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Drought

Drought declared across eight areas of England

Expert group declares official drought amid prolonged dry spell, meaning water rationing may take place

England drought: how the country has been affected – video

[Helena Horton](#) Environment reporter

Fri 12 Aug 2022 06.59 EDTFirst published on Fri 12 Aug 2022 05.07 EDT

A drought has been declared across wide swathes of [England](#) after a meeting of experts.

The [prolonged dry conditions](#), with some areas of the country not receiving significant rainfall all summer, have caused the National Drought Group to declare an official drought.

The Environment Agency has moved into drought in eight of its 14 areas: Devon and Cornwall, Solent and South Downs, Kent and south London, Herts and north London, East Anglia, Thames, Lincolnshire and Northamptonshire, and the east Midlands.

Documents seen by the Guardian show the Environment Agency expects a further two areas will move into drought later in August. These are Yorkshire and West Midlands.

[hosepipe ban areas](#)

The group met earlier this summer to discuss the lack of rainfall and decided to put the country in “prolonged dry weather status”, the first of four emergency dry weather stages, and one step before drought. Now, the country has been tipped into that second stage.

This means water rationing may take place across the country, with fewer barriers for water companies who wish to ban customers from using hosepipes and washing the car with tap water. More severe measures can also be put in place at this stage, including banning the use of sprinklers the cleaning of buildings, vehicles and windows.

So far this year hosepipe bans have been implemented by Southern Water and South East Water. Welsh Water will implement a ban from 19 August, and Yorkshire Water from 26 August. Thames Water [has also said it is “ready to go”](#) with a hosepipe ban.

Those in the meeting were shown harrowing statistics about England's food security. Half of the potato crop is expected to fail as it cannot be irrigated, and even crops that are usually drought tolerant such as maize have been failing.

The group was told “irrigation options are diminishing with reservoirs being emptied fast”, and losses of between 10% and 50% are expected for crops including carrots, onions, sugar beet, apples and hops. Milk production is also down nationally due to a lack of food for cows, and wildfires are putting large areas of farmland at risk.

Farmers are deciding whether to drill crops for next year, and there are concerns that many will decide not to, with dire consequences for the 2023 harvest.

The government was keen to stress that essential water supplies for households are not at risk.



Parched fields and meadows in Finedon, Northamptonshire. Photograph: Joe Giddens/PA

Water minister Steve Double said: “We are currently experiencing a second heatwave after what was the driest July on record for parts of the country. Action is already being taken by the government and other partners including the Environment Agency to manage the impacts. All water companies have reassured us that essential supplies are still safe, and we have made it clear it is their duty to maintain those supplies.

The group contains representatives from water companies, the Department for Environment Food and Rural Affairs (Defra), the Environment Agency (EA), the National Farmers' Union, Natural England, CCW, Ofwat, Water UK and the Drinking Water Inspectorate, as well as the Angling Trust and the Rivers Trust.

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While previous dry summers have been offset by wet autumns, meaning the worst effects on water supply have not hit, those present at the meeting were told that was unlikely to be the case this year, with arid conditions predicted to continue due to climate breakdown.

Slides from the EA say: “An increased chance of warm conditions through August to October is consistent with an increased westerly flow from warmer than average seas, and our warming climate. With a typical north-west (wetter) to south-east (drier) gradation in rainfall most likely, there are no strong signals for a significant amelioration of current dry conditions.”

average rainfall

Catherine Sefton, a hydrologist at the UK Centre for Ecology and Hydrology, said: “In the south-east of England, the continued dry weather means that many river flows remain notably or exceptionally low, and hydrological forecasts suggest this situation will persist over the next few months.

“Where river flows are supported by groundwater that recharges during the winter months, the impact of dry weather is reduced. But a continuation of below average rainfall into a second winter would likely result in serious hydrological and environmental drought, with further intensification of the water supply restrictions and fish rescues that we are starting to see in the south-east.”

The last time a drought was announced was [in 2018](#). Though research has not yet been conducted to determine whether this year’s drought was caused by climate breakdown, the dry conditions and extreme heat in 2018 were found by the Met Office to have been made 30 times more likely by climate change.

There have been five consecutive months of below average rainfall across all geographic regions in England and above average temperatures. River flows, groundwater levels and reservoir stocks all decreased during July. Thirteen EA monitored indicator rivers are at the lowest levels ever recorded and soil moisture deficit is comparable to that seen at the end of the 1976 drought.

Scotland and Wales have similar drought reaction groups, which are also understood to be meeting this summer after drier than usual conditions.

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2022/aug/12/drought-declared-england-hosepipe-ban-water-restrictions>

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[Environment](#)

Millions more in England facing hosepipe ban ahead of drought ruling

Yorkshire Water announces ban from 26 August and Thames Water could introduce measure from Friday

England drought: how the country has been affected – video

[Ben Quinn](#) and agencies

Fri 12 Aug 2022 03.13 EDTFirst published on Fri 12 Aug 2022 02.51 EDT

A hosepipe ban could be introduced as early as Friday by Britain's largest water company, covering London and much of the south-east of England, [after a drought is declared across eight areas of England on Friday.](#)

Thames Water is “ready to go” with its hosepipe ban, according to its strategy and regulatory affairs director, Cathryn Ross, who said there was a process for introducing a ban but that it could be bypassed if an official [declaration of drought](#) is made on Friday.

[hosepipe ban map](#)

“We have to wait and see what the government says and exactly what that means, possibly even later today. I don’t know, we will obviously consider that,” she told BBC Breakfast. “But, as you probably noticed, at [Thames Water](#) we’ve been asking our customers since late May to respond to the hot weather, to respond to the dry weather, and just really take steps to use water wisely.

“Obviously before we introduce the ban itself, we need to be really ready with all of our communications for people right the way across the region, so we’re really clear for everybody what they can do, what they can’t do, and if they’re having any issues how to contact us. We are ready to do that.”

Yorkshire Water has become the fifth water company in England and Wales to announce a hosepipe ban owing to the hot and dry conditions. The company, which has more than 5 million customers, said the restrictions would come into effect from 26 August.

On Friday a hosepipe ban came into force for about 1.4 million South East Water customers in Kent and Sussex.

The National Drought Group, made up of government and agency officials, water companies and other groups such as the National Farmers' Union (NFU), is due to meet on Friday to discuss the prolonged dry weather.

There are expectations that a drought could be declared for the worst-affected areas of England, in the south and east, after the driest July on record for some areas and the driest first half of the year since 1976.

As a result, the Environment Agency and water companies would implement further plans to manage the impacts of low water levels, which can include actions such as hosepipe bans.

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On Friday afternoon, temperatures are expected to reach as high as 35C in southern areas of the UK, which will be hotter than the Bahamas, Jamaica and Barbados. A four-day amber warning for extreme heat from the Met Office is in place for much of England and Wales until Sunday, with warnings of health impacts and disruption to travel.

There is also a heat health alert in place from the UK Health Security Agency, with experts advising people to look out for young children, older people and people with health conditions.

The ongoing dry conditions, combined with last month's record-breaking heatwave, have depleted rivers, reservoirs and aquifers and dried up soil, affecting agriculture, water supplies and wildlife and raising the risk of wildfires.

Yorkshire Water's director of water, Neil Dewis, said the prolonged heatwave conditions had left the company with little other choice than a hosepipe ban.

"Parts of Yorkshire have seen the lowest rainfall since our records began more than 130 years ago," he said. "The hot, dry, weather means that Yorkshire's rivers are running low and our reservoirs are around 20% lower than we would expect for this time of year. We've been doing everything we can to avoid putting in restrictions, but unfortunately they're now necessary as part of our drought planning."



Satellite image from the Met Office showing the vast parts of the UK that have been affected by the prolonged dry spell. Photograph: Met Office/PA

“We’ve been monitoring reservoir levels, weather forecasts and other environmental indicators closely to determine whether we might need to put further measures in place. As we’ve now reached that trigger point, we need to make sure that we have enough supply for the essential needs of people across the region this year and next, as well as making sure we’re able to protect our local environment by limiting the amount of water we have to draw from the rivers.”

He added: “Our decision to introduce a hosepipe ban is based on the risk that water stocks continue to fall in the coming weeks and the need to be cautious about clean water supplies and long-term river health.”

Under the restrictions, customers are banned from using a hosepipe to water gardens, clean vehicles, fill swimming pools or clean homes. They are permitted to complete those activities with tap water from a bucket or watering can, or using water that is not sourced from taps.

Businesses will be allowed to use a hosepipe only if it is directly related to a commercial purpose.

Thames Water, Welsh Water (Dwr Cymru) and Southern Water have all previously signalled that hosepipe bans will be necessary, while the Wildlife Trusts have called for an England-wide hosepipe ban to protect nature and rivers.

Dewis thanked customers for their efforts in conserving water usage. “We’re grateful to our customers, who have been saving water where they can this summer,” he said. “It is really important that we all continue to do so, to help protect our water resources and the environment.”

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/business/2022/aug/12/yorkshire-water-announces-hosepipe-ban-after-record-low-rainfall>

J Sainsbury

Sainsbury's and Tesco halt disposable barbecues sales amid wildfire risk

Supermarkets introduce total ban as large swathes of UK suffer from lengthy dry spell



A petition on the UK government website calling for a national ban on disposable barbecues has so far received more than 20,000 signatures.
Photograph: Yui Mok/PA

*[Sarah Butler](#)
[@whatbutlersaw](#)*

Thu 11 Aug 2022 14.07 EDT Last modified on Fri 12 Aug 2022 03.54 EDT

Sainsbury's and Tesco have halted sales of disposable barbecues amid rising alarm about their potential to spark wildfires, as large swathes of the UK suffer a [lengthy dry spell](#).

The supermarkets are the latest to introduce a complete ban [after Marks & Spencer](#), Waitrose and Aldi announced they will no longer stock disposable barbecues because of the potential detrimental impact they have on the environment and wildlife.

The Co-op decided to stop selling disposable barbecues in 130 stores situated within a one-mile radius of national parks in June last year, while Morrisons has a similar policy. Morrisons is reportedly reviewing whether to stop selling them altogether.

Tesco changed its policy from a local ban near areas of outstanding beauty such as the New Forest to a UK-wide temporary pause on sales late on Thursday in the light of the heatwave and dry conditions. It is understood to be planning to restock disposable barbecues once weather conditions make it safe to do so.

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Temperatures have climbed again this week with tinderbox conditions, after the longest dry spell since 1976, prompting the Met Office to [issue its highest warning](#) under its fire severity index.

A petition on the [UK government website](#) calling for a national ban has so far received more than 20,000 signatures. The Labour party are also calling for a complete ban on their sale. Andy Roe, London's fire commissioner, said "[urgent action" must be taken](#) to outlaw the sale of disposable barbecues because of the "untold damage" they cause.

The barbecues are a fire risk, especially when used on dry ground, as parts of England have seen the driest weather experienced for 111 years. Drought conditions have prompted several water companies to issue hosepipe bans.

Disposable barbecues were cited as the cause of several of fires, including a serious blaze in Lickey Hills near Birmingham. Morden Hall Park in south London was also hit by a large fire after a disposable barbecue was left there, leaving a large area of the park scorched.

A Sainsbury's spokesperson said: "As a precautionary measure we are removing from sale all disposable barbecues until further notice. Safety is our highest priority and we have made this decision due to the hot and dry weather that we are currently experiencing across the country. We will continue to closely monitor the situation and listen to customer feedback."

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/business/2022/aug/11/sainsburys-halts-disposable-barbecues-sales-amid-wildfire-risk>

Drought

What happens when drought is declared by the UK government?

With drought declared in parts of England and other areas at pre-drought stage, we look at some key questions



Low water levels at Woodhead reservoir in Derbyshire. Photograph: Dave Higgens/PA

[Tom Levitt](#)

Fri 12 Aug 2022 09.08 EDTFirst published on Thu 11 Aug 2022 11.17 EDT

Parts of England were declared to be [in drought on Friday](#). Here we look at what this means, and how long it may last.

Why are we in this situation?

The Environment Agency (EA) [declared](#) the whole of the UK is in a pre-drought stage earlier in the week. Now that regional droughts are declared we can expect to see more [restrictions on water use](#) by households, and if conditions worsen, on businesses too.

The decision comes after areas of southern and eastern [England](#) recorded less than 10% of average July rainfall, while for England as a whole it was the driest since 1935. The situation has continued into August, with south-east England receiving no rainfall so far this month.

So what does it actually mean?

Water companies will be required to enact their drought plans – already agreed with the EA – which include temporary bans on the use of hosepipes for watering gardens, cleaning cars or filling paddling pools.

“Hosepipe bans are common early measures and for good reason,” said Alastair Chisholm, the director of policy at the Chartered Institution of Water and Environmental Management. “They tackle profligate use first, before more essential use needs to be constrained. A lawn sprinkler can typically use 1,000 litres in an hour. That’s more than one person on average uses at the moment a week.”

The plans also allow companies to apply for drought permits, if needed, to abstract more water from rivers, reservoirs or aquifers.

“There will also be a lot more transferring of water around the network,” said Chisholm. “Water companies will pump water from one area, where they might have more resources, to another and pop-up storage reservoirs. You can’t easily move water massive distances because of high energy costs, but you can move it regionally.”

[Map of hosepipe bans](#)

What if conditions worsen?

If things get worse an “extreme drought” may be declared. This would result in local restrictions being introduced by water companies on non-essential water use, including limits on commercial car washes, swimming pools or the cleaning of commercial premises.

If conditions worsen further still, water companies may need to ask the government for an emergency drought order to allow them to ration water supplies to homes and business at certain times of day, or to ask customers to access water from standpipes or mobile water tanks. Farmers could also face restrictions on usage for irrigation.

Natural England, the government conservation body, also has the [power to restrict access](#) to some areas if there is a risk of fire caused by the dry conditions.

How long will this go on?

Drought conditions are expected to continue until October, with [rivers forecast to be low and exceptionally low](#) in central and southern England, and groundwater levels likely to be notably or exceptionally below normal in southern England and south Wales. There are also fears there could be irreversible damage to some environments, such [as chalk streams](#).

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Twilight of the A-list: has the 21st century killed off the movie star?



Last maverick standing ... Tom Cruise in this year's Top Gun film.
Composite: Guardian design/Alamy

Brad Pitt's new film is fizzling out. Meryl Streep is doing TV. Only Tom Cruise fills cinemas – and, in the age of superheroes and streaming, his days

may be numbered. So, what does the future hold for Hollywood's big beasts?

[Tom Shone](#)

Fri 12 Aug 2022 01.00 EDT Last modified on Fri 12 Aug 2022 13.41 EDT

These are dark days for movie stars. The new Brad Pitt action-comedy [Bullet Train](#) took \$30.1m (£24.6m) on its opening weekend in the US – a solid enough figure to top the domestic box office chart, but unspectacular given the film's \$90m budget and Pitt's star power. One of the few actors who can still “open” a film, Pitt represents an increasingly endangered breed: the movie star who refuses to do TV.

Another TV holdout, Tom Cruise, continued his hot streak with [Top Gun: Maverick](#), which recently [surpassed Titanic at the US box office](#), although the film's very success is being heralded as the end of an era, with Cruise lionised variously as “[the last movie star](#)” and “[the last movie star standing in a changing Hollywood](#)”. Meanwhile, obituaries declare the “[death of the movie star](#)” and “[RIP to the movie star](#)”.

If the movie star is not exactly dead, they are certainly enjoying the hammiest of death scenes, like Marlon Brando's virtuoso farewell in *The Young Lions*: stumbling after being shot and rolling headlong down a hill, before being stopped by a branch, looking stunned and blinking incredulously, then toppling into a watery ditch.



Brad Pitt in Bullet Train. He is one of the few stars to have resisted TV in recent years. Photograph: Sony/Scott Garfield/Allstar

The A-list is a shrinking paddock of ageing thoroughbreds. All five films in the top 100 this year that might be called “star vehicles” – Cruise in Top Gun: Maverick, Pitt in Bullet Train, [Sandra Bullock in The Lost City](#), [Mark Wahlberg in Father Stu](#) and [Jennifer Lopez in Marry Me](#) – feature leads who found fame in the 90s, with an average age of 56. The 2010s seem to have produced fewer certifiable movie stars than any previous decade. Chris Pratt, Benedict Cumberbatch, Adam Driver and Jennifer Lawrence have had substantial careers out of superhero spandex, with Lawrence speeding through her ingenue phase to win an Oscar at 22 and now enjoying the twilit semi-retirement from the grind that an Academy Award buys you. Even so, after a trio of failures from 2016 to 2018 – [Red Sparrow](#), [Mother!](#) and [Passengers](#) – the Hollywood Reporter [published a piece](#) titled: “If Jennifer Lawrence Can’t Open a Movie, Who Can?”

“There are no movie stars any more,” said the Avengers actor Anthony Mackie [in a clip that did the rounds](#) on Twitter. “Anthony Mackie isn’t a movie star; [The Falcon](#) is a movie star. And that’s what’s weird. It used to be, with Tom Cruise and Will Smith and Stallone and Schwarzenegger, when you went to the movies, you went to go see the Stallone movie; you went to go see the Schwarzenegger movie. Now you go see X-Men. So, the

evolution of the superhero has meant the death of the movie star.” Chris Evans has enjoyed playing against type in Knives Out and The Gray Man, but almost every Avengers cast member who came to fame through the series has struggled to make it outside the Marvel bubble.

Of course, reports of the death of the movie star are to be taken with a pinch of salt. Part of it is the natural process of “ageing out” that occurs periodically in Hollywood, as one generation hands over to another. “Glamour is on life support and is not expected to live,” [declared Joan Collins](#) at end of the 60s, as the star system – by which studios signed actors to exclusive seven-year contracts, giving them lessons in manners, diction, acting, riding, walking, dancing, singing and fencing – finally crumbled. It made way for the young turks who followed – Jack Nicholson, Robert Redford, Steve McQueen, Dustin Hoffman, Robert De Niro, Al Pacino – who in turn paved the route for the stars of the 80s and 90s.

Studios rely almost exclusively on superhero movies and franchises, for which they can just as easily cast newcomers as stars

But who can deny that a subtle sapping of movie-star power is at work when the producers of the 2022 Oscars invited sports stars including Tony Hawk, Shaun White, Kelly Slater and the Williams sisters on to the podium to presents awards, banishing [Samuel L Jackson](#), [Elaine May](#), [Liv Ullmann](#) and [Danny Glover](#) to the untelevised Governors awards to pick up honorary Oscars?

Throughout most of the 90s, the big question hanging over George Clooney’s career was whether he could break out from TV and make it in the movies. Today, [Keanu Reeves](#) has just [signed up for a TV show](#) (executive-produced by Leonardo DiCaprio), joining [Harrison Ford](#), [Dakota Fanning](#), [Jude Law](#), [Emma Stone](#), [Amy Adams](#), [Meryl Streep](#), [Jonah Hill](#), [Julia Roberts](#), [Sean Penn](#) and [Matthew McConaughey](#) in completing the reverse exodus, from the ever-more convulsive movie business to the relative sanctuary of TV. Clooney topped the list of highest-paid movie stars in 2017 – not for any role, but for selling the tequila brand he co-founded for \$1bn.

“The business has changed entirely,” [Roberts told the New York Times](#) in April, upon the release of [the mini-series Gaslit](#) (which also stars Penn). “When I started, I felt like you did a movie and if it did well then you might get offered a couple of other movies and might have more choice and you’d get paid a little bit more on the next one. There were incremental shifts in opportunity and it made more sense. Now, it’s made more of air; maybe it doesn’t feel as sturdy when you’re going along. I felt pretty sure-footed about the choices I was making. You don’t have those incremental markers any more, it doesn’t seem like.”



Jennifer Lawrence, who won an Oscar for her performance opposite Bradley Cooper in 2012’s *Silver Linings Playbook*, was one of only a handful of actors to skirt with movie-star status in the 2010s. Photograph: Snap Stills/Rex Features

The causes of this volatility are multifarious and far-reaching. These days, studios rely almost exclusively on superhero movies and other branded franchises – for which they can just as easily cast newcomers as stars – to draw crowds into cinemas. Amazon [paid \\$465m](#) for its production of *The Lord of the Rings*, a spin-off with no stars attached, while subscriptions to streaming services have changed how everyone in Hollywood gets paid.

Most workers are better off – it is a seller’s market – but the power of the megastars is dimming. Last year, [Scarlett Johansson got into a fight with Disney](#) after the studio decided to stream [Black Widow](#) on Disney+ on the day of its cinema release, so retaining [up to \\$50m](#) it might have owed the actor, depending on the film’s box-office performance. This spat is but the most public of a series of tussles between studios and stars as actors try to determine their worth in the branded-franchise era. Henry Cavill has ended his run as Warner Bros’ Superman, while Chris Pine and Chris Hemsworth have walked away from Star Trek 4, after contract talks actors broke down over their pay.

So, how much is a star worth? This has always been a dark science. “As far as the film-making process is concerned, stars are essentially worthless and absolutely essential,” said the screenwriter William Goldman after the collapse of the star system. Freed from the studios for the first time, actors were able to negotiate multimillion-dollar deals. For 1989’s Batman, Jack Nicholson took a \$6m paycheck and a cut of the box office and merchandise sales, [ultimately netting about \\$60m](#). The nearest recent equivalent is Robert Downey’s Jr’s \$10m fee for Iron Man 2, but that was negotiated only after the success of the first film, for which he took home \$500,000. Even actors as established as Downey Jr are only as valuable as the superheroes they play. In another role, his price would plummet.

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Jack Nicholson as the Joker in Batman. He made about \$60m from the film.
Photograph: Snap/Rex Features

Streaming has only further muddied the waters. Before the pandemic, everyone in Hollywood engaged in the weekly anxious ritual of poring over the weekend's box office, to determine the week's winners and losers. Now, the streamers pore over viewership data, keeping score of streaming-app sign-ups and retention rates and measuring unconventional metrics such as mentions on social media as they try to determine the quicksilver quality that is a star's worth.

But the connection between star and quarterly subscription rate is even more nebulous than that between star and weekly box office returns. When big movies hit HBO Max, downloads of its app spike, a recent study found. One agent confided recently that some of their more famous clients prefer the streamers' secrecy around ratings because it avoids the bright glare of flopping at the box office.

From the stars' point of view, the connection between their work and their worth has been muffled. They might not be paid as exorbitantly for their successes, but nor are they blamed so harshly for their failures. Indeed, they are buffeted by the same economic forces as the rest of us. "When we were content to gaze up at movie stars on a screen that seemed bigger than life,

the exchange was fairly simple,” wrote the critic Ty Burr in *Gods Like Us*, his 2012 history of movie stardom. “We paid money to watch our daily dilemmas acted out on a dreamlike stage, with ourselves recast as people who were prettier, smarter, tougher, or just not as scared.”



Studio-era stars such as James Dean longed for their work to be valued artistically – as is increasingly the case with celebrity actors. Photograph: Snap/Rex Features

Today, celebrities attuned to social media are much closer to their audiences. The internet has brought a “marked devaluation of the traditional movie star”, argued Burr, conspiring to strip movie stars of their mystique and marking what he calls “the triumph of celebrity socialism. The means of the production of stardom are at last in the hands of the people.”

The gods have become mortal. One benefit is that it has returned a level of artistry to discussion of their work. Spend much time on the fan sites and you will find – in place of the advice columns, beauty tips, fashion features and recipes that used to fill the fan magazines in the studio era – earnest discussion of a star’s acting chops: their “dedication”, “commitment” and “transformation” for a given role. Buzzwords, to be sure, but Brando, James Dean and Montgomery Clift would have killed for such treatment, longing to be seen as Laurence Olivier, not Clark Gable.

“Today, actors and actresses float across and around stardom,” wrote the film historian Janine Basinger in *The Star Machine*, her 2007 history of the star system. She identified the rise of something she called “the neo-star”: the actor who threads the needle between typecasting and character acting. The description fits Driver, Lawrence and Cumberbatch, all of whom have moved between big branded franchises and Oscar-bound film projects.

The old-school, Klieg-lit movie star may soon die, but behold, by the light of a million smartphones the neo-star is born.

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

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Energy bills

‘I’m doing it out of principle’: five views on Don’t Pay UK campaign

As thousands plan to cancel direct debits in protest at soaring energy prices, charities warn about dangerous levels of debt



One person says their monthly bill has already shot up from £100 to £167.
Photograph: Jeanette Teare/Alamy

[Jedidajah Otte](#)

Fri 12 Aug 2022 01.00 EDT

More than [100,000 people have pledged to cancel their direct debit payments](#) for gas and electricity from October in protest against rocketing energy prices, but charities are warning that such actions could push people into dangerous levels of debt.

Five people share their views on the Don't Pay UK campaign, which launched in June, and explain why they will join the protest, or not.

'I just don't have the money'



Kayleigh, a mother of four from Milton Keynes, plans to cancel her direct debit from October. Photograph: Guardian Community/Handout

Kayleigh, a hotel housekeeper from Milton Keynes, has signed up to the campaign in the hope that collective consumer action will force energy providers to lower people's bills.

"I'm a working single mother of four. Back in January, I was forced to go on a variable tariff as I could not afford the new fixed rate Ovo were offering me. In April, my monthly bill shot up from £100 to £167. That's already £802 more a year, and it will increase again in October. I simply won't be able to pay it.

"So far, I have only been able to not go into debt because my energy account was in credit, but the winter will obviously eat that up. I will cancel my direct debit. I'd rather be in the scary position of not paying my bill than being unable to buy food and other necessities this winter."

Kayleigh will put as much money as she can aside while her direct debit is suspended so that she will have money saved up to pay when she “absolutely must”.

“But I know my consumer rights. It would take a long time for a bailiff to come in, and I think that if enough people do it, it’ll cost the energy companies too much. I hope such action would result in lower bills for people. Friends have said they are going to do the same.”

‘The fact I can pay these amounts doesn’t make it right to charge this much’



Steven Johnson fears skyrocketing energy bills could put small companies out of business. Photograph: Steven Johnson/Guardian Community

Steven Johnson, a builder from the north-west of England with his own business, is also signed up to Don’t Pay UK. The 64-year-old says nothing will deter him, although he plans to settle any outstanding energy charges “just before it reaches court action”.

“My main concern is, apart from people not being able to put the heating on, that small businesses could collapse over soaring energy prices. It’s a very real risk.

“People are doing this to try to tell the government they need help. I can afford the price rises, but I can also afford to pay £10 for a pint of beer, but I’m not going to pay that because it’s wrong to charge that much for a beer. I’ve signed up out of principle.

“I’m doing it, 100%.”

‘I’ll only stop paying if enough people do the same’

Simon, 55, a mature student from Scotland, has pledged his support for the campaign but is undecided whether he’ll actually follow through over concerns that it may not gain enough traction.

“It’ll only work if it’s a mass-scale rebellion,” he says. “If only a few people do it, they’ll get hammered by the companies.”

Like others, he is potentially planning to cancel his direct debit, but wants to pay eventually, and is not prepared to damage his credit score. Behind all this, he says, is his belief that utility companies should be nationalised.

“I accept that any government would be in an exceptionally difficult position, without easy solutions. But I’m currently £750 in credit with my energy provider, which benefits their cashflow and bankrolls their operations, while it’s a huge burden for me to keep these payments up.

“The government must make sure that the most vulnerable people are looked after, that’s their job.”

‘I can’t support a campaign encouraging vulnerable people to get into debt’



Caitlin Robinson, an expert on fuel poverty, worries about the potentially very serious consequences. Photograph: Caitlin Robinson/Guardian Community

Caitlin Robinson, an academic fellow at the University of Bristol specialising in fuel poverty, empathises with people who want to stop their monthly payments because they can't afford them, but has concerns about the campaign.

"While I believe in the power of collective action that underpins Don't Pay UK, I can't support a campaign that encourages people to get into debt with their energy supplier," she says.

"As charities have warned this week, the consequences of going into debt can be severe. Suppliers can use debt collection agencies to secure a warrant to enter a person's home and install a prepayment meter that will be debited with the outstanding debt."

Robinson concedes that some people who plan to participate in Don't Pay UK have told her that they understand the implications of what they are doing.

"Perhaps that is fair enough. But what about those households who are already struggling to pay their bills, at risk of energy debt, or already in

debt? The campaign makes it sound as easy as boycotting an energy bill, but I worry it will only make the situation worse.

“We should instead divert our collective efforts into putting even greater pressure on the government to provide support for those who can’t pay, and the long-term investment in energy efficiency and low carbon alternatives we so desperately need.”

‘I won’t pay a thing until a fairer solution is found’



Amy, 36, says she won’t be intimidated by warnings about personal debt and credit scores. Photograph: Guardian Community/Handout

Amy, 36, from Old Trafford, Greater Manchester, is unemployed and has made up her mind: she will stop paying her energy bills and is fully prepared to face any possible consequences.

“We need to stop being dictated to by fossil fuel corporations. I will cancel all payments until the matters are resolved fairly and realistically. For society,” she says.

She believes warnings about damaged credit scores and debt collections are “fear mongering”, adding: “The politics of credit scoring is oppressive too.

So I am refusing to be fearful of it all. And I live in hope that there will be far fairer leniencies regarding this horrendous situation.”

Many who will participate, she says, will be in a situation where they have no other choice. “We’re just trying to survive this crisis.”

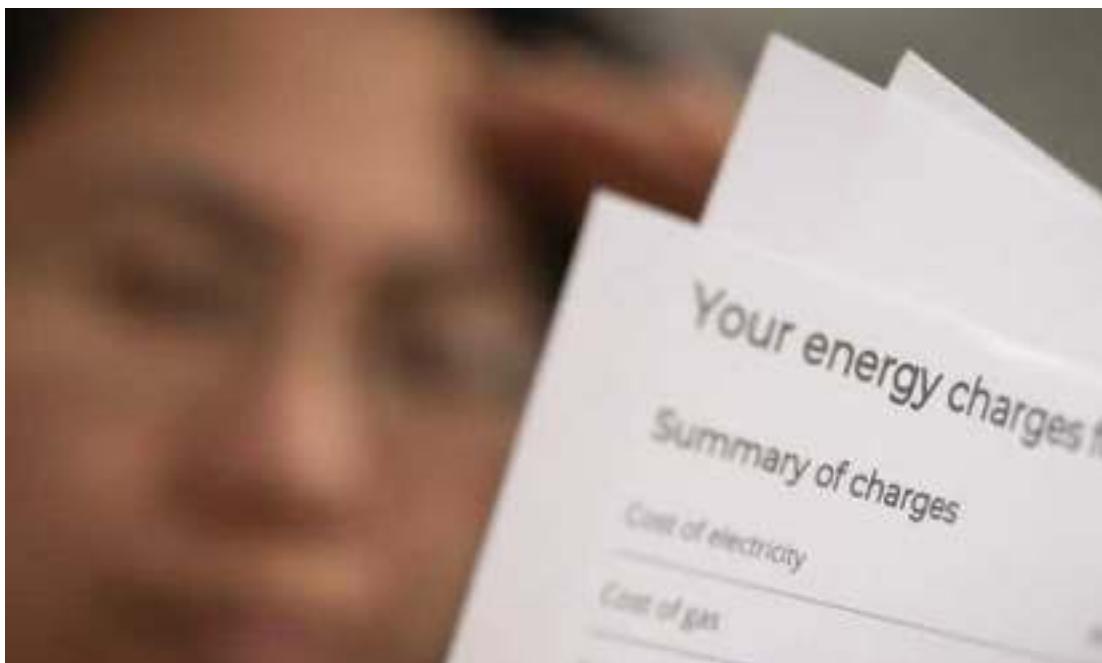
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UK cost of living crisis

More than 100,000 people join Don't Pay UK in protest against energy price rises

Campaign group plans mass non-payment if 1 million sign up and government fails to address crisis



The announcement comes as annual bills for a typical household are forecast to top £4,200 from January amid the biggest cost of living crisis in Britain for decades. Photograph: Danny Lawson/PA

[Jane Clinton](#)

Thu 11 Aug 2022 10.30 EDTFirst published on Thu 11 Aug 2022 10.17 EDT

More than 100,000 people have pledged to cancel their direct debits for gas and electricity from October in protest against rocketing energy prices, according to a campaign group.

Don't Pay UK, which launched in June this year, said its campaign had reached “millions of people” and the support received so far “demonstrates the anger and frustration at a broken energy system that needs to be drastically transformed for the interests of people”.

“In just a few weeks, over 100,000 of us from across the country have come together to say we will refuse to be pushed into fuel poverty and we no longer want to pay for the profits of the energy companies,” it said.

“We are building the biggest mass non-payment campaign since the Poll Tax and we are showing the powers that be that our collective power will force an end to this crisis.”

Don't Pay UK, which is run by a group of activists operating anonymously, said that in addition to the 100,000 pledges, more than 31,000 people have signed up as activists in their communities and 3,000 have joined 150 Don't Pay groups across the country.

The announcement comes as annual bills for a typical household [are forecast to top £4,200 from January](#) amid the biggest cost of living crisis in Britain for decades.

Don't Pay UK said it would only take action if one million people signed up to the mass non-payment of energy bills by 1 October and the government failed to “adequately address the crisis”.

Despite the momentum building for the movement, charities have warned that not paying energy bills could lead to serious consequences, including harming an individual's credit score.

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This week the consumer champion Martin Lewis described soaring energy bills [as “a national crisis” on the scale of the Covid pandemic](#) and the former prime minister, Gordon Brown, [writing in the Guardian](#), called for energy companies that cannot offer lower bills to be temporarily brought back into public ownership.

On Thursday, Boris Johnson, the chancellor, Nadhim Zahawi, and business secretary, Kwasi Kwarteng, met with energy company bosses to discuss the situation.

Johnson appealed to the electricity companies to help ease the cost of living pressures, but added that any “significant fiscal decisions” would be for whoever succeeds him next month to take.

The Treasury said Zahawi and the energy firms agreed to “work closely” over the coming weeks to ensure the public, including vulnerable customers, were supported in the face of rising costs, but did not elaborate on what that would entail.

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Interview

The Mars Volta: ‘The most revolutionary thing we could do was to make a pop record’

[John Doran](#)



‘Losing fans is baked into what we do’ ... the Mars Volta’s Omar Rodríguez-López, with fellow band member Cedric Bixler-Zavala.

After their 2013 split left fans in shock, Cedric Bixler-Zavala and Omar Rodríguez-López reveal how the Church of Scientology drove them apart – and inspired their surprise new album

Fri 12 Aug 2022 03.00 EDT Last modified on Fri 12 Aug 2022 15.48 EDT

When Cedric Bixler-Zavala joined the Church of Scientology in 2009, he thought of it as lightly as “signing up for a yoga class or a self-help group”. Having been introduced by his new wife (TV star Chrissie Carnell) and friends, the frontman of the revered US rock band the Mars Volta underwent an induction process designed to tackle his [\\$1,000-a-week weed habit](#) (essentially a month of rigorous daylong sauna sessions). He found it helpful until he realised it came at a price. “Scientology becomes habitual, [a] crutch,” he says. “What becoming involved actually did was to alienate me from a lot of close friends.”

Top of this list was Omar Rodríguez-López, his pal since childhood days in El Paso, Texas, and the only other constant member of the Mars Volta. As Rodríguez-López says bluntly: “Cedric joining the Church of Scientology contributed to the Mars Volta breaking up [because of] the types of absolutist ideas he started to believe.”

Bixler-Zavala admits that the religion put him “up on a cloud” from which he looked down on everyone around him, whom he considered to be “stuck” without the religion. He decided to try to turn them on to Scientology despite knowing that the response would probably be negative.

Fans were stunned [when the band split in 2013](#). Since forming the Mars Volta in 2001 from the ashes of punk band At the Drive-In, the pair had recorded six fiendishly complex concept albums, drawing together jazz, metal, Latin music and prog. It wasn’t a total rupture – during the hiatus, the pair toured extensively with the reunited At the Drive-In and formed a supergroup, [Antemasque](#). It took until this summer for the group to

announce their reunion. A new, self-titled album, which the pair have been working on in secret since 2019, is released next month



Bixler-Zavala and Rodríguez-López in 2003. Photograph: Peter Pakvis/Redferns

Nevertheless, we speak on separate calls: Rodríguez-López is affable and insightful, despite struggling with Covid; Bixler-Zavala is friendly and generous. But my repeated requests to interview them together, to get a feel for their rejuvenated relationship, come to nothing.

Both bristle at the mention of Scientology. Not only is it one reason behind their split, but it also gives their new album its theme. In 2016 and 2017 four women, including Carnell, accused Danny Masterson, a Church of Scientology member and star of the US sitcom *That '70s Show*, of raping them in the early 00s. Carnell – then Masterson's co-star and girlfriend – alleges she was unconscious during one of these assaults. The criminal trial starts later this month in California and Masterson will face up to 45 years in prison if found guilty. He denies all counts. The women are also suing Masterson and the Church of Scientology for alleged conspiracy to obstruct justice. The women claim they were followed, harassed and surveilled by agents of the church, while Carnell also claims that two of her dogs were killed by people acting on their behalf. The suit alleges that, in the eyes of

Scientology, the women are “fair game” for violating sanctions the church imposed on its members by involving the police. Both Masterson and the church strongly deny all allegations.

Bixler-Zavala is also a plaintiff in the civil case, so he chooses his words carefully. “What I’m writing about on this album is watching my wife and her [spiritual] sisters go through a great deal. For me it is an act of listening, observing the emotional toll and saying: ‘You are not alone.’ There is a view of [the Mars Volta] as crazy, warlike people, but those emotions come from a violent part of the human heart, and here I’m just acting in an emotional support capacity.”

Heavy subject matter is nothing new for a group whose founding mission was to “honour our roots, honour our dead”. Previously, however, these stories were abstracted or converted into fantastical narratives. Bixler-Zavala’s new lyrics, he says, “take the air out of the room” and are, for him at least, unusually clear and to the point. “I’ll shine the blackest light to the culprit on all fours,” [he sings on the single Blacklight Shine](#).

I’m not bound by genre. The only thing that matters is if music makes you feel something

Omar Rodríguez-López

This time, the levity is in the sound. When the Mars Volta reunited, the real shock for fans was that they had returned with – relatively speaking – pop songs without their labyrinthine, heavy hallmarks: Blacklight Shine has a languid funk groove that speaks of David Bowie in mid-70s Stay mode, or Steely Dan at their Latin-inspired best. It’s a long-in-the-making volte face – and another contributing factor to their split. Bixler-Zavala wasn’t receptive to the idea when his bandmate mentioned experimenting with pop in 2007, he says.

“I’m not bound by genre,” says Rodríguez-López. “The only thing that matters is if music makes you feel something.”

Nevertheless, both have been preempting a negative reaction to their new style. The comments under the videos for [Blacklight Shine](#) and [Graveyard](#)

[Love](#) are overwhelmingly positive, yet Bixler-Zavala has rooted out the few negative responses. “Some people might see it as betrayal.” He laughs, defensively: “I’ve seen some people call it yacht rock. But yacht rock slaps so hard that hip-hop producers sample it all the time.”

“Losing ‘fans’ is baked into what we do,” says Rodríguez-López. “I don’t know a greater happiness than losing ‘fans’. A true fan is someone interested in what’s happening now, and then there’s everyone else trying to control what you do or project on to it. I have an aversion to that. That sounds like school. That sounds like the government. That sounds like the police. And unfortunately that’s what a lot of people who think they’re fans end up thinking like.”

Perhaps the lack of any real pushback is a sign of how music has changed during their absence. Pop has been the battleground of the avant garde for the decade that the Mars Volta have been on ice. Their most prominent fan of recent years is Lizzo, who clearly doesn’t care about genre partisanship, and nor do her Zoomer audience. “The most revolutionary thing we could do would be to make a pop record, really,” says Bixler Zavala. I want to believe them, but on paper there isn’t much to separate this idea from the narrative arc of most bands: simply mellowing with age.

The one argument against this being an exercise in commercial survival rests on the quality of the new material. Their single [Vigil](#) is the catchiest thing they have written, landing between Hall & Oates, mid-80s Peter Gabriel and early Talk Talk; Shore Story is pristine R&B that makes it sound as though they’ve been playing this music their whole lives. Bixler-Zavala, who was born in Texas to Mexican parents, appreciates the description: “R&B is not alien to our DNA. It’s cholo music. It’s what my parents listened to when I was a kid. Once my skateboard session was over, I’d go home and there would be a lot of Sunny and the Sunliners, a lot of the Penguins being played.”



The Mars Volta performing in Manchester, Tennessee in 2009. Photograph: C Taylor Crothers/FilmMagic

If Bixler-Zavala's direct response to his wife's alleged trauma speaks of a newfound creative maturity, it's a shift in attitude that's shared by Rodríguez-López. The guitarist was born in Puerto Rico and his interest in shining a light on the colonial history of his homeland has shaped the Mars Volta's new videos. Their visual aesthetic was once exotic, surreal and garish, but the 11-minute film accompanying *Blacklight Shine* is given over to a bomba performance recorded in Puerto Rico, featuring percussionists and improvised dance, speaking both to the indigenous culture of the island and its roots in slavery. The short film for *Graveyard Love* goes a step further, offering a lengthy reading list regarding the island's colonial history and an epigraph from the freedom fighter Lolita Lebrón, who carried out an armed attack on the US Capitol building in 1954: "I did not come to kill anyone, I came to die for Puerto Rico!"

That idea of familial lineage has proved to be healing in the group's reconciliation. When Bixler-Zavala became a father to twins in 2013, Rodríguez-López says that holding his friend's children for the first time was a "breathtaking moment ... I'm sure it helped break the spell".

So, too, has the commitment to acknowledging the darkness that stems from their roots. Rodríguez-López still names his dead relatives and friends five times a day. “It’s deeper than the music. American people have a pathological fear of dying but what they don’t understand is that it’s already happened. It’s inevitable, but here with us all the time. But the closer to death you are, the closer you are to life. It’s healthier that way.”

“I think everyday life requires embracing sadness, and embracing certain emotions that Scientology teaches you to ignore,” Bixler-Zavala concludes.

Removing the crucible of the Mars Volta helped too; their time in At the Drive-In and Antemasque helped to clear the path to reunion. “The Mars Volta is a sacred ground as much as it is also a playground,” says Rodríguez-López. “All of the elements had to be exactly correct for my imagination to open up to it. And that happened naturally over time.”

Bixler-Zavala concludes that they are back for the foreseeable future: “We have worked on this in secret for a long time now. Omar said the Mars Volta can be whatever we want it to be, which was refreshing as it sets the parameters of us not being a heritage act that relies on old songs. We can redefine what we are and move forwards. Our original feeling was that anything was possible and now, once again, it is.”

The Mars Volta is released on September 16.

In the UK, [Rape Crisis](#) offers support for rape and sexual abuse on 0808 802 9999 in England and Wales, 0808 801 0302 in [Scotland](#), or 0800 0246 991 in [Northern Ireland](#). In the US, [Rainn](#) offers support on 800-656-4673. In Australia, support is available at [1800Respect](#) (1800 737 732). Other international helplines can be found at [ibiblio.org/rcip/internl.html](#)

2022.08.12 - Opinion

- Liz Truss is easy to mock, but she could do more damage than Boris Johnson ever did
- Britain's wetlands are the key to saving us from drought, wildfires and even floods
- Britain is sliding towards an energy precipice. So where are its leaders?
- I was a senior officer – and even I struggle to get the police to investigate crimes

[**Opinion**](#)[**Conservative leadership**](#)

Liz Truss is easy to mock, but she could do more damage than Boris Johnson ever did

[**Gaby Hinsliff**](#)



The Tory leadership frontrunner is a calculating workaholic who readily drops positions that no longer serve her



Liz Truss. ‘She loves maths so much she approaches political decisions like an equation to be solved.’ Photograph: Carl Court/Getty Images

Fri 12 Aug 2022 01.00 EDT Last modified on Fri 12 Aug 2022 05.47 EDT

Liz Truss loves maths. She loves it so much that she used to fire mental arithmetic questions at civil servants during meetings, and once told an audience of female high-flyers that her best advice for their ambitious daughters was to study the subject. She loves maths so much, indeed, that she approaches political decisions like an equation to be solved. The maths professor’s daughter works methodically through every possible option, including some that others would consider beyond the pale; she likes to test every argument, sometimes to exhausting lengths. (As one of her aides used to joke: what’s the difference between a rottweiler and [Liz Truss](#)? A rottweiler eventually lets go.) Her logical, dispassionate mathematician’s approach makes her a formidable negotiator and an unsentimental strategist, swift to abandon positions that no longer serve her.

Yet those who know her best say that with it comes a curious emotional detachment, or inability to factor into her calculations how things feel to other people, which is only now being exposed. She can be good company in private, funny and lively. But when colleagues mention her “faintly awkward” manner, or even call her “as close to properly crackers as anybody I’ve met in parliament” (Dominic Cummings, no stranger himself

to being called something similar), this particular disconnectedness is often what they mean. It's shaped the campaign of the woman still most likely to be Britain's next prime minister, barring a political earthquake, and may soon shape this country's future.

The first slip was her regional pay policy, ditched amid predictable outrage at the thought of lower salaries for teachers and nurses in the north of the country. The second and most serious was pledging to help with fuel bills by lowering taxes, "not giving out handouts". (She now claims both policies were misunderstood, and that she wasn't ruling out direct grants.) Even those sympathetic to Truss expect a U-turn on those handouts, in a climate where focus group participants talk about moving their elderly parents in with them for the winter because it's the only way everyone can afford to keep warm. "Politics is about emotions, it's not a mathematical equation," says a former colleague who has worked closely with her. "If you're in a situation like we're in, where people are genuinely terrified, all this 'wrap yourself in the flag, bang on about how great Britain is' sounds tone-deaf." Truss is enviably calm in a crisis, this colleague adds, in part because she strips the emotion away from the issue. But the trouble is that sometimes emotion is key, and empathy matters. What this means for the country, if she does end up leading it through a crisis of staggering proportions, remains poorly understood.

With her extensive cabinet track record and burning ambition, she's not "the Tory Corbyn". But nor is she just "Boris in a dress", although her indulgence of the ridiculous notion that the media are to blame for Johnson's wilfully self-inflicted downfall suggests similarly Trumpian tactics. She lacks Johnson's taste for high living – any emerging scandals won't involve gold wallpaper – or his need to be loved; she has taught herself not to care what people in politics think of her. But where Johnson never seemed to know what to do with his enormous majority, Truss is a workaholic policy geek whose government would be driven by her manic energy. In the worst-case scenario, she could do more damage than he ever did.

"She's a contrarian. Just because 90% of people tell her, 'This way is the way', she's not inclined to accept that. That's not a bad quality, but it can be a problem if it's taken too far and if your default setting is that the orthodoxy

is always wrong,” says a former No 10 staffer, who sympathises with her argument that the Treasury isn’t always right but nonetheless points out that consensus can be the consensus for good reason. “She sees the world in black and white. There’s no room for fudge or grey areas.” Yet the paradox of Truss is that in some ways, she can be astonishingly flexible.

Under David Cameron she was a card-carrying centrist Cameroonian, part of what in his memoirs he called his future “dream team”, alongside Nicky Morgan, Matt Hancock and Anna Soubry. Now she’s the darling of the hard right. Three years ago, she backed building on the green belt so young people could own a home; not any more. She has passionately championed flexible working for parents all her career, yet now indulges Jacob Rees-Mogg’s war on working from home. An unenthusiastic remainder in 2016 (George Osborne talked her out of backing leave in the referendum, a decision she regretted when leave won) she was a no-deal-beats-a-bad-deal Brexiteer by the time power began ebbing from Theresa May to Johnson less than three years later.

Her belief in low taxes, and public spending to match, is much more authentic and consistent. (She was a hawk-eyed chief secretary to the Treasury, challenging sums conventionally regarded as peanuts, and still diagnoses the NHS’s problems as too much bureaucracy rather than not enough money.) But instead of growing the economy and using the proceeds to cut taxes as Cameron advocated, now she argues for doing the easy bit first and hoping growth follows. “She is wherever the power is, which I find extraordinary,” a former cabinet minister says. “But on the other hand, those people tend to win.”

She might well seek to recalculate once in No 10, ditching unpopular positions without embarrassment as she has done before. Yet her room for manoeuvre would be tiny. The Tory right put her where she is now and they won’t tolerate backsliding over tax cuts, or over the Northern Ireland protocol – although trade wars with Europe would only deepen the coming recession – or threats to quit the European court of human rights. As a prime minister facing multiple complex crises simultaneously, she’d struggle to operate in her usual methodical but time-consuming way, all while judging the public mood minute by minute. If anything, mis-steps might come thicker and faster.

There are still people who can't take Liz Truss seriously, but it's this kind of sneering that has arguably been the making of her. When critics mocked her speeches, she set about methodically overhauling her presentation skills. Even as she built a power base in plain sight, she was never deemed sufficiently threatening for either Johnson or May to sack her. Rishi Sunak visibly underestimated how much homework she'd done on the Tory membership. Now she's having the last laugh, except this isn't funny. She could be running the country in four weeks. If that's not serious, what is?

