Hadi Matar, 24, was arraigned during a brief hearing in Chautauqua county district court on an indictment returned by a grand jury that charged him with one count of second-degree attempted murder and one count of second-degree assault.

Two weeks before the attack, Rushdie had told an interviewer that he felt his life was "very normal again" and that fears of an attack were a thing of the past.

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## New Zealand

# Big opportunity, little interest: New Zealand struggles to fill dream job protecting wildlife

The Department of Conservation is looking for a biodiversity supervisor on the wild, remote coast of the South Island, a Unesco world heritage site



The successful applicant will be put to work protecting newly discovered populations of the Haast tokoeka kiwi in New Zealand's South Island – as well predator control and monitoring the local songbirds. Photograph: Murdo MacLeod/The Guardian

*Tess McClure in Auckland*

*@tessairini*

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A NZ\$90,000 salary, a helicopter commute, and a Unesco world heritage site as your playground. It sounds like a dream job. But despite the

considerable perks, New Zealand's Department of Conservation has been struggling to attract candidates to be their new [biodiversity supervisor](#) in Haast on the wild, remote coast of the South Island. Now, the region's search is going global.

The job is based in Te Wāhipounamu – an area encompassing 26,000 square kilometres of mountain ranges, isolated beaches and native forests, classed as a Unesco World Heritage Area in 1990. Its mountain ranges formed the backdrop for the White Mountains/Ered Nimrais in Peter Jackson's adaption of the Lord of the Rings.

The successful applicant will be put to work protecting newly discovered populations of the Haast tokoeka kiwi – as well as keeping tabs on local fur seal and lizard populations, predator control and monitoring the local songbirds. They will work across remote, rugged areas, many of which are accessible only by helicopter or jetboat.

The job advert calls the region an “extremely special place to live, surrounded by mountains and ocean, with endless activities for an outdoor enthusiast,” and a salary range of NZ\$72,610 - \$92,780. On Monday, however, [the New Zealand Herald reported](#) that the department’s call for applicants had failed to attract significant interest, with just three people inquiring so far.



Mount Aspiring national park, Part of Te Wahipounamu Photograph: Murdo MacLeod/The Guardian

Wayne Costello, operations manager for DOC in [South Westland](#), said the job was right for people who love spending time in nature, and are comfortable with a degree of isolation.

“It is working in one of the most amazing natural environments that the country has got to offer,” he [told Stuff](#). “It’s just spectacular. But it is not for everyone. You’d have to be self-reliant and be able to work in the outdoors. If you’re interested in opera and theatre, it’s probably not for you.”

The Department of Conservation is not alone in struggling to attract workers to the area’s wild beauty. This month, the west coast’s regional development agency released a new campaign announcing it was “on a global hunt for new ‘coasters’”.

“We’re looking for people who are sick of the crowds, cars and commercialism of the city, and would prefer a bit more space,” Development West Coast chief executive Heath Milne said in a release.

Many west coast businesses and organisations were crying out for staff, Milne said – and the region was particularly hoping to attract healthcare workers, with 50 vacancies in aged care, primary care, ED, mental health

and inpatient services. Across [New Zealand](#), many sectors have reported chronic labour and skills shortages, as more New Zealanders head overseas after the pandemic, and immigration gradually recovers. Job ad site SEEK reported a 27% increase in job listings on the west coast over the past year.

“The Coast is a special place that attracts a special kind of person,” Milne said. “We’re on the hunt for a few more of them.”