- Gaby Hinsliff is a Guardian columnist
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OpinionWater

Britain's wetlands are the key to saving us from drought, wildfires and even floods

[Tony Juniper](#)

By restoring these natural wet assets that were neglected for decades we can mitigate the worst effects of climate change



Wetlands created for conservation and the protection of wildlife between Cley and Salthouse on the north Norfolk coast. Photograph: David J Chilvers/Alamy

Fri 12 Aug 2022 02.00 EDT Last modified on Fri 12 Aug 2022 16.42 EDT

Fresh water is the lifeblood of civilisation. It makes life on land possible. But we have lost touch with how the water cycle works. As Britain runs further into [serious drought](#), people are asking if we are prepared and if we

should have planned better, by building more reservoirs or plugging leaks in the water distribution system.

These are hugely important subjects. What is not being discussed are the severe floods that may well arrive in a few months' time. Climate change is leading to greater volatility in the water cycle. It's time to stand back and examine our resilience to water extremes and start improving water quality.

One standout conclusion for me is that we need to have much more water in our environment. During the last 100 years, the [UK has lost 90%](#) of its wetlands. This has led to the drastic decline of wildlife and rendered the country more vulnerable to the effects of extreme conditions. Draining fens, desiccating peat bogs, drying floodplains and the claiming of coastal marshes has transformed how our land looks and works. Restoring some of those wetlands could deliver huge benefits.

Wetlands can help to keep rivers flowing, even when rain is scarce, thereby protecting the living, shimmering threads that bring life to the landscape. [Water](#) standing on the land also helps recharge the aquifers that underpin much of our public water supply. Holding more water in the environment through the restoration of wet ecosystems can reduce flood peaks and protect us from the misery of the flooding that periodically affects communities across the country.

During a recent visit to Norfolk, I saw a newly created beaver pond. The animals had been released by the farmer into a large wooded pen on the site of an old wartime base. A tiny stream had been impounded by the animals to create a quite substantial body of water topped up with winter rain. Since the rain stopped earlier this year, that pond has been sustaining a headwater stream of the Glaven, one of England's precious chalk rivers. The new beaver pond has helped that wonderful watercourse remain in better shape than it would otherwise have been. When it does rain again, that stream will flow more evenly than if there were no beavers, therefore reducing the risk of floods.

Beaver ponds and wetlands in general are also excellent at catching carbon and other pollutants such as agricultural fertilisers, so they can play a role in

meeting water-quality targets. That beaver pond was also a reminder of how wetlands can bring vibrant life back into otherwise degraded landscapes. Frogspawn, fish, birds and wetland plants had all found a home there.

Wetter conditions also diminish the risk and effect of major fires. For decades, many of our upland blanket bogs have been subject to drainage, rendering them more susceptible to fire. Making these bogs wetter can not only reduce that peril but also improve water quality, increase wildlife and reduce downstream flooding.

At Natural England, we are pleased to see lots of plans afoot to make more of wetlands. The new [Environmental Land Management schemes](#) that are replacing the EU's common agricultural policy are a major opportunity. The new tool of [biodiversity net gain](#), which will require developers to replace and increase habitat lost to housing and infrastructure, will add to the mix. So, too, will plans to create new wetlands to soak up nutrients from new housing developments. There is a national programme to improve peatlands and also a partnership with businesses, vigorously led by the Wildfowl and Wetlands Trust, to [create 100,000 hectares](#) (247,000 acres) of new wetlands.

There are also opportunities for water companies in the development of [nature-based solutions](#), which harness habitat creation as a natural partner and complement to hard infrastructure. There could also be huge benefits in the careful design of engineering infrastructure such as reservoirs. One example is the Abberton reservoir in Essex, which is not only a major strategic water supply asset, it is an [internationally important habitat](#) for many bird and amphibian species.

A more natural water cycle should be a strategic national priority. Winston Churchill famously once said that we should "[never let a good crisis go to waste](#)". The current drought, and the floods that are likely to arrive later in the year, should be an opportunity to find a new way of looking at water.

- Tony Juniper CBE is the chair of Natural England

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Britain is sliding towards an energy precipice. So where are its leaders?

[Larry Elliott](#)



Gordon Brown's solutions highlight a vacuum that extends beyond the Tories and to the party he once led



The energy round table was really just a PR exercise intended to show the government is doing something while the clock runs down. Photograph: Kyle Heller/No10 Downing Street

Thu 11 Aug 2022 12.55 EDT Last modified on Fri 12 Aug 2022 03.33 EDT

It is a measure of Britain's political vacuum that radical solutions to the energy crunch are being provided not by the prime minister but by Gordon Brown – someone who left Downing Street more than 12 years ago.

No question, the country is being failed by its current leaders. Boris Johnson turned up to a meeting with electricity companies organised by the chancellor, Nadhim Zahawi, and the energy secretary, Kwasi Kwarteng, but it was really just a PR exercise intended to show the government is doing something while the clock runs down.

There were no new substantive proposals, merely a joint pledge by government and industry to work together to ensure the public would be protected as “unprecedented” global events drove prices higher. There was a vague hint from the chancellor about a tougher windfall tax but the real message was: “We can do nothing but feel your pain.”

Johnson made that abundantly clear when he said any fiscal decisions would be left to the next prime minister when they take over at the beginning of September. It is up to Rishi Sunak or Liz Truss to say how much support they will provide and how they will pay for it, something they have so far failed to do.

In an article for the Guardian, [Brown says the lessons](#) he learned from being at the helm during the 2008 global financial crisis were the importance of being ahead of events rather than behind the curve, and to get to the root of the problem. Judging by the way the government is blundering into a crisis, neither lesson has been learned.

That's not to say the parallels with 2008 are exact. Back then, the solution was to nationalise or part-nationalise failing banks, pump state capital into them, then allow them to carry on functioning as before.

The energy supply companies represent a different problem. They are going concerns and don't need a bail out. Nationalising them would be expensive and – given many of them are foreign owned – fraught with legal difficulties. The government could take energy companies under state control and cap bills at a much lower level than the one determined by the global gas market, but that's what it is effectively already doing through discounts.

Brown says nationalisation should be kept in reserve as a last resort, but even so his plan – a suspension of the price cap, greater financial help for the neediest, voluntary energy cuts, home insulation to be treated with the same urgency as the Covid-19 vaccination programme, a tougher windfall tax and a levy on high City bonuses – still has more meat to it than anything Sunak or Truss has produced thus far.

Then again the party Brown once led is not exactly covering itself in glory either. Britain is sliding towards the precipice, so where is Labour?

Another gap to add to all the others in the UK economy

Britain has some clear divides. There is the gap between rich and poor, the gap between north and south, the gap between cities and towns. To that list should now be added the gap between small and big businesses.

That much is obvious from the latest [snapshot of the economy](#) provided by the Office for National Statistics and covering the period in late July and early August.

A big business is defined as a company with more than 250 employees and while this group accounts for only 0.1% of the total, it employs almost 40% of UK workers. In the past three months, 5% of these businesses made one-off payments to their staff in response to the cost of living crisis.

For businesses with fewer than 250 employees it was a different story. Of them, only 1% topped up salaries with a payment. It was a similar story with wages: workers in firms with more than 10 employees were more likely to be getting a pay increase.

A number of conclusions can be drawn from these nuggets of information. One is that even among big businesses top-up payments are not especially widespread. A second is that small businesses are hanging on by their fingertips even before they are whacked by much higher energy bills in the autumn.

A third is that fears of a wage-price spiral are completely overblown. The TUC says by the end of the year [real wages](#) – pay adjusted for inflation – will be falling by 7.75% if the Bank of England's estimates are right. There have been bigger squeezes on real pay but you have to go back a 100 years to find one.

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/business/2022/aug/11/britain-is-sliding-towards-an-energy-precipice-so-where-are-its-leaders>

OpinionPolice

I was a senior officer – and even I struggle to get the police to investigate crimes

[Dal Babu](#)

A new and damning inspectorate report reflects what many of us have been saying about deficiencies

- Dal Babu is a former chief superintendent in the Metropolitan police



‘The Met suffers most critical attention, but a key problem is the nationwide postcode lottery that says the standard of service you receives depends on where you live.’ Photograph: Marcin Rogozinski/Alamy

Thu 11 Aug 2022 09.16 EDT Last modified on Thu 11 Aug 2022 10.20 EDT

So the truth is out. For month after month, year after year, former police officers like me, and even disinterested observers, have been warning that our forces and those who run them risk losing the trust of the public.

Today comes tragic validation, and, if you listen closely, the sound of chickens coming home to roost. Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire & Rescue Services, the authority in these matters, says police are [failing victims of burglary](#) and theft, and missing chances to catch thieves.

Andy Cooke, the chief inspector of constabulary, has spelt it out – and his findings are damning. The deficiencies are basic policing. “It’s not rocket science,” he says: evidence missed because police lacked digital forensic capacity, poor delivery of crime prevention advice and even a failure to preserve forensics.

It’s bad, but it merely reflects what many of us knew to be true. I have lost count of the number of times people tell me about their unsatisfactory experience of policing. They included politicians, journalists and, of course, former colleagues. As ever, the Met suffers most critical attention, but a key problem is the inconsistency, the nationwide postcode lottery that says the standard of service you receives depends on where you live.

I have personally experienced difficulties in getting the police to investigate crimes when I have intervened on behalf of vulnerable victims. Criminals masquerading as roofers scammed elderly victims of thousands of pounds, but police insisted it was civil matter, and it was left to a local authority to convict the fraudsters. Think on that. If I, as a former officer, who knows the system, the culture and the language, cannot elicit a satisfactory response on behalf of vulnerable members of the public, what chance do others have?

How have we reached this sorry pass? Well, in the first instance at least, follow the money. Let us not forget the [20,000 police officers](#) and [18,500 police staff](#) that were cut in England and Wales when Theresa May was home secretary and then prime minister. Indeed, in 2018, May implemented the most severe cuts across policing. The Police Federation pointed out that reducing police numbers would lead to crime increases. They were right. She said they were “crying wolf” (she later denied doing so, but the

evidence is still [there on YouTube](#)). And in the meantime, as we know, the big, bad wolf has carried on breaking into all our houses without much fear of detection.

The crisis we now face will take money and time to deal with. Policing and effective investigation skills cannot be taught overnight. I was fortunate to have a six-month residential initial training course at Hendon Police College. Much of that estate has long been sold off, as much of the training was transferred online, and poorly equipped third-party trainers were given responsibility. The police are desperately trying to recruit but new police officers are leaving at an alarming rate: on average [one in 10 new recruits](#) leave within 12 months. The slick new recruitment adverts look great but they struggle to convey the difficulties of modern policing in a time of tight resources, when force leaders are subject to so much political pressure.

Law and order is catnip to politics. Remember Tony Blair’s mantra, “tough on crime, tough on the causes of crime”. Margaret Thatcher’s “short, sharp shock” also proved popular with the electorate. But in both cases, the effectiveness of the policies was secondary.

There was another political slogan. It was a Tory one: back to basics. In this case, that means properly funded forces fulfilling their remits as visible public servants, responding to public concerns and making communities feel noticed and safe. It’s time politicians and police leaders got back to those core concerns.

- Dal Babu is a former chief superintendent in the Metropolitan police
- *Do you have an opinion on the issues raised in this article? If you would like to submit a letter of up to 300 words to be considered for publication, email it to us at guardian.letters@theguardian.com*

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2022.08.12 - Around the world

- [Meta Facebook owner injects code into websites to track its users, research says](#)
- [Encryption Facebook will begin testing end-to-end encryption as default on Messenger app](#)
- [Gotabaya Rajapaksa Ex-president of Sri Lanka turns up in Thailand after Singapore visa expires](#)
- [Animals farmed How a Spanish tourist spot became a global hub for live animal export](#)

Meta

Meta injecting code into websites to track its users, research says

Owner of Facebook and Instagram is using code to follow those who click links in its apps, according to an ex-Google engineer



Krause discovered the code injection by building a tool that could list all the extra commands added to a website by the browser. Photograph: Arnd Wiegmann/Reuters

[Alex Hern](#)

[@alexhern](#)

Thu 11 Aug 2022 14.11 EDT Last modified on Fri 12 Aug 2022 00.29 EDT

Meta, the owner of Facebook and [Instagram](#), has been rewriting websites its users visit, letting the company follow them across the web after they click links in its apps, according to new research from an ex-Google engineer.

The two apps have been taking advantage of the fact that users who click on links are taken to webpages in an “in-app browser”, controlled by [Facebook](#) or Instagram, rather than sent to the user’s web browser of choice, such as Safari or Firefox.

“The Instagram app injects their tracking code into every website shown, including when clicking on ads, enabling them [to] monitor all user interactions, like every button and link tapped, text selections, screenshots, as well as any form inputs, like passwords, addresses and credit card numbers,” [says Felix Krause](#), a privacy researcher who founded an app development tool acquired by Google in 2017.

In a statement, [Meta](#) said that injecting a tracking code obeyed users’ preferences on whether or not they allowed apps to follow them, and that it was only used to aggregate data before being applied for targeted advertising or measurement purposes for those users who opted out of such tracking.

“We intentionally developed this code to honour people’s [Ask to track] choices on our platforms,” a spokesperson said. “The code allows us to aggregate user data before using it for targeted advertising or measurement purposes. We do not add any pixels. Code is injected so that we can aggregate conversion events from pixels.”

They added: “For purchases made through the in-app browser, we seek user consent to save payment information for the purposes of autofill.”

Krause discovered the code injection by building a tool that could list all the extra commands added to a website by the browser. For normal browsers, and most apps, the tool detects no changes, but for Facebook and Instagram it finds up to 18 lines of code added by the app. Those lines of code appear to scan for a particular cross-platform tracking kit and, if not installed, instead call the Meta Pixel, a tracking tool that allows the company to follow a user around the web and build an accurate profile of their interests.

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The company does not disclose to the user that it is rewriting webpages in this way. No such code is added to the in-app browser of WhatsApp, according to Krause's research.

"Javascript injection" – the practice of adding extra code to a webpage before it is displayed to a user – is frequently classified as a type of malicious attack. Cybersecurity company Feroot, for instance, describes it as an attack that "allows the threat actor to manipulate the website or web application and collect sensitive data, such as personally identifiable information (PII) or payment information."

There is no suggestion that Meta has used its Javascript injection to collect such sensitive data. In the company's description of the Meta Pixel, which is usually voluntarily added to websites to help companies advertise to users on Instagram and Facebook, it says the tool "allows you to track visitor activity on your website" and that it can collect associated data.

It is unclear when Facebook began injecting code to track users after clicking links. In recent years, the company has had a noisy public standoff with Apple, after the latter introduced a requirement for app developers to ask permission to track users across apps. After the prompt was launched, many Facebook advertisers found themselves unable to target users on the social network, ultimately leading to \$10bn of lost revenue and a 26% fall in the company's share price earlier this year, according to Meta.

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/technology/2022/aug/11/meta-injecting-code-into-websites-visited-by-its-users-to-track-them-research-says>

Technology

Facebook will begin testing end-to-end encryption as default on Messenger app

Users who do not opt in to encryption could be vulnerable to unwitting access to their messages – including police searches



Facebook is facing backlash over its cooperation with a Nebraska police department. Photograph: Dominic Lipinski/PA

[Johana Bhuiyan](#)

Thu 11 Aug 2022 16.23 EDT Last modified on Thu 11 Aug 2022 16.37 EDT

Facebook announced on Thursday it will begin testing end-to-end encryption as the default option for some users of its Messenger app on Android and iOS.

The development comes as the company is facing backlash for [handing over messages](#) to a Nebraska police department that aided the department in filing charges against a teen and her mother for allegedly conducting an illegal abortion.

Facebook messenger users currently have to opt in to make their messages end-to-end encrypted (E2E), a mechanism that theoretically allows only the sender and recipient of a message to access its content.

But had all Facebook messages been encrypted by default back in June when Nebraska police issued a search warrant for Facebook user data of the mother investigated in the case, Facebook would not have messages to hand over to police in the first place.

Facebook spokesperson Alex Dziedzan said on Thursday that E2E encryption is a complex feature to implement and that the test is limited to a couple of hundred users for now so that the company can ensure the system is working properly.

Dziedzan also said the move was “not a response to any law enforcement requests”.

Meta, Facebook’s parent company, said it had planned to roll out the test for months. The company had previously announced plans to make E2E encryption the default in 2022 but pushed the date back to 2023.

An affidavit in support of the search warrant in the Nebraska case shows that a Norfolk police department detective asked Facebook in June for the “profile contact information, wall postings, and friend listing, with Facebook IDs” of the mother. Authorities also requested all of her photos and private messages from April to the day the warrant was issued.

The extent of the user data Facebook ended up handing over is not clear, but private messages between the women discussing how to obtain abortion pills were given to police by Facebook, according to [the Lincoln Journal Star](#).

Experts previously told the Guardian that the main way for tech companies to avoid aiding in abortion-related prosecutions is to not store or collect the data at all.

“The only way for companies like Facebook to meaningfully protect people is for them to ensure that they do not have access to user data or communications when a law enforcement agency comes knocking,” Evan

Greer, the director of the digital rights group Fight for the Future, [said](#). “Expanding end-to-end encryption by default is a part of that, but companies like Facebook also need to stop collecting and retaining so much intimate information about us in the first place.”

The Nebraska case illustrates that some tech companies’ focus on limiting or deleting abortion-specific user data in response to privacy concerns may not be an effective strategy.

Facebook this week said that the warrant it received did not mention that the investigation was abortion-related.

Unfortunately this is as many privacy experts projected, that legal data requests are not going to come through neatly labeled as being for abortion. They’ll be for stillbirths, murder, drug trafficking, and all the other wild nonsensical charges they throw at people.
<https://t.co/QJk2XwYVDH>

— Don’t post about crimes. (@KateRoseBee) [August 10, 2022](#)

As Kate Rose, who works on privacy and abortion access at the Digital Defense Fund, tweeted, “legal data requests are not going to come through neatly labeled as being for abortion”.

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/technology/2022/aug/11/facebook-encryption-default-messenger>

[Sri Lanka](#)

Former Sri Lanka president Gotabaya Rajapaksa turns up in Thailand after Singapore visa expires

Rajapaksa allowed in on diplomatic passport for ‘temporary’ stay, say Thai authorities



Gotabaya Rajapaksa at Bangkok's Don Mueang international airport.
Photograph: Reuters

Staff and agencies

Thu 11 Aug 2022 19.19 EDT Last modified on Fri 12 Aug 2022 11.21 EDT

The former Sri Lankan president Gotabaya Rajapaksa, who fled overseas to escape protests against his government, arrived in Thailand on Thursday night on a flight from Singapore, where he had been staying since mid-July.

Thai television stations showed Rajapaksa and a woman believed to be his wife outside the VIP hall at Bangkok's Don Mueang airport being led to a limousine, which drove off to an undisclosed destination.

Officials in [Thailand](#) on Wednesday said they had been asked by the Sri Lankan government to allow him entry, and that he would be permitted to stay temporarily.

The Thai prime minister, Prayuth Chan-ocha, said he was aware of Rajapaksa's intended visit and that it was allowed for humanitarian reasons because the former president was seeking asylum in a third country. He did not elaborate but said Rajapaksa would not engage in political activity while in Thailand.

Rajapaksa has made no public comments about his travel plans. After fleeing Sri Lanka in July, he went to neighbouring Maldives in a Sri Lankan military plane and then on to Singapore, where his visa expired on Thursday. He submitted his resignation from the presidency only after he left Sri Lanka.

A Thai foreign ministry spokesperson, Tanee Sangrat, said Rajapaksa's "stay is temporary in nature with the aim of onward travel. No political asylum has been sought." He said that because the former president held a diplomatic passport, he would be allowed to stay for 90 days without a visa.

Sri Lankans have staged large street protests for months demanding democratic reforms and solutions to the country's economic collapse.

Protesters who had occupied official offices and residences in Sri Lanka's capital, Colombo, blame mismanagement and corruption by the Rajapaksa family for the economic crisis that has led to serious shortages of essentials such as medicines, food and fuel. Sri Lanka is negotiating with the International Monetary Fund for a bailout programme.

In addition to being criticised for mismanaging Sri Lanka's economy, Rajapaksa has been accused by human rights groups of involvement with

war crimes when he was defence secretary during Sri Lanka's civil war, which ended in 2009.

With Associated Press

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Animals farmedLive exports

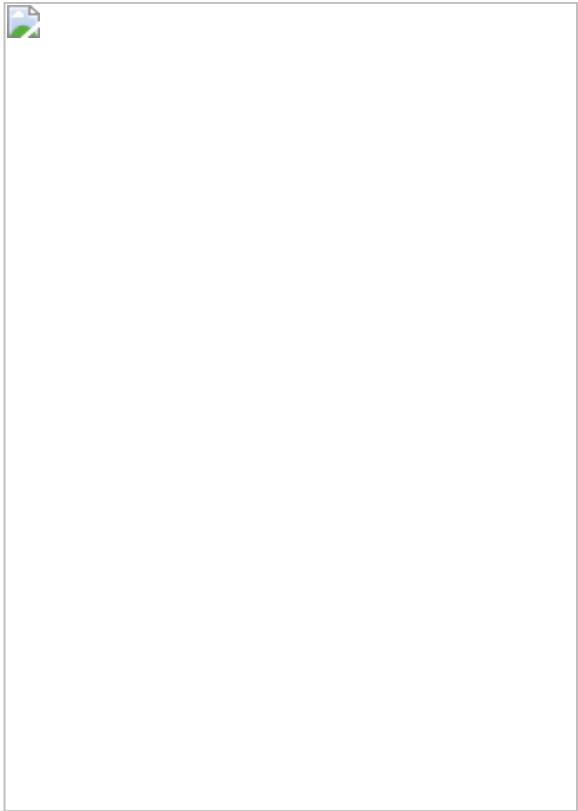
How a Spanish tourist spot became a global hub for live animal export

Millions of sheep and cattle are being shipped from Cartagena to the Middle East in a trade branded ‘cruel and unnecessary’



Animal welfare activists monitor freight ships in the port of Cartagena, which exports millions of live animals to the Middle East. Photograph: Laura Villadiego

Animals farmed is supported by



About this content

Laura Villadiego in Cartagena

Fri 12 Aug 2022 01.30 EDT Last modified on Fri 12 Aug 2022 01.52 EDT

It is 7am in the port of Cartagena, and the Jouri, a livestock carrier, is getting ready for loading. Dozens of trucks full of noisy cattle line up, waiting for their animals to be weighed before they are transferred to the vessel.

The tourists who visit its Roman ruins and nearby beaches might never guess that this region has quietly become one of the biggest players in the [global trade of live animals](#).

The past month has seen a peak in exports, driven by demand for animals to slaughter for Eid al-Adha, the festival of sacrifice, which took place in July this year, and is celebrated throughout the Muslim world.

A boom in exports from Spain over the past decade has seen it now establish itself as the largest exporter of cattle by sea in [Europe](#), and second largest exporter of sheep after Romania.

More than three million farm animals have been sent out on ships from Cartagena's port in the past five years, mostly to the Middle East and north Africa, in a trade worth almost £500m to Spain in 2020.

Live animal exports

A tightening of animal welfare rules by another leading exporter of farm animals, Australia, has been a big boost for Spain. The new rules include requirements for details on the conditions animals will be slaughtered in once they arrive at destination countries.

Since the [new rules were introduced in 2011](#), Australia has stopped trading with Saudi Arabia and Libya, with both countries now a top destinations for sheep and cattle from Spain, along with Lebanon and Jordan.

Cartagena

“Usually within a market, if someone pulls out … someone else comes in to fill the void, and [Spain](#) was willing to do that,” says Olga Kikou, European Affairs Manager at Compassion in World Farming, an organisation campaigning for stronger EU regulations on farmed animal welfare.

Spain is also the perfect place to fatten animals, say animal welfare campaigners, who point to the comparatively low cost of feed, and large amount of space available for animals. Many of the cattle are male calves unwanted by the dairy industry and sent to Spain from across Europe.

It's the unnecessary cruelty, which will sooner or later be the end of this industry

Gabriel Paun, Animals International

Along with Tarragona, another Spanish port 500km to the north, Cartagena is the only facility in Spain with permits to consign live animals by sea.

Last year, close to 400,000 animals were exported from Cartagena and a total of 534,000 from the whole of Spain. Not that anyone in the city itself would know. Trucks from farms across Spain bring the animals directly to an area of the port closed off to the public. Only when trucks arrive after the port's closure, and drivers have to wait at a nearby petrol station, does the noise of the animals give a hint to outsiders.

Animal welfare activists use superzoom lenses to look for evidence of violations of EU rules. These include: wounds, bad conditions inside the trucks, and cruelty to animals when they are loaded.

“Most people wouldn’t even understand why we are putting a goat, a sheep, a pig or cattle on a long transport. It just doesn’t make sense. It’s the unnecessary cruelty, which will sooner or later be the end of this industry,” says Gabriel Paun, director of Animals International.

Although vets check the animals before they board, conditions onboard remain largely unknown, with only Australia releasing mortality figures for what are often multiple-day journeys. Activists are calling for the mandatory presence of a vet on vessels to be included in new EU legislation, expected by the end of 2023.

Last year, almost [3,000 cattle exported from Spain](#) on two separate vessels died within two weeks. The Karim Allah and the Elbeik were stranded after being refused entry into Middle East ports because of suspected cases of the animal disease bluetongue.



Cattle on board a livestock ship after leaving the port of Cartagena in Spain.
Photograph: Tallia Shipping Line /Reuters

The Karim Allah had departed from Cartagena with 895 cows onboard and was refused entry into several ports in Turkey, Libya and Tunisia. After a two-month-long journey, it returned to Cartagena.

During the journey, 31 animals died. The others were declared unfit and euthanised in early March. The Elbeik, with 1,789 animals onboard, suffered the same fate. When it returned to port in Spain, 179 animals were already dead. The remaining animals were also declared unfit and euthanised.

The official report for the Elbeik, seen by the Guardian, describes a lack of water and food for the animals, with malfunctioning feeding systems, overcrowding of some parts of the vessel, breaking maximum density rules, and overall neglect of animal welfare by the crew.

The captain also confessed to Spanish authorities that at least 169 cattle were chopped up and thrown overboard into the Mediterranean.

Activists continue to lobby for an [outright EU ban](#) on the live animal trade, and its replacement with frozen meat exports.

Some Spanish politicians agree. María Marín, a member of the regional parliament in Murcia, says her Unidas Podemos party will propose regulations to “forbid the trade of livestock to third countries” and replace it with meat trade of “animals slaughtered in Europe following European regulations”.

Widespread political support for such a ban in Spain remains unlikely, says Spain’s animal rights party, the Party Against Mistreatment of [Animals](#). “Spain is an industrial farm that makes a high contribution to the economy of the country and private companies. It was actually one of the few sectors that grew during the pandemic,” it said in a written answer.

A starting point would be greater transparency, argues Guillermo Díaz, a national MP from the liberal party Ciudadanos. “As long as the citizens don’t have information on this trade, there will be no pressure against it,” he says. “If people knew how these animals are raised and transported, they would turn against it.”

Sign up for the [Animals Farmed monthly update](#) to get a roundup of the biggest farming and food stories across the world and keep up with our investigations. You can send us your stories and thoughts at animalsfarmed@theguardian.com

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Headlines saturday 13 august 2022

- [Salman Rushdie Author stabbed on stage in New York remains on ventilator after surgery](#)
- [Salman Rushdie Police identify attack suspect as 24-year-old from New Jersey](#)
- [Blood and terror Witnesses tell of attack on Salman Rushdie at literary festival](#)
- ['This is shocking' Writers and celebrities horrified by attack](#)

[US crime](#)

Salman Rushdie on ventilator after being stabbed on stage at New York state event

Author attacked at event in western New York as police identify the suspect in custody as Hadi Matar

- [Police identify suspect in Salman Rushdie attack](#)
- [Iranians react with mixture of praise and concern](#)

Salman Rushdie on ventilator after being stabbed at New York event – video report

[Ed Pilkington](#) and [Maya Yang](#) in New York, [Sam Levin](#) in Los Angeles and agencies

Fri 12 Aug 2022 14.13 EDTFirst published on Fri 12 Aug 2022 11.15 EDT

Sir [Salman Rushdie](#) remains on a ventilator after being attacked on stage at an event in western New York state on Friday morning.

Rushdie, the author whose writing led to death threats from Iran in the 1980s, was stabbed in the neck and torso as he was about to give a lecture in western [New York](#).

Rushdie, 75, was taken to surgery, and Andrew Wylie, his spokesperson, said in a statement early Friday evening that the author was put on a ventilator and had suffered significant injuries: “The news is not good. Salman will likely lose one eye; the nerves in his arm were severed; and his liver was stabbed and damaged.”

Authorities later identified the man suspected of stabbing Rushdie as 24-year-old [Hadi Matar](#) of Fairview, New Jersey, who had bought a pass to the event.

An Associated Press reporter witnessed a man storm the stage at the Chautauqua Institution and begin assaulting Rushdie as he was being introduced to give a talk to an audience of hundreds on artistic freedom.

Stunned attendees helped wrest the man from Rushdie, who had fallen to the floor. A New York state police trooper providing security at the event arrested the attacker.

“A man jumped up on the stage from I don’t know where and started what looked like beating him on the chest, repeated fist strokes into his chest and neck,” Bradley Fisher, who was in the audience, said. “People were screaming and crying out and gasping.”

A doctor in the audience helped tend to Rushdie while emergency services arrived, police said.

Photos taken by an Associated Press reporter show Rushdie lying on his back, with a first responder crouched over him. The author’s legs were being held up above his chest, presumably to keep blood flowing to the heart.

Rushdie’s interviewer, Henry Reese, 73, was also attacked and suffered a minor head injury, police said.

Reese, who co-founded an organization that provides residencies to writers facing persecution, was released from the hospital on Friday and [said in a statement](#) that Rushdie was “one of the great defenders of freedom of speech and freedom of creative expression”. He added, “The fact that this attack could occur in the United States is indicative of the threats to writers from many governments and from many individuals and organizations.”



Rushdie is tended to after he was attacked during a lecture. Photograph: Charles Savenor/Local News X/TMX/Reuters

The White House national security adviser, Jake Sullivan, described the attack as “appalling”. He wrote on Twitter: “We’re thankful to good citizens and first responders for helping him so swiftly.”

The assault happened shortly before 11am at the Chautauqua Institution near Erie in western New York state close to Lake Erie, about 400 miles (644 km) north-west of New York City.

Rushdie, author of 14 novels, had been invited to talk about the importance of the US offering asylum for writers and other artists in exile.

Eyewitness reports said that a man wearing a black mask rushed onstage and began to attack Rushdie as he was sitting on the stage. Paula Voell, a retired journalist, told [the Buffalo News](#) that it was quickly apparent that an assault had taken place.

“We saw the man race a few steps across the stage and there was horror – the whole audience reacted, and probably 15 spectators raced on to the stage to try to attend to him, or so it seemed,” she said.

Phone footage captured moments after the attack shows audience members scrambling on to the stage to help. Gasps are heard around the auditorium as members of the public immediately evacuate the space.

Jeremy Genovese, 68, from Beachwood, Ohio, a retired academic from Cleveland State University, told the Press Association news agency he arrived at the amphitheater as it was being evacuated and that people were “streaming out”.

He said: “People were in shock, many people in tears. Chautauqua has always prided itself as a place where people can engage in civil dialogue.

“The amphitheatre is a large outdoor venue where people have given lectures since the late 1800s. You need a pass to access the grounds but it is not too difficult get in.”

The [New York Post](#), citing law enforcement sources, described the suspect Matar as being sympathetic toward the Iranian government. At a news briefing late Friday, authorities said a motive for the attack was unclear.

Rushdie’s book The Satanic Verses has been banned in Iran since 1988, as many Muslims consider it to be blasphemous. A year later, Iran’s late leader Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini issued a fatwa, or edict, calling for Rushdie’s death. A bounty of more than \$3m has also been offered for anyone who kills Rushdie.

Iran’s government has long since distanced itself from Khomeini’s decree, but anti-Rushdie sentiment lingered.



Salman Rushdie in London. Photograph: Luke MacGregor/Reuters

In 2012, a semi-official Iranian religious foundation raised the bounty for Rushdie from \$2.8m to \$3.3m.

Rushdie dismissed that threat at the time, saying there was “no evidence” of people being interested in the reward. That year, Rushdie published a memoir, *Joseph Anton*, about the fatwa.

Journalists, writers and celebrities reacted with shock and concern. Horror novelist Stephen King tweeted: “I hope Salman Rushdie is okay.”

Indian author and political and environmental activist Arundhati Roy told the Guardian: “I am shocked and saddened beyond measure. Nothing can justify this attack.”

Close friend Nigella Lawson, the English food writer and celebrity television cook, wrote: “Such shocking news of Salman Rushdie having been stabbed. This is horrific. Am distraught. Please, please let him be ok.”

Speaking to the Guardian, Japanese-born English novelist Kazuo Ishiguro said: “He’s been incredibly brave through all these years, continuously putting himself on the line for the right to think and speak freely, despite the dangers that never went away. We’re hoping and hoping he’ll pull through.”

The president of France, Emmanuel Macron, [tweeted](#), “For the last 33 years, Salman Rushdie has symbolised freedom and the fight against obscurantism. Hatred and barbarism have just struck him, so cowardly. His struggle is ours and universal. Today, more than ever, we are at his side.”

In the US, where Rushdie lives, the New York state governor, Kathy Hochul, told a press conference that a state police officer saved Rushdie’s life and that of the moderator.

She added: “He is alive, he has been airlifted to safety. But here is an individual who has spent decades speaking truth to power, someone who’s been out there unafraid, despite the threats that have followed him his entire adult life.”



Rushdie, in 1983. Photograph: Reg Innell/Toronto Star/Getty Images

Rushdie was previously president of PEN America, which celebrates free expression and speech, and its chief executive, Suzanne Nossel, was among those reacting to the attack.

She said: “PEN America is reeling from shock and horror … Our thoughts and passions now lie with our dauntless Salman, wishing him a full and speedy recovery. We hope and believe fervently that his essential voice cannot and will not be silenced.”

Rushdie found fame with *Midnight's Children*, about the birth of India, which won the Booker prize in 1981.

The author lived in hiding for many years in London under a British government protection programme after Ayatollah Khomeini issued a fatwa calling for his execution over *The Satanic Verses*.

Finally, in 1998, the Iranian government withdrew its support for the death sentence.

He was knighted in 2008.

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US news

Police identify Salman Rushdie attack suspect as 24-year-old from New Jersey

Hadi Matar, 24, in custody after author of Satanic Verses was stabbed at literary event in western New York



A view of the Chautauqua Institution where Salman Rushdie was attacked on Friday. Photograph: Lindsay Dedario/Reuters

[Ramon Antonio Vargas](#)

Fri 12 Aug 2022 18.21 EDTFirst published on Fri 12 Aug 2022 17.48 EDT

The man accused of [stabbing author Salman Rushdie](#) on a stage in western New York on Friday is a 24-year-old man from Fairview, New Jersey, according to authorities.

Police identified the suspect as Hadi Matar, 24, in a news release distributed hours after the Indian-born author's attack.

Rushdie, 75, was about to speak at a literary festival hosted by the Chautauqua Institution late in the morning when Matar allegedly rushed on stage and stabbed him at least once in the neck and the stomach, Maj Eugene Staniszewski of New York state police said.

Spectators and institution staffers rushed Matar and tackled him after the stabbing, Staniszewski added. A state trooper and a local sheriff's office deputy working security at the talk then moved in and arrested him.

A doctor who was attending Rushdie's speech treated the wounded author until a helicopter crew could fly him to a hospital, where he underwent surgery.

Rushdie's agent, Andrew Wylie, [said](#) on Friday evening that he was put on a ventilator and had suffered significant injuries: "The news is not good. Salman will likely lose one eye; the nerves in his arm were severed; and his liver was stabbed and damaged."

The speaker introducing Rushdie, 73-year-old Ralph Henry Reese, was treated and released for what Staniszewski described as a relatively minor facial injury.

Rushdie's novel *The Satanic Verses* – centering on two Indian Muslims living in England – has been banned in [Iran](#) since 1988, with many Muslims considering it to be blasphemous.

Staniszewski said police had not determined a motive for Matar's alleged attack on Rushdie, though agents with the FBI had arrived to assist local and state officials with their investigation into the stabbing that had made international headlines.

The exact charges against Matar, who had bought a ticket to Friday's talk, would also depend on Rushdie's condition following the stabbing.



Law enforcement officers detain a person outside the Chautauqua Institution where Salman Rushdie was attacked on Friday. Photograph: Charles Fox/AP

Many have noted that Iran's late leader Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini called for Rushdie's death in 1989, with a bounty of more than \$3m being offered for anyone who killed the author.

[The New York Post](#), citing law enforcement sources, reported that Matar was sympathetic toward the Iranian government. Police have not yet announced a motive.

Iran's government has long since distanced itself from the Ayatollah's fatwa, or edict, calling for Rushdie's life. But anti-Rushdie sentiment has persisted.

The Chautauqua Institution's president, Michael Hill, said his organization had made sure in advance to have law enforcement officers on hand for Rushdie's talk. He said the stabbing was "unlike anything in [the institution's] nearly 150-year history".

"Be assured we will return to our pulpits and our podiums," Hill said while offering prayers to the families of Rushdie and Reese. "We'll continue to convene the critical conversations that can help build empathy, obviously which is now more important than ever."

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US crime

Blood and terror: witnesses tell of attack on Salman Rushdie at literary festival

Arts event interrupted by screams as people rushed to render aid to the novelist and subdue his assailant



Law enforcement officers stand watch outside at the Chautauqua Institution after author Salman Rushdie was attacked during a lecture. Photograph: Joshua Goodman/AP

[J Oliver Conroy](#)

Fri 12 Aug 2022 16.12 EDT Last modified on Sat 13 Aug 2022 04.38 EDT

The Chautauqua summer arts festival in upstate [New York](#) is normally a calm and pleasant affair, drawing thousands of literary-minded people eager to commune with their favorite writers.

That changed dramatically on Friday, when the famed novelist [Salman Rushdie](#), who had just walked on to a stage to give a lecture, was stabbed by a man wielding a knife – transforming the faculty-lounge atmosphere into a blood-spattered scene.

The shocking events unfolded in seconds and stunned onlookers.

Rushdie, who has been targeted for death over accusations that his prize-winning 1988 novel *The Satanic Verses* is blasphemous, was sitting in a chair on the stage as a panelist introduced him and his work. A man dressed in black rushed the stage and attacked Rushdie.

“I could just see his fists sort of pounding on Salman,” a witness, Bill Vasu, [told](#) the New York Times.

As members of the audience screamed, people ran to tackle the attacker and render aid to Rushdie, who had been apparently stabbed several times, including in the neck. Rushdie lay face up on the floor, as someone elevated his legs. He was “covered with blood and there was blood running down on to the floor” as people crouched over him saying, “He has a pulse, he has a pulse,” two other witnesses told the Times.

A state police officer at the event immediately arrested the man, who was identified later by authorities as Hadi Matar, a 24-year-old from New Jersey.



Salman Rushdie is loaded into a medevac helicopter after he was attacked while on stage at an event in Chautauqua, New York. Photograph: @HoratioGates3/EPA

Later, six people bore Rushdie by stretcher across a grassy lawn to a waiting medevac helicopter, which flew him to a nearby hospital. His agent, Andrew Wylie, has said Rushdie was put on a ventilator and had suffered significant injuries: “The news is not good. Salman will likely lose one eye; the nerves in his arm were severed; and his liver was stabbed and damaged.”

According to the festival’s itinerary, Rushdie was planning to discuss the US’s role as an “asylum for writers and other artists in exile and as a home for freedom of creative expression”.

He was accompanied on the stage by Henry Reese, the co-founder of a residency program for writers living in exile under threat of persecution. Reese reportedly suffered a minor head injury.

A member of the Chautauqua staff asked the audience to calmly evacuate the 4,000-person auditorium. Shortly thereafter the festival canceled all events for the day.

In 1989, the then supreme leader of Iran, Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini, declared that Rushdie’s novel *The Satanic Verses* – which included

speculative sequences about the early life of the prophet Muhammad – was blasphemous, and called for Rushdie's death. The book was banned in many countries.

Rushdie, who was born in Mumbai and then worked in Britain, was forced into hiding. He lived for a time under an assumed name and police protection. Several assassination attempts were made against people associated with the publication of the book. In 1991, a man stabbed Rushdie's Japanese translator, Hitoshi Igarashi, to death in Tokyo.

Rushdie moved to New York in 2000.

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Salman Rushdie

‘This is shocking’: writers and celebrities horrified by Salman Rushdie attack

Author, who has previously faced death threats, was stabbed as he was about to deliver a lecture in western New York



Salman Rushdie in Spain in October 2015. Photograph: Jl Cereijido/EPA

[Maya Yang](#)

Fri 12 Aug 2022 13.48 EDTFirst published on Fri 12 Aug 2022 12.54 EDT

Writers and celebrities have reacted with shock and horror after author [Salman Rushdie was attacked onstage](#) at an event in New York state on Friday.

Rushdie was attacked as he was about to deliver a lecture at the Chautauqua Institution in western [New York](#), according to witnesses. Police later said he

had been taken to hospital with an apparent stab wound to the neck.

Rushdie's writings, which many Muslims consider blasphemous, has led to death threats from Iran in the 1980s as Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini issued a fatwa, or edict, that called for Rushdie's death.

Stephen King tweeted: "I hope [Salman Rushdie](#) is okay."

"‘What is freedom of expression? Without the freedom to offend, it ceases to exist.’ – Salman Rushdie. Holding thoughts for you today,” Scott Simon, host of the Weekend Edition Saturday on NPR, [tweeted](#), quoting Rushdie's own words.

Wajahat Ali, author of Go Back to Where You Came From and Daily Beast columnist, [tweeted](#): “I was there 2 weeks ago giving a talk. It’s a lovely place with a fantastic, curious and welcoming community. This is shocking. I hope Salman Rushdie isn’t injured and can recover and heal quickly. How disgusting.”

He went on to [add](#): “Unhinged men wanting to police the world through violence. Salman Rushdie stabbed today. FBI attacked yesterday. I fear these examples of violence will only keep escalating with polarization, disinformation and extremism going mainstream.”

Ian McEwan, the Booker-prize winning author, criticised the “appalling attack”, saying it “represents an assault on freedom of thought and speech”.

“Salman has been an inspirational defender of persecuted writers and journalists across the world. He is a fiery and generous spirit, a man of immense talent and courage and he will not be deterred.”

JK Rowling condemned the “horrifying news”, adding: “Feeling very sick right now. Let him be ok.”

Neil Gaiman [wrote](#): “I’m shocked and distressed to see my friend @SalmanRushdie has been attacked before a talk. He’s a good man and a brilliant one and I hope he’s okay.”

“Prayers for Salman Rushdie,” former Democratic presidential candidate and author Marianne Williamson [tweeted](#).

The New York governor, Kathy Hochul, thanked state police’s swift response and offered her thoughts to Rushdie, [tweeting](#): “Thank you to the swift response of @nyspolice & first responders following today’s attack of author Salman Rushdie. Our thoughts are with Salman & his loved ones following this horrific event. I have directed State Police to further assist however needed in the investigation.”

Suzanne Nossel, CEO of PEN America, a non-profit organization that works to defend freedom of expression through literature, issued a statement, [saying](#): “PEN America is reeling from shock and horror at word of a brutal, premeditated attack on our former President and stalwart ally, Salman Rushdie … We can think of no comparable incident of a public violent attack on a literary writer on American soil.”

She continued: “Just hours before the attack, on Friday morning Salman had emailed me to help with placements for Ukrainian writers in need of safe refuge from the grave perils they face. Salman Rushdie has been targeted for his words for decades but has never flinched nor faltered. He has devoted tireless energy to assisting others who are vulnerable and menaced.”

Nigella Lawson, an English food writer and television cook, [wrote](#), “Such shocking news of Salman Rushdie having been stabbed. This is horrific. Am distraught. Please, please let him be ok.”

Speaking to the Guardian, Japanese-born English novelist Kazuo Ishiguro said: “He’s been incredibly brave through all these years, continuously putting himself on the line for the right to think and speak freely, despite the dangers that never went away. We’re hoping and hoping he’ll pull through.”

Indian author and political and environmental activist Arundhati Roy told the Guardian, “I am shocked and saddened beyond measure. Nothing can justify this attack.”

In a statement to the Guardian, Tanzanian-born English author Abdulrazak Gurnah said, “This is such a dreadful persecution for someone who has

written about things he has understood. We have been through this thing for ages, and we thought he was safe, but now we find out he was not. It seems writers cannot speak out and are in danger.”

Meanwhile, Benjamin Haddad, a member of the National Assembly of France, [tweeted](#): “Solidarity with the writer, symbol of freedom of expression and intellectual courage in the face of Islamist fanaticism.”

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- Pregnancy I had babies in Germany 10 years apart. This is what I learned about healthcare, motherhood and race

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How brain surgeon Henry Marsh went from doctor to patient: ‘I blurted out the question we all ask – how long have I got?’



Henry Marsh: ‘I simply couldn’t believe the diagnosis at first, so deeply ingrained was my denial.’ Photograph: Sebastian Nevols/The Guardian

For years, the author and neurosurgeon dismissed symptoms of prostate cancer. Then he finally got the diagnosis he'd been avoiding ...

[Henry Marsh](#)

Sat 13 Aug 2022 05.00 EDT

It seemed a bit of a joke at the time – that I should have my own brain scanned. I should have known better. I had always advised patients and friends to avoid having brain scans unless they had significant problems. You might not like what you see, I told them.

I had volunteered to take part in a study of brain scans in healthy people. I was curious to see my own brain, if only in the greyscale pixels of an MRI scan. I had spent much of my life looking at brain scans or living brains when operating, but the awe I felt as a medical student when seeing brain surgery for the first time had fallen away quite quickly once I started training as a neurosurgeon. Besides, when you are operating you do not want to distract yourself with philosophical thoughts about the profound mystery of how the physical matter of our brains generates thought and feeling, and the puzzle of how this is both conscious and unconscious. Nor do you want to be distracted by thinking about the family of the patient under your knife, waiting, desperate with anxiety, somewhere in the world outside the theatre. You need to separate yourself from these thoughts and feelings, although they are never far away. All that matters is the operating and the self-belief it requires. You live very intensely when you operate.

Perhaps I thought that seeing my own brain would confirm the fascination with neuroscience that had led me to become a neurosurgeon in the first place, and that it would fill me with a feeling of the sublime. But it was vanity. I had blithely assumed that the scan would show that I was one of the small number of older people whose brains show little sign of ageing. I can now see that although I had retired, I was still thinking like a doctor – that diseases only happened to patients, that I was still quite clever and had a good memory, with perfect balance and coordination. I ran many miles every week and lifted weights and did press-ups. But when I eventually

looked at my brain scan, all this effort looked like King Canute trying to stop the rising tide.

I was looking at ageing in action. My 70-year-old brain was shrunken and withered

As I looked at the images on my computer's monitor, one by one, just as I used to look at my patients' scans, slice by slice, working up from the brain stem to the cerebral hemispheres, I was overwhelmed by a feeling of complete helplessness and despair. I thought of folk stories about people who had premonitions of attending their own funeral. I was looking at ageing in action, in black-and-white MRI pixels, death and dissolution foretold, and already partly achieved. My 70-year-old brain was shrunken and withered, a worn and sad version of what it once must have been. There were also ominous white spots in the white matter, signs of ischaemic damage, small-vessel disease, known in the trade as white matter hyperintensities – there are various names for them. They looked like some evil pox. Not to put too fine a point on it, my brain is starting to rot. I am starting to rot. It is the writing on the wall, a deadline.

I have always felt fear as well as awe when looking at the stars at night, although the poor eyesight that comes with age now makes them increasingly difficult to see. Their cold and perfect light, their incomprehensible number and remoteness, the near eternity of their lives, in such contrast to the brevity of mine. Looking at my brain scan brought the same feeling. The urge to avert my eyes was very great. I forced myself to work through the scan's images, one by one, and have never looked at them again. It is just too frightening.

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There is extensive medical literature about the white-matter changes on my brain scan, the white matter being the billions of axons – electrical wires – that connect the grey matter, the actual nerve cells. If we reach 80 years old, most of us will have these changes. Their presence is associated with an

increased risk of stroke, although it is unclear whether they predict dementia or not. If we make it to 80, we have a one-in-six risk of developing dementia, and the risk gets greater if we live longer. It is true that a so-called “healthy lifestyle” reduces the risk of dementia to a certain extent (some researchers suggest 30%), but however carefully we live, we cannot escape the effects of ageing. We can only delay them, if we are lucky. Long life is not necessarily a good thing. Perhaps we should not seek it too desperately.

We accept that wrinkled skin comes with age but find it hard to accept that our inner selves, our brains, are subject to similar changes. These changes are called degenerative in the radiological reports, although all this alarming adjective means is just age-related. For most of us, as we age, our brains shrink steadily, and if we live long enough, they end up resembling shrivelled walnuts, floating in a sea of cerebrospinal fluid, confined within our skull. And yet we usually still feel that we are our true selves, albeit diminished, slow and forgetful. The problem is that our true self, our brain, has changed, and as we have changed with our brains, we have no way of knowing that we have changed. It is the old philosophical problem – when I wake in the morning, how can I be certain I am the same person today that I was yesterday? And as for 10 years ago?

Hope is one of the most precious drugs doctors have at their disposal

I always downplayed the extent of these age-related changes seen on brain scans when talking to my patients, just as I never spelled it out that, with some operations, you must remove part of the brain. We are all so suggestible that doctors must choose their words very carefully. It is easy for doctors to forget how patients cling to every word, every nuance, of what we say. You can unwittingly precipitate all manner of psychosomatic symptoms and anxieties. I usually told cheerful white lies. “Your brain looks very good for your age,” I would say, to the patients’ delight, irrespective of what the scans showed, provided that they showed only age-related changes and nothing more sinister. The patients would leave the room smiling happily and feeling much better. The eminent American cardiologist Bernard Lown has written of how important it can be to lie to patients – or at least to be much more optimistic than the facts perhaps justify. He tells stories of

patients of his who were close to death from heart failure but who rallied and survived when he was overly positive.

Hope is one of the most precious drugs doctors have at their disposal. Even if there's only a 5% chance of survival, a good doctor will emphasise that 5% of hope without denying or hiding the 95% chance of death. It is Pandora's box – however many horrors and ailments come out of the box, there is always hope. Only at the very end does hope finally flicker out. Hope is not a question of statistical probability or utility. Hope is a state of mind, and states of mind are physical states in our brains, and our brains are intimately connected to our bodies (and especially to our hearts). Indeed, the idea of a disembodied brain, promoted by the more extreme protagonists for artificial intelligence, might well be meaningless. This is not to say that being kind and hopeful will cure cancer or enable us to live for ever. The human mind is always trying to reduce all events to single causes, but most diseases are the product of many different influences, and the presence or absence of hope is only one among many.

I should have known that I might not like what my brain scan showed, just as I should have known that the symptoms of prostatism that were increasingly bothering me were just as likely to be caused by cancer as by the benign prostatic enlargement that happens in most men as they age. But I continued to think that illness happened to patients and not to doctors, even though I was now retired. Twenty months after I had my brain scanned, I was diagnosed with advanced prostate cancer. I had had typical symptoms for years, steadily getting worse, but it took me a long time before I could bring myself to ask for help. I thought I was being stoical when in reality I was being a coward. I simply couldn't believe the diagnosis at first, so deeply ingrained was my denial.

I had been planning on seeing a medical colleague about my increasingly irritating prostatic symptoms – poor flow, and urgency and frequency of urination – but the lockdown put this on hold. Besides, the pandemic was such a strange and intense experience that I quite forgot my symptoms and another seven months passed before I arranged an appointment. To save time, I decided to go privately, although I no longer had private medical insurance.

Having carefully washed my bottom, in anticipation of a rectal examination, I cycled into Harley Street, swigging a litre of mineral water as I went. I had been told to do this so that I could have my urine flow measured on arrival. I had to report to a friendly nurse who made me drink many more cups of water. She would put her head round the door every so often. “Are you bursting yet?” she would ask.



Henry Marsh, at home in Oxford. Photograph: Sebastian Nevols/The Guardian

When I eventually reached this point, I was directed to a urinal that carried out the necessary measurements and recorded my sad and struggling attempt to empty my bladder – a problem I had been living with for many months, perhaps even years. Once this was done, I was ushered up a grand carpeted staircase to the consulting room.

The double oak doors of the room were so tall and imposing that I hesitated to go in, finding it hard to believe they were simply for a medical consulting room. But this was Harley Street, and not the NHS. The room was huge, and my colleague, Ken, masked like myself for the pandemic, was sitting behind an enormous desk. It reminded me of stories of Mussolini, who had a gigantic desk in his office. His cabinet ministers had to run at the double the long distance to his desk when they came to deliver their reports. But Ken is

a very nice man and not at all like Mussolini. He had operated on me two years ago for a kidney stone – I had made careful inquiries as to whom I should consult. Being able to do this is probably the greatest benefit of being a doctor yourself. It is otherwise less clear that being a doctor is helpful when you are ill. In my case, it proved to be little short of disastrous.

We chatted for a while. The Covid crisis had been good for him, he said – his NHS hospital had come to understand that stones, as he put it, were important. Patients continued to need urgent treatment for kidney stones during the lockdown, unlike some other specialties. We discussed my symptoms – I found myself playing them down, or at least my endless preoccupation with them.

“I need to examine you,” he said a little apologetically. In the past I had always rather dreaded having a rectal examination – in practice, it is unremarkable. “Your prostate is a little firm,” he said as I pulled my trousers up.

“I don’t want a PSA,” I said. PSA stands for prostate-specific antigen, and is an abbreviation with which many ageing men are deeply concerned. The test measures a protein in the blood that is secreted specifically by the prostate gland. The prostate steadily enlarges in most men throughout their life, and in one in seven men turns cancerous. In these cases, the PSA will rise, although cancer is not the only cause of a raised PSA, and a slightly raised level in an older man can be perfectly normal. For many men, the cancer is relatively harmless – they die with it rather than from it, with few ill effects. This can make it difficult to decide whether to treat the cancer in every case or not – as no treatment is without some risk. The cancerous gland can be removed with surgery, provided it has not spread beyond the gland’s capsule, but the operation comes with the risk of impotence and incontinence, and it can be hard to know when the risk of surgery is justified. But if the gland has spread beyond the prostate, it will probably kill the man – although this might take some years.

I am amazed at how wilfully blind I was, how I had been so frightened by my symptoms that I had now probably left it too late

Ken managed to persuade me to have a PSA test. I couldn't very well deny that I had come to seek his advice. "If it is cancer, I don't want any treatment," I told him, "unless it progresses."

"I know where you're coming from, but it's no good putting your head in the sand," he said.

Looking back, I am amazed at how wilfully blind I was – how I had been so frightened by my symptoms over the years that I had refused to admit the need for a PSA, and had now probably left it too late.

"You know," I said, as I was about to leave, "when I was still in practice, all I ever wanted to do was operate all the time. It meant more to me than anything else, although I also loved caring for patients. But now that I have finished, I don't miss it at all – I'm not entirely sure why not. Do you like honey?" He replied that he did, and that he had honey every morning for breakfast, so I pulled out the small pot of honey made by the bees I keep in my garden and gave it to him.

I had had intermittent prostatic symptoms for close on 25 years, which at first were almost certainly due to a common condition called chronic prostatitis. I was a little embarrassed by them, and did not seek professional help, and also as a doctor I suffered from the firm conviction that illness happened to patients and not to doctors such as myself. When we are medical students we enter a new world – a world of illness and death. We learn about all manner of frightening diseases, and how they usually start with trivial symptoms. Many students, in response to a few minor aches and pains, become convinced that they have developed a catastrophic illness. In order to survive, they have to believe that diseases only happen to patients and not to themselves. A few doctors remain hopeless hypochondriacs throughout their careers, but most of us carefully maintain a self-protective wall around ourselves, which separates us from our patients, and becomes deeply ingrained, sometimes with unfortunate results.

Doctors with cancer are often said to present with advanced disease, having dismissed and rationalised away the early symptoms for far too long. I was well aware of this phenomenon, but this knowledge did not prevent me from

falling victim to it myself. Prostatism affects most older men – in medical language, frequency and urgency of [micturition](#), and poor flow. In medical school, students are taught a process called the diagnostic sieve. Inflammation of the prostate cannot be distinguished from cancer in its early stages. In theory I knew this, but for too many years I had indeed chosen to bury my head in the sand.

So when the simple PSA blood test showed that I had a PSA of 127, I couldn't really believe it. Only 4% of men with cancer of the prostate present with a PSA over 100 – most cases of cancer will be well below 20. Frantic, panic-stricken Googling told me that most men with a PSA of over 100 will be dead within a few years.

I was referred to a famous NHS cancer hospital, the Royal Marsden, in central London. It was six miles away from my home, and as I had read that cycling can put up your PSA from the pressure of the saddle on your bottom, I walked to the hospital. I hoped that this would show the first PSA reading was a mistake, and not a death sentence after all.

Hospitals remind me of prisons. Your clothes are taken away and you are put in a confined space. You must obey orders

Much of what goes on in hospitals – the regimentation, the uniforms, the notices everywhere – is about emphasising the gap between staff and patients, and helping the staff overcome their natural empathy. It is not about helping patients. Hospitals always remind me of prisons. These are places where your clothes are taken away, you are given a number and you are put in a small, confined space. You must obey orders. And then you are subjected to a rectal examination – well, perhaps not always.

At the Marsden, once I had been checked in by an unsmiling receptionist, I sat down beside a stand of pamphlets about living with a wide variety of cancers – prostate, rectal, breast, pancreatic. They had pictures on their covers of healthy-looking elderly people smiling manically. I wondered whether they were models or actual patients. A nurse eventually came, and I was weighed and measured. I noted that I was almost two inches shorter than when I was a young man, and much to my annoyance that my bathroom

scales had been flatteringly underestimating my weight by five kilos. I was then told I needed to perform once again on a urine-flow device. I was put in a small side room and presented with many plastic cups of water, which I dutifully drank before being led out like a child to the specially equipped toilet.

I emerged a few minutes later, holding the printed readout that measured objectively my difficulties urinating. The nurse glanced at it briefly with a rather disapproving look. I got the distinct impression that I had not tried hard enough. I felt as though I was entering my second childhood already and that I was being potty-trained all over again.

I followed the disapproving nurse back to the side room. She had long, luxuriant dark hair down to her waist.

“I like your hair,” I said.

“I am growing it for charity,” she replied, “to make wigs for the women having chemotherapy.”

I had not received a word of explanation about what was happening until, as she left the room, she told me that the doctor would be coming to see me.

After a while, the oncologist arrived. “Let me start by saying how sorry I am that we are meeting like this,” he said. I suppose it was kindly meant, but I found this rather a depressing start to our relationship, and it filled me with foreboding. He spoke for a few minutes and assured me that he would fast-track the various scans that were needed to establish whether my cancer was already widely spread or not.

“How probable is that, given my PSA?” I asked.

“Seventy per cent,” he replied, looking away from me. I asked hopefully about the effect of bicycling on my PSA. “You would have to bicycle 100 miles on a very bumpy road to raise it by maybe one,” he said.

I struggled with being a doctor and an anxious patient at the same time, and found it very hard to ask him about my future – reluctant to hear bad news but hoping for hope. “Please talk to me as a doctor,” I said to him. “I used to

have to tell my patients about their cancers and try to cheer them up at the same time.”

“That’s not how we do things here,” he replied cryptically. In retrospect, I realised I had given him conflicting messages – that I wanted to be told the truth but also given hope.

He was sitting perched on the edge of a chair, as though he was about to leave any minute, with a piece of paper on his knee on which he jotted down a few notes. I found myself feeling awkward and tongue-tied. I inevitably blurted out the question that all of us ask oncologists when we first meet them: “How long have I got?” – or rather a medicalised version of it. I asked him what the probabilities were that I would be alive in five years’ time with a PSA of 130 as the only predictor. In fact, I already knew the answer: 30%. But he did not tell me this.

“You needn’t write your will for five years,” was his reply. The reality, of course, is that he could have no idea what would happen to me. I knew this, but still, childishly, hoped he would tell me that I would be fine. He could only quote probabilities, which he seemed reluctant to do. Patients want certainty, but doctors can only deal in uncertainty.

“Let’s get to know a little about you,” he said. I said that I valued being physically fit and that I wrote.

“If you write one book a year, you will be able to write five more books,” he said with a laugh. Perhaps he was trying to reassure me, but I felt he underestimated the difficulty of writing.

“I read somewhere that hormone therapy can have cognitive effects,” I ventured.

“You may be a little less sharp,” he replied, but did not elaborate. He may well have told me more about the possible side-effects of treatment, but if he did, I was far too anxious to take them in. I had always known, as a doctor, that patients only hear a small part of what you tell them, especially at the first visit.

He mentioned something about my meeting “the team” and then left.

Percentages are a problem for patients. Some of the oncologists I have worked with over the years told me that they would never give patients percentages. The problem, of course, is that the patient wants to know what will happen to him or her as a specific individual, and the doctor can only reply in terms of what would happen to 100 patients with the same diagnosis. After a given number of years a certain percentage will still be alive, and the remaining percentage will be dead. There is no way of knowing into which group an individual patient will fall. Your doctor never knows how long you will live, not until the very end.

When I thought back on my years as a surgeon, often dealing with cancer, I realised that I, too, rarely talked in terms of percentages. Malignant gliomas – primary brain cancers – have a mortality of at least 50% at one year, and only 5% or so of patients are alive at five years, despite treatment with surgery and radiotherapy.

I look back in wonder at how little I thought about the effect I had on my own patients after I had spoken to them

I told patients with these tumours that if they were “unusually unlucky” they might be dead in six months, and if they were “unusually lucky” they might be alive in several years’ time. I would explain that for most people the tumour would recur between these two extremes, and that further treatment might be possible, without admitting that further treatment usually achieved very little. At the time I thought that this was quite a good way of dealing with the problem, and of finding a balance between hope and realism. In the days of Google and the internet, I am not sure if this is still true.

When I now think of how the uncertainty about my own future, and the proximity of death, threw me into torment, careering wildly between hope and despair, I look back in wonder at how little I thought about the effect I had on my own patients after I had spoken to them. I did worry that if my tone of voice was too pessimistic the poor patient might spend what little time they had left feeling deeply depressed, simply waiting to die. So I tried to find a balance between telling them the truth and not depriving them of

hope. After a patient died, I only occasionally heard back from the family, so I had little way of knowing whether the way I had spoken to them was appropriate or not. As I was discovering myself, false hope – denial by another name – is better than no hope at all, but it is always very difficult for the doctor to know how to balance hope against truth when talking to patients with diseases such as mine.

I must have misunderstood the oncologist about meeting the team, because when the nurse returned to say that I could go, I said that I thought I was going to meet the team. The nurse looked dubiously at me and reluctantly went into the next room. Through the open door I could see the oncologist sitting in front of a computer monitor, laughing and talking with a couple of colleagues. The nurse returned.

“You can go,” was all she said.

Ah, I thought, I have crossed to the other side. I have become just another patient, another old man with prostate cancer, and I knew I had no right to claim that I deserved otherwise.

Henry Marsh's cancer is now in remission. He is awaiting his next PSA test result to find out if it has returned. He recently travelled to Ukraine to lecture and advise on medical cases and plans to return in October. He has a Ukrainian refugee family living with him in London.

This is an edited extract from *And Finally: Matters of Life and Death* by Henry Marsh, published by Vintage on 1 September at £16.99. To support the Guardian and Observer, order your copy at guardianbookshop.com. Delivery charges may apply.

Henry Marsh will talk about *And Finally* with novelist Will Self at a Guardian Live online event on Monday 5 September at 8pm. Book tickets [via the Guardian live website](#).

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‘Books bring us into being’: how writing about reading became an inspiring literary genre of its own



Illustration: Kerry Hyndman/The Guardian

Bibliomemoirs are an increasingly popular way for writers to celebrate reading and its power to shape lives

Lara Feigel

Sat 13 Aug 2022 03.00 EDT

Books throw us into the world as much as they provide respite from it. Now that summer is here, I am reminded of the particular pleasure of lying reading on the grass. It's a memory of adolescence, filled with sensuality: toes curled on to green softness; the sun, pulsing hot on bare legs; the book – Jane Eyre, or The God of Small Things perhaps – held aloft to keep glare off the face. But it also has an ethical charge. I was reading, as so many young women have read, to find out how to be a strong woman in an oppressive world, how to channel anger and let it take me outwards, away from the pettiness of family squabbles; how to allow the body's needs and wants to play out without shame.

Think of Jane Eyre herself. The novel begins with Jane poring over Thomas Bewick's The History of British Birds, reading her way to the bleak shores of Lapland and Siberia and into centuries of winters, "happy at least in my way", glad to be able to imaginatively escape the oppression of the present, where her aunt and cousin torment her. When her cousin John comes upon her and chides her for reading the family's books ("They *are* mine"), she gains confidence from having read about the Romans to pit her spirit against his: "You are like a murderer—you are like a slave-driver—you are like the Roman emperors!!"

Jane becomes the archetype for so many other restless young women, reading their way out of constrictive worlds. How many of us have longed to utter her speeches, like this one to her cruel aunt: "How dare I, Mrs Reed? How dare I? Because it is the truth." So often the act of reading has a special intensity for young women. It's part of the development of a self with a bodily life.

Martha Quest, the eponymous heroine of Doris Lessing's coming-of-age novel, "read the same books over and over again, in between intervals of distracted daydreaming, in a trance of recognition, and in always the same place, under the big tree that was her refuge, through which the heat pumped like a narcotic". Martha eats while she reads, ingesting oranges and words.

Lila and Lenù, in Elena Ferrante's *My Brilliant Friend*, get hold of a copy of *Little Women* and meet in the courtyard to "read it, either silently, one next to the other, or aloud", so many times "that the book became tattered and sweat-stained".

I have been thinking in recent years about how to recapture the intensity of that early reading. So often the university students I teach complain that studying English has taken the pleasure out of reading; that years of spotting similes and metaphors and lexical fields have stopped them caring about characters or being affected by the language they are parsing. It's not only pleasure that is lost here, it's also urgency – the hope that reading can help us navigate a world full of conflict and suppression and make us want to change it.

Was reading Doris Lessing somehow responsible for the end of my marriage?

My response has been to try to recapture that intensity in my adult reading: to allow myself to read out of need; to focus exclusively at times on the work of one writer; to argue with dead authors who seem sometimes more alive to me than many of my friends. In 2015 I began a two year stint of reading Doris Lessing. I'd just had a miscarriage; I was becoming unhappy in my marriage; I was going to too many weddings and was disturbed by the happy-ever-after they implied. I was coming to realise that the model I'd been sold in which achievement was followed by reward had been false and Lessing seemed to me an unexpectedly vital guide as I entered this new, middle phase of life and came to accept the place of failure and disappointment.

Her 1962 era-defining novel *The Golden Notebook* is about a woman trying to reconcile her political and personal lives. It's a novel written in many voices (a collage of notebooks created to describe different aspects of the heroine's life), including everything from dreams to newspaper stories to psychoanalytic sessions to drafts of fiction. With its many voices and styles, it spoke to me intellectually, but also as a woman at that time in my life. It allowed me to take seriously boredom, irritation and alienation as part of my imaginative life and – at a moment when I felt constricted in my marriage

and the social restrictions of my world – it set expectations of freedom. “I am interested only in stretching myself,” Lessing’s narrator writes, “in living as fully as I can.” What would it be like to live like that, I asked myself, and I wrote a book about Lessing’s various ideas of sexual, political, psychoanalytic and ecological freedom.

Those years were exhilarating and disturbing. I still don’t know if Lessing was somehow responsible for the end of my marriage. She certainly made me more honest with myself and with others. But it was a while, after that, before I wanted to write about a writer again.



Books are a means of escape for Lila and Lenù in *My Brilliant Friend* ...
Photograph: ©Wildside/Umedia 2018

I’d been contracted to write about [DH Lawrence](#) during a brief period of passion for him at 30, but had turned away from him as I became more immersed in feminist writing, finding myself drawn to reading women. Since then I’d been teaching Lawrence, and found my students’ reluctant passion for his female characters inspiring. Now it was time to write my book, and I discovered that what I had learned about myself as a reader through the Lessing book suggested new ways of braiding my academic identity with my allegiance to readerly pleasure and self-discovery. I began at the beginning – with his novel *The White Peacock*, and its celebration of

the English countryside in spring. I discovered that the urgency of his writing about animals and nature spoke directly to our own times. And then Covid rushed in, and I found myself hastily renting out my London flat and moving with my children to the Oxfordshire countryside to be nearer to my partner and to have a garden.

Suddenly, I was immersed in landscapes uncannily similar to the ones Lawrence described so well. Reading my way through Lawrence's novels, essays, letters and poems in the hours that were available amid lockdown childcare, I found that everything around me seemed to come from a Lawrence novel: our urban cat catching a mouse for the first time, the birds singing outside my window (into the future, he'd have said). Lawrence's combinations of lush rapture and fraught intellectual acumen articulated the possibilities of that moment. It became clear that this again was going to be a book that brought me into close dialogue with another author.

“Certain words are alive, active living,” the narrator says in Claire-Louise Bennett’s *Checkout 19*, “in fact it feels as if they are being written as you read them.” Published in 2021, *Checkout 19* is a novel, but it also belongs to a strand of writing that has flourished over the past few years, sometimes known as “bibliomemoir”, in which authors chart their lives through books. It’s a piece of writing about adolescent reading that becomes a book about the role of reading in making a self and a life.



‘Jane Eyre becomes the archetype for so many other restless young women, reading their way out of constrictive worlds.’ Photograph: c Focus/Everett/Rex Features

The novel homes in on adolescence precisely because reading at that age is so ardent. Bennett is obsessed with reading as a bodily act; she’s fascinated by misreading, by daydreaming while reading, by what is remembered and what forgotten, by the way that our “fairly fervid” desire to turn the pages of a book leads us to skim over the final sentences on a page. “For books are not absolutely dead things,” she quotes Milton as writing, “but do contain a potency of life in them to be as active as that soul was whose progeny they are.” Books reveal the world to readers, but they also change readers and change the world around them. We are creating the text we read, she says. “And isn’t the opposite true too – that the pages you read bring you to life? Turning the pages, turning the pages. Yes, that is how I have gone on living. Living and dying and living and dying, left page, right page, and on it goes.”

Books bring us into being, living and dying on the pages. I suppose I knew that as a teenager, lying on the grass in the park, as Jane Eyre knows it and as Lila and Lenù do. The more explicitly nonfictional bibliomemoirs published in the last decade have tested the limits of this process. Samantha Ellis excavates childhood and adolescence in *How to Be a Heroine*, rereading the books that shaped her. In retrospect, she realises that The Little

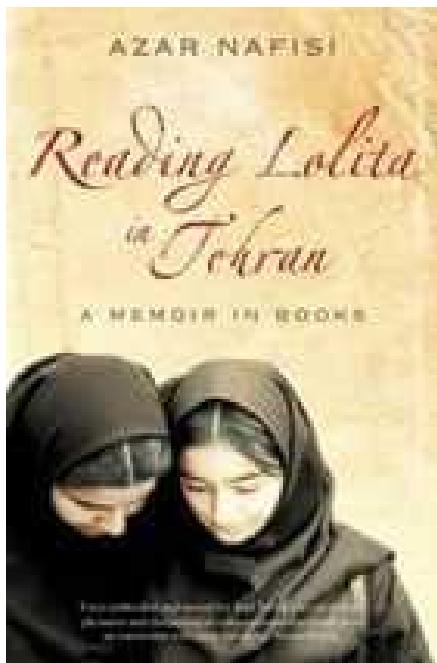
Mermaid helped her grapple with her parents' fears after emigrating from Iraq: "terrors of displacement and separation and loss". She sees that she feared womanhood, frightened that when "bold, clever, creative girls" like Anne of Green Gables and Jo March become women, they become less themselves.

What if other people's pages are so powerful that they take over, subsuming our own voice?

In her 2019 book, *The Lost Properties of Love*, Sophie Ratcliffe reads Anna Karenina while wondering whether or not to have an affair. "That's what books do. They change lives," she writes, making us aware how hazardous reading can be while she thinks about how an affair is "an attempt to live twice ... it exists beyond a door you think nobody else has noticed". Books determine life decisions too in Nell Stevens's 2019 book *Mrs Gaskell and Me*. Stevens was doing her PhD on Victorian literature when she found herself in daily dialogue with Elizabeth Gaskell, scouring between the lines of Gaskell's letters and fiction for glimpses of her secret desire for a not-quite lover at the same time as Stevens herself embarked on and then mourned her own love affair. Eventually – heavily tranquilised, having just had an ovary removed – she finds herself in conversation with the ghost of her heroine, asking her: "Should I just use a sperm donor, and have a baby, alone?"

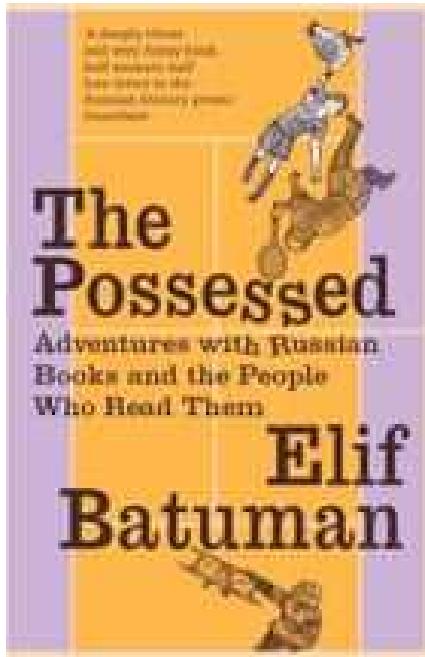
New Yorker writer Rebecca Mead was older and less ingenuous when she began writing *My Life in Middlemarch*. She had loved Middlemarch in adolescence because it helped her ask "how on earth might one contain one's intolerable, overpowering, private yearnings". In middle age, she found that this book that is so good on middleness – on paths not taken and disappointment – spoke to her with almost troubling directness. Mead had recently become a step-parent and found herself drawn to George Eliot's experiences as a stepmother in middle age, seeing this as part of the novel's "tensile strength". She found now that reading was not the form of escapism she had once thought it, but the place where "one finds oneself": "There are books that seem to comprehend us just as much as we understand them."

What if other people's pages are so powerful that they take over, subsuming our own voice? This question preoccupies journalist Nilanjana Roy in her 2016 essay collection *The Girl Who Ate Books*. Roy associates reading with eating, as Lessing did, and as Virginia Woolf did (in *On Being Ill* Woolf talks about words giving out a scent and distilling a flavour, coming to us "sensually first, by way of the palate and the nostrils"). She interviews various fellow Indian writers accused of plagiarism and then becomes preoccupied by it herself. "On one occasion, I read my column in print, chilled by the conviction that I had come across those paragraphs before," she writes, only to discover that she has in fact plagiarised herself.



In worrying about plagiarism, Roy hints at the dangers of reading too intensely. The best bibliomemoirs bring an ambivalence to their readerly need. It may be neither healthy nor sane to grow up thinking you are Jane Eyre, or to almost have a love affair because you are urged on by Anna Karenina, or, in my own case, to pay more heed to the constriction in my marriage because of Doris Lessing. Elif Batuman ends her 2011 dextrously wayward bibliomemoir *The Possessed* by insisting that if she could "start over today, I would choose literature again. If the answers exist in the world or in the universe, I still think that's where we're going to find them." But she has said in recent interviews that she's become more aware since then of how fraught and double-edged it can be for books to suffuse a life. Her

recent autobiographical novel *Either/Or* grapples with her undergraduate reading and finds herself at fault for being lured into too aesthetic a vision of life – captivated by beauty, she loses a sense that she has political agency.



For other female readers and writers, reading itself has been a political act. There is no question of aestheticism in Azar Nafisi's 2003 *Reading Lolita in Tehran*, which describes Nafisi's attempt, after being driven out of the university, to set up a secret, egalitarian community of women, reading together and writing a collective diary of their responses. Discarding their headscarves, they read *Lolita*, and compare Humbert to the Ayatollah Khomeini: "They had tried to shape others according to their own dreams and desires, but Nabokov, through his portrayal of Humbert, had exposed all solipsists who take over other people's lives."

A particular appeal of Nafisi's book is that it offers us reading as a collective experience. Similarly, Sarah Chihaya, Merve Emre, Katherine Hill and Jill Richards have experimented in a more literal form of collective criticism in their invigorating *Letters* (2020), which consists of letters between the four while reading the Neapolitan quartet. Selby Wynn Schwartz, meanwhile, is more explicit in setting her narrator up as a kind of chorus in her novel *After Sappho*, longlisted for the Booker prize, which is a series of vignettes of literary lesbians from Sappho through to 1928.

For me, reading Lawrence has demonstrated a way beyond today's polarised politics, because he was so prepared to allow contradictory thoughts to coexist, to push every thought to its extremity in order to try it out and then think its opposite. There's much to be angry about in Lawrence (his forays into gender essentialism and racial hierarchy, his denial of his wife Frieda's identity as a mother). But I've also learned from him to find antagonism productive and I have realised how hard I have found it as a woman to accept anger – my own and other people's. I think back to Jane Eyre. "How dare I, Mrs Reed? How dare I?" Those cadences shaped my adolescence but it is only now that I have got to the point where I could utter them.

Lara Feigel is the author of [Look! We Have Come Through! – Living with DH Lawrence](#) (Bloomsbury).

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[Nicola Sturgeon](#)

Interview

‘The world is my oyster’: Nicola Sturgeon on feminism, her last push for independence and life after politics

[Libby Brooks](#)



Nicola Sturgeon, photographed in Bute House, Edinburgh, last month.
Photograph: Manuel Vazquez/The Guardian

Scotland's first minister is one of the most capable, if divisive, politicians of her era. Could her record-breaking reign conclude with the end of the union?



Sat 13 Aug 2022 03.00 EDT

Nicola Sturgeon won't take "no" for an answer. Standing at one end of the long table in the cabinet room at her official Edinburgh residence, Bute House, her white suit jacket is reflected in the glossy mahogany. [Sturgeon](#) is *convinced* that the final scene of [Dirty Dancing](#) includes a moment when Patrick Swayze leaps on to a table just like this. Two young women on her political staff disagree: Swayze was dancing down the aisle, they insist – correctly. How can she not remember this; how many times has she watched it? It's the first rule of Scottish interaction that the more you like a person, the more you take the piss out of them. Perhaps it is the sunny afternoon or the slightly less punishing schedule of Holyrood in recess but, for now at least, Scotland's [longest-serving first minister](#) is in a playful mood.

We are meeting two weeks after Sturgeon [named the date](#) for a second [Scottish independence](#) referendum as 19 October 2023, and revealed her plans to take the fight to the UK's supreme court by asking judges to rule on

the legality of holding the vote without Westminster's permission. Earlier in the day, she held a press conference in the elegant first-floor drawing room, to launch the second in a series of Scottish government papers making the case for independence. Poised at the podium beneath a portrait of Robert Burns, she was on ebullient form as she condemned the Tory leadership contest's "wholly manufactured culture war" and accused Keir Starmer of giving "the proverbial two fingers to Scotland", an uncharacteristically coarse jibe for the usually lawyerly Sturgeon.

Whenever I do stop being first minister, I'm still going to be relatively young, but a life after politics doesn't faze me

She seems noticeably upbeat, I tell her as we sit across from each other at the cabinet table. Does it feel as though the momentum is building now? "I've set out a clear path forward, so I'm feeling up for that," she says, as she fiddles with the "first minister" place marker in front of her. Sturgeon loves a fidget – her clicky pen is notorious during briefings.

The first minister, who is 52, means she's "up for" another campaign for independence – but she also has one eye on her own post-Holyrood future. While insisting that she has "certainly not ruled out standing again", she is also clear that "whenever I do stop being first minister, I'm still going to be relatively young. This would not always have been true of me, but a life after politics doesn't faze me."

She is looking forward to some privacy – "just not feeling as if you're on public display all the time" – but can't imagine an international role that takes her too far from Scotland "because I'm a homely person". With all the usual caveats and sub-clauses one expects from a political leader in interview mode, she concludes, "The world is my oyster," which may at first seem jarring from the woman who has just placed the UK on red alert for a second referendum.



‘I take very seriously the fact that I am first minister for all Scotland.’
Photograph: Manuel Vazquez/The Guardian

And it raises the question: is this the final lap for one of the most popular, trusted and capable politicians of her era, a woman who followed Lady Gaga in filling the 12,000-seat Hydro arena in Glasgow when she first took office in November 2014 and, eight years on, still enjoys healthy [approval ratings](#)? And could her record-breaking run of success in [Holyrood](#) and [Westminster](#) elections conclude with the end of the union?

So, how likely is another referendum, given the significant doubts that any of the three routes she proposed will actually deliver. It’s a path “not without hurdles along the way”, she says with some understatement. The UK government has consistently refused plan A, the [section 30 order](#) that would grant Holyrood the powers to hold a legal vote, while constitutional experts are sceptical about plan B; that the [supreme court](#) will rule a referendum is legal without Westminster’s approval.

Is there time to fit all the moving parts, including Holyrood legislation and an expected 16-week campaign period, before the set date of October 2023? Sturgeon is sanguine: “Assuming there is a judgment round about the turn of the year, then we will be able to take legislation through on a timescale for [a vote on] 19 October.” Meanwhile, her plan C if all other routes are

exhausted, to fight the next general election on the question of independence alone – a “de facto referendum” – is already mired in procedural confusion: would success mean a majority of votes just for the SNP, or would other pro-independence parties count towards the tally? How can one party dictate the terms of an election? And so forth.

For now, Sturgeon faces two related challenges: how to maintain momentum among her own activists as the courts and parliament go into summer hiatus; and the existential question of how she manages a campaign in a country that is split down the middle. Polling over the past 18 months shows support for both yes and no hovering around 50% on whether Scotland should end its 315-year-old union with the rest of Britain.

“I spend a lot of my time thinking about that, because I take very seriously the fact that I am first minister for all Scotland,” she begins, before insisting that “for the majority of people, not everybody, the point of unity is around democracy as the route to settle that”.

There’s no ounce of complacency on my part. This is not just picking up from the result in 2014. This is a fresh debate

She characterises a referendum as a hopeful alternative to multiple domestic and international crises, but some yes activists warn against complacency: the assumption that Brexit or the cost of living make independence an obvious alternative, when in truth voters who feel vulnerable are more likely to cling to the status quo.

“There’s no ounce of complacency on my part. I’ve spent the last few years with people within the yes movement saying, ‘Why don’t you go for it now, because obviously people are going to vote yes, given the state of the UK?’ I’ve never thought it is that straightforward.” She sounds mildly exasperated. “This is not just picking up from the result in 2014. This is a fresh debate.”

With the post-Johnson Tories in convenient chaos, today she reserves her fire power for Labour, whose electoral success is far more of a threat to independence support. After years of self-defeating equivocation on the constitution, Starmer and the new Scottish Labour leader [Anas Sarwar](#) have

presented a far more unified front. The council elections in May saw Scottish Labour [re-emerging as the closest challenger to the SNP](#) as the Scottish Conservatives plunged to their worst electoral result in a decade.

Like the Tories, Starmer has refused to countenance a section 30 order if Labour takes power, and in July he dismissed a Westminster deal with the SNP, telling the Scottish lobby: “There is no alliance to be forged with a party that wants to break up the United Kingdom.”

Senior Labour figures are known to be pushing Starmer to be strident on the SNP, in an effort to spike renewed Conservative attacks on a “coalition of chaos”, and Sturgeon is acute in her response: “It’s not about winning votes in Scotland; it’s about winning votes in England. I think they’d win more respect in England if they actually stood up to these Tory attacks, rather than crumble in the face of them.”

For many progressive voters outside Scotland, the leader of the SNP can seem like the best leader they never had. When she appeared in her first leaders’ debate for the 2015 general election alongside David Cameron and Ed Miliband (just six months after her predecessor Alex Salmond stood aside having lost the first independence referendum), “Can I vote for the SNP if I live in England?” [became one of Google’s top searches](#) of the night.

This admiration at one remove peaked during the Covid crisis. While Johnson offered Churchillian bombast, Sturgeon pledged to treat the people of Scotland as grownups at her daily briefings, and spoke directly to anxious children in her national broadcasts. Her caution – imposing tighter local lockdowns than elsewhere in the UK – drew criticism from Scottish parents and businesses, but was praised by epidemiologists, and often England followed where Scotland (and Wales) led, for example on face masks in shops and schools.

Just like Boris Johnson, she is referred to across Scotland by her first name – “our Nicola”, or “bloody Nicola”. In an age of political hyper-management, evasion and misinformation, Sturgeon comes across as direct, considered and remarkably human.

There's a flip side, of course. Her domestic opposition point out that grandstanding on the UK stage costs her nothing and offers an easy distraction from her party's variable record on education, transport, hospital waiting times and drug deaths, and the fact that, after 15 years in government, many progressive pronouncements have yet to be delivered. She was called "Elsie McSelfie" on Twitter after posing with celebrities at last year's [Cop26](#) climate conference in Glasgow. Opponents depict a weary, opaque and complacent administration with only one idea left.

But still the SNP continues to dominate Scotland's political landscape, thanks to Sturgeon's success in harnessing yes voters behind her party after the disappointment of September 2014. Last May, the party won its fourth consecutive Holyrood victory.

The first minister's demeanour today is a world away from the winter of 2020-21, when Covid cases were surging again, just as Alex Salmond vented his fury for what he claimed was a "malicious plot" to destroy his reputation orchestrated by senior officials close to Sturgeon.

"There was a period where I was trying to lead the country through a global pandemic, and at the same time trying to withstand a full-frontal assault by my predecessor to bring me down," she says, as though she still finds it hard to compute.



With Alex Salmond in 2012. Photograph: Murdo MacLeod/The Guardian

Coming through it “has shown me that I’m a bit more resilient than I thought”, she reflects; “more confident in my own skin”. “Having to deal with Covid also allowed me – even given the toxic horribleness of the Salmond stuff – to put it into perspective in a way that I probably wouldn’t have been able to do had it been on its own without that backdrop.”

That “toxic horribleness” began when details of sexual harassment complaints made against the former first minister by two female civil servants were leaked to the Daily Record in August 2018. Salmond immediately launched a court challenge and won a significant legal victory against the Scottish government after the civil service admitted its internal investigation had been mishandled.

But then, in a development that shocked the Holyrood establishment – including Sturgeon – Salmond was charged with multiple criminal counts of sexual assault, which included the two original complaints. He was acquitted of all charges at the high court in Edinburgh in 2020, but by then his sense of betrayal had a ferocity that those close to Sturgeon say she was not prepared for. The SNP is often described as more like a family, led by a tight-knit group who have kept faith together across decades of public unpopularity. At the heart of that family was the symbiotic relationship between Sturgeon and

her mentor Salmond. As she told the Holyrood inquiry: “He was a really close friend of mine that I cared about.”

After two high-profile investigations last year into the Scottish government’s handling of the initial complaints, including Sturgeon’s own conduct, she was ultimately cleared of misleading parliament. But what the original two complainants called a “culture of complicity” was exposed around Salmond’s allegedly inappropriate behaviour during his time as first minister. This was “very difficult for anybody in government to read”, Sturgeon said soon after.

Early on, it seemed that the Salmond saga might prove to be Scotland’s #MeToo moment – it became instead a psychodrama about two titans of Scottish nationalism. As Sturgeon told me a few weeks after the inquiries concluded: “If you’re a woman in Scotland over the past year or so, what you’ve witnessed is an entire political class and an inquiry of the national parliament at times indulging and amplifying the subject of complaints, saying that it was all a conspiracy, questioning the motives of the women who came forward, effectively saying that because there was an acquittal in a criminal trial that was tantamount to them lying.”



Suit, by Veronica Beard; knit, by Joseph; shoes by Jimmy Choo. Necklace and pendant, by Ellis Mhairi Cameron, aetla.co.uk. Above and top images:

suit, by Pinko; blouse, by Club Monaco; shoes, by Jimmy Choo (all clothes from Harvey Nichols, Edinburgh). Gold pendant, by Ellis Mhairi Cameron, as before. Stylist: Amanda Blackwood. Hair: Zoe Harrison. Makeup: Jak Morgan.

Photograph: Manuel Vazquez/The Guardian

The reports also revealed levels of government mishandling that tested credulity and the lingering suspicion that concerns were not pursued because of their likely impact on the paramount goal of independence. With that came legitimate questions and criticism of Sturgeon herself, but throughout there was also that queasy sense that a woman was being held accountable for a man's inappropriate behaviour.

Yet a year on, the party is still facing questions about how it handles such complaints. In June, the Guardian revealed that a new system for dealing with sexual harassment complaints within the SNP is [expected to finally become party policy](#) this summer, after escalating frustration from activists about lack of accountability.

Sturgeon meets the criticism sideways. “I often feel frustrated about the length of time things take going through party processes, but particularly with policies around harassment or bullying, we need to make sure that we are doing things in a way that is legally robust as well.”

In June, she condemned the behaviour of her own MPs as “utterly unacceptable” after it appeared that some in the Westminster group were protecting their senior colleague and former chief whip Patrick Grady, who [had been suspended](#) for making an unwanted sexual advance to a teenage staff member. And two weeks after our interview, the SNP leader of one of Scotland’s largest councils, North Lanarkshire, [resigned](#) following allegations of inappropriate behaviour.

Does the SNP have a problem with sexual harassment? Sturgeon doesn’t hesitate: “I would not say that the SNP has no issues there, because I think literally every organisation, every political party has these issues. It’s very deeply embedded in society. It’s about men’s attitudes towards women; it’s about sex and power. Actually trying to deal with the fundamentals,” she

adds, “is sometimes harder than just ‘something happens and somebody resigns’”.

Scottish independence has been Sturgeon’s lodestar all her life. She grew up in the new town of Irvine on the North Ayrshire coast, with her younger sister and parents Robin, an electrician, and Joan, a lab technician. She remains especially close to her mother, who served as an SNP councillor for a decade. It was the devastation wreaked by Margaret Thatcher and the hopelessness she witnessed among her peers that spurred her to join the SNP as a serious-minded 16-year-old. In the 1980s, the party was on the margins and membership was not about forging a career in politics. She has said before: “My generation came into this purely out of conviction.”

The first in her family to attend university, she was the youngest ever parliamentary candidate in Scotland in the 1992 general election, at the age of 21, before completing her law finals at the University of Glasgow. She worked as a solicitor in her 20s, then entered the newly created Scottish parliament in 1999.



With husband Peter Murrell as voting began in the local government elections in May this year. Photograph: Jane Barlow/PA

Sturgeon has married within the party: her husband, Peter Murrell, is the chief executive of the SNP, a concentration of power that has raised plenty of concerns about transparency over the years, and particularly among MSPs during the Salmond inquiry. They wed in 2010, and Sturgeon enjoys presenting herself as undomestic in contrast to Murrell, bantering with him on social media about her hopelessness in the kitchen.

Sturgeon is an inveterate Twitter user, managing her own account unlike many senior politicians, sharing swift rebuttals but also book recommendations: she is evangelical about reading, and tells me she is now enjoying International Booker winner [Tomb of Sand](#) by Geetanjali Shree. During lockdown, the broadcasts from her constituency home in Glasgow revealed heaving shelves (alphabetised, then in chronological order by author).

Her public persona is often characterised as a “nippy sweetie”, a Scottish description – largely used by men, about women – for a sharp-tongued person. Undoubtedly she is not a glad sufferer of fools and sometimes finds it hard to conceal her irritation. Longtime observers suggest she is not a natural extrovert and has worked hard to develop a convincing and empathic public style.

But there are also the off-camera moments I’ve witnessed over eight years of reporting on her premiership: her capacity to make quick and genuine connections with young parents; her habit of acknowledging more junior women in the room at meetings to make them feel included; her ability to reassure an anxious elderly constituent who has waylaid her on the way in to a community centre, listening to him as though she has all the time in the world.

Though when the charm is absent it is arctic: she can be exceedingly short-tempered with journalists who don’t ask what she considers to be the right questions, and there were some excruciating moments during Covid briefings when Sturgeon would berate reporters, accusing them of trying to get an easy headline when they were simply trying to do their jobs.

While Sturgeon describes herself as “naturally quite a reserved and shy person”, she has spoken candidly about personal challenges that many women will relate to. In 2016, she [discussed having had a miscarriage](#) aged 40 just as she was preparing to share the news of her pregnancy with friends and family. She did it to confront assumptions, she explains now, “because if you are a woman, particularly in a senior position without children, there is an assumption made that you’re a cold-hearted bitch that has decided to prioritise your career over having children”.

I’m curious to know if she has ever felt judged for not having children. “I have been subject to a lot of scrutiny and commentary about it. Is that being judged?” she asks herself. “I don’t know. And men don’t get that. The perfect illustration is me and Salmond: I can’t recall a single interview that he did in his entire time as first minister or SNP leader about why he didn’t have children.”

I’m the first woman in this office, and only here for a relatively short time, so I’ve got some obligation to move the dial

In an interview with Vogue last autumn, Sturgeon mentioned that she and her husband had discussed fostering. “We have talked about it in very, very general terms,” she says now, with some caution. “That has come from the work I’ve done with care-experienced young people, which has really got under my skin. I’ve seen the difference that good foster parents can make.”

Earlier this year, she discussed her experience of being “in the foothills” of the menopause on [The Shift](#), a podcast featuring women in midlife. She told host Sam Baker: “I’ve got windows open in the depth of winter; my poor husband is shivering. I’ve thought to myself: what if that happens when I’m on my feet in parliament in the middle of first minister’s questions?”

What prompted her to speak out? “These are still such big things for women, shrouded in so much mystery and also masses of stigma,” she says. “I’m the first woman in this office and only here for a relatively short period of time, so if there are things you can do to try to move the dial a little bit, I’ve got some obligation to do that.”

When I began reporting on Sturgeon as first minister, she had appointed the country's first gender-balanced cabinet and appeared in the Holyrood chamber alongside two other female party leaders – expectations were high. Nowadays I seem to spend as much time reporting on other women's disappointments with her.

But any female leader, even one as publicly feminist as Sturgeon, is not the cure-all for systemic inequality – she must carry with her a party, government and indeed country that lags behind. So I wonder sometimes how much of people's disappointment in the glacial pace of change gets pinned on Sturgeon *because she's there*.

She has increasingly become the focus of [opposition to SNP plans](#) to introduce a simplified system by which transgender individuals can change the sex recorded on their birth certificate – known as self-identification. Last June, at the final evidence session of the Holyrood committee examining these plans, the hearing had to be temporarily suspended after a number of women suddenly [revealed T-shirts](#) that read: "Nicola Sturgeon: destroyer of women's rights".

There are real threats to women from the misogyny that is still rife across our society. Trans women are not the threat

How does it feel to read that slogan? "I bow to no one in my commitment to feminism ..." Sturgeon is so definitive on this point that her voice cracks. She doesn't answer my question directly – "People have a right to say these things in a democracy" – but she does go on to answer the question that no politician can escape in the current climate: can you define a woman? She was heavily criticised at the local elections for refusing to do so.

She says: "The vast majority of women are people like us, who were born women and are biological women, and a very small number who are trans women – who are women. When that question is asked, usually it's an invitation to exclude the tiny number of women who are trans," she says, her frustration clear as her delivery accelerates, "and I am not going to do anything to further exclude and stigmatise them."

She repeats her earlier concern about the rightward direction of the Tory leadership contest. “There are real threats to women right now, from the attack on our reproductive rights, the misogyny that is still rife across our society, the threats and reality of sexual violence that women face on a daily basis. That’s what feminists should be focused on. Trans women are not the threat to women.”

Before she leaves, I return to the question of her future. When Sturgeon talked about fostering last October, it was the first signal that her mind was on life beyond Holyrood. “I am not about to quit the stage,” she says evenly, and whether she stands at the next election is a judgment she will make closer to the time. “But I look forward to the opportunity to do other interesting things after politics.” It is telling that she doesn’t resort to a politician’s answer here, insisting that by then she will be negotiating the terms of the breakup of the UK having won the second independence referendum.

And what it tells you depends on where you stand on Sturgeon. Is it proof that her heart’s not really in her plan for another vote, that she doesn’t believe it will happen or that she can win it? Or is it a refreshingly realistic response from a woman who is, just maybe, done with worrying about how anyone else interprets her? Her – stated at least – refusal to cling to office is a marked contrast to the likes of Tony Blair or Boris Johnson.

It is time for her portraits. Sturgeon stands alone, trim-figured and tiny without her trademark heels, dwarfed by the lighting rig. She swings her arms and bounces on her stockinginged soles like a gymnast limbering up for the vault. She’s ready for what comes next.

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‘I felt I was being assessed on my skin colour’: Black women around the world share their birth stories



Shakia Stewart, UK. Photograph: Kate Peters/The Guardian

From Rio to Reykjavik, London to Shanghai, Black women face a maternal health crisis. Six mothers share their stories of pregnancy, birth – and racism

I had my babies in Berlin. My son arrived first, but [the twins' birth went less smoothly](#)

[Grace Holliday](#)

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'The NHS is wonderful, but it is also a microcosm of our society. The same inequalities are played out'

Shakia Stewart, 34, global head of content, British Council, London

I always wanted to have children, and my first pregnancy, in 2019, was a really positive experience overall. I was exhausted and had nausea, but zero complications, and we'd conceived easily too. Some women are understandably terrified of birth, but I couldn't wait, and I desperately wanted to do it at home.

As our due date approached, we had all the plans in place, but at a late-stage scan doctors detected an excess of amniotic fluid. When I still hadn't gone into labour naturally just shy of 42 weeks, they pretty much insisted on inducing me.

I was on the induction drip for 18 hours, but eventually had to be taken for an emergency C-section. The whole experience was so beyond what I had wished for. There was so much going on, I didn't even realise they had lifted my baby – a boy we named Kofi – out of me. I didn't get to hold him or have skin-to-skin contact for more than two hours. It's hard to feel like you have agency when you're under someone else's knife.

The feelings of failure, disappointment, sadness and trauma were overwhelming – every time he cried, I believed he was angry with me about how he'd been brought into the world. It took a long time to start to come to terms with how horribly my first pregnancy ended.