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# Table of Contents

[The Guardian.2022.10.30 \[Sun, 30 Oct 2022\]](#)

[Headlines friday 28 october 2022](#)

[Live Elon Musk reportedly plans to become Twitter's interim chief executive after buying platform](#)

[Twitter Elon Musk completes takeover and 'fires top executives'](#)

[Analysis Twitter braces for Trump's return as Musk takes over platform](#)

['To help humanity' Musk explains his Twitter acquisition](#)

[2022.10.28 - Spotlight](#)

['People had to urinate in Pringles pots' Passengers on Avanti travel trauma](#)

['I think about death 35 times a day' Bill Nighy on sex, social media – and still being able to manage the stairs](#)

[Race Uncovering Britain's record of bussing ethnic minority children](#)

[You be the judge Should my partner get rid of our lockdown wormery?](#)

[2022.10.28 - Opinion](#)

[Patients dying outside A&E, hospital corridors as makeshift wards – and it's only October](#)

[Oil and gas firms are still making a killing – and No 10 is letting them](#)

[M&S is a shining example of how not to treat the high street – or the planet](#)

[The cult of Putin in Serbia reflects a nation that has still not dealt with its past](#)

[2022.10.28 - Around the world](#)

[Iran Protests reignite at commemorations and funerals for those killed](#)

[India Young girls being sold to repay loans, says human rights body](#)

[Where is China's former leader? Experts ask whether Hu Jintao's removal from party congress was suspicious](#)

US elections Democrats on the defensive as economy becomes primary concern over abortion

New Zealand Women to be able to access abortion over the phone

### Headlines saturday 29 october 2022

Royal Navy Chief orders inquiry into ‘abhorrent’ allegations of bullying and sexual harassment

US Attack on Pelosi’s husband heightens fears of increasing political violence

Paul Pelosi Hammer attack puts Nancy Pelosi's husband in hospital

Twitter Elon Musk declares ‘moderation council’ as some users start pushing the limits

Twitter Elon Musk completes takeover amid hate speech concerns

### 2022.10.29 - Spotlight

Damian Lewis ‘When someone dies prematurely, you’re left careering in a different direction’

‘I want to work’ Why UK parents are taking part in March of the Mummies

Garth Marenghi ‘Many writers cite me as an influence ... and I will be suing them all’

Talking typewriters and slithering eels: an extract from Garth Marenghi’s chilling new novel

Rishi Sunak Finance, property and mining: the money behind £460,000 leadership bid

### 2022.10.29 - Opinion

What one change would you make to achieve black equality in Britain? Our panel writes

Britain’s first Hindu prime minister is destroying Tories’ pitiful vision of diversity

Orbán says Hungary is ‘exempt’ from the conflict: tell that to his friend in Moscow

Rishi Sunak is the best choice the Tories could have made – but Labour can still beat him

### 2022.10.29 - Around the world

[Storm Nalgae Floods and landslides in Philippines kill at least 45](#)

[Exclusive Goal of limiting global heating to 1.5C ‘more fragile’ than ever, says Cop27 chair](#)

[California Man released from prison after 38 years after DNA test](#)

[Espionage Suspected Russian spy arrested in Norway spent years studying in Canada](#)

[Kentucky Man who plays dead on TikTok gets new life as corpse on TV crime show](#)

## Headlines

[Cost of living crisis Price of budget food items in supermarkets soar by 17%](#)

[Energy bills UK homes switching to pre-pay meters to keep bills under control](#)

[Astronomy Partial eclipse of Sun in UK begins](#)

[Live Ukraine invites UN nuclear inspectors after discredited ‘dirty bomb’ claim](#)

[Biden Progressive Democrats urge President to directly engage with Russia](#)

## 2022.10.25 - Spotlight

[‘You have to be thick-skinned’ What is it like to lose the status of a top job?](#)

[‘A lot of my work has this insane anxiety about it’ David Shrigley on worrying, God and drawing like a five-year-old My small, doomed stand One writer’s front row seat to Thatcher’s war on truth](#)

[Long Covid 2,000 Guardian readers told us about their experiences. Here are their stories](#)

## 2022.10.25 - Opinion

[Rishi Sunak will leave the economy in a hole – Labour will have to think big to dig it out](#)

[I had to fight for Bosnia. That’s how I know Ukrainians can win, and they will rebuild](#)