The fact that Black women are four times more likely to die during pregnancy is not down to a few bad apples – if it was, it would be easier to fix

When I got pregnant again, in 2021, it began relatively easily. I desperately wanted a vaginal home birth this time, so I did lots of research before meeting a consultant. She spent less than two minutes with me before declaring: “Looking at you, I don’t think the question is whether you can have this baby at home, but vaginally at all.” “Looking at what,” I thought. It felt to me that she was assessing me based on my skin colour.

The NHS is a wonderful service, but it is also a microcosm of our society. The same inequalities are played out in a hospital setting, and the same outcomes replicated. The Black maternal experience is a symptom of this, and that consultant was, for me, the mouthpiece for inherent biases and snap judgments.

I felt second-guessed and distrusted by my healthcare providers at so many points during my two pregnancies. It was a lot of little things – odd comments, tones of voice, dismissive answers. I had to fight to feel in control. At one point during my first birth, I couldn’t feel the contractions showing on the monitor. The doctors looked at me like I was crazy or lying. I felt compelled to apologise even though I had nothing to apologise for.

I knew the risks to me, as a Black woman, before getting pregnant. However, I am also mixed race, and I have an English accent. I can acknowledge that my life has been made easier by not being darker. Perhaps this is why I didn’t feel the need to arm myself with the details; I avoided reading about these risks wherever possible during my pregnancy. But my lighter skin colour did not protect me entirely: to some, I am still seen as an “other”.

The fact that Black women are [four times more likely to die during pregnancy](#) than white women is not down to a few bad apples – if it was, it would be easier to fix. The fact is, those who have the power to change things don’t care enough to do so, because the issues don’t directly affect them. So there is a lack of training, education and understanding, which

means health professionals like that consultant can't see how or why their words or actions are the wrong ones. Staff across all healthcare areas need to understand that many of the conditions that put Black women more at risk are driven by these external factors. It's devastating that something as important as a person's health could be impacted by them.

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I learned so much during my first pregnancy, and in the end decided on an elective C-section for my second birth. It was a much more positive and peaceful experience than the first time around. Having gone through both types of C-section, I know just how much you need to feel like you've been listened to, and not like you've been pushed down a certain route. It can make all the difference; it did for me.

Throughout my pregnancy there was a whole narrative playing in my head: what are my babies' lives going to be like in this society? Racial injustices cross every social level – you can want for nothing and still worry about their future. If, in 20 years' time, that consultant was assigned to look after my daughter's pregnancy, I would want to remind the doctor that the facts are crucial, but they only say so much. All pregnant people need treating on a personal, human level. Black women should be no different.

Shakia had her baby in October 2021



Photograph: Matjaz Tancic/The Guardian

‘Being pregnant and giving birth in China as a Black woman is, shall we say, interesting’

Olivia Mandy, 38, preschool teacher, Shanghai, China, now living in Toulon, France

When my husband visited China as a student just over a decade ago, he became convinced it was the future. Then, one day, he cajoled me into moving there from our home in France. At the time, I was five months pregnant with our first child. I was sleeping well and eating well, and had no complications, so I was as active as a rabbit, doing anything and everything.

We settled in Shanghai, but went back to France for a couple of months for Jillian’s birth, because at the time I didn’t speak Chinese and I wanted to be somewhere familiar. After she arrived, we began to put down roots and learn the language. It meant that when we had our second, Malcolm, four years later, we were able to stay in China rather than pull Jillian out of school. My second pregnancy was much harder. I had all the classic symptoms: heartburn, insomnia, nausea and sciatica.

Jillian and Malcolm are now 10 and six, respectively, and I'm pregnant with my third child. It's been harder going still, because I'm 38. I always used to say: "Age is just a number." Now I want to lie in bed and yell: "Leave me alone!"

Having the language has certainly made pregnancy and birth easier than it would have been. Non-Chinese-speaking women here often need to go to a private hospital to access foreign doctors who speak their language. If you don't have the money or the insurance to cover that, it's a gamble whether you'll find English staff at your local government hospital.

It's incredibly expensive to have a child in Shanghai. The initial blood tests to check my thyroid, hormones and iron was ¥30,000, which is about £185. My next appointment cost ¥20,000. They won't tell you the total price of each appointment until afterwards, which is frustrating.

When you first arrive in China as a Black person, you think there are no other people like you in the entire country, but there are. You just have to find them. I've had a pretty good experience overall, aside from the stupid questions: "What do you eat?" and "Do you wash your hair?" They aren't asked out of malice, just ignorance. Being pregnant and giving birth in China as a Black woman is, shall we say, interesting. With all my pregnancies, doctors panicked about the size of my belly, thinking that I must be expecting twins or that the baby was too big for a natural birth. One of my Black friends was told to have a C-section because the baby was big; he was born small, at 3kg (6lb 10oz). I was also taken aback during my pregnancies by old ladies coming up to me in the grocery store to tell me I shouldn't be drinking this or eating that. In Europe we mind our own business.

It's like they're scared of vaginal births, or not really trained for them; C-sections are the standard in China

Back in France, I had to have a C-section with Jillian, but I insisted on a vaginal birth with Malcolm. I've heard of vaginal births after C-sections (VBAC) being flat-out refused in private hospitals. I had been seeing an English-speaking doctor at the local hospital, and told him what I wanted,

but when I arrived at 40 weeks he wasn't on shift and the staff all freaked out. I insisted again on a VBAC, which they weren't happy about, and they brought me all sorts of paperwork and waivers to sign. In the end, all went to plan.

I wish I was a little mouse that could go into the hospital to hear the staff talk about vaginal births. It's like they're scared or not really trained for them – C-sections have been practised for years in China, so that's what they put in women's minds as the standard. But for me surgery seems riskier, because it's surgery.

The maternity system is much better in France. It's free and it feels like the staff are your friends – they take time to talk to you. When I gave birth to Jillian in France, a nurse looked after her on the first day. On the second day she showed me what to do, and on the third day I had a go myself. I stayed six days in total, sharing a room with just one other woman. They want to know you can take care of a baby before they send you home.

In Shanghai, there are just so many women to take care of. You feel part of a chain, just a number. When you start having contractions, you're put in a room with lots of other women, and only when you're ready to push is your partner called. Some places don't allow partners in at all. You leave the hospital as soon as you physically can.

One positive aspect is that the one-child rule is now a thing of the past, and the government wants people to have more children, so they have improved maternity leave and benefits. Unfortunately some companies are trying to get around it or cut corners – they hope their staff won't know the new laws. But there is a movement of women fighting for their rights that is starting to gain traction.

We moved back to France this year after the two-month lockdown in Shanghai. We just felt it was time to go home. A lot of the Black community left due to Covid – it's yet to be seen whether they will return.

Olivia's baby is due in August 2022



Photograph: Ackerman + Gruber/The Guardian

‘The problem isn’t white doctors, it’s doctors who lack respect, care and humility when their patient is Black’

Louise Whittemore, 36, office manager, Office of the Ombudspersons for Families, Minnesota, US

I fled the civil war in Liberia when I was five years old. We were in a port town and had the opportunity to leave by boat, but the war had separated my family. I left with my mum, auntie, uncle, cousins, brother and sisters, but my dad was missing. We spent the following eight years in a refugee camp in Ghana, where we lived in a tent before building our own house. It was Africa, but it was still a strange land. On 19 February 1999 – I still remember the date – I arrived in the US. I was 13; my mum didn’t come until much later, in 2013.

I’m 36 now, and pregnant with my seventh child. I have two daughters, Mackenzie, seven, and Makayla, six, and a baby son, David, who is one. I also have a stepson, Otto, who is 18. He lives in Liberia, and we live in a small city in Minnesota called Monticello.

I also have two children I lost through miscarriage. Both times I was four months pregnant. I think about them all the time and ask myself if they'd have been boys or girls, if they'd have looked like my other children, if they'd have made me a better person. I imagine holding them. I still have my ultrasound pictures – I keep them in my Bible. I know they're in heaven, but I miss them.

You know yourself when something isn't right, but the doctor refused to consider that a mistake had been made, and dismissed me

Because of my miscarriages, my later pregnancies were fraught with anxiety, so I've kept them very private, and I haven't gone out much, unless I've really needed to. Thankfully, I have an amazing doctor – she takes her time in appointments, asks me about my family, even checks in on my mental health. I drive back to the area where we used to live, an hour away, especially to see her. We are one of only a few Black families in our area of Minnesota, but house prices were a lot more affordable here than in the more urban community where we used to live when I was a single mother buying my first house alone.

My doctor is worth the drive, because I've seen first-hand how some medical professionals treat women, especially Black pregnant women. I tore badly during my first daughter's birth and needed a lot of stitches, but they weren't done well. You know yourself when something isn't right, and I wasn't healing properly, but the doctor refused to consider that a mistake had been made, and dismissed me. As a result, when I had my other children I tore badly in the same place, so after my next birth I may need surgery. Both my doctor then and my doctor now are white. The problem isn't white doctors – it's doctors who lack respect, care and humility when their patient is Black.

Even so, I feel very blessed to have given birth in the US and not Liberia. I've heard a lot of horror stories from friends and family who still live there. When someone is sick it can take two or three hours to get to the nearest hospital, which is overcrowded and poorly equipped, and they might be out of the necessary medication. If you don't have enough money, they won't

meet your medical needs, which is why a lot of women die in childbirth there.

I was at a school event recently and a mother asked where I was from. I found it odd. There are a lot of white people in the US who aren't from here, but they're never asked about it. It's one of the many reasons I'm considering moving to Liberia soon. You never feel 100% at home as a Black minority in America. Even though I was naturalised years ago, that can always be ripped away from you and you can be deported. My children were born here, but I don't want them to ever forget their roots. We are African. Some kids born in the US have a sense of entitlement because they haven't seen how people suffer in other countries. After living in a refugee camp, I can't stand it when people here are wasteful. I want my children to have respect for a dollar.

I would love to retire to Liberia. I went back for the first time to marry my husband, 20 years after I left. I've never known peace before, but when I arrived there, I did. That's how you know you've arrived home.

Louise had her baby in April 2022



Photograph: Eduardo Martino/The Guardian

'I wish there was more education around pregnancy, because Brazilians are so afraid of natural birth'

Priscila Messias, 40, president of the Brazilian Women's Union, Rio de Janeiro

The last time I was pregnant, the [Zika virus](#) was running rampant through my country. No one really knew what was happening or what the [risks of birth defects](#) were. We just heard stories and rumours, so I stayed home as much as possible. Thankfully, the baby was born safely. He's called Pedro and is six now; he joined two older brothers, Leonardo, 16, and Rafael, 14.

I couldn't have imagined that not only would I become pregnant for a fourth time – with another boy – but that there would be another dangerous virus, Covid, to worry about. This pregnancy was unplanned. I'm 40 and I already have my wonderful boys, but [abortion is illegal here](#), so that wouldn't have been an option. Once I knew I had the support of my family and friends, I was able to embrace it, and though we're anxious we're excited too. He'll be called Mateous. It's very common here to announce your child's name to loved ones before their arrival.

I will be having my fourth C-section, because that is the expected method of birth here. With my first, I wanted a natural birth, but I reached 41 weeks and was pressured into having a caesarian. The doctors don't want to wait for natural labour – C-sections are faster, easier, and can be planned and controlled.

I wish there was more education around pregnancy, because Brazilians are so afraid of natural birth. Our fear comes from our grandparents and ancestors who lost babies this way, but they didn't have the knowledge we have now. C-sections are done to benefit the doctors' schedules, not women or their babies. Pregnancies in Europe seem so beautiful and relaxed by comparison.

During this birth I'll opt to be sterilised. In Brazil, life gets harder the more children you have

Healthcare only became free to all in 1988, and it's still a postcode lottery. Since [Jair Bolsonaro](#) came to power in 2019, he has redirected money away from maternity services and the cracks are showing. I saw on the news that a woman in northern Brazil gave birth on the street. The hospitals in the bigger cities can be chaotic.

It tends to be the case that the smaller the city, the safer you are. I live a two-hour drive from the capital, in a municipality of Rio state, and the system works well enough here. I've had appointments once a month and will go more often as the birth approaches. If there are any issues, you will see a doctor rather than the usual obstetric nurse. But giving birth in Brazil you don't feel safe, you don't feel protected. I hope things are better by the time my grandchildren arrive.

During this birth I'll opt to be sterilised. That's another thing about Europe: the economy is more stable, so people can have many children if they want. Here, life gets harder and harder the more children you have. I don't regret this pregnancy, though. Mateous will be so loved by all of us.

Priscila had her baby in March 2022



Namisa with her daughters Aminata, left, and Kadijah. Photograph: Michael Duff/The Guardian

‘At 23 weeks, I began bleeding and was feeling unwell. The midwife’s advice was to take paracetamol, drink folic acid syrup and use some pads’

Namisa Jabbie, 29, project facilitator of [Girlz Empowered](#), Freetown, Sierra Leone

Earlier this year, my home pregnancy tests kept coming back negative, but then I felt movements inside my stomach that I recognised. I went to the local hospital, tests in hand, and a blood test confirmed my suspicions. I was already four months along. I’m 29 and already have two daughters: Kadijah, seven, and Aminata, two. This was an unplanned pregnancy, and I’m scared – we can’t afford the cost.

Sierra Leone is one of the very worst countries in the world for maternal mortality rates. I signed up to a basic local maternity hospital, and over the nine months will have 18 prenatal appointments, two a month. They don’t see you that often out of kindness – it’s for money. You have to pay for each appointment. The nurses are paid by the government, but you also pay unofficially the equivalent of about £1 to see them. If you’re having any issues or complications and want to see a doctor, that’s another £9. At a private hospital, it could be £15. If you have a minimum-wage job here, you’re only earning the equivalent of £37 a month. The appointments aren’t mandatory, but if you don’t go they will be angry with you, and women are reluctant to upset the people who will look after them and their baby, especially when death before, during and after childbirth is so common. On top of that, it’s very common to have to bribe medical professionals to make them pay proper attention to you. Some women can’t afford hospitals at all and have to rely on traditional midwives, who are local women who make house visits.

Covid made the situation even worse. Going back to the [Ebola outbreak](#) in 2014, many doctors lost their lives, and families were minimally compensated, many not at all. When Covid hit, the fear was so great that the

moment doctors noticed a patient had Covid symptoms, they would bribe a nurse to take the case instead.

In my country, being a woman is a challenge. Pregnancy brings more challenges, and so does raising children

At 23 weeks, I began bleeding and was feeling unwell, so I called the midwife. She said: “I can’t help you right now – I’m in church.” Her advice was to take paracetamol, drink folic acid syrup and use some pads. The next morning, I went to the hospital and saw a different nurse. She told me to just go and lie down. Eventually, they told me I was pregnant with twins and that one of the twins was not well and was in a bad position. Again, they said all I could do was go home and rest. There was zero psychological or emotional support, let alone any physical support, and I had to pay for each midwife I saw. I don’t know if I trust what they told me.

When a pregnancy is planned, it’s beautiful, but in Sierra Leone there are many reasons why women get pregnant. There is a lack of proper family planning and awareness. There is poverty – I work with two pregnant teenage girls at a community club who mingled with the wrong boys. Another reason is status. Women aspire to get pregnant – bringing home a baby is held in higher regard than bringing home a college degree.

We also need education for men, because sympathy from the father is usually nonexistent. They just think about all the women who manage pregnancy and have a healthy baby, and expect that you should be able to do the same. They don’t believe you when you say you’re in pain or that something doesn’t feel right. I can’t imagine seeing a father on a labour ward.

I wasn’t ready physically, financially or subconsciously. In my country, being a woman is a challenge. Pregnancy brings more challenges, and so does raising children. I envisage my eldest daughter becoming a doctor. Then maybe another woman won’t have to go through what I am going through.

Seven weeks after Namisa was interviewed, her twins were stillborn at 32 weeks



Photograph: Sigga Ella/The Guardian

‘In Iceland, natural birth is encouraged, and I wanted that. Back in Venezuela, C-section is the norm’

Valenttina Griffin, 37, mechanical engineer and co-founder of Women In Tech Iceland, Reykjavik

It has been two decades since I left Venezuela for the first time. We initially moved to Norway, where I finished high school, then back to Venezuela for a short time before settling in Iceland. I had my first child here when I was 27; he’s nine now.

The maternity system here is one of the very best in the world, and I think that’s because it was developed to encourage population growth. You have to support pregnancies and childbirth to achieve that. The population has still not reached half a million. It’s both a historical and a cultural thing. Women used to give birth very young here to increase the chance of healthy babies. Now they are having children older, and in tandem with that there are improvements in care and other developments designed to decrease child mortality.

You see a midwife at three- or four-week intervals during your pregnancy, and there is a comprehensive online system where you can access every single detail related to your pregnancy. They even upload all of the photos from your scans free of charge.

There is a subtle racism here – we need a foreign workforce to do the jobs locals don’t want to do – but I love Iceland

In Iceland, natural birth is normal and encouraged, and that’s what I wanted; back in Venezuela, C-section is the norm and there is a stigma around natural birth. My first was difficult. As a child, I was told I was allergic to silicone, which is used to deliver an epidural, meaning I couldn’t have one. I was pushing for two hours, and when my son began to come out he was face up and got stuck, so I had to have an assisted birth with a ventouse. I

recently met the head anaesthetist to discuss my upcoming birth, and his jaw dropped when I told him I hadn't had an epidural.

When I had my 12-week appointment for this pregnancy, it finally hit me that I would have to give birth again: "Oh my God, I have to push this baby out!?" I knew then that the first birth was a more traumatic experience than I had realised, so I've been seeing a therapist. I had some bleeding in the first months, due to a low-lying placenta, but later scans have shown it has moved up, meaning I won't have to have a C-section.

My grandfather was Black and my grandmother white, though I identify as Black. Living in Iceland, it doesn't bother me that none of my healthcare professionals are Black. I did hear a story from a midwife who heard about colleagues who were unsure, and quite worried, about what a dark patch on the skin of a newborn mixed-race baby was. That's very common in Venezuela; it's just the colour the baby's skin will become when they're older, and nothing to worry about. But here they were stumped. I've never heard of anything serious being missed or overlooked because the baby isn't white, though.

A big part of the reason I've had such a positive experience here is because I speak the language. I resisted learning it when I first arrived – "What would be the point in learning something only 300,000 people speak," I thought. But there was a wall between us. I was lucky because I already spoke a Norwegian dialect that is similar to Icelandic, and being able to communicate has made all the difference in bringing that wall down. There is a subtle racism here, though. We need a foreign workforce to do the jobs locals don't want to do, like cleaning and cutting fish, but these new immigrants are often segregated from the locals. I love Iceland, though. I know my baby will too.

Valentina had her baby in May 2022

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/lifeandstyle/2022/aug/13/black-women-around-world-share-birth-stories-pregnancy-racism>

Pregnancy

I had babies in Germany 10 years apart. This is what I learned about healthcare, motherhood and race

My son was born soon after we moved to Berlin to open a bookshop. Last year I had twins – and things went far less smoothly

More stories of [Black women's birth experiences around the world](#)



Sharmaine Lovegrove: ‘Experience left me feeling afraid of having to rely on the NHS.’ Photograph: Briony Ridley/The Guardian

[Sharmaine Lovegrove](#)

Sat 13 Aug 2022 02.00 EDT

Of the mothers in my circle, I thought I was the most “one and done”. I became pregnant with my first child at the age of 29, shortly after marrying my husband, and a year after I’d moved to Berlin following Boris Johnson’s

election as mayor of London. I felt he would damage my home city, taking it further along the road to unaffordability and unfettered capitalism. The rise in the cost of everything in London meant the life I had assumed I would have as a third-generation Londoner wasn't possible.

It was a childhood dream to open a bookshop and to have a family of my own, and Berlin made both those things possible. I was lucky to have a smooth pregnancy, and the public healthcare insurance scheme in [Germany](#) cost me the same as I would pay in national insurance contributions in the UK. Included in my plan was a monthly scan with my gynaecologist, as well as two deep scans and one 4D scan, so when my child arrived I knew everything about him. The care from my doctor was stern and medicalised – when my six-week scan showed two eggs, she told me not to get excited as one egg could vanish, which was alarming and upsetting. I chose to also get a midwife, paid for by my health insurance, who had a more holistic approach. My son was two weeks late, and she suggested that I insert a tampon soaked in olive oil and cloves, sit on a toilet filled with lavender and hay, and drink camomile tea. The doctor suggested that I be induced. I did both, and the latter brought me my son.

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The hospital was wonderful. For an extra €500, my private room felt more like a boutique hotel – my husband could stay, and there was a buffet laid on for the non-birthing parent each morning. The nurses showed us how to care for our son, and took him for periods so I could nap. After five days, the time all birthing parents are encouraged to stay, we went home confident and relaxed, ready to embark on our life as a family of three.

When our son was ready to start primary school, we moved back to the UK to reconnect with family and enhance our careers. It was wonderful to be home in south London and to raise our child in the streets and parks where I had played; there was comfort in familiarity. What was less comfortable was coming back to discussions about the EU referendum and seeing the levels of inequality in London. There was so much talk about multiculturalism, yet so many companies lacked diversity, as did many schools and friendship

groups. Every aspect of society seemed to be divided, and it was disheartening.

As a Black British person I face far fewer race-related issues in Berlin than people of colour who have grown up here

At this time, Black women I knew started to discuss their struggles with fertility and getting adequate medical care. I had first-hand experience of not being heard over a medical issue that should have been routine; because I didn't fit into a box, it took too long to get the correct diagnosis for my symptoms, and that had left me feeling afraid of having to rely on the NHS.

By 2020 we were in the Brexit transition period, and my family and I moved back to Berlin to secure our EU status and again escape Boris's reign, this time as PM. Living here, I am a privileged immigrant. While the city has many issues with race, being British and speaking German means I am not treated differently in the healthcare system. This is double edged: medical professionals simply don't look at the factors that could be racial or draw on data from studies of Black bodies – there are so few of us here that they don't consider it. This is complicated and conflicting, but as a Black British person I face far fewer race-related issues than people of colour who have grown up in Berlin, people from Turkish backgrounds or those living with refugee status trying to navigate the system.



‘The hospital was grim, totally different from the first experience,’ says Sharmaine Lovegrove. Photograph: Briony Ridley/The Guardian

Despite this, Berlin is my family’s home and, when I turned 39, knowing I would get better care here, we decided to try for another baby. To my gleeful surprise, I quickly became pregnant with twins. The only thing I did differently this time was to have a doula. I wanted a woman of colour, and I wanted to be indulged and to lean in to my pregnancy, to ease out of being a workaholic, and to have massages and self-care moments. None of this materialised as my doula was flaky, and despite the money I’d paid didn’t contact me for the entirety of my second trimester. It was a blow, but I knew from experiences of close friends how fragile pregnancy is and how random it was to conceive and deliver healthy babies, so I focused on the positives of my experience and set the date for a caesarean section for my twins’ birth.

The birth went smoothly, but although we had a private room, the hospital was grim, totally different from the first experience. Our 10-year-old son came to see us and meet his sisters, and then two days later had a false-positive Covid test at school. We mentioned it to the nurse to see if he could get a PCR test at the hospital, and unbeknown to us they shut down our room: we didn’t see or hear from anyone until they came with full protective gear and full-face masks to measure and weigh the babies. We were told that

the firstborn twin had lost a lot of weight, and my husband had to finger-feed her with a pipette and syringe; it was frustrating, as they had both latched on perfectly and we had mastered tandem breastfeeding. From there, everything went downhill, and although all our PCR tests came back negative, no one talked to us about what would happen should the babies get Covid. It was all so upsetting. Having planned to stay for five days, we went home on the fourth, pushing my post-surgery body to get approval to leave.

As they were doing our paperwork, the hospital realised they had got twin one and two mixed up, and there had been no need to give one of the babies formula as both were the correct weight. By this point I needed to get out and get my babies home; I was so angry I knew if I spoke I would scream. Even so, eight months on, I am relieved that race wasn't the factor I know it would have been [in the UK](#). Services were stretched, and the fear of the pandemic in the hospital meant mistakes were made and suboptimal care given, but this was because of the unusual circumstances, not because of my protected characteristics.

On the flip side, there are tremendous benefits to us being in Berlin. Recently I got my first bill for our twins' childcare: €46 a month for them both to attend full-time nursery, versus roughly £3,000 for the equivalent in London. I am so pleased we remained.

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- [If men find three minutes in a menopause simulator is no joke, imagine a decade](#)
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OpinionDrought

As drought blights the UK, our politicians have their heads buried in the sand

[Caroline Lucas](#)



England's privatised water system is compounding the climate emergency. Instead of fixing it, the government has gone awol



‘All that profit, yet investment in our waterways is falling woefully short.’
Baitings reservoir in Ripponden, West Yorkshire. Photograph: Christopher Furlong/Getty Images

Fri 12 Aug 2022 10.21 EDT Last modified on Fri 12 Aug 2022 12.45 EDT

A drought has officially been declared across [vast swathes of England](#). Rivers and reservoirs are evaporating in front of our eyes. Water may soon be rationed and crop irrigation restricted. Drought, and the extreme heat that exacerbates it, isn’t some occasional freak occurrence that can be brushed off as “[super scorcho](#)” fun once or twice a year. It’s a consequence of years of inaction on the climate emergency. This is producing a perfect storm of energy insecurity, food supply chaos and extreme weather that is wreaking havoc on society.

Getting a firm grip on this crisis requires both immediate and long-term solutions. Our lame duck government is offering neither. It’s clear that the privatisation experiment for water companies has failed. They’re fit for profit, not for purpose. The head of Thames Water – the company responsible for the supply fiasco at [Northend in Oxfordshire](#) – is set to receive a £3.1m “[golden hello](#)” for signing on as CEO. English water firms across the board have [handed over £72bn](#) to shareholders in dividends.

Ed Vaizey claimed on [Good Morning Britain](#) this week that “you get better run companies in the private sector”. Are these the same companies that dithered over hosepipe bans for fear of [annoying customers](#), further intensifying our drought crisis? Companies that [failed to meet](#) their own targets on fixing leaks and faulty mains pipes? Companies whose incessant dumping of raw sewage has [blighted our waterways](#)?

All that profit, yet investment in our waterways is falling woefully short. Not a [single new reservoir](#) has been built in the past three decades, and our Victorian water pipes are being replaced at a rate 10 times slower than our European neighbours. So we need immediate action. The Green party is calling for an [urgent enforcement order](#) on water firms, a cut to bosses’ obscene executive pay, an end to dividends to shareholders and for the water supply to be brought back into public ownership as soon as is practicably possible.

Public ownership works, and is popular. Publicly owned Scottish Water is the [most trusted](#) public utility in the UK, while not-for-profit Welsh Water has helped 60,000 low-income customers to pay their bills. They invest more, too. Scottish Water has [invested nearly 35% more](#) per household in infrastructure since 2002 than privatised firms in England; it charges 14% less in water bills; and it doesn’t pay out costly dividends to shareholders.

Making ourselves more resilient to droughts in the future requires long-term solutions that tackle the climate emergency at its source. Yet just when we need real climate leadership to address this urgent crisis, our government has gone awol. During last month’s heatwave, Boris Johnson [ducked out](#) of chairing several Cobra meetings, and has barely been seen in public since. Prospective leader Rishi Sunak thinks [letting his daughters do the recycling](#) will help us get to net zero. This is hardly the muscular and resolute decision-making we need to tackle the climate emergency.

Meanwhile, Liz Truss is on a bizarre crusade complaining about [solar panels](#) in fields, when solar is the [cheapest form of energy](#) and covers just [0.06% of UK land](#), far less than the amount of land used by airports. To top it all off, Truss has also refused to increase the windfall tax on energy companies, and has pledged to [lift the ban](#) on climate-wrecking fracking.

The solutions to this crisis are clear. We must keep fossil fuels in the ground and deliver a clean, green and affordable energy system. We need publicly owned utilities to do what they say on the tin, rather than simply siphon off obscene profits to shareholders. The climate emergency affects us all – and we can all be part of the solution.

- Caroline Lucas is the Green MP for Brighton Pavilion
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The ObserverMenopause

Now our ‘menopause allies’ really know how we suffer. Isn’t that right, Iain Duncan Smith?

Catherine Bennett



Wearing a gilet to feel a hot flush has opened his and others’ eyes, so they claim. Hmm



Labour MP Carolyn Harris turns up the heat on Iain Duncan Smith's MenoVest menopause simulator. Photograph: Sarah Lee/The Guardian

Sat 13 Aug 2022 09.15 EDTFirst published on Sat 13 Aug 2022 01.30 EDT

Shortly before his relaunch as a lead apologist for Liz Truss, Sir Iain Duncan Smith had enough time on his hands to try on a [MenoVest](#), a kind of heated gilet now enjoying a moment. This successor to the pregnancy simulator, with its understated hint of the “This is what a feminist looks like” [T-shirt](#), is advertised as converting its male wearers into “menopause allies”.

Last week’s best known recruit was the BBC presenter Jeremy Vine. After moments in the gilet, he told a campaigner: “[I’m now suffering what you suffered.](#)” In fact, Vine suspected, he was already cognitively struggling, just like an actual menopausal woman having a hot flush: “I can’t even think of a question now.” Mercifully it had passed [before management got to hear about it.](#)

The response among MPs was equally gratifying. Tim Loughton, a Tory who once said Sarah Teather, a woman with no children, [should not be a families minister](#), is now another qualified ally, inducted into “the challenges that so many women have to go through”. As for IDS, after his simulated hot flush it came home to him, [he reported](#) to BBC Radio 4’s *Woman’s Hour*,

“that we sometimes make a joke about it really – ‘oh well, she’s menopausal or something’ – then dismiss behaviour as though there’s no other reason to dig into that”. Suddenly, you get the inevitability, in 2019, of his [all-male Johnson leadership campaign](#).

Was some inner imbalance, I wonder, to blame for IDS’s insulting comments about Labour’s women-only shortlists?

Had IDS personally encountered sufferers? Well, his mother,, he said, but also “just women, you know”, when “we could have been a lot more sensitive to this, and we weren’t, and I just recall some sometimes slightly erratic behaviour, uh, difficulties, but people just kind of glossed over it really”.

While it’s unclear what his epiphany will mean in practical terms, given IDS’s known [hostility](#) to working from home, he can presumably continue to attribute a hormonal cause to middle-aged female behaviour he judges erratic or difficult, but in a way that is certifiably empathetic. Maybe the erratic Liz Truss is already getting the benefit? “If women go through this and they’re trying to work,” IDS mused, “it must lessen their capability, productivity, their abilities at times.”

We await some similarly illuminating device to help women better understand the occasionally incapable, difficult or erratic behaviour of middle-aged male co-workers and public figures. In the absence of a male simulation suit, we are left guessing why, say, so many senior male politicians in Duncan Smith’s party can seem distracted, even cognitively deficient, to the point that this must lessen their capability and productivity. In terms of empathy, it would help to know that a middle-aged Tory minister’s absences, lapses or confusion might not be something to mock or dismiss as a classic midlife crisis but painful symptoms of hormonal turmoil.

Was some inner imbalance, I wonder, to blame for the pre-empathetic IDS’s memorably insulting comments about Labour’s women-only shortlists (“people who haven’t really performed as politicians”)? Could it explain his fluctuating attitudes to, for instance, Boris Johnson, who went from “capable

of [also] capturing a mood of optimism for too long missing”, to “hugely damaging”, to “[Johnson must stay](#)”, to “Liz Truss has inner steel”.

It might be argued that three minutes in an IDS Vest is too short to appreciate the complexity of the 68-year-old’s predicament as he struggles for status in a culture where occasional [brain fog](#) and the mature acquisition of sports cars and [a motorbike](#) can still invite heedlessly cruel comments. Some women, certainly, have already recoiled from the proposal that three minutes in the MenoVest offers a man any meaningful insight into the experience of menopause, with its other symptoms potentially including night sweats, insomnia, forgetfulness and depression, along with the inescapable message that much of society considers you superfluous. As for creating women’s allies, any vest that can make those out of recent supporters of Johnson needs to be not so much educational as miraculous.

Inevitably, as with the recent glut of celebrity menopause literature, the gilet’s focus on the extreme, sometimes disabling, discomfort experienced by some women can look unhelpful to those who escaped more lightly, or with manageable symptoms, or who even report feeling liberated by the event. If three out of five women say they’ve been negatively affected at work, as detailed in a new government [report](#), Menopause and the Workplace, that’s two out of five who might consider the MenoVest a virtuous-looking pretext for the new allies to patronise women before, during and after the menopause.

It’s worth considering similar techniques to generate male interest in female experience habitually classified as ignorable

But given the revelatory impact on Vine, IDS and others, there’s possibly something to be said for performative, vest-style male learning, in place of less exciting illustrations of poor health and workplace provision. Women have, after all, been [campaigning for years](#) against ignorance about the menopause and inadequate treatment, without IDS concluding that the menopause might not be, contrary to his lived experience, a joke.

Supposing, unlike the now largely discredited homeless-for-a-night, poor-for-a-week and fat-for-a-day media stunts, the menopausal-for-a-moment

contraption does make any difference, it's worth considering similarly immersive techniques to generate male interest in female experience habitually classified as intractable or ignorable. Could some prominent men agree, for instance, to try out working for, say, 10.4% less, or whatever the local [gender pay gap](#) is? After a few seconds Vine could discover "I'm now suffering what you suffered!"

Much, then, depends on the allies. While [Carolyn Harris](#), the chair of the menopause taskforce, has been justly congratulated on her MenoVest session, we can't be sure any related conclusions about female debility were not, for certain parliamentarians, a dream come true. And if that's unfair, what is it about the menopause that brings out a tender side in figures who have never, until now, done anything for women?

Catherine Bennett is an Observer columnist

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OpinionSwimming

Why I'm telling my Sikh 'aunties': come on in, the water's lovely

[Minreet Kaur](#)

I've been helping the south Asian community learn to swim for the past two years – and it's the best thing I've ever done



Minreet Kaur with one of her classes. 'It feels radical to help these women open their eyes to new possibilities for the first time.'

Sat 13 Aug 2022 04.00 EDT Last modified on Sat 13 Aug 2022 09.31 EDT

"Can you help me lift my legs," says a Sikh woman in her 70s, who's determined to keep her face above the water. She is preparing to swim her first length of the local swimming pool. "Yes, auntie," I say, and dutifully place my hands under her, and suddenly, she is buoyant. In her leopard-print costume and with bangles skimming the water, she launches into a determined breaststroke, with her neck arched to the beams. She stops halfway down the lane, just before her feet no longer touch the bottom.

It's hard to describe just how big a milestone this is for her – and for me. I've been teaching her to swim for six weeks, and just a few classes ago, she was terrified of getting wet, let alone being seen in leopard print and swimming lengths. Now, her confidence is unrecognisable. She is one of many south Asian women I teach who never learned to swim as a child, and who is now reckoning with their inherited view of leisure, tightly bound in cultural and gendered restrictions.

I've been helping the south Asian community learn to swim for the past two years – and it's the best thing I've ever done. My family has always kept fit – my dad is the infamous [Skipping Sikh](#), and my mum, the [Hula Hoop Kaur](#). Both go into primary schools to encourage kids to get active. Needless to say, this is an atypical vocation in the Punjabi community – especially at their age, in their 70s. I've always been a confident swimmer, so when my mum and her close friends said they wanted to learn how to swim, I started giving them free lessons. Since then, demand has grown exponentially.

I love to see the aunties arrive poolside, glamorous in glittery, brightly coloured swimwear, and still wearing their jewellery. And each week, I get to see their confidence grow, from learning to feel comfortable standing in the water, to being able to kick their legs while holding the side. We gossip and have a laugh, and that's all part of making learning to swim appealing. At the end of some of our lessons, the aunties invite my mum and me around for pakora and chai, and I feel like a little girl again.

For many of the women of my mum's generation, sport and physical activity were never encouraged – and were actively stigmatised. Culturally, many Sikh children never learn to swim, because their parents never learned, and it wasn't seen as something girls did. These missed opportunities in childhood only become more entrenched in adulthood, as women get married and start raising their own children. Among my mother's friends, a group of time-poor women, shackled to the demands of traditional family life, swimming for leisure was a completely alien concept. So for them, learning to swim is actually quite radical.



‘I love to see the aunties arrive poolside, glamorous in glittery, brightly coloured swimwear, and still wearing their jewellery.’

Not being able to swim goes beyond missing out on the health benefits exercise has to offer. It’s a vital life skill, and a public safety issue that disproportionately affects Black and minority people. Research by Sport England in 2020 found that [93% of Asian adults and 78% of Asian children don’t swim](#). The figures are [even higher among the Black community](#), with 95% of adults and 80% of children not swimming. We should all be outraged by these figures, which translate to higher rates of drowning deaths among these communities.

As a Sikh swimming instructor – the only one I know – I feel it’s important to open up a wider conversation about how we make our municipal spaces accessible to all. During my first swimming lesson as a child, one of the kids in my class mocked my “hairy” legs and this has always stayed with me. I know how it feels to be the only Brown girl in the water. The women that I teach see that I look like them, albeit a younger version – and that’s significant. I wear a swimming costume confidently, and put my face in the water. I stuff my hair into a swimming cap – a huge barrier for many Black women, and some Asian women, too. I conduct lessons in English and Punjabi. “I can’t put goggles on, I’m squashing my fake lashes,” one woman told me. I understand the difficulty she has in being seen without makeup

and with wet hair, and the cultural significance of that. My great-aunt, who is in her 80s, was worried about putting her face in the water in case her meticulously pencilled eyebrows washed away. “No one is watching,” I told her. “Just feel free.”

Helping create a safe and familiar space for these women, and modelling what a “swimmer” looks like, allows them to experience something that should be a universally accessible pastime. “I trust you because you’re like my daughter,” one of the aunties told me, through tears, after a particularly successful lesson. For another woman in my group, swimming has been a way of discovering her independence for the first time. Her ex-husband never allowed her to learn, and after a lifetime of duty and obligations, getting in the pool has been a reawakening for her. It feels radical to help these women open their eyes to new possibilities for the first time.

What is happening in my community is significant. I’m witnessing a sort of renaissance among the south Asian aunties I teach, whose children have now left home, and who no longer want to accept the gendered restrictions they grew up with. Here, the cliche rings true: age is just a number.

- Minreet Kaur is a journalist who covers Britain’s south Asian community
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[Opinion](#)[Conservative leadership](#)

Behold the warring Tories, fighting like cats in a sack to achieve – precisely nothing

[Marina Hyde](#)



They rail against a mythical force that scuppers their plans for radical change. The truth is they don't have any



‘Sitting round the ‘Get Jack Shit Done’ table yesterday were Boris Johnson, business and energy secretary Kwasi Kwarteng (right), and No 11’s Nadhim Zahawi (left).’ Photograph: Kyle Heller/No10 Downing Street

Fri 12 Aug 2022 09.25 EDT Last modified on Fri 12 Aug 2022 13.02 EDT

Nothing could possibly be longer than this [Conservative leadership](#) race – not even the final minute of your washing machine cycle. Every promise made in it should be treated with the same deference you’d reserve for the claim that the tab closure on a cardboard cereal box “seals in freshness”. Given the crises raging outside, the contest resembles a Dickensian reality show, in which two grotesques compete to run the workhouse, simply refusing to be thrown off course by the increasingly desperate entreaties of their paupers. Who, as a mark of lavishly sarcastic respect, are these days referred to as “clients”.

The hustings now take place at a pitch only 75-year-old sociopaths can hear, so I’m afraid I don’t know whether bubbly detention centre redcoat Liz Truss last night promised to “look again” at bringing back the poor laws, though I am enjoying the doomed efforts of the Sunak campaign to insist that their guy gets it. “For too long, water hasn’t had the attention it deserves”, [burbled Rishi](#), on the same day the Northern Echo ran an aerial photo of the huge swimming pool complex [Sunak is building](#) at his constituency home in Yorkshire, under an authority that this morning

announced a [hosepipe ban](#). Sunak's really done everything to show us his struggle is real, short of running under the slogan “[Kim, there's people that are dying!](#)”.

Attempts by our underdog to garner sympathy are best described as mixed. Last night Sunak revealed that he'd messaged and called Boris Johnson in recent weeks, [but hadn't heard back](#). Don't worry, mate – you can catch up on the backbenches in September. Except, regrettably that joke doesn't really work because it relies on the frankly incredible premise that Johnson will turn up to parliament.

He certainly can't be arsed being prime minister of a country on the point of immolating itself for his attention. Today's splash headline in the mild-mannered Metro newspaper is: [PM TURNS UP FOR MEETING](#). This was the story about Boris Johnson unexpectedly presenting as the “surprise guest” at a Downing Street meeting with the energy bosses who are about to plunge an unspecified but hefty percentage of the country into dire financial distress. The meeting resulted in the government announcing precisely zero new measures. So think of Johnson's quirky cameo as a sort of “and finally” to the cost of living apocalypse. According to his comments after the meeting, the prime minister plans to “keep urging” the sector to help people. The [official readout](#) adds that Johnson also “emphasised” some stuff. Thank you for your service, sir! The Rock has something he calls his [Get Shit Done](#) table. Downing Street has the opposite – a Get Jack Shit Done table.

Also sitting round it yesterday were business and energy secretary Kwasi Kwarteng (more on him later on), and No 11's Nadhim Zahawi, a man who's realised he's only going to be in post for a few weeks, and consequently wants to have a hot chancellor summer doing things such as naffing off on holiday and ignoring questions about [his tax affairs](#). Still, great to see Nadhim recharged by his time away, back round the table for another hard day's urging and emphasising. He apparently chucked out some flannel about “the spirit of national unity” – and you may well feel he will have success bringing the nation together in an overwhelming desire to call him a waste of space.

Hand on heart, however, you can't accuse Keir Starmer of filling the vacuum created by those at the top of the government to which he leads the opposition. A highly unfortunate clash of holidays has left the Labour leader and his frontbench [missing in action](#), with Starmer's absence from the debate once again raising the suspicion that his most tirelessly nurtured political skill is simply waiting for it all to go to shit. I don't know what you'd call this strategic ideology. Defaultism? Can your opponent double-fault you into No 10? I guess we'll end up seeing, but there is a school of thought that winning the argument is a better bedrock to build on than some other epic failure losing it. I note that the Labour leader is finally beginning to unfurl his proposed economic package like the fronds of a not-to-be-rushed rare fern, but leaving [Gordon Brown to step in](#) and make the counter-argument for him has felt a lot like getting your mum to do your school project.

As for Kwarteng, it feels ironicidal that he was one of the Tory MPs (along with Liz Truss) who once wrote a book claiming that [British workers](#) were "among the worst idlers in the world". High praise! The UK "rewards laziness" apparently, which feels accurate in this case, given that 10 years on, Kwarteng is now a cabinet minister whose job is being done by TV's Martin Lewis, along with those of about four other secretaries of state. I keep boggling over the lesser-known fact that turning the flow temperature down on many boilers can save consumers about 8% a year on their annual energy bills. When the Social Market Foundation's [James Kirkup](#) asked various politicians why the government wasn't out there formally giving the public boiler optimisation advice, they all essentially said they didn't want to be accused of nannying. They prefer to "nudge", apparently – so do be glad they didn't nanny those currently being nudged into the abyss.

Incredible, given all this inaction, that we are still somehow hearing about "the blob". Do you know about "the blob"? This is the invisible foe that ministers and their media frotters love to talk about because it shows how some woo-woo antagonist is stopping them being in even the same postcode as "adequate". The blob is a bone idler's version of [The Power of Nightmares](#), where a bunch of sensationaly indolent ministers and their [brosé-addled spads](#) concoct an enemy that will allow them to do the square root of nothing for the people they're supposed to serve, while blaming something called "the blob".

It's really a mark of how utterly beaten political discourse is that this way of talking about executive failure is still given the time of day, when the biggest decision Boris Johnson has bothered taking over the past few months of crisis is whether to let some tax avoider pay for another chocolate fountain at his wedding. In recent weeks the blob has been retrospectively blamed for Johnson's demise, and pre-emptively blamed for a Truss prime ministership's failings, and as these crises deepen you can be sure it'll carry on being cited by increasing numbers of lazy, unfocused or ineffective ministers trying to put the blame for ordinary people's anguish anywhere other than their own doorsteps. The blob?! Sorry, but no. Don't talk to us about the blob. THE BLOB IS YOU.

- Marina Hyde is a Guardian columnist
 - What Just Happened?! by Marina Hyde is published by Guardian Faber (£20). To support the Guardian and Observer, order your copy at guardianbookshop.com. Delivery charges may apply
-

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2022.08.13 - Around the world

- [Anne Heche Actor dies a week after car crash](#)
- [France Production of salers cheese halted due to drought](#)
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- [United Arab Emirates Ex-Khashoggi lawyer Asim Ghafoor freed after money laundering conviction](#)
- [US and China Officials discuss Biden-Xi meeting amid Taiwan friction](#)

[Anne Heche](#)

Actor Anne Heche dies a week after car crash

The 53-year-old star of films including *Donnie Brasco*, *Catfight* and the remake of *Psycho*, did not regain consciousness after a car crash on 5 August

- [Peter Bradshaw on Heche: a little too smart for Hollywood](#)
- [Gallery: a life in pictures](#)



Anne Heche in 2000. The actor has died at the age of 53, after she was injured in a car crash. Photograph: Graham Whitby-Boot/Sportsphoto/Allstar

*[Catherine Shoard](#)
[@catherineshoard](#)*

Fri 12 Aug 2022 13.40 EDT Last modified on Sat 13 Aug 2022 06.42 EDT

The US actor [Anne Heche](#) has died, a week after she was critically injured in a car crash.

The news was [confirmed](#) by a representative for her family to the US online media outlet TMZ, who said in a statement: “We have lost a bright light, a kind and most joyful soul, a loving mother, and a loyal friend.

“Anne will be deeply missed but she lives on through her beautiful sons, her iconic body of work, and her passionate advocacy. Her bravery for always standing in her truth, spreading her message of love and acceptance, will continue to have a lasting impact.”

On Friday afternoon representatives for Heche, 53, [confirmed](#) she was “brain dead”, which under California law is the definition of death. It was announced earlier in the day Heche would be taken off of life support. It is understood her heartbeat was being maintained in case appropriate organ donation could take place.

Anne Heche: a look back at the actor’s most memorable roles – video obituary

On Friday evening, Heche’s eldest son, Homer, 20, released a statement on behalf of himself and his half-brother, Atlas, 13.

“My brother Atlas and I lost our Mom,” he told People. “After six days of almost unbelievable emotional swings, I am left with a deep, wordless sadness. Hopefully my mom is free from pain and beginning to explore what I like to imagine as her eternal freedom.”

He added, “Over those six days, thousands of friends, family, and fans made their hearts known to me. I am grateful for their love, as I am for the support of my Dad, Coley, and my stepmom Alexi who continue to be my rock during this time.”

“Rest In Peace Mom, I love you,” Homer Heche concluded.

Earlier on Friday a friend of the actor, Nancy Davis, wrote on Instagram: “Heaven has a new Angel. My loving, kind, fun, endearing and beautiful

friend [@anneheche](#) went to heaven. I will miss her terribly and cherish all the beautiful memories we have shared.

“Anne was always the kindest, most thoughtful person who always brought out the best in me ... My heart is broken.”

Heche’s former partner, Ellen DeGeneres, [wrote on Twitter](#): “This is a sad day. I’m sending Anne’s children, family and friends all of my love.”

“Rest in Peace now Anne,” tweeted the actor Patricia Arquette. “Anne Heche was a wildly talented actress who endured more horror than anyone should have to,” [added](#) the respected film historian Mark Harris on Twitter. Harris linked to a 2009 profile of the actor, which detailed her traumatic childhood. “She deserves to be remembered with compassion.”

Many had hoped Heche would make a recovery after a publicist for the actor reported her in a “stable” condition after crashing her car into a house in [Los Angeles](#) on 5 August. Firefighters said she had been speaking to them as she was cut free of the wreckage and taken to hospital.

But the actor shortly afterwards lost consciousness and on 8 August representatives posted an update, saying Heche was in an “extreme critical condition” and had slipped into a coma. On Friday, [her family said in a statement](#) that she was not expected to survive and that she was being kept on life support to determine if her organs could be donated.

Heche, an actor of sharp intelligence, rose to prominence in the early 1990s, playing twins on the soap Another World, and with film roles, including as Catherine Keener’s best friend in Nicole Holofcener’s debut feature, Walking and Talking.

Her first major role was as Johnny Depp’s girlfriend in gangster drama Donnie Brasco (1997). In the same year she was cast in other enduring titles: political satire Wag the Dog, disaster movie Volcano and slasher classic I Know What You Did Last Summer.



Heche in *Donnie Brasco*. Photograph: Moviestore Collection Ltd/Alamy

Also in that same year, Heche began a high-profile relationship with sitcom star and talkshow host [Ellen DeGeneres](#), shortly after the comedian came out as gay. The couple were together for three years; Heche spoke of her gratitude to Harrison Ford who continued with production on romance *Six Days, Seven Nights*, despite the homophobic backlash to Heche's real-life relationship.

In 1998, she starred as Marion Crane in Gus van Sant's revisionist, shot-for-shot remake of Hitchcock's *Psycho*, then averaged a film a year for the following decade, choosing creatively ambitious projects to juggle with parenting responsibilities.

She played Nicole Kidman's sister-in-law in Jonathan Glazer's psychological drama *Birth*, and Ashton Kutcher's girlfriend in hustler comedy *Spread*. In 2011, she featured in winning indie comedy *Cedar Rapids* and co-starred as corrupt cop Woody Harrelson's ex-wife in *Rampart*.

Anne Heche: a look back at the actor's most memorable roles – video obituary

Recent key film roles include the mother of serial killer [Jeffrey Dahmer in a 2017 biopic](#), and as an enraged artist opposite Sandra Oh in acclaimed [2016 black comedy Catfight](#). [Reviewing](#) that film, the Guardian's Benjamin Lee called it "a rare comedy with something to say and a uniquely ambitious structure that reaches far beyond its limited budget.

"Both of the leads are excellent, with Heche in particular proving to be a welcome presence on the big screen, allowed to inhabit more than just a supporting character."

She was also a contestant on the 2020 season of US show Dancing with the Stars.

In 2001, Heche published a memoir, Call Me Crazy, which detailed her turbulent upbringing as the youngest of five children in a family that moved 11 times during her childhood.



Heche and Ellen DeGeneres in 1998. Photograph: Héctor Mata/AFP/Getty Images

When Heche was 13, her father died of Aids, which she said he contracted from same-sex partners. Heche also claimed that her father repeatedly raped her as a child, leading to her contracting genital herpes when young. Other members of her family disputed the claim.

Three months after their father died, Heche's brother, Nathan, died in a car crash, which his sister claimed was suicide. Heche became estranged from her mother soon after.

In 2000, according to reports, Heche drove to the desert and walked some distance to a stranger's ranch where she asked to take a shower and then settled in the living room to watch a film.

The occupant of the house called the local sheriff after Heche showed no sign of leaving; the actor was briefly admitted to a psychiatric unit and admitted that she had taken ecstasy. In her book, Heche says she was "insane" for the first 31 years of her life owing to the abuse she said she had suffered at the hands of her father.

Promoting the memoir, Heche said that in the past she would retreat for security into an alter ego: Christ's half-sister who had contact with extraterrestrial life forms.

In 2001, Heche married cameraman Coleman Laffoon, with whom she had Homer. The marriage ended in divorce and in 2009, Heche had another son, Atlas, with James Tupper, her Men in Trees co-star.

This article was amended on 13 August 2022. Heche did not play the role of sister in Walking and Talking, or in Birth; she played the best friend and the sister-in-law of Catherine Keener's and Nicole Kidman's characters respectively.

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/film/2022/aug/12/anne-heche-death-actor-dies-week-after-car-crash-aged-53>

[France](#)

Production of French salers cheese halted due to drought

Farmers in Auvergne despair as cows cannot be fed on grass left parched by hot summer



One of the rules of salers production is that the local cows must be fed on at least 75% grass from pasture if their milk is to be used. Photograph: Herve Lenain/Alamy

[Angelique Chrisafis](#) in Paris

[@achrisafis](#)

Sat 13 Aug 2022 02.00 EDT

Traditional cheese has become the latest casualty of France's summer [drought](#), as production of the salers variety in the central Auvergne region was halted due to a lack of grass for cows.

Salers is an unpasteurised cow's cheese that has been made for centuries in central [France](#). It carries France's *appellation d'origine protégée* (AOP) stamp of approval, meaning it is unique to the small area where it is produced.

But one of the rules of its production is that the local cows must be fed on at least 75% grass from pasture if their milk is to be used.

This summer's scorching temperatures have led most of the 76 farmers whose milk goes to the production of salers to despair that their once green pastures are parched and yellow from drought.

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"There's nothing left to eat," one farmer, Laurent Roux, told the local radio station [France Bleu](#). "The terrain is so dry that in places, it looks like ash. It's dust."

A decision was made to temporarily halt production of the cheese in the hope that rain would come in September and restore the pasture.

Laurent Lours, the head of the local group of salers cheesemakers, said: "Salers is a seasonal cheese, made in the grass season. That's one of the pillars of its identity." He said without grass the cheese would look and taste completely different, which risked damaging its image.

It is the first time that production of salers cheese has been completely shut down.

France is suffering its worst drought on record with some villages in the south left without safe drinking water and dependent on deliveries by truck, and farmers warning of a looming milk shortage in the winter.

The corn harvest is expected to be 18.5% lower this year and farmers said other cereal and fruit and vegetable crops were suffering.

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[Montenegro](#)

Montenegro shooting leaves 12 dead including gunman

Man opens fire at random in city of Cetinje, reportedly after a family dispute



A firefighter walks by a hearse at the site of the attack in Cetinje on Friday.
Photograph: Risto Božović/AP

Staff and agencies in Cetinje

Fri 12 Aug 2022 14.40 EDT Last modified on Fri 12 Aug 2022 16.25 EDT

Twelve people including the gunman have been killed in a mass shooting in [Montenegro](#), after a man opened fire at random in the city of Cetinje, reportedly after a family dispute.

State television said the 34-year-old gunman had also wounded six people, including a police officer, during the shooting in the Medovina neighbourhood.

The broadcaster RTCG reported that the attacker had randomly shot at people walking in the street, including children.

Four of the wounded were transferred to a hospital in Cetinje, while two others with serious wounds were sent to a clinical centre in the capital, Podgorica, it said.

“When we arrived at the scene, we saw nine dead bodies, including two children, and another two passed away on their way to the hospital,” Andrijana Nastic, a state prosecutor, told Vijesti TV.

Nastic did not say how old the children killed were and could not reveal the identities of the victims.

“I can only say that the shooter was killed by a citizen,” Nastic said. The media had reported earlier that police had killed the shooter.

RTCG quoted police sources as saying the attack came after a family dispute, but gave no further details. Police still have not issued an official statement about the attack, but have blocked off the area.

The Montenegrin prime minister, Dritan Abazović, wrote on his Telegram channel that there had been “an unprecedented tragedy” in Cetinje, calling on the country “to be, in their thoughts, with the families of the innocent victims, their relatives, friends and all the people of Cetinje”.

Residents were left in shock in the shooting’s wake.

“I can’t believe that this happened in Cetinje and [Montenegro](#). I do not know what to say, I am speechless. I do not know where this can lead us,” said Cetinje resident Milorad Mitrovic to RTCG.

[United Arab Emirates](#)

Ex-Khashoggi lawyer Asim Ghafoor freed in UAE after money laundering conviction

US citizen released after paying fine as United Arab Emirates court confiscates \$4.9m it says illegally moved through country



Dubai international airport, where Asim Ghafoor was detained a month ago while in transit. The former lawyer for murdered Saudi dissident journalist Jamal Khashoggi has been released from UAE detention. Photograph: Karim Sahib/AFP/Getty Images

Staff and agencies

Fri 12 Aug 2022 23.23 EDT Last modified on Fri 12 Aug 2022 23.24 EDT

The US citizen and civil rights attorney Asim Ghafoor, who had represented [Jamal Khashoggi](#) before the Saudi journalist was murdered, has been freed

from custody in the UAE where he was convicted on money laundering charges.

Ghafoor was headed home to the US, said his lawyer, Faisal Gill, having been freed after paying a fine and with help from the US embassy in the UAE.

A court on Wednesday upheld Ghafoor's earlier in-absentia conviction, ordering him to pay a fine but revoking a three-year jail term handed down in May. UAE officials had no immediate comment.

Ghafoor – former lawyer of Khashoggi, the dissident Saudi journalist who was murdered at Saudi Arabia's consulate in Istanbul in 2018 – had been transiting through Dubai airport on 14 July when he was detained for the in-absentia conviction, handed down in May, for money laundering and tax evasion that followed a 2020 request for assistance by US authorities.

Abu Dhabi's judicial department said on Wednesday that the court had confiscated funds illegally moved through the country. He would also be deported, it said.

Habib Al Mullah, a lawyer for Ghafoor, said the court confiscated 18 million dirhams (\$4.9m).

US officials have not confirmed the assistance request, but said the arrest was not made at the request of Washington.

Media reports in the US said Ghafoor, who lives in Virginia, had in the past come under US surveillance due to work representing Muslim Americans in civil rights cases.

The in-absentia trial and his detention in July while the US president, Joe Biden, was visiting the region drew criticism from rights groups and members of Congress.

Ghafoor's supporters said he was denied due process and was unaware of the charges before being detained. Some suggested the arrest could be

politically motivated, citing his ties to Khashoggi and work with rights groups critical of the UAE.

US intelligence says Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman approved the operation in which Khashoggi was killed. The prince has denied involvement. Saudi Arabia and the UAE are close allies.

UAE officials have repeatedly said the case against Ghafoor was strictly about financial crimes.

With Reuters in Dubai

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US foreign policy

US and Chinese officials discuss Biden-Xi meeting amid Taiwan friction

Two leaders raised possibility of in-person encounter when they last talked by phone in late July, US official confirms



Joe Biden speaks by video with Xi Jinping in March. Photograph: Reuters

[Julian Borger](#) in Washington

Fri 12 Aug 2022 15.39 EDT Last modified on Fri 12 Aug 2022 15.49 EDT

US and Chinese officials have been discussing a face-to-face meeting between Joe Biden and [Xi Jinping](#), amid a significant escalation in friction over Taiwan.

Kurt Campbell, the coordinator for Indo-Pacific affairs in Biden's national security council, confirmed on Friday that the two leaders had raised the possibility of an in-person meeting when they last talked by phone in late July "and agreed to have their team's follow up to sort out the specifics".

Campbell said there were no new details to announce, but both leaders are expected to take part in the G20 meeting in November in Bali.

The military exercises China has been conducting in the Taiwan Strait have wound down for the time being but Campbell told reporters: “They are part of an intensified pressure campaign against Taiwan which has not ended and we expect it to continue to unfold in the coming weeks and months.

“The goal of this campaign is clear: to intimidate and coerce Taiwan and undermine its resilience,” he said, adding that China’s purported outrage over the visit to Taiwan by the House speaker, Nancy Pelosi, was only a “pretext” to change the status quo in the region.

Campbell said that the US would continue to ensure freedom of navigation in the Taiwan Strait and in the region.

“We will not be reflexive or knee jerk,” he said. “We will be patient and effective. We will continue to fly, sail and operate where international law allows, consistent with our longstanding commitment to freedom of navigation and that includes conducting standard air and maritime transits through the Taiwan Strait in the next few weeks.”

He did not give details of when the transits would take place, or confirm reports that the US had opted not to sail an aircraft carrier through the strait on the grounds that it would be too provocative.

He did confirm, however, that Biden had ordered the carrier USS Ronald Reagan to remain “on station” in the region.

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Headlines monday 8 august 2022

- [Live Sunak says Truss's anti-handout approach to cost of living crisis 'won't touch the sides'](#)
- [Tory leadership race Sunak says Truss's cost of living plan is 'big bung' to wealthy and large firms](#)
- [Cost of living crisis City workers get double-digit wage rises while lowest-paid see 1% increase](#)
- [Don't Pay UK Serious consequences for not paying energy bills, warn charities](#)

[Skip to key events](#)

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

No 10's refusal of emergency budget shows Tories have lost control of economy, says Labour – as it happened

This blog is now closed. You can read all our coverage on the cost of living below

- [Cost of living crisis – all our coverage](#)

Updated 6d ago

[Andrew Sparrow](#)

[@AndrewSparrow](#)

Mon 8 Aug 2022 12.30 EDTFirst published on Mon 8 Aug 2022 03.56 EDT

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Volunteers work to put together food parcels to be distributed to clients attending the Bradford Central foodbank. Photograph: Oli Scarff/AFP/Getty Images

*[Andrew Sparrow](#)
[@AndrewSparrow](#)*

Mon 8 Aug 2022 12.30 EDTFirst published on Mon 8 Aug 2022 03.56 EDT

Show key events only

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Live feed

From 6d ago

[08.48](#)

Labour: No 10's refusal of emergency budget shows Tories have 'lost control' of economy

Labour has criticised No 10's decision to ignore calls for a recall of parliament and an emergency budget. In response to the Downing Street lobby briefing (see [12.37pm](#)), **Rachel Reeves**, the shadow chancellor, issued a statement saying that the Conservative party had “lost control” of the economy. She said:

People are worried sick about how they'll pay their bills and do their weekly food shop, and all this Tory prime minister does is shrug his shoulders. An economic crisis like this requires strong leadership and urgent action – but instead we have a Tory party that's lost control and are stuck with two continuity candidates who can only offer more of the same.

Labour would start by scrapping tax breaks on oil and gas producers and providing more help to people who are struggling to pay their energy bills. Only a Labour government can tackle this crisis and deliver the stronger, more secure economy that Britain needs.

It is also interesting to see Reeves describe both Liz Truss and [Rishi Sunak](#) as continuity candidates. “Time for a change” is often the most compelling message available in a political campaign, and so it is easy to see why Labour wants to brand them both as continuity figures.

But it does not square with conventional assessments of the Tory leadership contests. Truss is a continuity candidate in the sense that she is a Boris Johnson loyalist who shares his scepticism about fiscal orthodoxy and his faith in Brexit boosterism. But as PM she would implement unfunded tax

cuts on a scale way beyond anything Johnson was able to get past the Treasury.

And Sunak is a continuity candidate in terms of economic policy (which is not surprising, because he was largely in charge of Johnson's economic policy until a few weeks ago). But temperamentally he is very different, he appeals to a different type of voter and a Sunak administration would feel more like a conventional Conservative one. In a [good Sunday Times column yesterday](#), Robert Colvile argued that a Truss win would mark the victory of Johnsonism over Cameronism.



Rachel Reeves. Photograph: Kirsty O'Connor/PA

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Updated at 10.27 EDT

Key events

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- [6d ago](#)
[Sunak says Truss's anti-handout approach to cost of living crisis 'won't touch the sides'](#)

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[6d ago](#)[12.30](#)

Afternoon summary

- Boris Johnson has ruled out new cost of living measures until a new prime minister is in place, with No 10 saying the worst financial pressure on families will not hit until later in the year. No 10 stuck to the line that it would not be appropriate for him to pre-empt a decision that should be taken by his successor despite Labour (see [1.48pm](#)), the former prime minister **Gordon Brown** (see [11.11am](#)), Scotland's first minister **Nicola Sturgeon** (see [4pm](#)) and the CBI (see [5.03pm](#)) all calling for an urgent intervention from him now.
- Rishi Sunak has launched a fresh attack on his Conservative leadership rival Liz Truss's plan for tax cuts in an emergency budget, describing it as a “big bung” for large businesses and the better-off which would do little to help those most in need over the winter.
- Doubts have been cast on claims by Boris Johnson that it will be possible to go ahead with plans to axe 91,000 civil servants “without harming” frontline services.
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[6d ago](#) [12.25](#)

Boris Johnson is under pressure to intervene on the cost of living crisis. He is refusing to do so - but he has posted a message on Twitter thanking everyone who made the Commonwealth Games in Birmingham a success.

I want to say a huge thank you to everyone who helped make the 22nd Commonwealth Games such a success - athletes, officials, spectators, organisers & volunteers.

Birmingham has staged one of the all-time great sporting spectacles – a legacy that will live for generations. pic.twitter.com/bBbUlifO02

— Boris Johnson (@BorisJohnson) [August 8, 2022](#)

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[6d ago](#)[12.09](#)

I have updated the post at [4.23pm](#) to explain that, although Laura Farris says she has stood down from the privileges committee, technically she remains a member until the Commons passes a motion to replace her with someone else.

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[6d ago](#)[12.03](#)

CBI chief says Johnson should meet with Truss and Sunak to agree measures to deal with rising energy bills

Tony Danker, head of the CBI, has joined Gordon Brown (see [11.11am](#)) and Nicola Sturgeon (see [4pm](#)) in calling on Boris Johnson to take emergency action to address the cost of living crisis. In [a statement](#) Danker says Johnson should convene a meeting with his two potential successors, Liz Truss and Rishi Sunak, to agree a joint response to the announcement due later this month on the next rise in the energy price cap. The CBI says:

The PM must bring together both leadership candidates in the next two weeks to agree a way forward to support people and businesses with energy bills once the Ofgem price cap is announced on 26 August. This will allow the current prime minister to issue reassurances on 26th that people will be significantly supported – not waiting until 5 September or later.

Given that Truss and Sunak are at loggerheads over how to respond to the cost of living crisis (see [8.56am](#)), this proposal may be even less likely to be taken up than Brown's call for a recall of parliament, or Strurgeon's proposal for a meeting of the UK heads of government council.



Tony Danker. Photograph: Jonathan Brady/PA

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[6d ago](#)[11.37](#)



Lisa O'Carroll

The UK has been given an extra month to respond to [infringement proceedings issued by the EU](#) over the alleged “breach of international law” over the failure to implement the Northern Ireland Brexit protocol of the Brexit withdrawal agreement.

While Northern Ireland and Brexit has played little part in the Conservative party leadership election, the progress of the law suit is a sharp reminder that [Rishi Sunak](#) and Liz Truss’s threat to tear up the protocol risks a further deterioration in the already poor relations with Brussels.

The UK is currently facing seven infringement proceedings over the protocol.

The EU sent its legal opinion and two letters of formal notice on 15 June with a two-month deadline for a response.

After a request by the UK for more time, the deadline has been extended to 15 September, an EU official has confirmed.

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Updated at 11.49 EDT

6d ago11.23

The Conservative MP **Laura Farris** says she has stepped down from the privileges committee, which is carrying out the inquiry into whether Boris Johnson lied to MPs about Partygate.

A number of reports have appeared in the Mail & subsequent publications about the Privileges Committee, its investigation into the Prime Minister & comments I & others have made

I stepped down from the Committee last month. It is regrettable that no journalist spoke to me first

— Laura Farris MP (@Laura_Farris) [August 8, 2022](#)

I maintain confidence in the Committee, it's members and the mandate given to it by the House of Commons

— Laura Farris MP (@Laura_Farris) [August 8, 2022](#)

Farris and all other Conservative and opposition members of the committee have been singled out in reports, [in the Mail on Sunday yesterday](#) and [in the Daily Mail today](#), implying they were biased against Johnson.

As the government party, the Tories have a majority on the committee and, if Farris has left, they will nominate an MP to replace her. But the committee's website [still lists her as a member](#).

UPDATE: According to a parliamentary official, until an MP has been formally discharged from a committee (normally by a Commons vote replacing them with someone else), they remain technically a member of the committee, and named as such on its website. Farris will not be able to properly leave until after the summer recess, when MPs can vote to replace her.

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Updated at 12.08 EDT

[6d ago](#)[11.23](#)



Rishi Sunak looking at a book with Teddy Openshaw (aged 4) following a Conservative leadership campaign event in Ribble Valley today. Teddy was at the event with his dad. Photograph: Getty Images

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[6d ago](#)[11.00](#)

Sturgeon says Johnson should call emergency UK heads of government meeting this week to plan for cost of living crisis

Nicola Sturgeon, Scotland's first minister, has released the text of [an open letter to Boris Johnson](#) asking him to convene an emergency meeting with

the leaders of the devolved governments to discuss the cost of living crisis. She says it should happen “as soon as possible this week” to agree “urgent steps to help those in most need now, and also formulate a plan of action for the autumn and winter ahead”.

Explaining why she thinks action is needed now, she says:

While we will continue to take all actions available to us within devolved responsibilities and budgets – the Scottish government is investing almost £3bn this year in a range of measures which will help address the cost of living pressures – it is a statement of fact that many of the levers which would make the biggest difference lie with the UK government. It is also the case that only the UK government can access and make available resources on the scale required. Therefore, actions by devolved governments alone – though important – will not be enough to meet the unprecedented challenges we face.

Action is needed now to address significant gaps in help for households, in particular those on low incomes, who are increasingly vulnerable to the impact of rising household costs. However, it is also vital, given further increases to energy bills due to be announced later this month, that a substantial plan be developed now to avert and mitigate what will otherwise be a crisis of unprecedented proportions – a crisis in which many people will be unable to feed themselves and their families or heat their homes.

Sturgeon says the meeting should take the form of a heads of government council. This new body, set up [under reforms announced in January](#), was due to meet for the first time in September.

She also implies that the proposals to address the cost of living crisis from Liz Truss and [Rishi Sunak](#), the two Tories left in the contest to succeed Johnson, are “irresponsible”. She says:

While few will escape some impact of the cost of living crisis, these impacts are not being experienced evenly. That is why the focus must be on providing targeted support to those most adversely impacted, rather than an irresponsible reduction in broad-based taxes which will

benefit the relatively better off over those most in need. It is also vital that any tax cuts introduced by the UK government do not result in tighter controls on spending which will impact on delivery of public services already under immense pressure.

Sturgeon is referring to Truss's plan to reverse the national insurance increase, and Sunak's plan for a temporary cut in VAT on domestic fuel bills.

Earlier today, No 10 said Johnson would not be announcing emergency cost of living measures because it was for his successor to take major spending decisions of this kind. (See [12.37pm](#).)



Nicola Sturgeon on a visit in Glasgow last month. Photograph: Jeff J Mitchell/PA

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Updated at 11.03 EDT

[6d ago](#) [10.27](#)

More than 13,000 migrants have crossed the Channel since Priti Patel announced her plan to send asylum seekers to Rwanda, PA Media reports.

PA says:

According to the Ministry of Defence, 176 people made the crossing on five small boats on Sunday, bringing the total to 13,016 since 14 April.

It brings the total number of people who have crossed the Channel so far this year to 18,284.

Photographs taken on Monday morning showed another group of migrants, clad in life jackets and face masks, being brought into Dover by Border Force officials.

Analysis by the PA news agency of the MoD's provisional figures shows 1,885 people have been brought to the UK so far in August.

That is more than half of the 3,053 people rescued in August 2021.

In April Patel, the home secretary, hailed the Rwanda deal as a "world-class" plan that provided a "blueprint" for other countries to follow.

The week in which the deal was announced proved the busiest of the year for migrant crossings, when 2,076 made the journey across the Channel.



A group of people thought to be migrants brought in to Dover, Kent, from a Border Force vessel following a small boat incident in the Channel today.
Photograph: Gareth Fuller/PA

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Updated at 10.48 EDT

[6d ago](#) [10.23](#)



Rishi Sunak speaking to Conservative members in Ribble Valley in Lancashire today. Photograph: Reuters

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[6d ago](#) [10.15](#)

In May Boris Johnson set out [plans to cut the size of the civil service by around a fifth](#), with the loss of around 90,000 jobs. At the time he claimed that this could be achieved without frontline services being harmed.

According to [a report](#) by **Peter Foster** and **George Parker** in the Financial Times, a government review has now concluded that cuts on this scale would be impossible without frontline services being affected. They say:

One Whitehall insider who has worked on the plans to cut 91,000 civil servants said that it had become clear that Johnson had made his announcement – which was greeted with enthusiasm on the rightwing of the Conservative party – without fully thinking through the implications.

“You can only deliver 91,000 cuts by actual cuts to major frontline services,” added the insider. “There’s no way you can get to that number through efficiency savings or reductions in HQ staff.”

One government insider said the proposals to axe 91,000 civil servants would involve “serious cuts” to staff at HM Revenue and Customs, Border Force and prisons. “And you couldn’t protect jobs outside London,” added the insider.

Although estimates were not finalised, another Whitehall insider said a figure of £2bn had been discussed as a working assumption on the cost of compulsory redundancy payments.

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Updated at 10.48 EDT

[6d ago](#)[09.23](#)

It is not just the Labour party complaining about Tory inaction on the economy. (See [1.48pm.](#)) In [his column in the Sun](#) today, **Trevor Kavanagh**, who was for years political editor at the paper and who is definitely no socialist, attacks the governing party in terms that would probably be deemed too alarmist and extreme for a Labour party press release. This is how his article starts.

While the Stupid Party is busy rearranging the deckchairs, SS Great Britain is steaming headlong towards the biggest crash since the Great Depression of 1929.

This is not just a [cost-of-living](#) crisis. It is a national economic emergency.

We are on the brink of a full-blown calamity of wartime proportions, with soaring bankruptcies and unemployment, poverty and homelessness.

Belt-tightening won't cut it.

This country cannot wait four more weeks for the [Tories](#) to decide who might lead us through it.

Without what [Churchill](#) called “Action This Day”, millions of hardworking families – including Sun readers – face hunger and destitution for the first time in living memory.

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Updated at 09.45 EDT

[6d ago](#)[09.09](#)

Nadine Dorries, the culture secretary and arch Boris Johnson loyalist, has been the most vocal of the Tories calling for the privileges committee inquiry into claims that Johnson lied to MPs about Partygate to be halted. She posted this earlier today.

Collective hatred of Labour MPs towards [@BorisJohnson](#) for delivering Brexit and 80 seat maj for Gov taking traditional Labour seats, knows no bounds. This Machiavellian enquiry is the means to a by-election and Con MPs should have no part in it.
<https://t.co/FnkfWvqpsd>

— Nadine Dorries (@NadineDorries) [August 8, 2022](#)

Gavin Barwell, the Tory peer and chief of staff to Theresa May when May was prime minister, says that if Dorries feels this way, she should have voted against the Commons motion ordering the committee to hold the inquiry in the first place (which she didn't).

A reminder that [@NadineDorries](#) supported (or at least didn't vote against) referring this matter to the Privileges Committee on 21 April. She is now trying to publicly pressure the MPs on the committee not to do the job she - and the entire House - asked them to do <https://t.co/Tlm2Jhrqco>

— Gavin Barwell (@GavinBarwell) [August 8, 2022](#)

Arguably the context has changed since [the Commons vote in April](#), because Boris Johnson has now agreed to resign as PM. But Johnson still intends to remain an MP (and reportedly hopes he may one day be able to return to No 10), the charge that he committed a contempt of parliament by misleading MPs remains unresolved, and Johnson has failed to give a full and coherent account of why he told MPs that no parties were taking place in Downing Street when some of his most senior advisers were organising and attending those very events.

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[6d ago](#)[08.48](#)

Labour: No 10's refusal of emergency budget shows Tories have 'lost control' of economy

Labour has criticised No 10's decision to ignore calls for a recall of parliament and an emergency budget. In response to the Downing Street lobby briefing (see [12.37pm](#)), **Rachel Reeves**, the shadow chancellor, issued a statement saying that the Conservative party had "lost control" of the economy. She said:

People are worried sick about how they'll pay their bills and do their weekly food shop, and all this Tory prime minister does is shrug his shoulders. An economic crisis like this requires strong leadership and urgent action – but instead we have a Tory party that's lost control and are stuck with two continuity candidates who can only offer more of the same.

Labour would start by scrapping tax breaks on oil and gas producers and providing more help to people who are struggling to pay their energy bills. Only a Labour government can tackle this crisis and deliver the stronger, more secure economy that Britain needs.

It is also interesting to see Reeves describe both Liz Truss and [Rishi Sunak](#) as continuity candidates. “Time for a change” is often the most compelling message available in a political campaign, and so it is easy to see why Labour wants to brand them both as continuity figures.

But it does not square with conventional assessments of the Tory leadership contests. Truss is a continuity candidate in the sense that she is a Boris Johnson loyalist who shares his scepticism about fiscal orthodoxy and his faith in Brexit boosterism. But as PM she would implement unfunded tax cuts on a scale way beyond anything Johnson was able to get past the Treasury.

And Sunak is a continuity candidate in terms of economic policy (which is not surprising, because he was largely in charge of Johnson's economic policy until a few weeks ago). But temperamentally he is very different, he appeals to a different type of voter and a Sunak administration would feel more like a conventional Conservative one. In a [good Sunday Times column yesterday](#), Robert Colvile argued that a Truss win would mark the victory of Johnsonism over Cameronism.



Rachel Reeves. Photograph: Kirsty O'Connor/PA

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Updated at 10.27 EDT

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This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/politics/live/2022/aug/08/rishi-sunak-liz-truss-cost-of-living-conservative-tory-leadership-uk-politics-live>

Conservative leadership

Sunak says Truss's cost of living plan is 'big bung' to wealthy and large firms

Favouring tax cuts above support payments will leave those most in need out in cold, says ex-chancellor

- [Politics live – latest updates](#)



Rishi Sunak in Edinburgh on Saturday during his first visit to Scotland during his Conservative party leadership campaign. Photograph: Jeff J Mitchell/Getty Images

Tobi Thomas
[@tobithomas](#)

Mon 8 Aug 2022 05.31 EDT Last modified on Mon 8 Aug 2022 11.33 EDT

Rishi Sunak has launched a fresh attack on his [Conservative leadership](#) rival Liz Truss's plan for tax cuts in an emergency budget, describing it as a "big

bung” for large businesses and the better-off which would do little to help those most in need over the winter.

On Saturday, Truss rejected “handouts” as a way of helping people affected by the cost of living crisis. Rather, Truss said that she would go ahead with her proposed tax cuts, which would be her primary way of helping people with the cost of living crisis.

Speaking to the [Financial Times](#), Truss said she would help households facing a financial squeeze, but that she would do this “in a Conservative way of lowering the tax burden, not giving out handouts”.

Writing in [the Sun](#) on Monday, Sunak rejected this approach, saying: “Families are facing a long, hard winter with rising bills. Yet Liz’s plan to deal with that is to give a big bung to large businesses and the well-off, leaving those who most need help out in the cold.”

He added that what was worse was the fact that Truss said “she will not provide direct support payments to those who are feeling the pinch most”.

The result of the Tory leadership contest will be announced on 5 September.

On Sunday, Truss was accused of making another U-turn within a week, after her campaign [tried to play down suggestions there would be no support payments](#) to help millions of struggling people through an already worsening cost of living crisis this winter.

It follows Truss having been [forced to abandon plans](#) to cut public sector pay for roles outside London and the south-east.

Oliver Dowden, the former co-chairman of the Conservative party, who is backing Sunak for leader, said Truss’s plans of cutting national insurance would do little to alleviate the cost of living crisis.

Speaking to Sky News, Dowden said: “It’s that kind of scale of direct intervention that is required and I think just proposing to cut the national insurance contribution – which will only help people on the lowest incomes

working full-time on the national living wage by less than 60 – is not sufficient to this scale of challenge.”

He added that in contrast to Truss, Sunak had a “bold and direct action in response” to the current economic situation, in which a recession has been predicted among rising inflation by the Bank of England.

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Truss backer and former Northern Ireland secretary Brandon Lewis said: “It’s a false premise to argue that you can’t deal with inflation, whilst making sure that people are better off at the same time.”

On tax cuts, he added: “We want to do both, want to make sure we’re getting on top of inflation and you can – to get on top of inflation whilst still putting more money in people’s pockets.

“I think it’s a false premise to argue that you can’t deal with inflation whilst making sure that people are better off at the same time.”

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2022/aug/08/sunak-says-truss-cost-of-living-plan-is-big-bung-to-wealthy-and-large-firms>

UK cost of living crisis

City workers get double-digit wage rises while lowest-paid see 1% increase

Report finds ‘tale of two labour markets’ as workers in London’s financial district enjoy inflation-busting increases



The CEBR report found highest earners, most of whom work in London’s Square Mile, enjoy annual pay growth of 10%, while the lowest earners had a 1% rise. Photograph: Victoria Jones/PA

*[Phillip Inman](#)
[@phillipinman](#)*

Sun 7 Aug 2022 19.01 EDT Last modified on Mon 8 Aug 2022 02.32 EDT

City workers received double-digit wage rises while people on the lowest incomes were paid annual increases of just 1% in the last year, according to a study that illustrates the ability of better-paid workers to protect themselves from the [cost of living crisis](#).

The CEBR (Centre for Economics and Business Research) said workers in the banking and insurance sector had secured inflation-busting increases together with lawyers, accountants and professional services staff, mainly among those working in London's financial district.

The economic consultancy described the figures as illustrating a "tale of two labour markets" where the "highest earners now enjoy annual pay growth of 10%, while lowest earners see just a 1% rise".

Segregating monthly pay data into income groups, it said official data sources showed the bottom 10% had diverged from the 10% after a period of two years during the pandemic when they converged.

Nina Skero, the consultancy's chief executive, said that while an increase in the national minimum wage will have raised the incomes of many low-paid workers, the data showed many others were not able to benefit.

A rise in the national minimum wage of 6.6% in April was likely to be offset by a fall in the number of hours worked by those on low pay.

Skero said the lowest 10% of workers were falling well behind the general inflation rate of 9.4% and would suffer more than other groups should the consumer prices index [rise to 13%, as the Bank of England predicted](#) in its latest forecasts.

She said: "Two prevalent yet opposing narratives have emerged. One focuses on the significant bargaining power held by employees as they take advantage of the tight labour market to negotiate record pay rises and generous bonuses.

"The other points to the decline in wages once inflation is taken into account, and provides abundant anecdotal evidence of people in work struggling to make ends meet."

The central bank said last week that it was raising interest rates to 1.75% to combat the perception that inflation was becoming endemic, pushing workers to demand higher wages over the coming months.

However, the CEBR report and official figures indicate that the staff most able to drive up their wages are on the central bank's doorstep in the Square Mile.

According to official figures that show a breakdown of workers' wages by industry, staff in the finance and insurance sector were paid 10.6% more than a year ago, compared with 1.4% in the arts, leisure and entertainment industry.

Some industries that have suffered chronic staff shortages have raised weekly pay, including the construction and hospitality sectors, pushing average annual pay increases to 6.2%.

City law firms, accountancy businesses and firms aligned to the science and pharmaceutical sectors have also paid above-average wage rises to attract and retain staff.

The CEBR said that during the bonus season in February and March, City banking staff were paid salary and bonuses increases totalling almost 20% compared with the previous year.

"Earnings growth for the highest-paid 1% took off sharply at the start of 2022," the report said.

"In the UK, a lot of the highest earners are concentrated in City of London jobs, usually in the finance, professional and technical industries. Mean pay in these industries has seen especially strong growth in 2022 with year-on-year increases in finance and insurance peaking at 19.8% in February and remaining well above 10.0% in the latest data."

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Professional, scientific and IT sector workers also saw wage growth peak in February at 12.7%.

"These wage spikes are reflective of a robust recent performance in the sector and of the fact that workers in these industries commonly receive

performance-linked bonuses which represent a significant share of overall compensation,” the report added.

[Official figures last month](#) showed that after taking inflation into account, average pay including bonuses fell by 0.9% on the year to March to May 2022.

Excluding bonuses, pay adjusted for the Office for National Statistics’ preferred measure of inflation – the consumer prices index including housing (CPIH) – fell by 2.8%, the biggest fall since records began in 2001.

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/business/2022/aug/08/city-workers-get-double-digit-wage-rises-while-lowest-paid-see-1-increase>

UK cost of living crisis

Serious consequences for not paying energy bills, warn UK charities

Don't Pay group reportedly has 80,000 pledges to refuse payments from 1 October when price cap rises



Protest In Birmingham as Britain faces its biggest cost of living crisis in decades. Photograph: Mike Kemp/In Pictures/Getty Images

[Julia Kollewe](#)

Sun 7 Aug 2022 12.00 EDT Last modified on Mon 8 Aug 2022 00.12 EDT

UK charities are warning people of the severe consequences of not paying their energy bills, as a campaign to stop payments from October gains momentum.

The Don't Pay UK group, which is demanding a reduction of bills to an affordable level, has [reportedly](#) gathered support from 80,000 people who intend to cancel their direct debit payments from 1 October, when the

regulator raises the energy price cap, the maximum amount suppliers are allowed to charge.

Analysts are forecasting that [the average household bill will jump above £3,300 a year](#), from £1,971 in April.

[The group says](#) it will only take action if one million people sign up to its “mass non-payment strike of energy bills”.

Britain is facing its biggest [cost of living crisis](#) in decades as energy and food bills soar. [Citizens Advice said](#) the scale of the problem was significant and it had supported more people who were unable to top up their prepayment meter in June than it had in January 2022. It added that a record number of its service users lacked the funds to turn on their fridge or heat their hob to cook a meal.

Gas and electricity bills are classed as priority bills, which means there can be severe consequences for missing or being late on a payment, said the charity Stepchange. If people don't pay them, their supplier can collect the debt using a debt collection agency. They can also get a court warrant to enter people's homes to fit a prepayment card meter.

“Any arrears will be added to the meter and a set amount will be deducted each week. This means you must pay the arrears at a set weekly amount or lose the supply. Your supplier can also remove the meter and cut off your supply, but fortunately this is incredibly rare,” said Richard Lane, director of external affairs at Stepchange.

“If you've fallen behind with your household bills, and are worried about how you will pay, it's important not to wait to get help. Contact your supplier to let them know you're struggling, they may be able to offer support and inform you about any available grants to pay off a utility bill, or negotiate an affordable payment plan.”

Citizens Advice said there were some safeguards for customers, but they were still vulnerable to higher charges after a refusal to pay.

“Your supplier can’t make you move to prepayment if it wouldn’t be safe or practical; for instance, if an illness or disability means you’d be at risk if your gas or electricity was cut off. Your supplier also needs to follow clear guidance and make sure they’ve given you notice, given you time to pay any debts and offered you alternatives to being moved on to a prepayment meter.”

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The charity said if customers fail to strike an agreement with a supplier to pay off an energy debt, the supplier can apply to a court for a warrant to enter their home to disconnect their supply.

The charity urged people to contact their supplier to try to come to an agreement to clear their debt before a hearing takes place.

If people have owed money to their energy supplier for a while, the energy company might pass their debt over to a debt collection agency.

Debt collectors, unlike bailiffs, don’t have any legal powers but they are specialists at recovering debts. If this happens, Citizens Advice urges people to contact their supplier or get advice from a third party including its own advisers.

“If you don’t repay your debt, then additional interest can be added to the amount that you owe,” it said.

If customers continue to not pay their bills, the energy supplier can take them to court to get a county court judgment. If the supplier is successful in court, it can ask a bailiff to call at a customer’s home to collect the debt. A bailiff, however, cannot force entry to a customer’s home.

2022.08.08 - Spotlight

- ['It's not all celebratory' Five Birmingham residents on the Commonwealth](#)
- [The rise and fall of Alex Jones 'He has done more to further the cause of hate in the US than almost anyone'](#)
- [A new start after 60 Microblading my eyebrows gave me the confidence to change career](#)
- ['It's the songs that count' Erasure's Andy Bell on being out in the 80s, living with HIV and falling from fashion](#)

Birmingham

‘It’s not all celebratory’: five Birmingham residents on the Commonwealth

Beyond excitement for the Games, their history inspires enthusiasm and unsettling questions



Kashee Mistry. Photograph: Andrew Fox/The Guardian

[Jessica Murray](#) Midlands correspondent

Mon 8 Aug 2022 01.00 EDT

The eyes of the world have been on Birmingham as the city hosts the [Commonwealth Games](#). But in one of the most diverse cities in the world, questions have been raised about what the Commonwealth means in the 21st century. As the event enters its final day, five Birmingham residents reflect on what it means to them:

Kashee Mistry, 23, accountant from Solihull

My grandparents moved here in the 1960s from Kenya. They were born in India and moved to Kenya for work, as many people moved across to other [British empire](#) countries for jobs.

The Commonwealth Games is an exciting event, there's a lot of celebration around it, as there should be. But if you think about the history of the Commonwealth and why it came about, for me, it's not all celebratory. When people from Commonwealth countries started moving to Britain after the war, they weren't accepted, they weren't embraced.

Birmingham was the place where Enoch Powell made his "Rivers of Blood" speech and that was directly criticising some of the mass immigration from the Commonwealth. I think those parts of history should be remembered, we shouldn't just ignore them because they're uncomfortable and they don't fit with our values today.

I know that I wouldn't be here if it wasn't for the British empire. But while I was at university and I was studying the empire for the first time – because we're not taught about it in schools – I learnt about its brutal dark past, all the violence and subjugation, and how the legacy of that is the Commonwealth.

I'm so excited that the games are in Birmingham, but they were only in Scotland four years ago. How often are they in smaller, less well-known Commonwealth countries?



Kamani Anderson. Photograph: Kamani Anderson

Kamani Anderson, 23, master's student

I grew up in south Birmingham in Balsall Heath, but I'm from the Caribbean community. The majority of us are from Handsworth and Lozells, which is where everyone moved when they came over here in the 60s onwards.

The city has never had a great reputation. Everything from how it looks, to the accent, people have always got their opinions of Birmingham. But the city is absolutely buzzing at the moment, I've never seen anything like it, and I feel like it deserves it so, so much.

The Caribbean is the powerhouse of world athletics. I think there is a sense of that diaspora pride, especially in a place like Birmingham, which has the one of the largest Jamaican communities in England.

But they've taken the actual Commonwealth out of the games, in my opinion. The political and historical aspects have been taken away.

We saw in the opening ceremony a celebration of how diverse Birmingham is. Almost a majority of the population is non-white and most of those communities are from Commonwealth countries, particularly India,

Pakistan, Jamaica. But we don't talk about why, what brought us here, why we're here and everything that we went through as those communities.



Zafar Hussain. Photograph: Fabio de paolo/The Guardian

Zafar Hussain, 36, owner of Shababs restaurant in the balti triangle

My father came over to Birmingham from Kashmir in Pakistan in 1961 to work in the factories. The plan then was just to work a couple of years and to go back to Kashmir, but then my mother was allowed to join him. My eldest brother, who started this restaurant off with my dad in 1987, was born in Pakistan, and that's how Shababs came about.

It was the Balti bandwagon back in the early 90s – Ladypool Road was crammed with balti houses next door to each other. The restaurant has pretty much been part of my life from day one.

The Commonwealth Games is definitely brilliant for the hospitality industry – it's a boost that we really need after Covid. It's something to lift everyone up and get people together again.



Saima Razzaq. Photograph: Andrew Fox/The Guardian

Saima Razzaq, 37, head of diversity and inclusion at Birmingham Pride

I'd say it's a complicated relationship that I have with the Commonwealth. The fact that we've got such a major sporting event in Birmingham is really exciting.

But there are still a lot of countries where our existence is illegal. We've still got a long way to go, but I think we should recognise the progress being made within Commonwealth countries. Last year, Pakistan had its first ever national Transgender Day. In India in 2018, the discriminatory section 377 was repealed.

We need a nuanced conversation. Sometimes, it's a case of: "We're so great over here and they are so bad." Actually, we need to work with communities to make them understand that a lot of these laws came in at the hands of colonialism.

My family migrated here in the 70s from Kashmir – they moved to Pakistan from India before partition. Migrating to the UK hasn't been easy for my family. It has caused a lot of trauma that is still embedded within the ecosystem of our family. I'm here now, and I've got a positive story, but a lot of people have suffered for me to be living this lifestyle.



Shuranjeet Singh. Photograph: Andrew Fox/The Guardian

Shuranjeet Singh, 26, community organiser in Handsworth

My family moved to Handsworth in Birmingham in the late 1960s/early 1970s. They moved from Punjab in India to work in the factories and foundries up in Smethwick and down in Hockley in Birmingham.

We're very lucky to have the Commonwealth Games here in Birmingham, but I would have really liked to have seen more of an effort by the city to confront its relationship with the Commonwealth. A small feature on a particular programme or project, that to me is not good enough.

Having any kind of massive sporting event in a city is really important for local economies and communities. I think my main question is about legacy. How is this going to impact communities moving forwards?

You've just introduced a whole load of people to triathlon, for example – will they have any opportunities to actually develop those skills? Or is it that this is something that's happening, and it will just leave?

It's so important for young people in Birmingham to see their city in the limelight. Birmingham gets quite a negative reputation, so having the games here is very positive for young people to see things happening here.

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The far right

‘He has done more to further the cause of hate in the US than almost anyone’: the rise and fall of Alex Jones

For years, the Infowars provocateur has made millions of dollars spreading lies and disinformation on social media. Last week in a Texas court, he finally saw some comeuppance. But will this be the end of him – or is it just a temporary setback?



‘With Jones, fascism is a business’ ... Alex Jones at a rally a day before the 6 January 2021 insurrection. Photograph: Jim Urquhart/Reuters

Charlie Scudder

Mon 8 Aug 2022 05.00 EDT Last modified on Tue 9 Aug 2022 05.00 EDT

In front of a microphone with the cameras on him, Alex Jones looked comfortable on his first day of testimony. The delusional provocateur and conspiracy peddler sauntered to the witness stand in an Austin, Texas,

courtroom, shirt unbuttoned without a tie, and introduced himself to the jury with his characteristic, gravelled intonation.

“I actually feel good because I have a chance to say what’s really going on instead of the corporate media and high-powered law firms manipulating what I actually did,” Jones said. “My big frustration is people saying I’m personally going after them, when I question every event.”

Jones, who has stoked dangerous fires of disinformation and distrust on the far right for decades, was facing trial last week to determine how much he owes families of the 2012 Sandy Hook mass shooting – which he long proclaimed was a hoax.

Outside the courtroom last week, a new documentary that casts him as a free-speech activist was released. Throughout, Jones has continued to broadcast lies and disinformation to a huge audience online.

['Your attorneys messed up': how Alex Jones's texts were sent to Sandy Hook family's lawyers – video](#)

In court, however, he was held to a different standard. After testifying for two days – including a rigorous cross-examination that left Jones sweating and visibly uncomfortable – [a Texas jury ordered him to pay a total of \\$49.3m \(£40.8m\)](#) in damages to the parents of one of the Sandy Hook victims. He still faces several lawsuits from other families.

The judge, Maya Guerra Gamble, scolded Jones, after he told untruths at least twice on the stand. “It seems absurd to instruct you again that you must tell the truth when you testify, but here I am: you must tell the truth while you testify,” she said. “This is not your show.”

Jones tried to interject, saying he had only said what he believed to be the truth.

“You believe everything you say is true, but it isn’t. Your beliefs do not make something true. That is what we’re doing here,” the judge said.

The new documentary, Alex's War, was directed by Alex Lee Moyer and made with the cooperation of Jones. It charts his rise from a fringe public-access TV host to leader of rallies on 6 January 2021 that ended in a violent insurrection at the US Capitol.

Jones says in the documentary that he grew up a voracious reader. Starting with comic books and science-fiction, an obsession with history books began when he read Shakespeare's Julius Caesar. He lists a number of books written about the second world war and the Nazi regime that he read as a young man. Among the ones that most shaped his thinking, he says, was None Dare Call it a Conspiracy, by Gary Allen, a prominent member of the ultraconservative John Birch Society. The book claims that an all-powerful group of businessmen, communists and socialists are secretly trying to take control of the world.

But Jones didn't take to the airwaves with his conspiracy theories until after the 1993 siege of the Branch Davidian compound outside Waco, Texas, a few hours north of Austin. The botched raid, in which four federal officers and 82 civilians were killed, stirred up anti-government sentiment in many far-right circles. For Jones, it was a call to action.



The Branch Davidian Mount Carmel compound in Waco in 1993.
Photograph: Fort Worth Star Telegram/Sipa/REX/Shutterstock

He began hosting a show on Austin's public-access television station, where he was a fringe personality who ranted about impending martial law, and began developing the on-air persona that would make him rich later in life.

After the domestic terrorist Timothy McVeigh said he bombed an Oklahoma City federal building in 1995 as retribution for the Waco raid, Jones began interviewing people who claimed the government had staged the attack. Apparently unable to accept that he shared the same view as McVeigh, he rationalised the Oklahoma bombing as a false-flag operation.

He moved his show to Austin's talk radio station in 1996, and helped raise \$93,000 to memorialise the Branch Davidian compound in Waco. His show was cancelled in 1999 because [his views made it difficult for the station to find sponsors](#).

But in the early days of the internet, Jones set up shop in a spare bedroom of his Austin home and started broadcasting online with a new name – Infowars – and sold his show to nearly 100 FM and AM stations across the US.

After the 9/11 attacks, he began spreading more theories that the terrorist attacks were staged. He lost some syndication for his wild views, but online, his popularity continued to grow. “I don’t do it for the monetary thing. I do it for the truth,” Jones said at his trial last Tuesday, “and the monetary thing comes with it because people can tell I’m not reading from a script. I’m not lying like the corporate media on purpose.”

On his regular Infowars show, Jones is bombastic and animated. He gets worked up into fierce diatribes about such matters as demons and politics, fluoride in the water supply and an interlinked global conspiracy that is responsible for everything from Covid to gun control.

During the Obama administration, Jones ramped up racist and virulent rants against the nation’s first Black president. His influence and audience continued to grow, bolstered by, and helping to spread, a bigoted and nationalistic “alt-right” movement.

Jones also continued to spread untrue theories about terrorist attacks, mass shootings and major tragedies, claiming they were false-flag events where paid crisis-actors showed up to promote an agenda from a globalist new world order. “When I say staged, I mean they knew it was going to happen and stood back and let it happen,” Jones testified last week. “That’s what I thought about Sandy Hook.”

Jones purports to be a free speech advocate, and that the lies he spreads are protected by the US constitution. But limits to the first amendment include speech that defames someone or is dangerous.

“In some ways, there is no question that Alex Jones exercises his first amendment right to express himself and raise questions about public events,” says Roy Gutterman, director of the the Tully Center for Free Speech at Syracuse University. “But this case also shows that the law of defamation does limit what false and potentially harmful statements some speakers may make.”



Jones speaking to Trump supporters on election day in 2020. Photograph: Olivier Touron/AFP/Getty Images

The Southern Poverty Law Center (SPLC), which tracks hate and extremist groups in the US, calls Jones “the most prolific conspiracy theorist in

contemporary America". Michael Edison Hayden, an investigative reporter and spokesman for the SPLC, says Jones's ability to influence a huge audience makes his speech dangerous. "He is an amusing carnival barker so we kind of ignore many of the things that are staring us right in the face about how hateful he is," Hayden says. "He has probably done more to further the cause of hate in this country than almost anyone outside of Donald Trump himself."