[Loneliness is a struggle for new parents – can we all stop pretending everything’s ok?](#)

## 2022.10.25 - Around the world

[West Bank Four Palestinians killed in firefight with Israeli forces, health ministry says](#)

[Huawei Chinese spy duo charged in case as US condemns ‘egregious’ interference](#)

[Kanye West Chorus of outrage grows as antisemitic incidents rattle LA](#)

[China Xi Jinping’s party purge prompts fears of greater Taiwan invasion risk](#)

[Myanmar Airstrike kills 60 people at concert, says Kachin separatist group](#)

#### [Headlines thursday 27 october 2022](#)

[Live Suella Braverman deserves ‘second chance’, says Nadhim Zahawi](#)

[Suella Braverman Senior Tories split over appointment](#)

[Jake Berry Ex-Tory chair accuses Braverman of ‘multiple breaches of ministerial code’](#)

[Analysis From the economy to Rwanda, Rishi Sunak inherits a hefty in-tray](#)

#### [2022.10.27 - Spotlight](#)

[The long read Megalopolis: how coastal west Africa will shape the coming century](#)

[‘It’s become a real monster!’ How Britain fell for Halloween Fantastic plastic? Is there a future for the wonder material turned existential threat?](#)

[‘It is the memory of the people’ Unpacking Iraq’s artistic heritage](#)

#### [2022.10.27 - Opinion](#)

[With Rishi Sunak, the City’s takeover of British politics is complete](#)

[I’m going to spend five months with penguins, and no wifi or running water – here’s why](#)

[Sunshine and tears: here’s what my day in a struggling nursery system looks like](#)

[We can go to the moon – so why can’t we stop my glasses sliding down my nose?](#)

#### [2022.10.27 - Around the world](#)

[Coronavirus China locks down part of Wuhan, nearly three years after first case emerged](#)

[Meta Value of Facebook and Instagram owner drops \\$65bn in value as profits halve](#)

[Donald Trump Will he testify? Lawyers for former president accept subpoena from Capitol attack panel](#)

[Brazil Bolsonaro's campaign relies on 'secret budget' payoffs to win election](#)

[Elon Musk Billionaire makes splashy visit to Twitter headquarters carrying sink](#)

## Headlines

[Live 25,000 have fled Kherson, Moscow says; west denounces Kremlin 'dirty bomb' claim](#)

[Brexit Tory backer says UK economy is 'frankly doomed' without renegotiation](#)

[Homelessness Hundreds more families rehoused outside local area in England](#)

['Completely barking' Rees-Mogg move to axe 2,400 laws is 'anti-democratic', say legal experts](#)

[Live Business: Cost of UK borrowing falls as Sunak poised to become PM](#)

## 2022.10.24 - Spotlight

[Barbra Streisand It's the funniest thing to me that people still can't get my name right](#)

['Would I really do cocaine before going on stage?' Lewis Capaldi on anxiety, Tourette's and stupid rumours](#)

[Pan pipes, pinot noir and productivity The hidden power of music](#)

['Everyone wants to get involved' Inside Operation Bluestone: a new police approach to tackling rape](#)

## 2022.10.24 - Opinion

[The very last thing the UK needs is more 'grownup' politics. That's what got us into this mess](#)

[Trickle-down economics has had its day. Trickle-down diversity doesn't work either](#)

[The Tories have one last chance to restore stability and banish Johnson for good](#)

We face peril because the UK economy relies on house prices. Here are three ways to fix that

2022.10.24 - Around the world

Italy Pope prays for ‘unity and peace in Italy’ as Giorgia Meloni takes power

Italy Pilgrims to Mussolini’s birthplace pray that new PM will resurrect a far-right Italy

Salman Rushdie Author has lost sight in one eye and use of one hand, says agent

Big opportunity, little interest New Zealand struggles to fill dream job protecting wildlife