Jones has been able to grow his Infowars platform through a lucrative sales model where he hawks specially made products on air, such as [a variety of survivalist gear](#) and a line of ["overpriced and ineffective" vitamins and supplements](#). He testified last week that the company raked in \$165m in sales between September 2015 and December 2018. "With Jones, fascism is a business," Hayden says.

As the Infowars audience grew in the lead-up to the 2016 presidential election, Jones also gained a new fan and regular guest: Trump. "He ramps up his graft through the rise of extremist activism under Trump and sort of hitched his wagon of sales to Trump's rise," Hayden says. "To me, that's Jones in his final form, which is just coming from this libertarian, entrepreneurial, conspiracy-obsessed world to becoming something that is much more what we would call fascist."

Dan Friesen had heard of Alex Jones before the 2016 election, but had mainly seen his conspiracy videos in online rabbit holes, not taking him terribly seriously. The Chicago comedian was surprised to see Jones aligning with Trump.

"I just thought it was kind of like a guy who was trying to hold the system accountable, because that's the presentation of what the show is," Friesen says. He began looking into Jones's broadcasts more. "As we went along, it became so clear how so many of the things that he does are awful. I found so many problems with his ideology, and also the way he abuses information, that I started to take it more seriously."

Now Friesen co-hosts a podcast, [Knowledge Fight](#), where he breaks down Infowars shows and Jones's rhetoric. He says that Jones uses the same

toolbox of disinformation tactics to mislead listeners. Often, he will share a real headline from a mainstream news outlet on air, but make up what is in the actual article. He also regularly uses illegitimate sources, but tells listeners it is from the “most prestigious” expert.

“It’s just a complete farce of information,” Friesen says. “He doesn’t care about anything except for what he can use to defend the point he intends to make.”

Friesen came to Austin last week to cover the Sandy Hook trial for the podcast. It’s tiring work, he says, but important. He has heard from listeners who say his podcast has helped them reconnect with family members whose relationships have been damaged by the dangerous theories Jones spreads.

“Things like Alex, it’s nonsense and propaganda that has an effect on the real world,” Friesen says. “People are seeing this one way or another, whether or not it’s being given an appropriate critical view.”

The investigations into Jones’s involvement with the 6 January insurrection and Sandy Hook trials could have an impact on Infowars, but it is unlikely Jones will disappear completely. Recently, the SPLC reported that [an anonymous donor gave an \\$8m bitcoin donation](#) to Infowars, despite its parent company filing for bankruptcy during the trial.

“I don’t see what would be stopping him,” Friesen says. “I mean, if your entire existence has been about yelling, for like, 20-odd years, and relishing that attention, I don’t know how you can go away.”

By aligning with Trump, Jones’s popularity and influence grew rapidly. Trump used false and misleading Infowars headlines to prop up his campaign to become president. Jones said on his show that Obama and Hillary Clinton were demons from hell and smelled of sulphur.

In 2017, Jones helped spread the dangerous QAnon conspiracy theory that wrongly posits that Trump was working to overthrow a cannibalistic, satanist, paedophilic cabal that secretly controlled the US government.

Over the next several years, tech platforms began banning Jones and Infowars for spreading misleading information and hate speech against a number of minority groups. Twitter, Facebook, YouTube, Spotify, Apple and others have removed his content and banned his accounts.

Jones supported Trump's re-election campaign and organised "stop the steal" rallies across the US after he lost. [According to the New York Times](#), he helped fundraise for the rallies on 6 January before the violent insurrection. That day, he participated in the march to the Capitol, and posted an Infowars video saying: "We need to understand we're under attack, and we need to understand this is 21st-century warfare and get on a war-footing."

His ties to other far-right groups that organised the insurrection have made him a key witness for the US House's committee investigating the 6 January attack. [Jones sued Congress](#) when he was subpoenaed for his mobile phone records and text messages, but eventually spoke to the committee, [invoking his fifth amendment right not to give self-incriminating evidence more than 100 times](#), according to his lawyers. Later, he [sought immunity from federal prosecutors](#).

During Jones's testimony last week, attorneys for the Sandy Hook family presented evidence showing he had lied under oath, even though he ultimately admitted the attack was "100% real". Jones dodged and found ways to talk around questions he didn't want to answer, while still calling out "corporate media" whenever he had a chance.

But on the sixth day of testimony, before Jones took the stand, the parents of six-year-old victim Jesse Lewis told jurors how Jones had made the past decade even more unbearable. They talked about extended trauma and near-constant fear of attack from Jones's listeners who believe that they are paid actors and that their son never existed.



Neil Heslin and Scarlett Lewis, parents of Jesse Lewis, who was killed in the Sandy Hook mass shooting. Photograph: Lucas Jackson/Reuters

“Alex was the one with the match that started the fire,” the boy’s father, Neil Heslin testified. “He had a strong voice and he had a platform and he had power.”

At that moment, Jones was not in the courtroom but in his Austin studio, calling Heslin “slow” and continuing to peddle his inane theories about the 2012 shooting.

When Jones returned from his studio that afternoon, Scarlett Lewis, the boy’s mother, testified that losing her child was like losing a limb. She still has “phantom pains”, she says, like he should be there but is not.

“We went from having a child murdered and this impossible, lifelong journey … but it’s something you can process. This, I can’t,” she said. “It’s this element that’s always in the background, of fear, [that] keeps me from healing.”

The parents testified that Jones’s reach went beyond just unhinged theorists online. Lewis said she has had death threats, and received harassing emails and phone calls from Jones’s listeners. One Christmas, a man pulled up in front of the house and began taking photos of her and the property. Another

time, someone drove by firing a gun and shouting “Alex Jones” and “Infowars”. Lewis now sleeps with a knife and a gun nearby.

“Truth, truth is so vital to our world. Truth is what we base a society on,” she testified, speaking directly to Jones across the courtroom. “I think you know that Sandy Hook is real and that it happened, but I don’t think you understand at all the repercussions of going on air with a huge audience and lying … It seems so incredible to me that we have to do this, that we have to implore you – not just implore you, punish you – to stop you from lying.”

Heslin and Lewis were seeking \$150m in compensation, but said they were pleased with the verdict. It also emerged last week that Jones’s lawyer had inadvertently passed Jones’s text messages from the past two years to Heslin and Lewis’s attorney, Mark Bankston. The House committee investigating 6 January has requested to see them.

Bankston said, “With punitive damages still to be decided and multiple [other pending legal matters], it is clear that Mr Jones’s time on the American stage is finally coming to an end.”

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

A new start after 60: ‘Microblading my eyebrows gave me the confidence to change career’

After years spent looking after others, Linda Parker was determined to have some fun. A new look made her believe in herself – and a job at an arts centre was just the start



‘I’m not going to be defined by what I thought I couldn’t do when I was younger’: Linda Parker, who changed her looks and her career at 60. Photograph: Teri Pengilley/The Guardian

[Paula Cocozza](#)

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Mon 8 Aug 2022 02.00 EDT

When Linda Parker turned 60, she made a list. For the past 30 years, she had looked after other people, first as a carer for her dad, and then as a single parent of a daughter. Now she wanted some fun for herself alone. The first thing she wrote down was “microblade eyebrows”.

Before her birthday, she had looked in the mirror and seen a face she says she “barely recognised. I had no eyebrows. I had completely lost them. I felt pallid and invisible.” She has no idea “where or when” her brows disappeared – they must have gone gradually – but she thinks stress may have been to blame.

Microblading involves tattooing hair-like strokes, “little tiny cuts with a teeny tiny machine,” says Parker. When she told her daughter, Lara, her plan, she told her to be careful. “Right up to the day before, I thought, ‘I’m not sure I’m going to do this,’” says Parker. She braced herself for pain, but the discomfort was less than she had expected.

Her new eyebrows were “the first positive step” towards a new way of living. The swelling quickly subsided and the scabs dropped off. That one small step triggered several large leaps.

“Having eyebrows back gave me the confidence to apply for another job,” says Parker. At the time, she was working as a learning support assistant for children with special needs; she had sought a job in education after her partner left when Lara was three months old. By then, she had cared for her father, who had suffered a serious brain injury, for 10 years until his death. She learned she had an aptitude for caring.

The job she saw advertised at an arts centre in Guildford was very different. “It was for the guest experience team: taking tickets, selling ice-creams. I thought they would probably say: “She’s too old. We won’t take her.” At the interview, though, they asked when she could start.

“I am now trained in stage-door protocol – meeting famous people, organising keys and cards. It has given me my mojo back,” she says. “I look forward to every shift. It’s very energising. You are keeping up with different people’s opinions and viewpoints.” She continues to work in a

school, too. “I come home and I can be absolutely shattered, but the minute I get to the theatre, they are such a lovely crowd. And it’s given me the confidence to try other things as well.”

The “other things” include salsa dancing, wild swimming and standup paddle boarding. Further successes from her list include “achieving fudge that sets” and trying to make a difference – she has shared her home with a Ukrainian refugee.

Has a defined pair of eyebrows really spurred so much change? “I definitely wouldn’t have done any of this otherwise,” says Parker. At every landmark age, she says, there’s a natural inclination to think: “That bit’s passed me, now what’s going to happen?” She did not want to accept that “nothing exciting is going to happen now”. The eyebrows made it possible “[to] look in the mirror and think: ‘I’m never going to get rid of the wrinkles, but I’ve got a more defined and expressive face. I look what I would call normal again.’”

Parker was 42 when Lara was born, so her 60th birthday coincided with her daughter’s 18th. “I suppose that was also part of the catalyst,” she says. “I thought it was time to put a bit more fun into life. It was fun bringing her up. We have a great relationship. But as a single parent, you are always responsible.

“I didn’t want her to think I was sat at home like some sad sack doing nothing.”

Parker says she “grew up in the era where women and older people don’t get chances”. More than anything, the eyebrows were a promise. “I’m not going to be defined by what I thought I couldn’t do when I was younger,” she says. “I’ve proved to myself that limits and barriers are often internal – and that people are kinder than you think when other people have a go and try something new.”

- [Tell us: has your life taken a new direction after the age of 60?](#)
-

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Interview

‘It’s the songs that count’: Erasure’s Andy Bell on being out in the 80s, living with HIV and falling from fashion

[Emine Saner](#)



Andy Bell: 'I was one of those people who never got chatted up.'
Photograph: Josh Ritchie/The Guardian

Alongside Vince Clarke, the electropop pioneer has produced some brilliantly catchy and enduring songs. As the group releases a new album, the singer reflects on what happens when the hits dry up – and why he still loves performing live



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Mon 8 Aug 2022 01.00 EDT Last modified on Mon 8 Aug 2022 07.26 EDT

In the late 80s and early 90s, when the electropop band [Erasure](#) were, says Andy Bell, "kind of the darlings for a while", they reached what he calls "saturation TV". Bell, Erasure's vocalist, means they were big and mainstream enough to get on daytime television. And then, says Bell, "that all changes, the media changes, and they don't want you any more. It makes you realise your life isn't measured by how many people know you and stuff like that. In the end, it's the songs that count."

And what songs they are. Bell and Vince Clarke wrote brilliant, enduring pop songs – so catchy, I realise, that I've had A Little Respect going round in my head for most of my life, ever since the fateful afternoon I taped it off the Radio 1 chart show sometime in late 1988. Despite Clarke's history as

the synth-pop pioneer who had already had hits with Depeche Mode and Yazoo, at some point in the 90s, Erasure became rather uncool and never really recovered. Blame the daytime TV appearances perhaps, combined with a burgeoning laddish Britpop era that couldn't handle Bell's sequins and camp. But their biggest hits – among them Sometimes, Stop! and Blue Savannah – stand up.

“When I think about songs like Chorus, and Ship of Fools and Breathe, we do have standout songs,” says Bell. He seems to agree when I imply they have been dismissed as being a bit frothy and lightweight (even if their songs have tackled everything from a post-industrial Britain, to lost love affairs and homophobia), but he doesn’t seem bitter about it. “I just think, wow, that’s a hell of a lot of work we’ve done. And I think it’s great.”

The new Erasure album, Day-Glo (Based on a True Story), is not a return to those poppy hits but an experimental album, akin to 1995’s Erasure, which all but blew up their mainstream appeal. It’s a layered, and often gorgeous, selection of digital tracks, largely made up of manipulated songs from their previous album, The Neon (which gave them their first Top 10 album since the 90s), and created as a sort of companion piece. Clarke put it together at the studio at his house in Brooklyn during the lockdowns, and Bell wrote and recorded the vocals later. Clarke told him he could do anything he liked. “And I did. I only wanted to do poems, off the top of my head, and backing vocal sections,” he says. “I was like, I wonder how Enya does it.” He laughs. “A few of the songs have poems on them and I think [Clarke] thought maybe they were a bit rough, because I didn’t really know what they were about.”

Bell is at home in Miami (he splits his time between there and London, with his husband, Stephen, though they are about to move to Atlanta for a while, he says) when we speak over Zoom. He is warm and funny, wearing a vest top that shows tattoos over both arms, his face still boyish, even if the concessions to age include spectacles and some greying stubble. “I love performing live, I love my voice,” he says, of where his career is now. “I think we have been really lucky. I’m just glad that I met Vince and stayed with him.”



Erasure ... Bell with Vince Clarke. Photograph: Graham Tucker/Redferns

Bell answered an advert in the music paper Melody Maker in 1985, and turned up to find it was an audition for Clarke. He was already a massive fan, and had thought about writing to Clarke to ask if he was looking for a new singer. When he got the job and Erasure was formed, for around the first six months, says Bell, “I was very shy within the studio. I couldn’t even speak to him. I could not believe I was there.” You can hear it on their first album, *Wonderland*, he says.

Clarke had already been successful; did Bell feel pressure to match that with him? “No,” he says. “I just felt like I had tremendous blind faith in myself, but I also thought, maybe I’m not good enough to fill this position. Then after a while, you just pull yourself up.” How did he get over that? “I think probably with our first co-writing.” Sometimes, which became a huge hit, was one of the first songs they wrote together “and I think just that opened the floodgates to me”. They have been an egalitarian duo ever since.

Why has their four-decade friendship endured? “Vince is a sweetheart. He makes out he’s really tough on the outside, and I know that he’s not. We just balance each other really well.” Clarke is the straight-faced foil – usually wearing a suit onstage, standing behind screens and synths – to Bell’s exuberant showman. “Even though it’s been a long time, and I’m 58 now,

he's been a great teacher. He was in the industry five years or more before I joined him, he's taught me a lot about being sensible. As much as you can be." I suspect Bell didn't always listen. "No, not all the time," he says with a laugh.

Have they ever had a bust-up? "Only one time, we were on stage. We were both really tired, it was the middle of some tour somewhere. I was really frustrated and tired, and I just said: 'Oi!' on the stage to him, on the mic. He didn't say a word, and he came off, and said: 'Don't you ever talk to me like that again.' Then he was fine."

Bell had always wanted to be a singer. He was the eldest of six, with four younger sisters, then a baby brother, growing up in Peterborough where his father was a factory worker, and his mother was a cleaner at the school. She also then got a job behind the counter in a sex shop. "The only porno shop in Peterborough, which I thought was really great," says Bell. "Though we never saw any of the accoutrements." So his mother, particularly, was liberal and he says it didn't bother her one bit when he came out to her in a letter when he was 17.



Erasure onstage in New York in 2014. Photograph: Noam Galai/Getty Images

He says there wasn't "really too much bullying", and his growing awareness of his sexuality wasn't something he desperately tried to hide; he knocked on the door of one schoolfriend to tell him he was in love with him. There were rumours of a gay bar in a room in the back of a hotel, which he went to a couple of times, but was disappointed. "Peterborough was too small. I had to leave and the plan was always to move to London with a friend of mine called Jill, who'd had a tough time in school," says Bell. "Her brother was gay. I'd go to her house, and she'd tell me stories about the clubs he'd been to. So we made a pact that we were going to move to London together, and that's what we did."

He did odd jobs, but also joined a synth-pop band, the Void. "All I wanted to do was do gigs and be on stage. I didn't even think about whether I was just going to make money out of it." For a while, he lived in a gay housing co-op in Holloway, north London. "Through that, I just felt like I got my gay education," he says – personally, and politically. His housemates included activists and campaigners, such as Nick Partridge, who would become chief executive of the Terrence Higgins Trust, and Lisa Power, who co-founded Stonewall and the Pink Paper, which Bell ended up working for, taking photographs while a friend did bar reviews. Within a year or so, he had met Clarke, "so it was very quick".

Bell was out, "right from the very beginning. That's one thing I feel really good about. I think it made it harder for us in lots of ways, especially getting deals in America, being on the radio there. But it felt correct." Did anyone suggest he should hide his sexuality? Not exactly, he says, but "I don't think people were happy. But I think at that time, because you had Bronski Beat [the singer Jimmy Somerville was out], and Tom Robinson before then, and Sylvester and Divine, I think people were starting to look at it as less risk-taking and more of backing an outsider."

As a public figure, did it make him feel vulnerable? "It did," he says. At the time, he would hang out at the Bell pub in King's Cross, "which was quite a political pub. We went on loads of marches, solidarity for the Polish, coalminers, against clause 28. You just thought you're doing something that was useful or necessary." But it also meant gangs would wait nearby. "You would get chased home from the pub sometimes. Not that you got used to it, but you were very wary all the time." Bell managed to ignore much of the

rightwing press, which, he says, with some understatement, “didn’t necessarily seem to like [me]”, but he drew the line when they tried to out him, along with others, for having HIV (which was untrue). “You always felt like you had to just keep an eye over your shoulder.”



Erasure c1990. Photograph: Tim Roney/Getty Images

With other pop stars at the time unwilling to come out, did it feel lonely? “It did,” he says, but of those who were out, “we had enough solidarity between us, it was enough for us. A lot was changing politically, [but] it was frustrating sometimes that there were so few. Thankfully, things change.” Bell thinks being out protected him in other ways, particularly from predatory older men in the music industry. “That’s the whole thing, it was all secret. Because I wasn’t a secret, they couldn’t come near me.”

Erasure’s first big hit was *Sometimes*, from their second album, *The Circus*, which went to No 6 in 1987. Bell remembers one of the women who worked in the accounts department telling him he had to see the cheques she had for him. “She said: ‘We’re talking telephone numbers.’” He laughs. “You feel like you’ve done the work, but it’s lovely work, so you go through a period of thinking that you don’t deserve it for a while. But then afterwards you think, well, all you can do is buy your parents a house, go on nice holidays.”

How did he cope with fame? He was shy, something he says “that stays with you your whole life. I suppose I wanted people to know who I was, so they came up to me, so you’re forced to say hello.” Did he have men coming on to him? Not as much as you would think, he says with a laugh. “I was one of those people [who] never got chatted up. I didn’t think I was good looking, and I was quite a wallflower going into bars and places like that. I think maybe people didn’t think it was me.”

At the time, he had started a relationship with Paul Hickey, the band’s manager – a close bond that would last for more than 25 years, until Hickey’s death in 2012 (something Bell describes now as “the most horrific, wild time in my life. I felt like a wounded animal. I didn’t realise how much I loved him”). In 1990, about five years into their relationship, Hickey was diagnosed with HIV, the news delivered brutally by a doctor who told him he would soon die. “He came home. He was in floods of tears, and I think maybe I was naive. I said: ‘Don’t cry, don’t worry. I will look after you.’” That’s when their relationship became platonic, he says, though they would remain close. “We were really, really fortunate because everything was on the cusp,” says Bell. “The pills had only just come in. We saw quite a lot of people in our circle die at that time. With all that going on, you became numb to it, really.”

In 1998, Bell was diagnosed with HIV, though it would be another six years before he revealed it publicly. It had been an overwhelming time – Erasure had become huge, Bell was spending a lot of money on drugs, and dealing with fame. Erasure had reached their peak, but were on the way down, which gave Bell space to focus on getting well again. “We’d kind of taken a step back, and I needed that time,” says Bell. “Even Vince was affected by it. He had friends [who had died] and we closed our ranks, I suppose.”

When he revealed his HIV status in 2004, there was still a lot of stigma. In interviews around the time, he said he had deliberately sought infection, implying that he wanted to be part of an HIV-positive community. “That’s not right,” he says now. He had said it “in anger, first for it happening to Paul. I didn’t go out on purpose to get it, not at all. I just said that, I was trying to be shocking. It was stupid.”



Photograph: Josh Ritchie/The Guardian

He started looking after himself, underwent two hip replacements, joined Narcotics Anonymous, and got into reiki. “I’m not a saint or anything; your life doesn’t change overnight,” he says. “But I just felt so grateful to be alive still. The network is amazing, for HIV-positive people, and the stigma becomes much less. I think eventually, you forget about it, especially when it becomes undetectable.”

By the time Erasure’s intense fame had faded, Bell was almost glad of it. “I felt like the pressure was off, and also, I learned to love being anonymous again. I think that’s quite a hard lesson because once your ego’s been blown up, to come back down again is quite hard and a lot of people don’t cope with it.” He smiles. “You’re looking around like: ‘Oh, what’s happened?’ But you realise things change, things move on, and it’s not all about you all the time. Other people will have a chance. That’s very sobering.”

Bell looks happy and well he should be – married, still dancing on stage in a corset, still making music with Clarke, and caring less about critical recognition and more about enjoying himself. He has been through a lot, a trailblazer and survivor, but there are no regrets, he says. “I would do it again. I love not having a safety net, let’s put it that way.” He says Clarke

likes to describe him as fearless. “It’s all bravado, though,” he says with a smile.

Day-Glo (Based on a True Story) is out on Mute on 12 August 2022 on [fluorescent green vinyl, CD and digital formats](#).

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It's the culture war games – and the last Tory contenders are on the run from reality

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Boris Johnson is on his way out but the ‘war on woke’ is here to stay: it’s all they have to talk about as the economy crumbles



‘Rishi Sunak found out the hard way, and too late, that people want to be lied to.’ Photograph: Jeff J Mitchell/Getty Images

Mon 8 Aug 2022 01.00 EDT Last modified on Mon 8 Aug 2022 12.24 EDT

It is the ceremonial opening of the culture war games. Rishi Sunak, late to start but making up ground, showed up in earnest at the end of July with what has become the first ritual, the kicking of the asylum seeker. Liz Truss pledged to send even more of them abroad. Sunak, unable to outdo Truss by pledging to fire them into outer space, said hear me out: [cruise ships](#). How

about we house asylum seekers in a sort of floating prison while they are processed?

This didn't do the trick, and so Sunak effectively relaunched his campaign last week, pivoting towards a fight with "[leftwing agitators](#)" for trying to "take a bulldozer to our history, our traditions and our fundamental values". He accused them of "rewriting the English language so we can't even use words like 'man', 'woman' or 'mother' without being told we're offending someone". Then scrambling for more, announced that "vilifying the UK" should be an offence that should be referred to Prevent, as it amounts to extremism.

It's worth noting here that Sunak started out as the "commonsense" candidate, who was going to be "honest" and not depend on "fairytales". But then, presumably after actually getting to know the voting Tory membership, then having a Downfall-style meltdown at his team, decided that fewer facts and more empty posturing was the way to go. It is an embarrassingly desperate submission from someone who once insisted he had "zero interest in fighting a so-called culture war". The unsaid part, presumably, is "but I'll do it if I have to".

And boy, does he have to. He's trailing badly to Truss who was a culture warrior way before she ran for leadership of the party. She has a record and, most importantly, a personality that is more at ease with casual dissembling and delivering silly pabulum than Sunak, who always looks like the bully's sidekick, puffed up when in company but pleading for mercy the moment he's caught alone. He is way out of his comfort zone, which is why even his wording, when he tries to sound brawny, is always just a little bit off (last week, he said that lefties were trying to cancel "our" women). Truss has no such visible internal dissonance, instead she has now taken to randomly announcing that she "loves Britain" because "we are a great country".

For those hoping that the culture war nonsense and pugnaciousness of the Brexit and Johnson era were over, the past few weeks have been truly stomach-sinking. There has been so much infantile talk about serious things. The triviality of the two candidates' preoccupations sits in stark contrast to

the grave state of the UK's economic situation, which is worsening by the day.

Truss warns against 'talking ourselves into a recession' at hustings – video

But in fairness to Sunak and Truss, what else are they going to do? Sunak found out the hard way, and too late, that people want to be lied to. They want the fantasy, because waking up to real life is too painful. There is a reason that both candidates talk about their potential leadership as though the Conservatives are an opposition party: everything about modern Conservatism is about putting as much distance as possible between the party's actions and their consequences. Whether it is Brexit, the housing crisis, or a lopsided economy where the super-rich [float comfortably](#) above the inflation battering everyone else, the Tories can't fix what they themselves have broken. Cue a fake lineup of culprits – immigrants, Brussels, "lefty lawyers", the European Court of Human Rights – on which to blame unemployment, declining living standards and "red tape" that fetters growth. This is a party on the run from reality.

The result is a sort of political Ponzi scheme, where bigger and bigger earnings are promised, until the investment is so large that the punters themselves dare not question why their dividends are dwindling. This is why culture war offerings are so prized, not because people care specifically about their details, which in [polling](#) always rank low on what people say they care about, but because they are a comfort blanket, a way to soothe voters into believing that their status, as natives bewildered by pronouns and alarmed by the modern world, is sacred and therefore somehow fortified against the really big, scary things: asset depreciation, a threadbare health service, the next recession.

In a way, culture war are only a gateway to a promised land where our best days are ahead of us. It is part of a general pitch that is not about addressing specific grievances but projecting a style, posture and tone. Truss is happy in this fact- and substance-free zone, pre-empting any threat of a reckoning by cheerfully producing numbers that don't add up to kickstart the economy; dismissing Nicola Sturgeon as an attention seeker who needs to be ignored; evangelising for a Brexit that she herself campaigned against.

In a way, Johnson's undoing wasn't his lies, but what he lied *about*. Partygate did for him because it placed his supporters firmly outside an inner circle that he implicitly promised they were a part of. Truss, and lately Sunak, are learning that this protection racket politics is the only way forward, that a base created from lies can only be sustained by lies. It is too late to start telling a different story. Both Tory members and party leaders are trapped in a simulation that the former are too afraid to end and the latter too bankrupt to puncture.

In the 1997 science fiction film Gattaca, a purposeful, determined but weak man saves his much stronger, genetically gifted brother from drowning. When he is asked how he did it despite his physical limitations, he replies: "I never saved anything for the swim back." This is where the Conservative party finds itself at the moment – but without the principle or purpose. The lies worked and carried them far out to sea. But the land on the horizon will never come into sight, and they have saved nothing for the journey back.

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

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[Opinion](#)[Biodiversity](#)

The most awe-inspiring and exuberant birds are facing extinction first – let's stop nature becoming boring

[Lucy Jones](#)

From toucans and puffins to iridescent hummingbirds, the most unique creatures are the most vulnerable to human impacts



Adult toco toucan (*Ramphastos toco*). ‘Human activity is disproportionately destroying the most unusual and distinctive creatures on Earth.’ Photograph: All Canada Photos/Alamy

Mon 8 Aug 2022 05.00 EDT Last modified on Mon 8 Aug 2022 09.56 EDT

For decades ecologists have been warning about the homogenisation of diversity – species becoming more alike – in the living world. Now, researchers at the University of Sheffield [have published research](#) predicting that bird species with striking and extreme traits are likely to go extinct first.

“The global extinction crisis doesn’t just mean that we’re losing species,” says the study’s leader, Dr Emma Hughes. “It means that we are losing unique traits and evolutionary history.”

This shows that human activity is not just drastically reducing numbers of species, it is probably disproportionately destroying the most unique, unusual and distinctive creatures on Earth.

What would it mean to no longer share a planet with the toucan, and its bodacious bill four times the size of its head, even if you never see one in real life? Or the elegant [Bengal florican](#), which looks like a walking treble clef. Or the iridescent hummingbird? Or the bird of paradise, with its rococo coiled plumes?



A puffin at Bagh Mhiughlaigh (Mingulay bay). Photograph: Murdo MacLeod/The Guardian

Many of the potential impacts are unpredictable, but bleak. As Hughes says, we are losing species that could “confer unique benefits to humanity that are currently unknown”. And we already know the knock-on effects of species loss can be catastrophic. The decline of [vultures in India](#) and the loss of their scavenging, carrion-eating niche has already had negative consequences for human populations, including the spread of disease.

This will not just affect faraway places with higher numbers of unusual species. “The extinction crisis will lead to a loss of morphological diversity in the UK too,” Hughes says. Unfortunately, the Atlantic puffin, one of Britain’s most-loved birds, and other unique seabirds such as the black-legged kittiwake and Leach’s storm petrel, are vulnerable.

Losing any species is tragic, but we’re also facing a decline in the species that inspire the most awe in humans. In short, we can expect the world to become “really simple and brown and boring”, Dr Eliot Miller, of the Cornell lab of ornithology, told the [New York Times](#). More sparrows; fewer puffins.



A male peacock spider. Photograph: BIOSPHOTO/Alamy

If you were captured by an alien and asked to make the case for why the Earth shouldn’t be blown apart, what would you say? As much as I love little brown jobs, I would think about the species so beautiful and unusual you can barely believe they are real.

I would tell them about [the mandrill](#) with its bright blue and pink face and rump. I would tell them about [the hornbills](#) that look as if they’re balancing a banana on their head. I’d mention the [atlas moth](#) that’s as big as a human hand. The [peacock jumping spider](#), the [Christmas-tree worm](#), the elf owl. I

would tell them about the curlew, with its extraordinary curved beak; [the kingfisher](#) that bolts down the river like a turquoise meteor; the flamboyant antlers of a stag. I would tell them about mountain gorillas and blue whales and golden eagles. Baobabs, frogs and diatoms. Toucans! We have toucans!

It wouldn't be difficult to argue, for the exuberant diversity of life on Earth is its signature and wonder.

Wonder isn't just nice, or a luxury. Scientists have shown that experiencing awe has a measurable effect on human health. A study from the University of Toronto found that awe was the one positive emotion that could [predict lower levels](#) of unhealthy inflammation. Awe [can also affect](#) how we treat other people. People are more ethical, kind and generous after feeling awe, and despite our unprecedented estrangement from the non-human, we still get most of our experiences of awe from the living world.

All this focus on human emotions sounds awfully anthropocentric and a minor issue but humans are naturally curious – and curiosity thrives on variety and diversity. While denialism in the face of climate breakdown and extinction seems hard to budge, could this new deepening of what the biodiversity crisis means – a less interesting world – be a warning that cuts through?



A pair of kingfishers at Knepp, Sussex. Photograph: James West

This latest research illustrates what the often hard-to-imagine biodiversity crisis looks like: a less resplendent, less vibrant world. It is heartbreaking, yes, but galvanising, and an opportunity for focus and pressure on those in power. The vast majority of us don't want to live in a world bereft of toucans and puffins. Or a boring world, or a dying world. So would politicians care to mention how they square the myopic focus on "growth" with a burnt-out, used-up Earth that is clearly telling us to stop?

If we wipe out the species with the most unique traits, and continue to destroy the rich diversity of the Earth, we will all be impoverished in ways we can't yet comprehend. Even if we never see a toucan in the wild, we are still their kin. Their wildness is still, in some way, part of us. We are still animals among animals.

- Lucy Jones is a journalist and the author of *Losing Eden* and *The Nature Seed*

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Why I quitEating disorders

After years of torture, I broke free of the tyranny of calorie counting

[Amelia Tait](#)



Focusing on the calories in your diet is antiquated and destructive. I wish I could have told my anorexic teenage self



‘Displaying the amount of calories has little effect on obesity.’ Calorie values on a food counter in New York. Photograph: Chris Hondros/Getty Images

Mon 8 Aug 2022 03.00 EDT Last modified on Mon 8 Aug 2022 04.11 EDT

When science fiction writers imagine great, grandiose methods of social control – matrixes! Microchips! Really big bros! – they ignore one powerful form that already exists: the humble calorie.

Very little is more distracting, maddening, soul-destroying or totalitarian than the seemingly random number (egg: 155! Freddo: 95!) that is assigned to everything we eat. It is a number that will affect your body and – although it shouldn’t be the case – the way others around you value it. If you have ever counted your calories, and if you ever restricted them, then you have lived under a brutal regime. I’m really, truly sorry. I wish no one had ever told you that calories exist.

I feel this way because calories once consumed me. As an anorexic teenager I knew the number assigned to lettuce leaves, clementine segments, single yoghurt-coated banana chips and a Haribo sweet sucked for a second before being spat into the loo. I wasted so much time on minute-by-minute mental

maths; I was distracted in class, my breath reeking of hunger as I muttered numbers to myself.

It breaks my heart to think of the great minds similarly wasting away; the fingers lifting up flaps on the backs of packets before a snack is returned to its shelf. Think of all of the other things that humans – and yes, especially women – could have done if they didn’t spend their time counting calories. Think of where those minds could have been put to use.

I began to properly recover from my eating disorder when I was 18, but although I stopped meticulously counting calories I still made rough approximations in my head. I didn’t want to lose weight any more, but I didn’t want to gain it: my new housemates in my student halls would remark on my couscous and salads. But slowly, slowly, counting slipped my mind. At 21, I fell deeper in love than I ever knew was possible, and calories ceased to exist.

I mean it. At the beginning of my eat-whatever-you-like era, I got into the habit of buying a tub of cake icing, pouring in some hundreds and thousands and devouring the lot with a spoon. Have you ever heard of anything more wonderful? It made me far happier than any number on a packet or scale ever did. I don’t do it any more – mainly because I don’t want to die – but what a perfect end to calorie counting.

Because here’s the thing about calories: they’re bollocks. They’re completely oversimplified to the point of uselessness. Some dude in a laboratory in the 1800s came up with a system for totting up calories in food – and then almost 200 years later the US government basically guessed that a typical adult needed 2,000 calories a day. In recent years, leading academics and obesity experts have asked for the “antiquated” idea of calorie counting to be dropped.

But don’t wait for food packaging to be updated – drop calories yourself. Blur your eyes. Run through the red light of the traffic light label! Today, it’s my firm belief that calories don’t exist unless you look at them, like some kind of Doctor Who villain.

It's only when you start thinking about calories that they gain any power over you – and what they do to your brain is far worse than what they could ever do to your body. This is why it's so distressing that the government has forced large restaurants to [display calories](#) on their menus, despite evidence that this policy has little effect on obesity but is demonstrably [dangerous for people with eating disorders](#).

I know it's not easy to wake up one day and just give up thinking about calories – especially if counting them has been a part of your daily life for decades. Still, I desperately wish everyone could break free from their tyranny, as I consider it one of the best things I ever did. In the last decade, I have never once woken up and missed calorie counting. I have never longed to look at a label and divide 100g by the weight of the packet.

When I was a teenager, I got it into my head that every woman has an eating disorder, and that I'd be counting calories for the rest of my life. It's difficult to describe how thrilling it is that these numbers no longer have a hold on me. It feels like freedom, it feels like weightlessness, it feels like hundreds and thousands cascading into a tub of soft sugar.

- Amelia Tait is a writer on tech and internet phenomena
 - *Do you have an opinion on the issues raised in this article? If you would like to submit a letter of up to 300 words to be considered for publication, email it to us at guardian.letters@theguardian.com*
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OpinionBody image

I've got big, muscular legs – and I'm finally proud of them

[Jessica Fostekew](#)

Women are made to feel that if they have chunky, powerful legs, they should hide them. But it's time we showed them off to the world



'I don't look at big legs and have negative thoughts' ... Photograph: Cultura Creative (RF)/Alamy

Mon 8 Aug 2022 02.00 EDT

I've started wearing shorts for the first time, aged 39. I've got some serious legs on me – and by serious, I mean funny. They're short, they're thick, they're hench. They're the sort of legs that when people see them, they think: "I might have ham for lunch."

But with adulthood comes a heady and increasingly confusing relationship with pride. My legs are massive whether I do weightlifting or not, but I do lift weights and it brings me extreme joy. On a good day, I can squat 1.5 times my bodyweight, which I'm aware is a mega-brag. So I'm proud of these mighty *jambons*. I'm grateful that they work for walking – and sometimes slightly faster walking.

On the other hand, I'm less proud. I don't care anywhere near as much as I would have done a decade ago whether you fancy me, or even if you're repulsed by me. I don't mind if my legs are pre-waxed or full-wolf. I don't mind if they're scratched or bruised from clumsiness or adventures. I don't love cellulite, but I've got much more important things to have emotions about. So why on earth was I still not wearing shorts?

Half a lifetime of feeling disgusting about bigness, is why. Listening to really brilliant women in my life, including physically brilliant professional athletes, to this day, saying “I don't want big legs, though” is why. But I don't look at big legs and have negative thoughts, and the more people who agree with me, the better the world will be, frankly. The wind and the sun feels so lovely on my trunks. If you've got big ol' yams, free them! Show them the sky!

- *Jessica Fostekew is a comedian, actor and writer. Her show [Jessica Fostekew: Wench](#) is at the Edinburgh Fringe Festival for the whole of August*
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[Gaza](#)

Gaza: truce takes effect between Israel and Islamic Jihad after days of fighting

Joe Biden welcomes ceasefire agreed after three days of conflict triggered by Israeli airstrikes in Gaza Strip



A Palestinian man inspects his badly damaged home, following Israeli air strikes in Gaza City. Photograph: AFP/Getty Images

[Bethan McKernan](#) in Jerusalem and [Hazem Balousha](#) in Gaza City

Sun 7 Aug 2022 22.22 EDTFirst published on Sun 7 Aug 2022 08.06 EDT

A truce between [Israel](#) and the Palestinian militant group Islamic Jihad has taken effect in the Gaza Strip after three days of cross-border fighting triggered by surprise Israeli airstrikes.

US president Joe Biden welcomed the agreement on Sunday, and called on all parties to “fully implement the ceasefire, and to ensure fuel and humanitarian supplies are flowing into [Gaza](#) as the fighting subsides”.

The president also lamented the injury and death of civilians in Gaza, but did not specify who was responsible. “The reports of civilian casualties in Gaza are a tragedy, whether by Israeli strikes against Islamic Jihad positions or the dozens of Islamic Jihad rockets that reportedly fell inside Gaza,” Biden said.

The US, he said, had worked with both sides and regional partners “to encourage a swift resolution to the conflict”.

Israeli strikes and militant rockets continued in the minutes leading up to the beginning of the truce, which Egyptian mediators said started at 11.30pm (9.30pm BST) on Sunday. Israel confirmed the ceasefire was set to take hold, but said it would respond if it was violated. Islamic Jihad also confirmed the agreement. “We appreciate the Egyptian efforts that had been exerted to end the Israeli aggression against our people,” spokesperson Tareq Selmi said.

Israel and Islamic Jihad agree ceasefire after days of fighting – video report

The UN security council has scheduled an emergency meeting for Monday on the violence. UN Middle East peace envoy Tor Wennesland said in a statement: “We underscore our commitment to do all we can towards ending the ongoing escalation, ensuring the safety and security of the civilian population, and following up on the Palestinian prisoners file.”

The deal should at least temporarily halt the bloodshed that erupted in the blockaded territory on Friday with Israel’s “pre-emptive” Operation Breaking Dawn, which it said thwarted alleged planned rocket attacks by Palestinian Islamic Jihad.

Palestinian health officials said that a total of 44 Palestinians, among them 15 children, as well as members of Islamic Jihad, have now been killed in the bombing campaign, and more than 300 people have been injured, while 13 Israelis have been treated in hospital for minor injuries as hundreds of retaliatory rockets were fired across the Gaza frontier towards the south of the country.

Israel said a stray rocket fired by Islamic Jihad had killed several children in Jabalia, northern Gaza, on Saturday. Islamic Jihad has not commented on the

claim, while the aligned group Hamas, which rules the strip, blamed the attack on Israel.

The flare-up is the worst outbreak of violence between Israeli and Palestinian militants since an 11-day-war last May. The Israel Defence Forces (IDF) had signalled that the campaign was supposed to last about a week; Israel has inflicted significant losses on Islamic Jihad in the last three days, including the targeted killings of two senior commanders.

Whether the latest confrontation could yet escalate into full-scale conflict largely depends on whether Hamas, the larger Islamist movement in control of the strip, decides to intervene. While the two groups are allied, Hamas has not fully replenished its arsenal or tunnel network since last May's war, and has resisted being drawn into the fighting. All sides are aware, however, that every passing hour increases the risk of miscalculation or escalation.

Unlike Hamas, Islamic Jihad is not responsible for running the day-to-day affairs of the impoverished territory. As a result it is viewed as a more militant resistance faction, often acting independently and sometimes even undermining Hamas's authority.

Gaza's 2.2 million inhabitants have already been left reeling by the unexpected spasm of violence, which follows four wars and several other battles over the past 15 years.

A joint Israeli-Egyptian blockade imposed after Hamas seized control in 2007 has turned electricity and clean water into scarce commodities and trapped a population struggling with about 50% unemployment and crumbling medical infrastructure.

Mohammed al-Aydi, 37, used a hose to fill water tanks in Sunday afternoon's blazing heat, saying that his home had had no water since the hostilities broke out on Friday. Gaza's sole power plant was forced to shut down due to lack of fuel 12 hours later, leading the local health authority to warn that ambulances, operation rooms and intensive care units would be forced to suspend services if fuel was not available in the next 72 hours.

“Since yesterday the electricity has only been on for three hours at a time. I have to take batteries to charge for lighting and the internet router at my neighbour’s house as he got a subscription to a generator that I can’t afford,” he said.

“It’s only the third day of this and we are already suffering badly.”

Tensions were also high in Jerusalem and the occupied West Bank on Sunday after Islamic Jihad fired rockets overnight aimed at the west of Jerusalem, and large numbers of Jewish visitors were admitted to the Al-Aqsa mosque compound to commemorate Tisha B’Av, the destruction of two ancient temples that once stood on the site.

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The contested area is holy to Muslims and Jews, who call it the Temple Mount. Informally, Jews are allowed to visit but not pray at the site. In recent years, however, increasing numbers of Jewish visitors, sometimes praying or with police escorts, have exacerbated longstanding Palestinian fears that Israel plans to annex the compound.

The Israeli offensive followed a week of tension prompted by the arrest of Bassem al-Saadi, Islamic Jihad’s top commander in the occupied West Bank, last Monday. While Islamic Jihad did not launch rockets after Saadi’s arrest, Israel has insisted that the group is seeking revenge.

The Gaza Strip has remained relatively quiet since the war in May last year, which killed 256 people in Gaza and 14 people in Israel. The new round of fighting came as Israel prepares for its fifth elections in four years after the collapse of a short-lived coalition government, which ousted the longtime prime minister, Benjamin Netanyahu.

This article was amended on 8 August 2022 to attribute the Palestinian health ministry for the casualty figures reported.

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[Kenya](#)

Kenya election: shifting alliances and economic woe to fore

Raila Odinga is leading William Ruto in the polls but the latter hopes his ‘hustler’ image will win him votes among the poor



Election posters for Raila Odinga and William Ruto in Nairobi. Kenya goes to the polls on Tuesday. Photograph: Marco Longari/AFP/Getty Images

[Caroline Kimeu](#) in Nairobi

Mon 8 Aug 2022 00.00 EDT Last modified on Tue 9 Aug 2022 09.40 EDT

Kenyans are heading to the ballot box on Tuesday after a campaign season marked by a shift in ethnic alliances and two [big-ticket issues](#): the cost of living crisis and high unemployment.

The race pits presidential frontrunners Raila Odinga, the former prime minister, and deputy president William Ruto against each other in a hotly contested race. [Polls](#) place Odinga in the lead.

Odinga has run for the presidency four other times in races that were just as tight. This time, however, he's going in backed by an unexpected ally: his longtime political rival, President Uhuru Kenyatta.

The two united after a public handshake in 2018, signifying an end to their long political hostility. The handshake between the two leaders, who come from Kenya's legacy families, took the nation and the pair's supporters by surprise. Odinga and Kenyatta are from the Luo and Kikuyu ethnic communities, which have long been on opposing political sides. In Kenya's ethnic-driven political landscape, their alliance is seen as the card that could make Odinga fifth-time lucky, with Kenyatta's backing expected to draw in a part of the Kikuyu vote. But observers are unsure whether the alliance can bridge a decades-long ethnic divide.

"A big number of Kikuyus revolted against the alliance," says Gabriel Muthuma, a political analyst. "The only way we will be able to know whether it worked or not is by what it will produce at the ballot."



Kenya's president, Uhuru Kenyatta, left, claps as he does a jig to a popular campaign jingle on a podium next to his former political nemesis, Raila Odinga, right. Photograph: Tony Karumba/AFP/Getty Images

The handshake left Ruto – Kenyatta's former ally and successor hopeful – sidelined. The president and his deputy eventually fell out for reasons that are not clear, ending a once-favoured bromance revelled in by the public when the pair rode into power in 2013, earning them the name “UhuRuto”. But by the time of their fallout, Ruto had already garnered some favour in the Kikuyu-dominated Mount Kenya region. He broadened that influence by selecting a running mate from that region. Analysts say that his choice, Rigathi Gachagua, a businessman and outgoing member of parliament, holds significant sway in the region. Their campaign was dealt a blow, however, after he was recently ordered by the country's high court to forfeit 202m shillings of his wealth (£1.3m) for being linked to corruption.

Odinga, on the other hand, nominated [Martha Karua](#), former justice minister and longtime politician, as his running mate. She is the first woman to be nominated as running mate on a major political ticket, and if elected would be Kenya's first female deputy president. Karua is also from the Mount Kenya region, but is said to hold less sway there. Analysts say that Karua's selection as running mate, however, gave his campaign a boost among other voter demographics, including women, civil society and urban, educated Kenyans.



Supporters listen during a rally of Kenya's deputy president and presidential candidate, William Ruto. Photograph: Yasuyoshi Chiba/AFP/Getty Images

Beyond the redrawing of ethnic alliances, a tough economy has invited unprecedented public attention to the presidential candidates' economic agendas.

"The political class have had to step up after recognising that this time around, it won't just be about ethnic Balkanisation," says Kenyan economist Ken Gichinga.

Food prices have skyrocketed across the country, fuelled by global disruptions to the food supply chain caused by the pandemic and the Russia-Ukraine war. Kenyans are also bearing the brunt of the country's soaring 8.6tn shilling (£59bn) public debt through highly taxed goods. Many households are struggling, and one Gallup poll showed that seven out of 10 Kenyans reported having faced food insecurity in 2021.

"The economy is a very big pillar in these elections, and it may be a gamechanger," says Muthuma.

Annan Okenye, who is running for a country assembly seat in Pipeline, Embakasi, one of Nairobi's most populated neighbourhoods, says that the country's economic situation has made life unbearable. The greengrocer and street hawker, who ran a shoestring campaign on donations and meagre savings, spent six years trying to put himself through university on a daily income of about 400 shillings (£3) a day. Just as he closed in on his dreams of becoming the first graduate in his extended family in 2020 the Covid-19 pandemic hit, forcing him to quit school and look for work. With formal employment elusive, he found himself where he'd began: eking out a living at his market stall.

"Kenyans have been ravaged by economic conditions that make many of them believe that their best lives are behind them," says Gichinga.

Ruto, a street hawker in his early years, clawed his way into the ranks of the political elite and significant fortune. He positioned himself during his campaigns as a "hustler" who could understand the struggles of the ordinary Kenyan. He pitted himself against "dynasty" candidate Raila Odinga, but as the references to "dynasties" and "hustlers" took off some lawmakers

labelled it inflammatory, saying it was fanning class tensions and fuelling dangerous divides in a country with extremely high inequality.



William Ruto speaks to supporters during a rally in Machakos, Kenya, ahead of the general election. Photograph: Yasuyoshi Chiba/AFP/Getty Images

Ruto's "bottom-up" campaign messaging has gained ground with small business owners like market stall holders and motorcycle taxi drivers, says Okenye. The model pledges to empower those at the bottom of the economic pyramid by, among other things, providing a 50bn shilling (£346m) "Hustler Fund" to support small businesses.

"Market people feel like he's a part and parcel of them. I get to hear what people say, as a politician, and he scores high on bottom-up," says Okenye, who says he is not aligned with either candidate.

Odinga, on the other hand, has proposed a healthcare-for-all plan called BabaCare. He's also pledged that each vulnerable household will get 6,000 shillings (£40) every month as a form of social protection.

Economists say that cash transfers can be effective, but Odinga has not been clear on how the billions of shillings needed to implement it would be raised. "Will it be through taxes, and if so, are Kenyans ready for higher

taxes? Will it be through borrowing? If so, aren't Kenyans already debt-fatigued?" asks Gichinga.

Going into the elections, voter expectations for change are low. A resident of the Kayole Junction neighbourhood in Nairobi, Noah Dulo, says: "Our debt is now at nearly nine trillion. So the worry is that whichever leader we elect, there are just not enough resources to run the country."

This article was amended on 9 August 2022 because if elected, Martha Karua would become Kenya's first female deputy president, not Kenya's first deputy president as an earlier version said.

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US Senate

Senate passes \$739bn healthcare and climate bill after months of wrangling

Inflation Reduction Act will reduce planet-heating emissions and lower prescription drug costs – and give Biden a crucial victory



The Senate majority leader, Chuck Schumer, gives the thumbs up as he leaves the Senate chamber after passage of the Inflation Reduction Act.
Photograph: Drew Angerer/Getty Images

[Joan E Greve](#) in Washington

@joanegreve

Sun 7 Aug 2022 16.00 EDTFirst published on Sun 7 Aug 2022 15.18 EDT

Senate [Democrats](#) passed their climate and healthcare spending package on Sunday, sending the legislation to the House and bringing Joe Biden one step closer to a significant legislative victory ahead of crucial midterm elections in November.

If signed into law, the bill, formally known as the Inflation Reduction Act, would allocate \$369bn to reducing greenhouse gas emissions and investing in renewable energy sources. Experts [have estimated](#) the climate provisions of the bill will reduce America's planet-heating emissions by about 40% by 2030, compared with 2005 levels.

Democrats have promised the bill will lower healthcare costs for millions of Americans by allowing Medicare to start negotiating the price of certain expensive prescription drugs and capping Medicare recipients' out-of-pocket prescription drug prices at \$2,000 a year. Those who receive health insurance coverage through the Affordable Care Act marketplace are also expected to see lower premium costs.

The legislation includes a number of tax provisions to cover the costs of these policies, bringing in \$739bn for the government and resulting in an overall deficit reduction of roughly \$300bn. The policy changes include a new corporate minimum tax, a 1% excise tax on stock buybacks and stricter enforcement by the Internal Revenue Service.

US Senate passes \$739bn healthcare and climate bill – video

“Today, Senate Democrats sided with American families over special interests, voting to lower the cost of prescription drugs, health insurance and everyday energy costs and reduce the deficit, while making the wealthiest corporations finally pay their fair share,” Biden said in a statement celebrating the bill’s passage. “I ran for president promising to make government work for working families again, and that is what this bill does – period.”

The final Senate vote was 51-50, with every Democrat supporting the bill while all 50 of their Republican colleagues opposed the legislation. With the Senate evenly divided on the bill’s passage, Vice-President Kamala Harris cast the tie-breaking vote.

Because Democrats used the reconciliation process to advance the bill, they needed only a simple majority to pass the proposal, allowing them to avoid a Republican filibuster.

But the choice to use reconciliation also somewhat limited what Democrats could include in their bill. The Senate parliamentarian ruled on Saturday that a key healthcare provision, which would have placed inflation-related caps on companies' ability to raise prescription drug prices for private insurance plans, ran afoul of reconciliation rules. Another proposal to cap the cost of insulin in the private insurance market at \$35 a month was also stripped out of the bill after 43 Senate Republicans voted to block the policy on procedural grounds.

Still, Democrats celebrated that the Senate parliamentarian allowed most of their healthcare and climate provisions to move forward.

“While there was one unfortunate ruling in that the inflation rebate is more limited in scope, the overall program remains intact and we are one step closer to finally taking on big pharma and lowering Rx drug prices for millions of Americans,” the Senate majority leader, Chuck Schumer, said on Saturday.

Democratic leaders previously had to alter the tax provisions of the bill to secure the vote of Kyrsten Sinema of Arizona, who [announced her support](#) for the proposal on Thursday.

Sinema caused some last-minute hand-wringing among Democrats on Sunday, as she pushed for changes to the new corporate minimum tax that would exempt some businesses from the policy. Democratic senators ultimately reached an agreement with Sinema to approve the exemption, which was paid for by extending loss limitations for pass-through businesses.

Sinema was considered the last Democratic holdout in the negotiations, after fellow centrist Joe Manchin said he would vote in favor of the bill. The Senate’s approval of the bill came nearly eight months after Manchin abruptly scuttled talks over the Build Back Better Act, which was viewed as Biden’s signature legislative proposal. After tanking that bill, Manchin spent months participating in quiet deliberations with Schumer over another spending package that was more focused on reducing the federal deficit and tackling [record-high inflation](#).

The resulting bill was able to win the support of the entire Senate Democratic caucus on Sunday, even though the legislation is much smaller in scope than the Build Back Better Act.

The bill's narrower focus frustrated the progressive senator Bernie Sanders, who criticized the compromise in a Saturday floor speech. Sanders complained that the legislation would do little to help working Americans struggling to keep up with rising prices, and he unsuccessfully pushed for expanding the bill to further lower healthcare costs.

"This legislation does not address the reality that we have more income and wealth inequality today than at any time in the last hundred years," Sanders said. "This bill does nothing to address the systemic dysfunctionality of the American healthcare system."

Despite that criticism, Sanders backed the final version of the bill. The Senate's approval followed a marathon session that lasted overnight and into Sunday afternoon, as Republicans forced votes on dozens of proposed changes to the spending package. Democrats remained mostly unified in opposing Republicans' amendments, keeping the bill unchanged and ensuring the legislation's passage.

"It's been a long, tough and winding road. But at last, at last we have arrived," Schumer said on Sunday. "I know it's been a long day and a long night, but we've gotten it done. Today, after more than a year of hard work, the Senate is making history."

Republicans fiercely criticized the bill, rejecting Democrats' arguments that the legislation will help tackle rising prices. According to [a report issued by Moody's Analytics](#), the bill will "modestly reduce inflation over the 10-year budget horizon".

"Democrats want to ram through hundreds of billions of dollars in tax hikes and hundreds of billions of dollars in reckless spending – and for what?" the Senate Republican leader, Mitch McConnell, said in a Saturday floor speech. "For a so-called inflation bill that will not meaningfully reduce inflation at all."

House Democrats have dismissed Republicans' criticism of the bill, insisting they will swiftly pass the legislation and send it to Biden's desk. The majority leader, Steny Hoyer, has said the House will return on Friday to take up the legislation, and Democrats do not need any Republican votes to pass the bill.

The House speaker, Nancy Pelosi, has promised that the chamber would move quickly as soon as the Senate gave the bill its stamp of approval. She told reporters at a press conference last week, "When they send it to us, we'll pass it."

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[Colombia](#)

Colombia's first leftist president says war on drugs has failed

At his swearing in Gustavo Petro, a former guerrilla, says the country is getting a ‘second chance’ to tackle violence and poverty

‘The war on drugs has failed’: Colombia’s first leftist president calls for peace and unity – video

Associated Press

Mon 8 Aug 2022 00.29 EDT Last modified on Tue 9 Aug 2022 00.10 EDT

Colombia’s [first leftist president](#) has been sworn into office, promising to fight inequality and bring peace to a country long haunted by bloody feuds between the government, drug traffickers and rebel groups.

Gustavo Petro, a former member of Colombia’s M-19 guerrilla group, won the presidential election in June by beating conservative parties that offered moderate changes to the market-friendly economy, but failed to connect with voters frustrated by rising poverty and violence against human rights leaders and environmental groups in rural areas.

On Sunday, he said Colombia was getting a “second chance” to tackle violence and poverty and promised that his government would implement economic policies that seek to end longstanding inequalities and ensure “solidarity” with the nation’s most vulnerable.

The incoming president said he was willing to start peace talks with armed groups across the country and also called on the United States and other developed nations to change drug policies that have focused on the prohibition of substances like cocaine, and fed violent conflicts across Colombia and other Latin American nations.

“It’s time for a new international convention that accepts that the war on drugs has failed,” he said. “Of course peace is possible. But it depends on current drug policies being substituted with strong measures that prevent consumption in developed societies.”

Petro is part of a growing group of leftist politicians and political outsiders who have been winning elections in Latin America since the pandemic broke out and hurt incumbents who struggled with its economic aftershocks.

The ex-rebel’s victory was also exceptional for Colombia, where voters had been historically reluctant to back leftist politicians who were often accused of being soft on crime or allied with guerrillas.



Hundreds gathered in the country’s capital to celebrate the inauguration of the new Colombian President Gustavo Petro and Vice President Francia Marquez in Bogota. Photograph: Anadolu Agency/Getty Images

A 2016 peace deal between Colombia’s government and the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia turned the focus of voters away from the violent conflicts playing out in rural areas and gave prominence to problems like poverty and corruption, fuelling the popularity of leftist parties in national elections. However, smaller rebel groups like the National Liberation Army

and the Gulf Clan continue to fight over drug trafficking routes, illegal goldmines and other resources abandoned by the FARC.

Petro, 62, has described US-led anti-narcotics policies as a failure but has also said he would like to work with Washington “as equals,” building schemes to combat climate change or bring infrastructure to rural areas where many farmers say coca leaves are the only viable crop.

Petro also formed alliances with environmentalists during his presidential campaign and has promised to turn Colombia into a “global powerhouse for life” by slowing deforestation and reducing the country’s reliance on fossil fuels.

He has said Colombia will stop granting new licenses for oil exploration and will ban fracking projects, even though the oil industry makes up almost 50% of the nation’s legal exports. He plans to finance social spending with a \$10bn a year tax reform that would boost taxes on the rich and do away with corporate tax breaks.

“He’s got a very ambitious agenda,” said Yan Basset, a political scientist at Bogotá’s Rosario University. “But he will have to prioritize. The risk Petro faces is that he goes after too many reforms at once and gets nothing” through Colombia’s congress.

Analysts expect Petro’s foreign policy to be markedly different from that of his predecessor Iván Duque, a conservative who backed Washington’s drug policies and worked with the US government to isolate the regime of Venezuelan President Nicolas Maduro in an attempt to force the authoritarian leader into holding free elections.

Petro has instead said he will recognise Maduro’s government and try to work with the Venezuelan president on several issues, including fighting rebel groups along the porous border between the countries. Some border residents are hoping that improved relations will generate more commerce and job opportunities.

In Cúcuta, a city just a few miles from the Venezuelan border, trade school student Daniela Cárdenas is hoping Petro will carry out an educational

reform that includes free tuition for college students.

“He has promised so many things,” Cardenas, 19, said after traveling 90 minutes from her rural community to the city. “We must work to be able to pay our student fees, which are quite expensive and, well, that makes many things difficult for us.”

Petro won the election by just 2 percentage points, and is still a polarizing figure in Colombia, where many have been wary of having former guerrillas participate in politics.

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UK economy shrank in second quarter according to poll of economists – as it happened

Rolling live coverage of business, economics and financial markets as analysts weigh risk of recessions across the world

Updated 6d ago

[*Jasper Jolly*](#)
[@jjpjolly](#)

Mon 8 Aug 2022 10.16 EDTFirst published on Mon 8 Aug 2022 03.16 EDT

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[Oil prices drop as traders eye drop in demand if economies contract](#)
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Inflationary pressures are expected to cut Britons' disposable income, with a long recession forecast by the Bank of England. Photograph: Tolga Akmen/EPA

Jasper Jolly

@jjpjolly

Mon 8 Aug 2022 10.16 EDTFirst published on Mon 8 Aug 2022 03.16 EDT

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Live feed

From 6d ago

05.20

UK economy likely shrank by 0.2% in second quarter - poll of economists

The UK economy probably shrank between April and June, according to a poll of economists who are bracing for the cost-of-living crisis to become a broader economic downturn.

The UK's gross domestic product for the second quarter probably shrank 0.2%, according to a survey of economists published on Monday by [Bloomberg News](#). The Office for National Statistics plans to publish its first estimate of second-quarter economic activity on Friday.

It will be the first insight into the UK economy since the Bank of England last week [warned of a coming recession](#) that will last from the final three months of this year until the end of 2023.

The data are likely to show that the extra holidays for the Queen's jubilee in June slowed growth compared to last year, but economic activity is faltering as inflation surges. The Bank has forecast it will reach 13% by the end of the year.

[A graph showing the Bank of England's forecasts that the UK economy will enter recession later this year and stay in negative growth for most of 2023.](#)

However, the Bank's forecasts cannot take into account one key variable: the response of the government when a new prime minister takes office (probably in just under a month). Liz Truss (the strong favourite in the Conservative leadership race) or Rishi Sunak will likely feel strong pressure to stage a major economic intervention to try to soften the effect of a recession - even if most of the economic policy debate so far seems to have [revolved around cutting taxes](#) (not much help to companies who are losing money) or [cutting salaries for workers outside London](#).

[Writing in the Observer](#), former Labour prime minister Gordon Brown argued for immediate help for poorer households. He wrote:

The reality is grim and undeniable: a financial timebomb will explode for families in October as a second round of fuel price rises in six months sends shock waves through every household and pushes millions over the edge.

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Key events

- [6d ago](#)
[Oil prices drop as traders eye drop in demand if economies contract](#)
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[6d ago](#)[10.16](#)

The FTSE 100 has followed the lead of Wall Street: London's blue-chip index is now up by 0.8% with just over an hour of trading remaining.

For investors it is all about treading the tightrope: will there be recessions as is widely feared? Will central banks have to tighten interest rates more than expected to tame inflation? Can they navigate the “soft landing” that avoids too much pain for the broader economy?

The [US jobs numbers last week](#) “blew away the fears of recession which had been sparked by the news that GDP had declined in both the first and second quarter”, said **Rupert Thompson**, an investment strategist at **Kingswood**, a wealth manager. But questions remain for the UK.

There are certainly more UK rate rises ahead, he said. The question is whether bleak forecasts from the Bank of England will come true:

The surprise was much more in the doom and gloom emanating from the Bank's latest economic forecasts. It is now forecasting inflation to peak as high as 13% in October and a lengthy recession. GDP is expected to start contracting late this year and only emerge from recession in early 2024, falling a cumulative 2.2%. Meanwhile, the unemployment rate is projected to rise from 3.8% to 6.3% by 2025.

The hope is that this latest set of forecasts prove as wrong as its recent projections. Indeed, the Bank itself acknowledged the large uncertainties surrounding its estimates. It is also worth noting that the forecasts do not incorporate the additional fiscal support measures certain to be enacted regardless of whether Truss or Sunak becomes PM.

Economists think the [UK economy is already contracting](#), according to a poll by financial data company Bloomberg. If that is correct the Bank of England's forecasts are already wrong, points out Danny Blanchflower, a former member of the Bank's monetary policy committee.

UK economy shrank in second quarter according to poll of economists
— business live if so mpc forecast wrong in a week
<https://t.co/MOFZYPW940>

— Professor Danny Blanchflower economist & fisherman (@D_Blanchflower) [August 8, 2022](#)

That's it for today's business live blog, but you can continue to follow our live coverage from around the world:

In our UK politics coverage, Labour claims No 10's refusal of emergency budget shows Tories have lost control of the economy

In our US coverage, Biden visits flood-ravaged Kentucky after Senate passes \$739bn healthcare and climate bill

In our coverage of the Russian invasion of Ukraine: Moscow-controlled Zaporizhzhia is set for vote on joining Russia, and the UN chief calls for access to the threatened nuclear plant there

Thank you to everyone who joined us today. Do join us tomorrow for more live coverage of business, economics and financial markets. JJ

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[6d ago](#)[09.54](#)

Wall Street has gained ground on Monday morning trading, with the tech-heavy Nasdaq up by 1%.

It looks like something of a bounceback after a steep drop at the end of last week following very strong US jobs data. The Federal Reserve could be forced into more rate hikes if the [US economy](#) is running hotter than it thought.

So the US economy might be doing well, but with inflation rising that could make the Fed hike more aggressive.

Reuters reported:

Wall Street's main indexes rose on Monday after last week's blockbuster jobs data soothed some fears about an economic slowdown, but investors remained cautious as it also added to expectations of a hawkish Federal Reserve.

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[6d ago](#)[09.16](#)

I think we can safely say that Twitter founder Jack Dorsey has no plans to expand any of his various businesses into [China](#). At least, you don't tweet, "End the CCP" if you want to do so.

Dorsey, who no longer has any direct involvement in Twitter, tweeted a news report by CNN that detailed Beijing's strict lockdown rules.

End the CCP <https://t.co/tFuxHOGXxX>

— jack (@jack) [August 6, 2022](#)

Dorsey's Block holding company, whose most prominent arm is payments company Square, does not operate in China, and the country also bans cryptocurrency trading for which Dorsey is an evangelist. That means he doesn't have any direct interests in China. That door will likely be firmly closed now, for as long as the Chinese Communist party exists.

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[6d ago](#)[08.38](#)

Oil prices drop as traders eye drop in demand if economies contract

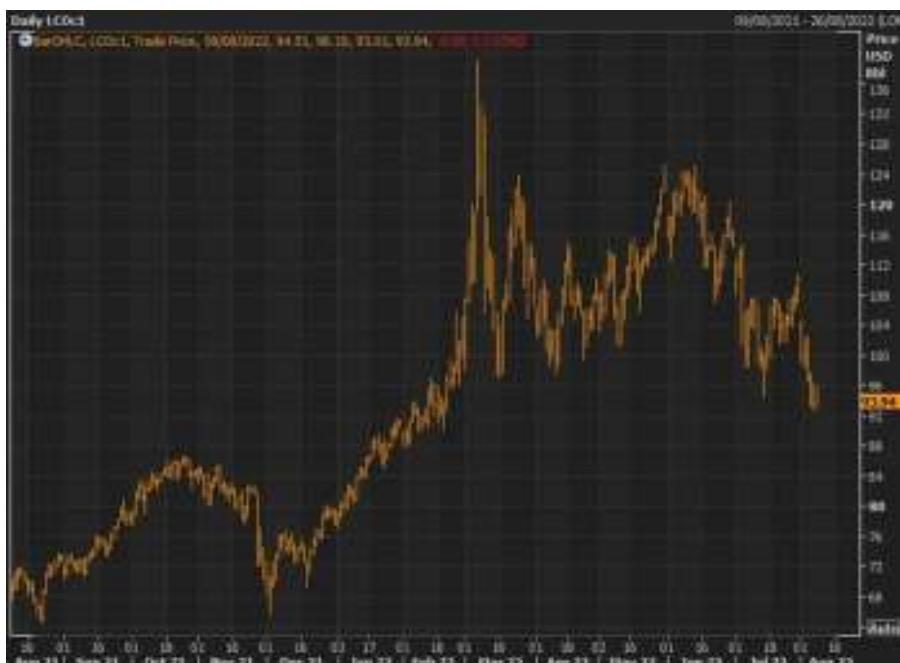


An aerial view of Buckeye Pipe Line Co in Linden, New Jersey, United States. Photograph: Anadolu Agency/Getty Images

The oil price increases of recent months have played an important part in the woes of economies around the world: higher global energy prices have fuelled rapid inflation, which is likely going to choke consumer spending in the coming months.

Crude oil futures prices have dropped by a dollar today, as investors look at the next part of the cycle: that fall in spending will likely drag down demand for oil (dragging down the prices that caused all the problems in the first place).

The **Brent crude** contract (the North Sea benchmark) dropped by 1% on Monday, down from nearly \$95 to \$93.92 at the time of writing. At its lowest on Friday it hit \$92.78, the cheapest since mid-February, just before Russia's autocratic ruler Vladimir Putin launched his invasion of Ukraine, a move that was seen as a threat to global energy supplies.



Oil prices have dropped back from levels seen above \$130 per barrel shortly after Russia invaded Ukraine. Photograph: Refinitiv

West Texas Intermediate, the North American benchmark, dropped by 1.1% to \$88 on Monday - also nearly its lowest since the invasion began.

John Briggs, global head of economics and markets strategy at **Natwest Markets**, said the oil price declines came despite the strong US jobs data. The reason for the decline is not immediately obvious, he said, but demand concerns are likely behind it.

It could be the end of summer driving season, it could be that recession and demand destruction fears remain (or the reaffirmation of the Fed's

commitment to destroy demand), I also heard some concern about lower Chinese demand.

Downward moves in the oil price could be good news in the short term for central banks and governments hoping to engineer a “soft landing” - reducing inflation without a painful recession. Briggs said:

The declines this week are interesting and we all know more would be very well received by the global central bank community as it may be the only realistic path to a soft landing for many economies.

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Updated at 08.39 EDT

[6d ago](#)[07.33](#)



Hungary has accused Ryanair of consumer protection violations after it raised ticket prices to cope with a tax on what the government calls “extra profits.” Photograph: Anna Szilagyi/AP

Irish airline Ryanair has responded in typically punchy fashion to Hungary’s announcement that it will fine it on consumer protection

grounds, saying it will appeal any ruling against it.

Hungarian justice minister Judit Varga revealed in a Facebook [post](#) on Monday that regulators had decided to fine Ryanair 300m forint (€760,000/£640,000) because of alleged breaches of a new law bringing in a special tax on businesses.

Reuters reported:

Nationalist Prime Minister Viktor Orban's government in May announced the special tax measure targeting "extra profits" earned by major banks, energy companies and other firms, aiming to plug budget holes created by a spending spree that helped him gain re-election in April.

Hungary's consumer protection authority found that Ryanair has "misled customers with its unfair business practice", Varga wrote. She added:

War inflation and the war economic situation mean that multinational companies making extra profits should pay their share of the costs of protection and national defense! In Hungary, the laws apply to everyone. In the future, avoiding or repairing the extraprofit separator will be punished by consumer protection investigation and fines!

However, in an emailed statement to Reuters, Ryanair said:

Ryanair [...] will immediately appeal any baseless fine raised by the Hungarian Consumer Protection Agency.

No notice of any such fine has yet been received by Ryanair. If necessary, Ryanair will appeal this matter to the EU courts.

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[6d ago](#)[07.10](#)



TheWorks.co.uk PLC warned of a tough Christmas ahead as it slashed its guidance. Photograph: Mike Egerton/PA

It may only be August, but already the prospect of a cost-of-living Christmas is lumbering into view, according to discount book retailer TheWorks.co.uk.

Analysts are on the look out for big profit warnings as the cost-of-living crisis hits consumers, and The Works said the slump in sales is already here, with no clear end in sight.

It said sales dropped because of a “challenging online performance” with a like-for-like sales decline of 28.6% during the quarter ending on 31 July, even as in-store sales edged up.

But it was the outlook that spooked the market, prompting a deep sell-off: its share dropped by 23% on Monday morning.

The company said:

The general market outlook has deteriorated since the beginning of the calendar year, with low consumer confidence and rising inflation being significant factors. It is not clear how long these market conditions will persist, which creates a heightened degree of uncertainty about how

consumers will behave, particularly in the forthcoming Christmas shopping season, The Works' most important trading period.

It also flagged “cost headwinds such as historically high freight costs, which are showing little sign of abating in the short term, as well as increases to the National Living Wage”.

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[6d ago](#)[06.55](#)



Mark Sweney

The French utility group Veolia has agreed to sell the UK waste business of Suez to the Australian private equity group Macquarie for €2.4bn (£2bn) to resolve competition concerns.

Veolia, which agreed a €13bn deal to buy its smaller French rival last year after a bitter takeover battle, has been disposing of parts of Suez in a number of international markets to clear anti-trust concerns.

The deal, the last step in Veolia's acquisition of Suez, follows objections raised by the UK's Competition and Markets Authority (CMA) after the

combination of the world's two largest waste and water groups.

In May, the CMA said that the merger of the two companies' businesses in the UK risked driving up council bills by cutting the choice of rubbish treatment and collection providers.

You can read the full story here:

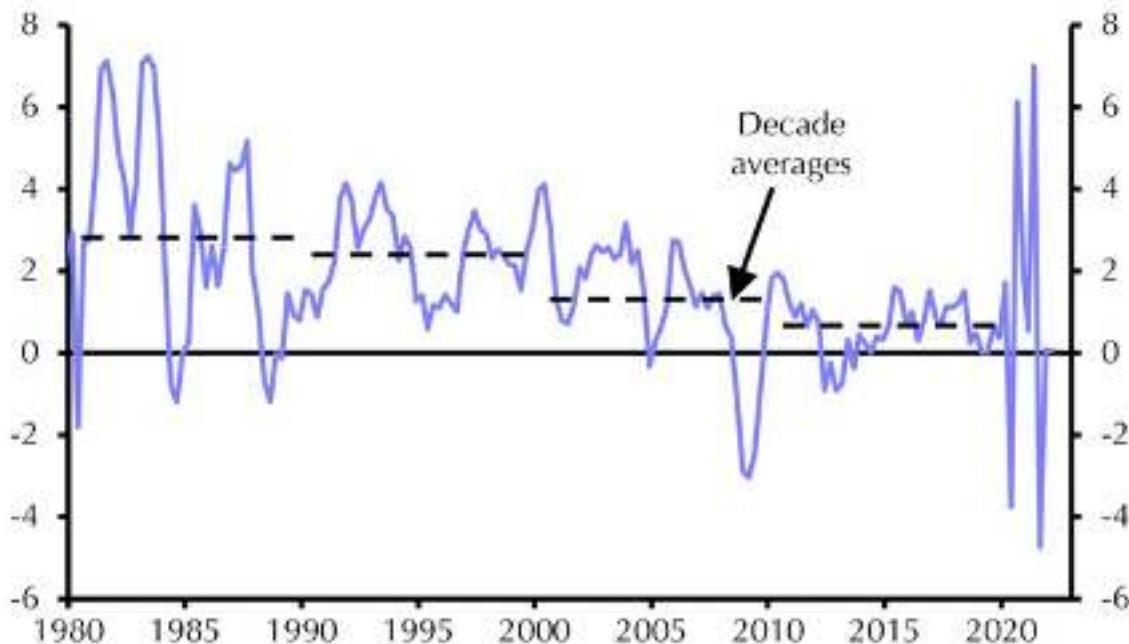
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[6d ago](#) [06.45](#)

An [interesting perspective](#) on the tax-cutting showdown between the two people aspiring to be the UK's next prime minister, from Capital Economics's group chief economist, Neil Shearing: “This is not a grown-up race for the Conservative party leadership.”

He points to the lack of focus on policies from the candidates, Liz Truss and Rishi Sunak, on measures that would improve the UK's deeply unimpressive lack of productivity growth - rather than tax cuts that are not thought by many economists to have a strong link to investment.

Average output per hour worked in the UK increased by only 0.7% a year in the decade before the pandemic, down markedly from the average of previous decades - see the dotted steps down in this chart (before data went haywire during the pandemic on the right-hand side).



The UK's average rate of productivity growth (measured in annual percentage growth in output per hour) has dropped steadily in recent decades. Photograph: Refinitiv; Capital Economics

While it isn't a problem unique to the UK, Shearing points to factors including falling public investment and lower business confidence since the global financial crisis - both of which demand a focus on ways to use government spending to find ways of kick-starting productivity growth once more.

He wrote:

A grown-up race would involve grown-up debate around the economic policies needed for the UK to secure sustainable growth in its future. Instead, we have the unedifying spectacle of two candidates battling almost exclusively on who can deliver the biggest tax cuts and when.

There has been almost no discussion about key issues such as post-Brexit trade and regulatory policy, energy and food security or long-term fiscal challenges. Most importantly, in articulating where they want to steer the UK as Tory leader and the country's third prime minister in six years, neither Rishi Sunak nor Liz Truss has set out a plan to address the economy's chronically low rate of productivity growth.

You can read more updates on the Conservative leadership campaign - and the argument about tax plans - here:

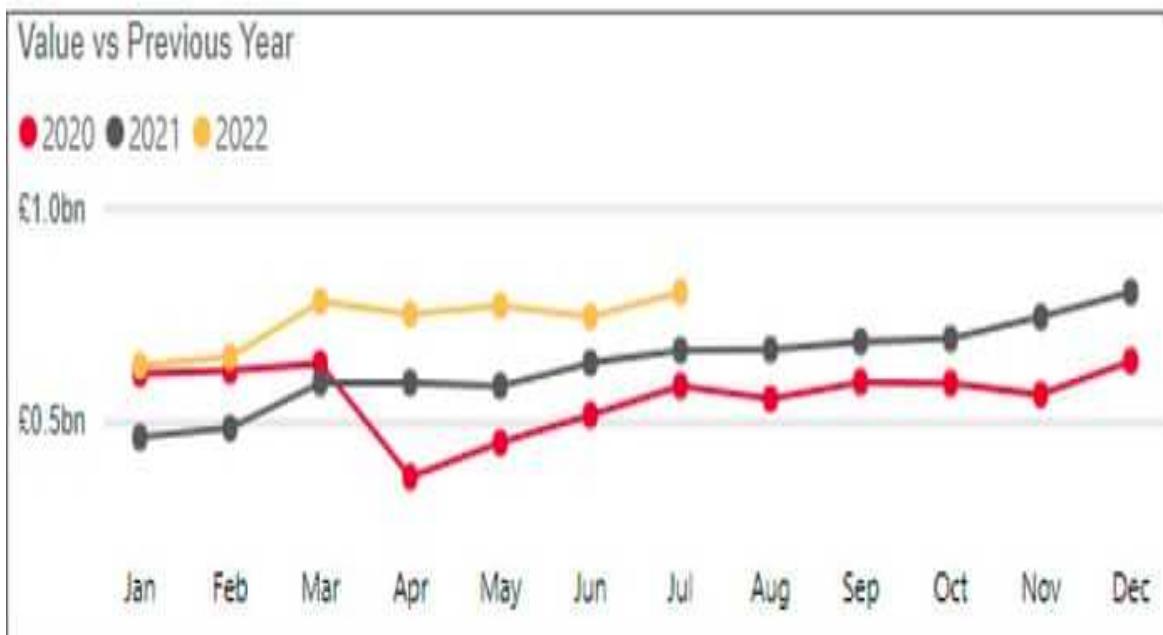
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Updated at 06.45 EDT

[6d ago](#)[06.02](#)

People in the UK withdrew a record amount of cash from post offices in July, including £800m for personal use, in what the Post Office said was a sign that people are turning to cash to manage their budgets amid the economic squeeze.

In total, a record £3.31bn in cash deposits and withdrawals were handled at post offices in July, £100m higher than in June, the company said. Personal cash withdrawals have been higher than the previous two years in every month of 2022.



Personal cash withdrawals have increased markedly in recent months, the Post Office said. Photograph: Post Office

The Post Office is keen to emphasise its own role as a provider of cash withdrawal and other banking services, but its long history nevertheless makes it a handy source of data on consumer behaviour.

The company pointed to two - somewhat contradictory - factors pushing up cash usage: the need for holidaymakers planning to stay in the UK, and the need for households to turn to cash for budgeting amid the inflationary pressures that are increasing.

Martin Kearsley, banking director at **Post Office**, said:

We're seeing more and more people increasingly reliant on cash as the tried and tested way to manage a budget.

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[6d ago](#)[05.20](#)

UK economy likely shrank by 0.2% in second quarter - poll of economists

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However, the Bank's forecasts cannot take into account one key variable: the response of the government when a new prime minister takes office (probably in just under a month). Liz Truss (the strong favourite in the Conservative leadership race) or Rishi Sunak will likely feel strong pressure to stage a major economic intervention to try to soften the effect of a recession - even if most of the economic policy debate so far seems to have revolved around cutting taxes (not much help to companies who are losing money) or cutting salaries for workers outside London.

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The reality is grim and undeniable: a financial timebomb will explode for families in October as a second round of fuel price rises in six months sends shock waves through every household and pushes millions over the edge.

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[6d ago](#)[04.26](#)



The logo of Price Waterhouse Coopers is seen at its Berlin office.
Photograph: Wolfgang Rattay/Reuters

The UK's accounting regulator has fined PwC £1.8m and reprimanded the firm and a partner for failures in its audit of [FTSE 100](#) telecoms company BT.

PwC's fine from the Financial Reporting Council (FRC) was cut from £2.5m after it quickly admitted the failure, while Richard Hughes, the partner in charge of the BT audit, will also pay a fine of £42,000, cut from £60,000.

BT found a fraud in its Italian operations in 2016, and in its 2017 financial results it was forced to make adjustments worth £513m to its previous accounts.

However, the FRC said: “the respondents did not approach the audit of BT’s treatment of the debt adjustments with the necessary professional scepticism and they failed to adequately document their audit work across the entirety of the BT Italy adjustments.”

The auditors’ breaches were not found to have been “intentional, dishonest, deliberate or reckless”, but the FRC said they were breaches of important standards.

Claudia Mortimore, the FRC's deputy executive counsel, said:

In determining the financial impact of a major fraud detected within a business, difficult but important issues relating to appropriate accounting treatment and disclosures will need to be addressed. It is vital that these are subject to robust audit so that the users of financial statements can have confidence that the financial impact is properly and accurately stated in subsequent financial statements.

The sanctions imposed in this case, where certain elements of the adjustments following a fraud were not subject to the required level of professional scepticism, underscore this message and will serve as a timely reminder to the profession.

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[6d ago](#)[03.59](#)



Fashion retailer Joules, founded in 1989, could receive an investment from Next. Photograph: Mike Egerton/PA

Shares in London-listed fashion retailer Joules have jumped by a quarter after it confirmed that it is in talks with the [FTSE 100's](#) Next

over a £15m investment.

Joules describes itself as a “contemporary country living” brand (although the Press Association previously summed it up as a “posh wellies” retailer).

The Guardian’s Mark Sweeney reports:

Joules, whose share price has slumped by almost 90% over the last year, said it was in talks with Next about raising the sum in a deal that would result in the clothing and homeware retailer taking a strategic minority investment in the company.

Under the terms of the deal, Next could take a stake of about 25%, according to Sky News.

Last month, Joules hired KPMG to assist with efforts to improve “profitability, cash generation and liquidity headroom”.

Joules, which has about 130 stores and employs more than 1,000 people, also announced it was in talks to use Next’s online platform to run its digital operations. Next already sells Joules clothing through its own website.

The deal will involve the transitioning of Joules’s existing online operation, warehouse, distribution and logistics to use Next’s services, Total Platform, to run its retail websites and back-end operations.

You can read the full story here:

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[6d ago](#)[03.50](#)

SoftBank suffers losses of £18bn amid tech stock rout



SoftBank Group chief executive Masayoshi Son at a news conference in London in July 2016. Photograph: Neil Hall/Reuters

Japanese investor SoftBank has reported investment losses worth £18bn between April and June, as its massive bets on technology companies were hit by concerns about rising inflation and recessions.

SoftBank said its Vision Funds, two investment funds backed by Saudi Arabia, suffered losses of ¥2.9 trillion (£18bn) during the quarter.

The company, controlled by the billionaire Masayoshi Son, blamed the “global downward trend in share prices due to growing concerns over economic recession driven by inflation and rising interest rates”.

SoftBank has been hoping to list Arm, the UK-based chip designer, on the Nasdaq stock exchange, but the conditions have proven tricky for its portfolio of startups, many of which lose money and will need to raise funds via initial public offerings.

Some of the steepest losses for its publicly listed companies were from Japanese robotics company AutoStore, US office rental business WeWork, Korean online retailer Coupang, artificial intelligence company SenseTime and food delivery company DoorDash.

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[6d ago](#)[03.28](#)

It has been a fairly strong start to a Monday in August on the [FTSE 100](#). London's benchmark index is up 0.4% in the first 25 minutes of trade.

Leading the pack is Hargreaves Lansdown, the investment platform, up 6% following upgrades by analysts at Barclays and Deutsche Bank. Otherwise it is mostly fairly gentle gains across a broad range of sectors.

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[6d ago](#)[03.16](#)

China exports jump but economists warn of fading prospects

Good morning, and welcome to our live, rolling coverage of business, economics and financial markets.

China has reported a record trade surplus thanks to strong export growth, but economists suggest the recovery from coronavirus pandemic lockdowns could be short-lived.

Exports from China rose 18% year-on-year in July, well above economists' average expectations of a 14% increase.

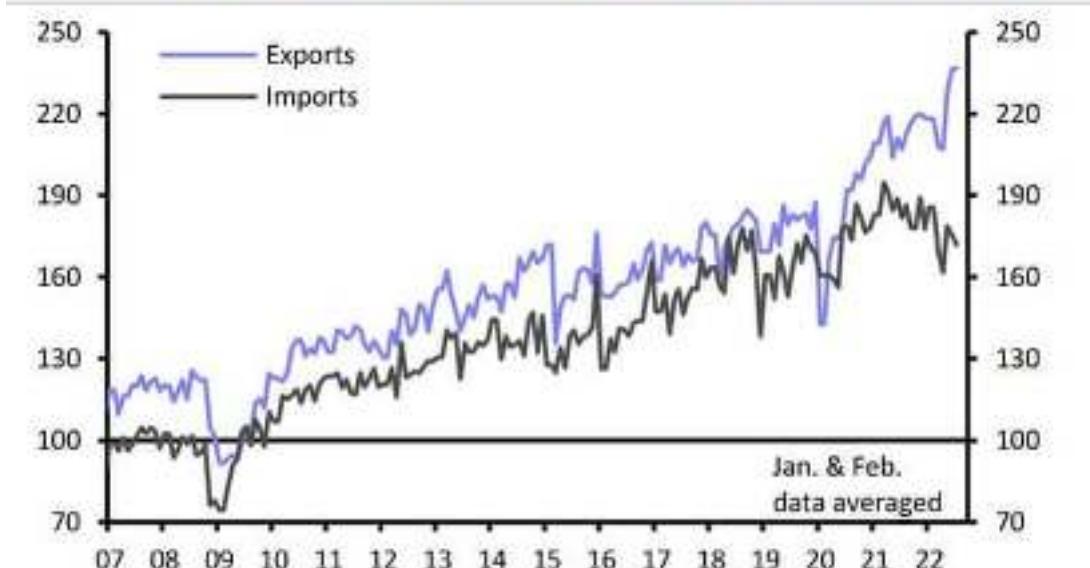
The Chinese economy has recovered rapidly in recent months, confounding predictions of a slowdown when many of its big consumers - [particularly in Europe](#) - are already braced for a recession. Yet there has been a sugar rush from the reopening following deep lockdowns and the untangling of much of the disruption at China's main ports, according to **Julian Evans-**

Pritchard and Zichun Huang, economists covering the country at **Capital Economics**, a consultancy. That will diminish, they argued:

Exports held up well last month, thanks to a backlog of orders still being cleared. But it won't be long before shipments drop back on cooling foreign demand. Meanwhile, imports continued to trend down, pointing to further domestic weakness.

Although the main constraints on exports recently have been on the supply-side, we think that cooling global demand will soon deflate China's pandemic export boom.

Chart 2: Goods Trade (\$bn, seas. adj., 2010 prices)



Chinese trade data showed a record surplus as exports boomed following reductions in pandemic restrictions and imports dipped. Photograph: Capital Economics

“The momentum from the reopening rebound is fading,” wrote **Craig Botham**, an economist covering China at **Pantheon Macroeconomics**, a consultancy.

We think the data suggest export growth should wane in the second half of the year, with sources of demand fading, but policy efforts to shore up manufacturing have the effect of subsidising exports, so the process is taking longer than we initially expected. Imports, meanwhile, are

unlikely to impress, but should eke out continued single digit growth. The combination should exert gradual downward pressure on the trade balance in the second half.

There are also conflicting signs from the only bigger economy in the world: the US. Economists are torn as to whether it is heading for recession shortly, or whether it will take more intense tightening of monetary policy from the **Federal Reserve**, the US central bank, to tip it into a contraction.

Some economists had postulated that a recession was already happening, but [US jobs data on Friday](#) suggested it is still growing fast. The data also suggest that the Fed may have to raise interest rates even more than expected in order to prevent further inflation.

Stock market futures on Monday suggested that Wall Street shares could dip when trading opens, in anticipation of tighter monetary policy.

“The [US economy](#) simply cannot be deemed to be in a recession in a month when +528k jobs have just been added as payrolls showed on Friday,” wrote **Jim Reid**, a strategist at **Deutsche Bank**.

This still feels to me like a classic (albeit compressed), old fashioned boom bust cycle. The Fed has been aggressively behind the curve with monetary policy amazingly loose versus history. The Fed have tightened a bit but monetary policy operates with a lag and monetary policy was and is still very loose.

I still think recession by around the middle of 2023 is a slam dunk and that risk assets will go well below their June 2022 lows when we’re in it, but I’m still not convinced the official recession happens over the next few months.

It probably won’t affect the short-term economic outlook, but there was also a big political story in the US overnight. The Democratic party has [managed to scrape through a bill, known as the Inflation Reduction Act](#), that will allocate \$369bn (£306bn) to reducing greenhouse gas emissions and investing in renewable energy sources. The bill passed the Senate after a

compromise deal agreed between Joe Manchin, a senator who held disproportionate power because of narrow majority, and will be voted on in the House of Representatives.

The bill, which is also aimed at cutting healthcare costs, will allow the administration of US President Joe Biden to claim a victory ahead of mid-term elections in November. It will also set the US on track to cut emissions by about 40% below 2005 levels, compared to about 25% without the act, according to several thinktanks' analyses.

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Headlines tuesday 9 august 2022

- [Energy UK bills forecast to hit £4,266 from January](#)
- [Business Head of CBI urges Boris Johnson to offer immediate help with energy bills](#)
- [Live Business: UK energy bills forecast to top £4,200 from January, as cost of living crisis deepens](#)

Energy bills

UK energy bills forecast to hit £4,266 a year from January

Government urged to announce more support for struggling households as Ofgem price cap expected to rise again



Bills are forecast to rise further in the second quarter of next year.
Photograph: Simon Dack News/Alamy

[Alex Lawson](#) Energy correspondent

Tue 9 Aug 2022 19.00 EDTFirst published on Tue 9 Aug 2022 04.53 EDT

Annual energy bills are forecast to top £4,200 from January, triggering a warning that Britons face “serious hardship on a massive scale” without government intervention.

The consultancy Cornwall Insight said on Tuesday that it expected the energy price cap to reach £4,266 a year for the first three months of next year.

The consultancy forecasts that bills could then rise to £4,426 in April before easing. Only a week ago Cornwall Insight predicted the energy price cap was [on track to rise to £3,615](#) a year from January.

The consumer champion Martin Lewis said the latest forecast was “tragic news” and urged the “zombie government” to come up with an immediate action plan to help households.

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The former chancellor Rishi Sunak announced [a £15bn support package for consumers in May, including £400 for every household](#). However, rising wholesale prices have since threatened to wipe out the impact of that support and Sunak and his Tory leadership rival, Liz Truss, are under pressure to announce further measures.

Peter Matejic, chief analyst at the Joseph Rowntree Foundation, a charity that aims to tackle poverty, said: “Every day action is delayed is increasing anxiety for low-income families who do not know how they will get by this winter.

“The payments promised by the government earlier in the year offer some help but their scale has been overtaken by events, and they must now be at least doubled if they are to protect people from serious hardship on a massive scale.”

Cornwall Insight said rising wholesale prices and a revision of the methodology used by the regulator Ofgem to calculate the price cap were behind the increase in its forecasts.

The consultancy’s principal consultant, Dr Craig Lowrey, said: “It is essential that the government use our predictions to spur on a review of the support package being offered to consumers.”

The consultancy now expects the cap to hit £3,582 from October, an increase of £200 on its last forecast. It expects bills to begin easing next

summer, to £3,810 in the third quarter and then £3,781 in the final three months of next year.

The cap, which is set quarterly by the energy industry regulator, Ofgem, was at £1,400 a year as recently as October last year.

Lowrey said: “If the £400 was not enough to make a dent in the impact of our previous forecast, it most certainly is not enough now.

“The government must make introducing more support over the first two quarters of 2023 a number one priority. In the longer term, a social tariff or other support mechanism to target support at the most vulnerable in society are options that we at Cornwall Insight have proposed previously. Right now, the current price cap is not working for consumers, suppliers, or the economy.”

Chart showing default tariff price cap over time

Ofgem last week confirmed plans to update the price cap every three months, instead of every six months, in an effort to allow suppliers to better manage the risk from volatile wholesale prices and prevent higher prices for consumers as a result of suppliers going bust.

The regulator is attempting to prevent a repeat of events last year, when almost 30 suppliers collapsed, in part due to a rise in wholesale energy prices.

Lowrey said changes to the cap had led to an increase in its predictions. However, he said the move would protect suppliers struggling with costs and prevent the cost of their collapses being added to consumers’ bills.

Ofgem plans to confirm the level of the next price cap on 26 August, days before the next prime minister will be announced on 5 September. The cap will come into force from 1 October.

Martin Lewis, the founder of the MoneySavingExpert website, wrote on Twitter: “Action and planning is needed now. The zombie govt needs to wake up sooner than 5 Sept. The leadership debate must not ignore this portentous national cataclysm any more.”

Lewis added: “People’s livelihoods, mental wellbeing and in some cases very lives depend on this. This is desperate.”

Tragic news

The latest [@CornwallInsight](#) prediction, based on Ofgem's new methodology, is an 81% price cap rise in Oct (taking typical bill to £3,582/yr) and a further 19% in Jan (so £4,266/yr)

Action & planning is needed now. The zombie govt needs wake up sooner than 5 Sept...

— Martin Lewis (@MartinSLewis) [August 9, 2022](#)

Simon Francis, coordinator of the End Fuel Poverty Coalition, said: “A tsunami of fuel poverty will hit the country this winter and these latest estimates further demonstrate that the level of support already promised by the government is just a drop in the ocean.”

Jane Tully, a director at the Money Advice Trust, said: “Government support announced so far to help with energy and cost of living price rises has been welcome but does not get close to matching the scale of the challenge households now face.”

A report by the comparison site Uswitch on Wednesday said households owed £1.3bn to their energy suppliers. The overall debt bill was already three times higher than it had been a year ago and was expected to grow this winter, the report said.

Six million households across the UK now owe an average of £206 to their energy provider, up from £188 in April. The number of homes in credit to their supplier has dropped from 11m to 9m since April.

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UK cost of living crisis

Head of CBI urges Boris Johnson to offer immediate help with energy bills

Tony Danker says waiting until after Tory leadership vote is too late for Britons facing ‘terrifying’ price rises



Energy analysts Cornwall Insight said bills would rise by about £200 more than it previously thought between October and November and increase even further in January. Photograph: Andrew Matthews/PA

*[Rachel Hall](#)
[@rachela_hall](#)*

Tue 9 Aug 2022 05.01 EDT Last modified on Tue 9 Aug 2022 05.04 EDT

The head of the Confederation of British Industry has called on Boris Johnson to take immediate action to help people with soaring energy bills, warning that putting it off until after the [Conservative leadership](#) vote would be too late.

Tony Danker told BBC Radio 4's Today programme that Johnson "needs to say something to the country to reassure people about what will happen" ahead of Ofgem's announcement of "terrifying" price rises on 26 August.

When the new prime minister is chosen on 5 September, they "need to tell us what will happen, not put it off for a couple of weeks while they do preparations for the emergency budget", he said.

It came as energy analysts Cornwall Insight said energy bills would rise by about £200 more than it previously thought between October and November and increase even further in January.

The energy consultancy said typical household bills would reach approximately £3,582 a year. It then forecast bills at £4,266 from January and £4,427 from April. The cap is then expected to start falling, down to £3,810 in the three months from July and £3,781 from October next year.

Danker urged Johnson to meet his two potential successors, Liz Truss and Rishi Sunak, to thrash out "the principles given they disagree on the mechanics" so the new prime minister is able to implement their plan on 5 September as "people are going to start making decisions now about their finances and life choices".

Meanwhile, the MP Mark Harper, a leading Sunak supporter, said Truss's tax cuts plan favoured the wealthy rather than providing direct support to the poor and most vulnerable to help with rising inflation.

He said her plans would give high earners such as the prime minister a tax cut of £110, while those on the "national living wage" would only receive about £50 and pensioners nothing.

He told Sky News: "There's a fundamental difference of opinion between the two leadership candidates. Rishi thinks we need to give direct support to people, that we can't just cut taxes because poor people don't pay a lot of tax. Liz Truss thinks we can cut national insurance but that gives a big boost to people on the biggest incomes."

Noting that the civil service was already drawing up plans for both candidates' approaches before the vote on 5 September, he said the public wanted "somebody with the grip and experience to deal with the economic challenge" ahead, and that he worried a Truss win would jeopardise the Conservatives' prospects in a general election.

Sunak threw down the gauntlet to Truss on Monday by pledging to provide similar help with energy bills to his last package of measures, amounting to £400 a household and £650 for the most vulnerable – a £15bn overall package.

"This winter is going to be extremely tough for families up and down the country, and there is no doubt in my mind that more support will be needed," he said.

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Over the weekend, Truss had said she would "do things in a Conservative way of lowering the tax burden, not giving out handouts", although her team later said this had been misinterpreted and she could look at further measures.

Writing in the Times, the deputy prime minister, Dominic Raab, said "people are facing some very tough circumstances in the months ahead" and that household budgets would be under pressures "well beyond the living memory of millions of voters".

He said "an emergency budget that fails to measure up to the task" would "read unmistakenly to the public like an electoral suicide note" and see the party "cast into the impotent oblivion of opposition".

He wrote: "A response to the challenges people are facing that stops at limited tax cuts, which do little for the most vulnerable, isn't Conservative politics. It's bad politics."

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UK energy bills ‘to top £4,200’ amid warning of ‘serious hardship on a massive scale’ – as it happened

Joseph Rowntree Foundation, consumer champion Martin Lewis and CBI chief urge PM to act urgently to help people with soaring energy bills

Updated 5d ago

[Julia Kollewe](#) and [Jasper Jolly](#)

Tue 9 Aug 2022 10.02 EDTFirst published on Tue 9 Aug 2022 02.46 EDT

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[Introduction: EU emergency gas plan takes effect; UK retail sales grow in 'lull before storm'](#)



A saucepan on a gas hob. Photograph: Danny Lawson/PA

[Julia Kollewe](#) and [Jasper Jolly](#)

Tue 9 Aug 2022 10.02 EDTFirst published on Tue 9 Aug 2022 02.46 EDT

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[5d ago](#) [10.00](#)

Closing summary

European and US stocks are trading lower as investors await US inflation figures tomorrow, with the exception of the UK's FTSE 100 index, which has edged 0.2% higher to 7,47, a gain of 15 points.

The UK fund manager Abrdn is the biggest loser, down 5.8%, after it swung to a loss in the first half of the year, after being hit by market turmoil.

Chief executive Stephen Bird, who scrapped the Standard Life Aberdeen brand for a new name last year, said the pretax loss of £320m in the six months to June “largely reflected the challenging global economic environment and market turbulence.” The fund manager had reported profits of £113m a year earlier.

Crude oil prices are up by about \$1 a barrel after Russia said oil exports to Europe via the southern leg of the Druzhba pipeline had been suspended since early August.

Our main story today:

Pressure is mounting on the UK government to announce a fresh support package for struggling households as energy bills are now forecast to top £4,200 from January.

The consultancy Cornwall Insight said on Tuesday that it expected the energy price cap to reach £4,266 a year for the first three months of next year.

Liz Truss has doubled down on her refusal to offer significant help to people with soaring energy bills this winter, despite a forecast that these could exceed £4,200 annually from January, and rise further during 2023.

Truss, the runaway favourite to succeed Boris Johnson as prime minister next month, has already said she does not want to give “handouts” to people struggling with bills, preferring to prioritise tax cuts.

While she has not definitively ruled out other direct help, questioned on Tuesday the foreign secretary would only confirm plans to reverse the recent increase in national insurance, and to temporarily suspend green levies on energy bills.

Here is a round-up of today's other stories:

Thank you for reading. We'll be back tomorrow. Take care, JK

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Updated at 10.02 EDT

[5d ago](#)09.38

Back to our main story: the forecast rise in UK energy bills to above £4,200 a year.

Nigel Pocklington, chief executive of the energy supplier Good Energy, said:

This is an emergency on the scale of the 2008 financial crisis or Coronavirus. In May, the government announced measures to shield poorer households from the expected rise, but a gap in that support of £600 will open up in October and widen to over £1,000 in January.

The two candidates for Prime Minister are squabbling over fringe measures that don't begin to tackle the issue. VAT cuts will save 5% and a moratorium on social and policy costs a similar amount.

Tax and National Insurance cuts won't bridge the gap for poorer households. To avoid the economic and social harm that will come with these rising bills, and to help people plan how they are going to get through the winter, we need to be clear on our plan by the time the new cap is announced.

If we don't see significant action to help people and businesses before the winter then the cost-of-living crisis will be compounded further. And whoever is in number 10 in December will be wishing something had been done sooner.

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Updated at 09.39 EDT

[5d ago](#)[09.35](#)

US stocks have opened lower, with the Nasdaq down 1% while the Dow Jones is flat and the S&P 500 slipped 0.1%.

Tech stocks have been spooked by a warning from the chipmaker Micron Technology, and investors are treading carefully ahead of US inflation figures tomorrow.

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Updated at 09.38 EDT

[5d ago](#)[09.03](#)

Oil rises as Russian pipeline halt sparks fresh supply fears

Crude oil prices have reversed earlier declines and are now up by more than \$1 a barrel, after Russia said oil exports to Europe via the southern leg of the Druzhba pipeline had been suspended since early August.

Brent crude is trading at \$97.91 a barrel and US light crude at \$91.9 a barrel.

The state-controlled pipeline transport company Transneft said Ukraine had suspended oil flows via the pipeline leg from 4 August because Western sanctions had stopped a payment from Moscow for transit fees.

Gazprombank, which handled the payment, said the money was returned because of European Union restrictions, Transneft said.

There is also scepticism whether the 2015 nuclear Iran deal can be salvaged which would pave the way for a sizeable boost to oil exports from Iran. The EU tabled a “final” text on Monday, which needs to be approved by Washington and Tehran. Talks have dragged on for months.

According to tanker trackers, Iran’s oil exports are at least 1m barrels per day below their rate in 2018, when then-US president Donald Trump exited the nuclear agreement with Iran, Reuters reported.

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[5d ago](#)08.49

Inflation in Mexico went up to 8.15% in July from 7.99% in June, the latest data showed today.

In Brazil, the annual inflation rate eased to 10.07% last month from 11.9% in June, but remained in double digits.

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[5d ago](#)08.46

Centrica signs £7bn LNG deal with US supplier

British Gas parent Centrica, Britain’s biggest energy supplier, has struck a £7bn deal to buy liquefied natural gas from US firm Delfin Midstream from 2026.

The company said the 15-year deal would involve buying 1m tonnes of LNG a year from the Delfin Deepwater Port off the coast of Louisiana. Countries across Europe are trying to wean themselves off Russian gas following Moscow’s invasion of Ukraine.

Centrica chief executive Chris O'Shea said:

Natural gas has now been recognised as an essential transition fuel on the path to net zero just at the point geopolitical uncertainty is impacting the global gas market.

The UK is home to three of the largest LNG terminals in Europe – two terminals at Mildford Haven and another at the Isle of Grain – where the super chilled fuel is transformed back into gas.

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[5d ago](#)08.40

Olive oil prices to rise 25% on Spain heatwave

The price of olive oil is set to rise by up to 25% as heatwaves hit production in Spain, a leading exporter has warned.

Spain produces nearly half the world's olive oil. Soaring temperatures across Spain and other big exporters such as Italy, Greece and Portugal, have hit olive oil production.

Acesur, which supplies the UK's biggest supermarkets, told the BBC this would feed through into prices in shops in the next three to four months when companies renew their contracts. The company's export manager, Miguel Colmenero, said customers could see prices rise by 20-25%.

Acesur accounts for more than 200,000 tonnes of olive oil a year, out of the 1.4m tonnes produced in Spain annually, and sells its products in more than 100 countries.

It sells around 20,000 tonnes a year in the UK and packs own-label brands for Sainsbury's, Tesco, Waitrose, Morrisons and Asda. The supermarkets also stock its La Espanola brand, which is the third biggest in the UK.

Most of the olives in its products are grown in Andalucia, southern Spain, which has had very little rainfall in recent weeks.

Colmenero said the dry weather could also affect next season's crop if olive trees cannot grow new branches due to lack of water.

Olive oil prices to rise as heatwave hits production
<https://t.co/iEex2dvXTg>

— BBC News (UK) (@BBCNews) [August 9, 2022](#)



Grove of ancient olive trees. Photograph: EAQ/Getty Images/iStockphoto

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Updated at 08.40 EDT

5d ago**08.03**

More reaction to the expected jump in average UK household energy bills to over £4,200 early next year.

By Jan, multiple 1000s of people will owe up to £10k in energy bills they just can't/won't pay. There has never been anything like this. And no plans are being made! Boris went on fucking holiday. As I just saw someone Tweet, "The rich have forgotten to be scared of the poor."

— Caitlin Moran (@caitlinmoran) [August 9, 2022](#)

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5d ago **08.00**

For the average family the proposed NI tax reversal doesn't even cover a tenth of the energy bill rise predicted by January.
<https://t.co/JkDcn86AP2>

— Sam Freedman (@Samfr) [August 9, 2022](#)

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5d ago **08.00**

"What I'm promising is from day one, people... will have lower energy bills," says Liz Truss.

A reminder that the latest forecast suggests the energy price cap will rise to *£4,200* by the start of next year. pic.twitter.com/2sbxcRt8RD

— Adam Bienkov (@AdamBienkov) [August 9, 2022](#)

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5d ago **07.50**

We have an update from the favourite to be the next UK prime minister on energy policy.

Asked if she would provide direct support to households, Reuters reports that Liz Truss said:

What I don't believe in is taxing people to the highest level in 70 years, and then giving them their own money back.

Truss, the foreign secretary, is seen as the frontrunner in the race for the Conservative leadership because of her poll lead among the party's members. There is little doubt that the "impending disaster" of the energy price rise (in the Joseph Rowntree Foundation's description) will be a top political priority for whoever wins. A decision is due by 5 September.

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[5d ago07.10](#)

UK faces 'impending disaster' without help on energy bills - thinktank

The UK faces an "impending disaster" and "serious hardship on a massive scale" unless the government takes action to offer at least double the support for households facing the prospect of rising energy bills, according to a thinktank focused on poverty.

The Joseph Rowntree Foundation said payments worth £400 to every UK household, announced in May by then-chancellor Rishi Sunak, would not be enough to cope with the surge in energy costs expected during the winter.

It came after energy researchers at Cornwall Insights, whose analysis is closely watched by the industry and politicians, on Tuesday issued a forecast suggesting that the average annual energy bill allowed under the government's price cap could break above £4,200 in January.

Peter Matejic, chief analyst at the Joseph Rowntree Foundation, said:

The latest projections of annual energy bills exceeding £4,200 from January is the latest in a series of terrifying warnings over the past week, from the Bank of England and others. Families on low incomes cannot afford these eye watering sums and as a nation we can't afford to ignore an impending disaster.

Both candidates to be prime minister must now recognise the extraordinarily fast-changing situation and act to protect the hardest hit from the coming emergency.

Every day action is delayed is increasing anxiety for low-income families who do not know how they will get by this winter. The payments promised by the government earlier in the year offer some help but their scale has been overtaken by events, and they must now be at least doubled if they are to protect people from serious hardship on a massive scale.

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[5d ago](#)[06.45](#)



Joanna Partridge



Felixstowe in Suffolk is Britain's biggest and busiest container port.
Photograph: Gareth Fuller/PA

Dock workers at the port of Felixstowe have been offered a £500 bonus to call off their eight-day strike planned for later this month, which is expected to bring Britain's biggest container port to a standstill.

Nearly 1,900 dock workers who are members of the Unite union have [voted in favour of strike action between 21 and 29 August](#) amid a pay dispute with the company which runs the Suffolk port, the Felixstowe Dock and Railway Company.

Following continued negotiations between the company and unions at the conciliation service Acas, the Hong Kong-owned port has offered workers a £500 lump sum, on top of its previous offer of a 7% pay rise.

The company said unions would put the bonus offer to their members. However, it added that staff paid hourly at Felixstowe would not be given the chance by Unite to vote on the offer.

A port spokesperson said:

There will be no winners from a strike which will only result in their members losing money they would otherwise have earned. Our focus

has been to find a solution that works for our employees and protects the future success of the port.

The union has rejected the company's offer to meet again.

There has not been a strike at the port since 1989, which is owned by the Hong Kong-based conglomerate CK Hutchison Holdings, owner of the Three mobile phone network and healthcare retailer Superdrug.

Any prolonged strike would almost certainly have an impact on the UK's supply chain, further knocking the British economy as it braces for recession.

The logistics hub handles about 40% of containers entering and leaving the UK - representing around 45,000 containers each week - full of freight including consumer goods, clothing and canned food.

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[5d ago](#)[06.34](#)

Morgan Wild, head of policy for Citizens Advice, has also responded to Cornwall Insight's new forecast for household energy bills to top £4,200 from January:

The cost-of-living crisis is already having a devastating impact on people's lives. Every day we hear from people who can't afford to turn the lights on or cook their kids a hot meal.

The government did the right thing by bringing in targeted support, but it won't be enough for people to manage these previously unthinkable price hikes. The obvious place to start is to increase benefits to keep pace with the cost of living. There's no time to waste.

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5d ago06.28

The head of the Confederation of British Industry has called on Boris Johnson to take immediate action to help people with soaring energy bills, warning that putting it off until after the [Conservative leadership vote](#) would be too late, reports the *Guardian*'s Rachel Hall.

Tony Danker told BBC Radio 4's Today programme that Johnson "needs to say something to the country to reassure people about what will happen" ahead of Ofgem's announcement of "terrifying" price rises on 26 August.

When the new prime minister is chosen on 5 September, they "need to tell us what will happen, not put it off for a couple of weeks while they do preparations for the emergency budget", he said.

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5d ago06.05

Martin Lewis, the consumer champion and founder of the website Moneysavingexpert, has tweeted about the prospect of soaring energy bills, and urged the government to take action NOW.

Tragic news

The latest [@CornwallInsight](#) prediction, based on Ofgem's new methodology, is an 81% price cap rise in Oct (taking typical bill to £3,582/yr) and a further 19% in Jan (so £4,266/yr)

Action & planning is needed now. The zombie govt needs wake up sooner than 5 Sept...

— Martin Lewis (@MartinSLewis) [August 9, 2022](#)

These amounts are unaffordable for millions. The Jan figure equates to 45% of the full new state pension, and a higher proportion of the old one.

The rise alone on the Jan prediction, from when the help was first announced in May, is roughly £1,400/yr...

— Martin Lewis (@MartinSLewis) [August 9, 2022](#)

That rise alone swallows up not just £400 help for all homes, but even the £1,200 for the poorest

This will leave many destitute. Tax cuts won't help poorest incl many elderly & disabled who've higher usage

Cutting green levy'd be just tiny sticking plaster on a gaping wound...

— Martin Lewis (@MartinSLewis) [August 9, 2022](#)

The leadership debate must not ignore this portentous national cataclysm any more.

- They can't say they weren't warned
- The excuse "we need to wait for Ofgem figure" doesn't wash. In May govt asked Ofgem for forward guidance & made plans based on that. It can do the same now..

— Martin Lewis (@MartinSLewis) [August 9, 2022](#)

An action plan is needed TODAY

They are all in the same party, let's call on them to come together for the good of the nation rather than personal point scoring

People's livelihoods, mental wellbeing & in some cases very lives depend on this

This is a desperate

Pls share

— Martin Lewis (@MartinSLewis) [August 9, 2022](#)

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[5d ago](#)[05.53](#)

Nurses in England and Wales to vote on strike action over pay

Hundreds of thousands of nurses in England and Wales will vote next month on whether to strike in a row over pay.

The strike ballot will open on 15 September and run until 13 October, said the Royal College of Nursing, the biggest union representing nurses.

RCN's Wales director Helen Whyley told Times Radio that more than 250,000 nurses would be balloted. If they vote to strike, it would be the first walkout in the RCN's 106-year history.

The union says a £1,400 pay rise announced by the government last month is not enough to cushion the impact of soaring consumer prices. UK inflation has hit a 40-year high of 9.4% and is set to rise above 13% in the coming months, pushed higher by spiralling energy and food costs.

Carol Popplestone, chair of RCN Council, said in a message to union members:

This year's pay award does not help you with the rising cost of living. It will do nothing to help to recruit or retain more nursing staff where

you work and will not keep patients safe.

A strike would mean further disruption to an already understaffed health service. Strikes have been staged by a number of other sectors including railway workers as the cost of living crisis deepens.

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Updated at 05.54 EDT

[5d ago](#)[05.45](#)

A bit of good news...

Birmingham is expecting a surge of tourists over the summer as the city's reputation receives a boost from the Commonwealth Games, business leaders said as the 11-day sports event comes to a close, reports our Midlands correspondent Jessica Murray.

The event has been heralded as a roaring success for the Midlands city, with more than 1.5m tickets sold – making it on track to be one of the most successful Commonwealth Games in history.

“I can categorically say this will be the busiest August that Birmingham has ever enjoyed,” said Neil Rami, chief executive of the West Midlands Growth Company. “You just have to see the throngs of people in the streets. We were forecasting about 85% hotel occupancy, but talking to some hotel managers it’s nearer 95% so we’re pretty much full.”



Fireworks during the Birmingham 2022 Commonwealth Games Closing Ceremony at Alexander Stadium on August 8. Photograph: Justin Setterfield/Getty Images

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[5d ago](#)[05.32](#)

Sterling, euro strengthen

On the currency markets, the US dollar has come off recent highs, ahead of US inflation data tomorrow.

The pound has strengthened 0.36% to \$1.2119 while the euro is also up against the dollar, at \$1.0236, a 0.4% gain. The yen held at 134.94 per dollar.

Ray Attrill, head of foreign exchange strategy at National Australia Bank in Sydney, told Reuters:

The market understandably is waiting for the numbers to then reprice, rather than moving in anticipation in of them.

We've had six CPI [consumer price index] numbers this year, four of those six have been upside surprises... but the impact on the dollar is a little bit ambiguous.

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Updated at 06.17 EDT

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1d ago



'It's astonishing': energy bill blunders add to agony for customers

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2d ago



Cost of living crisis will add strain to 'creaking' NHS, experts warn

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Head of CBI urges Boris Johnson to offer immediate help with energy bills

5d ago

-



Liz Truss refuses to rule out help with energy bills in apparent U-turn

4d ago



'Energy bills have overtaken wages': 280-year-old pub at risk of closure

2d ago



UK energy bills forecast to hit £4,266 a year from January

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Worried about bills this winter? In Truss's Titanic economics, only the rich will get a life raft

5d ago



Serious consequences for not paying energy bills, warn UK charities

7d ago

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2022.08.09 - Spotlight

- Money Bereaved relatives' grief compounded by unsympathetic firms
- 'I felt like a criminal' Woman's ordeal closing late husband's accounts
- 'I'd crawl over broken glass to work here' CBeebies take on Shakespeare
- 'Impossible to get an appointment' Britons forced abroad to seek dental treatment

Household bills

Bereaved relatives' grief compounded by unsympathetic firms

BT, TV Licensing, Tesco Mobile and others face complaints over treatment of relatives trying to close accounts after loved ones have died

- [Case study: woman's ordeal closing late husband's accounts](#)



Linda Bullamore, pictured, said she found the treatment 'was really upsetting'. Photograph: Linda Bullamore



Jess Clark

Tue 9 Aug 2022 05.00 EDT Last modified on Wed 10 Aug 2022 03.09 EDT

When Linda Bullamore's husband, Steve, passed away, she was left struggling to change many of the bills in his name. "It was a real inconvenience at that time in particular," she recalls. "With me needing to make lots of calls and lots of people trying to contact me."

She is just one of many bereaved relatives across the UK who have found the trauma of losing a loved one compounded by difficulties communicating with phone, TV, broadband and utility firms, facing difficulties closing accounts, unsympathetic staff and unexpected and unfair bills.

Guardian writer George Monbiot's [column last month](#) about the problems he had dealing with Vodafone following the death of his mother [prompted a wave of responses on Twitter](#) from others who had similarly poor experiences with the telecoms company.

However, charities that support grieving relatives say [such stories are common across the banking, utilities and tech sectors](#), with new research from the bereavement admin service Settld naming BT, TV Licensing and NS&I (National Savings and Investments) among the worst.

BT was one of the firms that Bullamore struggled with after losing her husband in 2020. She wanted to cancel a BT Sport package he had renewed shortly before his death, but was told she had to continue paying for a further 18 months.

After pursuing a complaint, she was eventually allowed to exit the contract early, and the extra charges were cancelled. “It was very unpleasant,” the 62-year-old from Buckinghamshire recalls. “They weren’t particularly helpful or sympathetic, or even particularly listening to what I was saying.”

Bullamore also struggled to change their family contract with Tesco Mobile to her name, and was temporarily left with a different phone number. “They said: ‘That’s breaking the contract, you can’t do that, and anyway we need to speak to the policyholder before we can do that’ … That had me in tears – it was really upsetting. Tesco just didn’t have a clue.”

The Settld research is based on a survey of nearly 3,000 people last month who were asked to share their experiences with companies after the death of a loved one. As well as highlighting poor service, it also found firms that had excelled in handling inquiries, including Lloyds Bank, Santander and Nationwide.

There are clearly caveats to such surveys: they are not scientific exercises, and huge organisations such as BT, NS&I and TV Licensing will arguably have more unhappy customers than smaller players.

However, big companies would do well to take such findings seriously. Stuart Lewis, chief executive of the over-50s website Rest Less, points out that there are big rewards for those that handle bereavement well. “If dealt with in a sensitive and caring fashion, it can create an unwavering customer loyalty for the long term,” he says.

“However, if done badly or if specialist training around this key area is ignored, not only are companies adding to the emotional distress that vulnerable people are going through, they also risk reputational damage.”

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A BT spokesperson said: “We’re really sorry that Mrs Bullamore’s experience was not up to the high standards we strive to provide our customers.”

BT has reviewed its bereavement processes over the last 18 months, creating a dedicated team and says it now accepts notifications from friends as well as family members, resulting in a decline in the number of complaints. It works with a death notification service called Life Ledger, selecting that firm over Settld.

A spokesperson for Tesco said: “We would like to sincerely apologise to Mrs Bullamore for any distress caused.” It said it followed its bereavement policy, which is to close the entire account and move other subscribers to pay as you go contracts.

A spokesperson for TV Licensing said: “We recognise that when someone has passed away it is a difficult time and we try to make it as simple as possible to inform us.”

An NS&I spokesperson said: “Due to Covid-19, our customers experienced some delays in 2021, for which we apologise. We had returned our customer service response times back to normal levels by autumn 2021.”

This article was amended on 10 August 2022 because an earlier version erroneously described Life Ledger as a not-for-profit organisation.

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/money/2022/aug/09/bereaved-relatives-grief-compounded-by-unsympathetic-firms>

Household bills

‘I felt like a criminal’: woman’s ordeal closing late husband’s accounts

After Lindsay Wright’s husband died suddenly, her grief was compounded by endless admin and a lack of communication

- [Bereaved relatives’ grief compounded by unsympathetic firms](#)



Lindsay Wright, who described her treatment as ‘gut-wrenching’, with her late husband Stuart and their daughter Lily. Photograph: Lindsay Wright



Jess Clark

Tue 9 Aug 2022 05.00 EDT Last modified on Tue 9 Aug 2022 05.04 EDT

Lindsay Wright's husband, Stuart, died suddenly at the beginning of the year, aged 46. Alongside the grief of losing her partner, and the father of their daughter Lily, 10, Wright had to deal with endless admin and a long list of companies, many of which she found unsympathetic.

She realised her Virgin Money credit card had been blocked when she tried to pay for some shopping. Her solicitor had informed the bank about her husband's death but a miscommunication meant she was not told the account would be closed.

He was the main account holder, but Wright had her own card. The couple had been saving their Virgin Points to upgrade to first class flights and go on holiday for their 10th wedding anniversary in 2021.

“There was no communication, there was no email, no letter, to say ‘we are stopping your card’,” she recalls. “When I rang them they were unbelievably unsympathetic.”

Wright had similar difficulties with British Gas when she tried to get the account for their solar panels transferred to her name, to allow her to claim

the money paid out as part of a feed-in tariff for generating energy.

The supplier had no problem changing the name on their dual fuel account, but the solar panels issue took seven months to fix, Wright says, and she has yet to receive the money.

“Different departments don’t speak to each other. You have to explain what’s happened to you again and again and again. It is emotional and painful, and horrible.”

She eventually had to send a death certificate, driving licence, passport, wedding certificate, the invoice for the solar panels, which had been bought eight years previously, and her husband’s will.

“I felt like a criminal – I felt like they were accusing me of trying to claim something that wasn’t rightfully mine.”

Meanwhile, BT are still sending emails for her to her late husband’s email address. “There are so few companies who can work through the process of, ‘let’s not email the dead guy’. They just can’t do it,” she says.

The conversations with various companies took an emotional toll, particularly when call handlers asked to speak with Mr Wright.

“You get to a stage where you say things like: ‘OK, shall we do a seance then, are you going to pay for me to go and see a medium, because that’s the only way you’re going to talk to him.’

“You have those really robust conversations and then you come off the phone and you’re in floods of tears for an hour, because it’s gut-wrenching.”

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Virgin Money said legal requirements meant it had to freeze the account, as being an additional card holder is different to having a joint credit account.

“We are sorry to hear that Mrs Wright found us unsympathetic and unhelpful – that’s not the customer service we strive to deliver. We are constantly

reviewing our processes and policies to make sure we treat bereaved customers with understanding and sympathy,” a spokesperson said.

A British Gas spokesperson said: “Unfortunately, we have to undertake different checks for transferring a regular energy account and a feed-in-tariff with solar panels.

“We understand this is a difficult time for the customer and will be making sure her first payment from her feed-in tariff goes through with no issues.”

BT has reviewed its bereavement processes over the last 18 months, creating a dedicated team, and says it now accepts notifications from friends as well as family members, resulting in a decline in the number of complaints.

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Interview

‘I’d crawl over broken glass to work here’: CBeebies take on Shakespeare

[Catherine Shoard](#)



CBebees stars Steve Kynman, Andy Day and Rebecca Keatley rehearsing Shakespeare’s As You Like It. Photograph: Teri Pengilley/The Guardian

The BBC kids' channel is known for its wit, invention and credo of inclusivity – but can its take on As You Like It captivate children? Just throw in a property developer baddie and some non-binary casting ...



[@catherineshoard](#)

Tue 9 Aug 2022 01.00 EDT Last modified on Tue 9 Aug 2022 10.21 EDT

Steven Kynman leans forward to show me his arm. “Look! All the hairs standing up! And that’s just from *thinking* about being on stage at the Globe.” Yesterday, when he actually rehearsed there, “I swear to God, those hairs didn’t go down *the whole time*.”

He leans back. He’s just had Covid, he says, still feels a bit emotional. His eyes shine. “I believe in the spirit of spaces. The wood is from Shakespeare’s time. It’s like a musical instrument; like standing in the middle of a guitar. I have never in my life felt more giddy about working somewhere.”

Kynman is 46 and looks on the anonymous end of a young Derek Jacobi. He’s not much recognised. Working recently with a famous actor, Kynman mentioned that he knew Justin Fletcher, the CBeebies star who has [popularised Makaton](#), a sign language for children with special needs.

The actor began to cry. “He said, ‘Can you please tell Justin I learned to communicate with my son because of him?’” Then he asked Kynman what he did. “I said: ‘Oh, I’m Robert the Robot.’ He just repeated ‘Oh my God’ for about 30 seconds and then said: ‘I have to call my wife.’”

Words put down 400 years ago connected with small children. That’s beyond magic.

Steven Kynman, CBeebies actor

If Fletcher – AKA Mr Tumble – is the most familiar face on preschool TV, Kynman is its most chameleonic. As well as playing the cheerful tin butler on [Justin's House](#), he's a regular on sketch show [Gigglebiz](#), voices [Fireman Sam](#), Lofty in [Bob the Builder](#) and most of [Thomas and Friends](#), and was [a dazzling baddie](#) in CBeebies' last Christmas panto.

That annual show is just one of the hybrid productions the channel mounts each year: performed live, screened later. They do the Proms, ballets and, since 2016, a condensed Shakespeare, with Kynman as the Bard, popping in and out of the wings to explain what's going on.

Previous years have seen 50-minute trims of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, *The Tempest* and *Romeo & Juliet*. This year it's *As You Like It*, and their first time at the Globe – a long-term ambition not just of the cast but the theatre's artistic director, [Michelle Terry](#).

“My little girl is five and a half,” she says, “and she’s probably spent more time with [CBeebies](#) people than me and her dad.” The collaboration is part of Terry’s drive to “demystify Shakespeare and get people through the doors – and the earlier the better. What CBeebies do brilliantly is find those avenues of fairytale and use them to prise the text open.”



‘You can’t be thinking about defrosting the Yorkshire pudding’ ... Steven Kynman as Shakespeare, alongside Zach Wyatt and Evie Pickerill as Romeo and Juliet. Photograph: James Stack/BBC

She has herself [starred in As You Like It](#), and the director of that Globe production, Elle While, takes the reins for this one too, working from an adaptation by CBeebies comedy supremo [Nathan Cockerill](#).

Cockerill’s tactic has been to scrap melancholy subplots – no more Phoebe, Silvius or Jacques (Kynman’s Shakespeare inherits the “All the world’s a stage” speech) – and add some helpful bookends.

So [Andy Day](#), usually seen halfway up a brontosaurus, plays a modern-day developer who wants to demolish the Globe and build flats. Shakespeare (somehow still going) assembles some players – mostly CBeebies regulars – to put on a show and persuade him otherwise.

The text is whittled but faithful. No bowdlerisation; as much verse as possible. The hope is it will soak in somehow. “At that age, language is still mercurial,” says Kynman. “It’s not solid metal yet, it’s liquid mercury.” He speaks excitedly of seeing big epiphanies on small faces. After a performance of *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*, two tiny siblings quoted lines

back to him. “It genuinely mattered to them. Words put down 400 years ago connected. That’s beyond magic.”

It’s not just under-sixes who appreciate the approach. “I’m still trying to understand Shakespeare’s text,” says Day. “You’re constantly learning. A teacher friend of mine said: ‘I show my A-level students CBeebies versions of Shakespeare because they then go: ‘Oh, *that’s* what’s going on!’’”

In fact, despite the apparent challenges, performing Shakespeare for 1,500 children might be more straightforward than doing so for adults. [Rebecca Keatley](#), who plays Rosalind, is one of the channel’s chief continuity presenters. Adults can forget how sophisticated a child’s sense of performance is, she thinks. “They’re much more accepting. They’re like sponges. When they play they just think: I want to be a knight, or a pirate, or a nurse, or a firefighter. They just inhabit that character.”

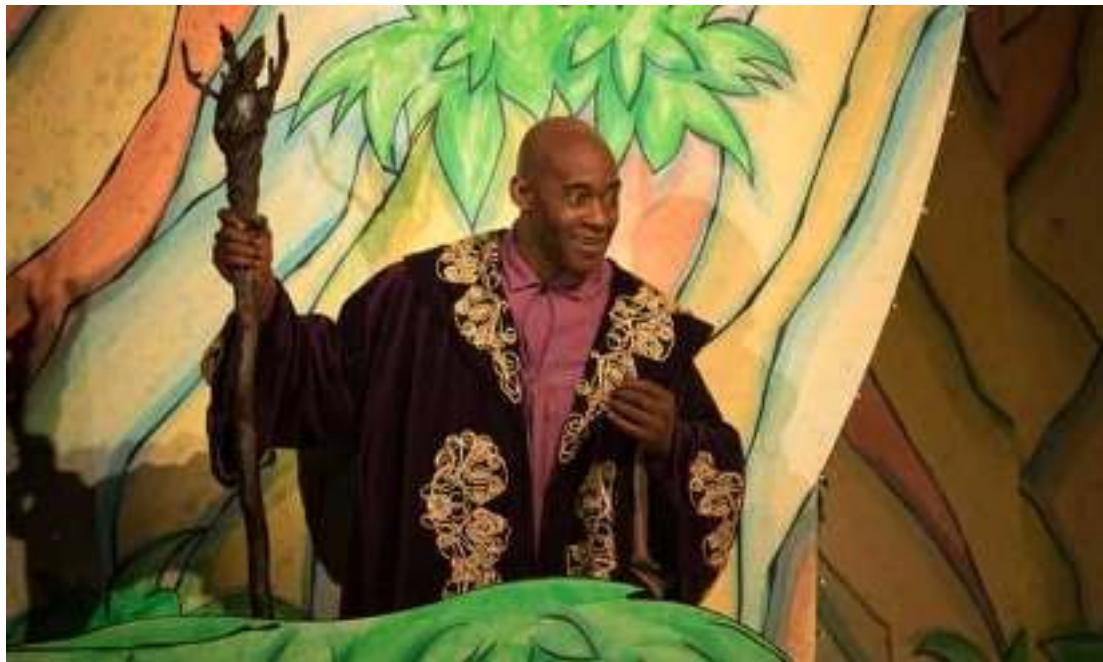
Day agrees: “As long as it’s authentic enough and they’re engaged enough, they’ll accept anything. They don’t see race or gender.”

Children will see through you. They’re like sniffer dogs for insincerity.

Steven Kynman

That’s another reason [As You Like It](#) – perhaps Shakespeare’s top cross-dressing comedy – is a good fit. For today’s children, thinks Terry, the play may actually “sit closer to what Shakespeare was exploring rather than what people have tried to squish it into. Kids are much more umbilically connected to their identity being multitudinous.”

While has three young children. “My experience is that it’s only as we grow older that we try and become animals of reason and rationale.” In the CBeebies version, Charles the wrestler is played by Joanna Adeyinka-Burford. The character was initially renamed “Charlie”, but that upset the scansion so they reverted to the original. “It’s very non-binary,” says While. The audience, she thinks, are unlikely to care – or notice.



Storming the stage ...Patrick Robinson as Prospero in *The Tempest*.
Photograph: Guy Levy/BBC

There are four performances and eight days of rehearsal: generous by CBeebies standards, but breakneck for the theatre. No scope for tender exploration of the themes – “subtlety isn’t our queen at the minute,” says CBeebies series producer Anna Perowne. A brief discussion of what pastoral meant for the cast majored on the fact most of them are vegan. But, happily for While, they were all unusually primed to “revert to the ability of their imagination as a child” – something which usually takes considerable coaxing.

“CBeebies is all about the audience,” says Keatley. “The prime objective is: what can we give to them? Are we giving the right messaging? Are they getting what they need? How can we do it in a way that’s inclusive?”

Such a specific demographic limits performers’ potential for self-indulgence. “You cannot fool children,” says Kynman. “They will see through you. They’re like sniffer dogs for insincerity. And that’s wonderful because it forces you to commit.”

He has adopted Fletcher’s watchwords: commitment, clarity and communication. “Be honest, be sincere. Don’t just smile and tell the kids

what you're meant to say while in the back of your mind you're thinking, 'Oh, I could really do with defrosting that Yorkshire pudding', because they spot it at 100 yards."

Kynman trained as an engineer before moving into conventional acting (RSC, Sunday in the Park with George at the Menier), puppeteering (Muppet Treasure Island, Star Wars: The Last Jedi) and audio work (he recently narrated Jamie Vardy's memoir). He used to be snooty about children's TV. "I was very naive and arrogant. But now I would crawl across broken glass to work on CBeebies. It's singlehandedly the most rewarding job I have ever done. You communicate with the child directly and there is nothing like it."

Yes, some people undervalue it, he says; mostly those in the industry who've never done it. Not parents, though: "If you tried to take away CBeebies, they'd riot on Downing Street."

They may yet need their placards. In May this year, it was [announced](#) both CBBC and BBC Four would be discontinued as broadcast services. The same fate may yet await their sister channel.

"I worry about it," says Terry. Its teachings have been as valuable as conventional education for her child: "The curation is so clever and smart and tuned-in." There's a clear equivalence with the organisation she runs – and it would be easy to detect a call-to-arms in Cockerill's added plot about saving the Globe from philistine capitalists.

After all, says Terry, Shakespeare founded the theatre with a public service remit. "It was the most amazing socio-economic model which said storytelling, cultural conversation, debate, nuance and multiple truths are a human right and should be for everybody. The idea of reducing that feels misguided and arrogant to me."



‘Beyond magic’ ... the CBeebies gang perform *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*. Photograph: Guy Levy/BBC

It’s easy to be evangelical about CBeebies once you’ve been a beneficiary of its output. As the outpouring of affection and admiration surrounding its [20th anniversary in February](#) demonstrated, its quality, ambition and agility far exceed what’s necessary – exemplified by projects such as the Shakespeare plays.

But it’s heartening that the people whose skills make it special seem, if anything, yet more invested. Kynman’s advocacy runs deep. Nobody does CBeebies for the cash, he says, welling up again. “It’s because we believe in trying to help children realise we can be better. Prejudice and sexism and hatred towards others are learned, and CBeebies is really, really good at going: kindness is your best weapon. And talking: don’t be afraid to open yourself up.”

He does so himself, unprompted. “I was heavily bullied at school,” he continues, “and learned to be funny to avoid that. My father, God rest him, was the kindest man I knew. I miss him every day. At his funeral, I said, ‘They say you shouldn’t meet your heroes, but I did. He was my dad.’”

He pauses. “I think this channel runs on kindness, and it means a lot to me. When I started working there, I went: ‘This, I get.’ And my dad was ever so proud.”

As You Like It with CBeebies is at [the Globe theatre, London](#), on 9 and 10 August. It will be broadcast next year.

CBeebies’ heavyweight recruits

Mark Rylance On [Bing](#), the new Globe’s first artistic director offers soothing counsel to an emotional young bunny. Rylance plays Flop, a knitted carer of uncertain species, physically dwarfed but never rattled by his demanding charge. Flop’s endless gentleness is inspirational.

Derek Jacobi Over 100 episodes of [In the Night Garden](#) were voiced by the actor, whose curiosity about whether the Tombliboos have brushed their teeth or how Makka Pakka will stack his stones appears indefatigable. His [rendition of Upsy-Daisy’s song](#) has incredible welly.

Cathy Tyson The former RSC star, who made her name in *Mona Lisa* and won a Bafta this year for her role in *Help*, puts in a wonderfully warm and humorous voice performance as the resourceful grandmother in [JoJo and Gran Gran](#).

Roger Allam The king of lugubriousness does lovely work as the narrator of [Sarah & Duck](#), a charmingly inventive series about a nine-year-old and her quacky pal. Listen out for cameos from Simon Callow, Andy Nyman and Fiona Shaw.

Kathy Burke Forget Nil By Mouth. Surely the defining role of Burke’s career is as Miss Grizzlesniff, long-suffering T-Rex teacher in [School of Roars](#) (catchphrase: “Oh my claws!”). Fellow staff are played by Andrew Scott and Sarah Lancashire.

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Dentists

‘Impossible to get an appointment’: Britons forced abroad to seek dental treatment

Four patients on why they went overseas for dental care due to costs and being unable to obtain treatment locally



The British Dental Association says funding cuts mean that NHS dentistry would require an additional £880m to return to 2010 levels. Photograph: Rui Vieira/PA

[Clea Skopeliti](#)

Tue 9 Aug 2022 04.59 EDT Last modified on Tue 9 Aug 2022 05.08 EDT

People in the UK are travelling abroad for dental care as treatment closer to home becomes increasingly inaccessible.

[Nine in 10 practices in England](#) are not offering NHS appointments to new adult patients amid chronic underfunding and the pandemic. Cuts to funding over the last decade mean that NHS dentistry would require an additional £880m to return to 2010 levels, according to the [British Dental Association](#).

Meanwhile, patients are also choosing to go abroad for dental work such as implants, which are not offered routinely on the NHS, and cost thousands of pounds done privately.

Here, four patients discuss travelling overseas for dental care due to costs and being unable to obtain treatment locally.

‘His whole face was swollen’



Adriana Clark. Photograph: Adriana Clark

Adriana Clark, 38, had dental work done in Egypt after being unable to get an appointment this year in Nottingham, either on the NHS or privately. Clark, who teaches at a university, recently got two fillings and a bridge fitted by a dentist in Ismailia while visiting her husband’s family. She had been trying to get an appointment for the fillings since January.

Meanwhile, her husband had been unable to access care for two months for a severe dental infection. “It’s been impossible to get an appointment,” she says. Clark describes a cycle of calling 111; being given the number of a practice; being told they weren’t accepting patients; and to call 111. Meanwhile, he was suffering. She said: “He had an infection so big that his eyes closed – his whole face was swollen.” He was eventually given an emergency extraction by a dentist they knew.

Clark paid £10 for two fillings at a dentist’s surgery in Ismailia; an eight-tooth bridge set her back £350. “Done privately in the UK, it would probably have cost £4,000-£5,000,” she says. “I don’t think I would go to the dentist [in the UK] unless I had to. [Dentists](#) are heavily understaffed – it’s the system, not down to individual clinics.”

‘It gets so bad that painkillers don’t help’

When 28-year-old Dessi began suffering from toothache two years ago, she rang up all the dentists in her London borough that said they worked with NHS patients. In what has become a familiar story to people across the country, none were accepting NHS patients. “It was just impossible. I still haven’t had the tooth fixed,” she says, adding that there’s “a big hole” in it and it will probably need to be extracted. “If food touches it, the pain gets so bad that painkillers don’t help.”

Private treatment is out of the question for the compliance professional, who says the bulk of her income goes on rent and bills. Dessi, who has lived in the UK for 10 years, has extended her trip this month to see family in Bulgaria in order to get treatment. She says she previously paid less than £50 for a check-up, X-ray and extraction in Bulgaria; she was quoted hundreds of pounds for the same work by a private dentist in the UK. “I spend half my time back home attending to my teeth,” she says. “I need to address it and it’s not going to happen here.”

‘I just wish I had done it sooner’



David Watkins. Photograph: David Watkins

Britons are also travelling abroad for treatments not routinely available on the NHS, such as dental implants. After David Watkins, a 54-year-old coach driver in Pontypridd, Wales, had his final two molars removed after a dental infection in 2021, his dentist advised him he would need dentures. “I freaked – I said, no, I’m not ready for dentures yet,” he says. He had a consultation with an implant specialist who quoted him £3,500 an implant. “There was no way I was going to do that.”

Watkins looked into his options for treatment abroad and settled on going to a clinic in Istanbul to get his teeth “all done, once and for all”. For two extractions, 10 dental implants, a bone graft and 28 crowns, as well as a seven-day stay in a hotel, Watkins paid about £7,000 – a fraction of the price he would have paid in the UK. He had the implants in May and will return in November for the crowns. He felt nervous before he went, but thought: “What have I got to lose? If I do nothing, I’ll get dentures.” He was impressed with the treatment. “My teeth have been the achilles heel of my life – I just wish I had it all done sooner,” he says.

‘Dentistry abroad is fine – as long as nothing goes wrong’

But treatment abroad carries significant risks, as Paul* learned when he had an implant fitted poorly in France. The self-employed 48-year-old had it done in July 2020 during a work trip, as he was unable to get an appointment in London amid Covid restrictions.

“Everything went well until about six months ago,” he says. “Then the implant started to smell. It turns out it didn’t quite fit and the gap was allowing fluid to collect which was causing a gum infection.” His dentist in the UK was unable to change the crown as the implant was manufactured by a French company that did not register with the Medicines and Healthcare products Regulatory Agency (MHRA) after Brexit.

“The problem is, they can’t even take it out, because then you have this hole in your bone,” he says. “So I’m in a worse position now than if I’d never had the implant done in the first place.” Paul says he’ll need at least two trips abroad to get the damage repaired. Getting dental work done overseas “is fine – as long as nothing goes wrong” he says.

**Name has been changed*

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2022.08.09 - Opinion

- Worried about bills this winter? In Truss's Titanic economics, only the rich will get a life raft
- I see you, single parents. I see your work, your pain – and your joy
- If the Murdoch press is so panicked about recession, why did it back austerity and Brexit?
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Worried about bills this winter? In Truss's Titanic economics, only the rich will get a life raft

[Frances Ryan](#)



With a national catastrophe looming, the Tory leadership candidates have adopted a muscular ‘anti-welfare’ stance



Liz Truss at Solihull Moors FC in the West Midlands on 6 August.
Photograph: Jacob King/PA

Tue 9 Aug 2022 03.00 EDT Last modified on Tue 9 Aug 2022 08.20 EDT

As millions of families get ready to choose between [starving and freezing](#), the biggest question in British politics right now is what government support is going to come in the next few months, and who exactly is going to get help. With Boris Johnson's "out of office" on, and the current chancellor [missing in action](#), it is left to the Tory leadership candidates to play at governing. On Sunday, the all but guaranteed victor, Liz Truss, [announced](#) she would "rush through" her £30bn worth of tax cuts six months earlier than planned, to "tackle the cost of living crisis".

It doesn't take an economist to realise that, far from "tackling the cost of living crisis", introducing tax cuts is a dire way to target support: it just adds more cash to upper middle-class families' pockets while the very poorest – many of whom pay little or no income tax – don't benefit. Just look at the details of Truss's £30bn cut: £19bn of it would go not to struggling families, but to businesses [skirting](#) corporation tax rises. Indeed, even Truss's plan to scrap the national insurance rise would benefit the wealthiest: 85% of the £8bn cost [would go](#) to the top half of earners. It is Titanic economics, where the country is sinking and only the rich get a life raft.

As inconvenient as it is for a party that has spent years running down the benefits system, common sense says one of the best ways to help people most vulnerable in a cost of living crisis is to bolster social security. After pressure from charities, ministers have pledged to increase benefits next April by this September's rate of inflation. But by then, prices will have rocketed again, and families will have been left to get through a cold winter alone. Analysis shows current government energy support schemes for low-income households will leave them up to £1,600 a year short. In light of this, the National Institute of Economic Research recommend urgently increasing universal credit by at least £25 a week for a minimum of six months from October – as well as increasing the energy grant to low-income families – as the most efficient form of state spending. If legacy benefits were also included in the rise, the move would simultaneously reach low earners, family carers and disabled people unable to work (who will disproportionately suffer with rising energy costs).

Against this clearcut case for strengthening the social security system, it is telling that the Tory leadership candidates have been busy discrediting “people on welfare”. When asked how she would help families struggling with rising bills, Truss framed her choice to cut taxes as being better than “giving out handouts”, as if state support was a gift from the benevolent rich rather than an entitlement funded by society. Her team later tried to backtrack, but the anti-welfare dog-whistle was loud enough for all to hear. At a recent hustings with Conservative party members, Sunak meanwhile pledged “to get much tougher on welfare” if he were to win, and said inflation was rising because there were “too many unemployed people”. Back in reality, UK unemployment is actually at its lowest level in 50 years, while about 40% of universal credit claimants are in work.

Those MPs eagerly pitching for a cabinet post in the new government have been just as willing to demonise the poorest for power. The former candidate Suella Braverman vowed to tackle the “stubborn” unemployed who “refuse” to get jobs, while Kemi Badenoch blamed “family break-ups” for housing demand (not the lack of social housing, naturally). A decade on, the Tories are back using George Osborne’s old “skiver v striver” playbook: the easiest way to get the public on side for failing to help people in poverty is to convince them that they don’t deserve it.

This would be grim at the best of times, but it is grotesque in the current climate. Benefit rates in the UK are at their lowest level in 50 years – at £77 a week, the basic rate for those over 25 is a meagre 13% of average pay. This follows a decade of benefit sanctions and freezes, which have left many families in a crisis of insecurity relating to debt and arrears, and worsening physical and mental health. Ahead of the winter, local councils are already planning “warm banks” – public spaces, like libraries, where impoverished people can go to avoid a freezing home. The idea that this impending socioeconomic emergency will be alleviated with tax cuts for the middle classes is as impractical as it is immoral.

The scale of the crisis ahead will not be solved by changes to the benefits system alone. The “energy furlough scheme” proposed by the Liberal Democrats on Monday, under which the government would fully absorb the cost of the £36bn price rise, is a rare example of politicians grasping the emergency that we face. Back in January, the Joseph Rowntree Foundation predicted single adult households in poverty would have to spend half their income on energy after the April price cap rise. With new projections suggesting the average annual household energy bill will reach £3,359 later this year, the Conservatives refusing to at the very least sufficiently increase people’s benefits starts to look less a matter of ideology than outright cruelty. A national catastrophe is coming, and the candidates to be Britain’s next prime minister are stuck peddling nasty divisions from the past. Life rafts may be on the way but, as it ever was, the poorest will be left to drown.

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

I see you, single parents. I see your work, your pain – and your joy

[Rhiannon Lucy Cosslett](#)



On top of the physical, emotional and financial pressures, single parents still face stigma and social exclusion, despite what they give their children



‘I have spoken to other adult children of single parents and they often reflect on the intimacy and closeness they feel their childhood has given them.’
Photograph: MBI/Alamy

Tue 9 Aug 2022 01.00 EDT Last modified on Tue 9 Aug 2022 08.47 EDT

Since having my son, I have thought often about single-parent families. “I don’t know how you cope” is a common refrain that you hear from coupled-up parents, but I’m not about to patronise any of you. You cope because you have to, because you love your child or children and they need you. I understand that. I saw my mother do it, and have single parents in my extended family and friendship groups.

What I’ve been trying to think about is more physical than that. You see, my back hurts. It hurts from lifting the baby, and from walking him up and down every night while singing him maudlin Irish folk songs and, I think, from the fact that as I’m sleeping I unconsciously twist my head towards him, so I can better hear his fluttering breaths. But when my back hurts too much, I pass the baby to my husband, and he starts walking him up and down, and I will go into another room, and sometimes pour a glass of wine.

It’s the absence of that small moment of respite that sticks with me. The grinding, physical toll of caring for a child alone, even when it hurts, even

when your bones seem to ache.

We don't give single parents much credit. In the UK, the government has actively [punished them](#), penalising them and their children financially in ways both craven and heartless. Reading accounts of how [single mothers are struggling](#) in the cost of living crisis brought me to tears last month. It seems to me painfully unfair that, as well as facing all the physical, emotional and financial pressures that come from looking after children alone, single mothers continue to be heavily stigmatised in ways that are both classist and misogynist, assumed to be "young, unemployed, feckless, uneducated, hyper-fertile" despite the data [showing otherwise](#).

Then there's the more subtle social exclusion, as couples tend to only socialise with their own. I think (hope?) that my generation is less prone to this particular form of tedious, insecure ostracism, as different lifestyles become more common and many more women especially are actively choosing single motherhood. But the notion of the nuclear family still holds an awful lot of sway.

Sophie Hewood [wrote beautifully](#), in this paper, about how it feels to live outside that narrative, how she replaced speaking with "the nod": "You will do The Nod when the nursery sends your kid home with a Happy Father's Day card that she's been made to copy her name on to. You will employ The Nod when other mums say they know exactly what it's like being a single parent because their lovely husband works abroad for up to two weeks at a time."

Hewood's memoir, *The Hungover Games*, is a tender and funny account of single parenthood (she calls smug coupled-up parents "the Hallouminati") in what is becoming a burgeoning genre that is long overdue its time in the sun. It follows Emily Morris's brilliant *My Shitty Twenties*, about the author's experience of an unplanned pregnancy at the age of 22. [Séamas O'Reilly](#)'s hilarious and heartbreaking *Did Ye Hear Mammy Died?* recounts the experience of being one of 11 siblings raised by a widowed single father.

In poetry, [Warsan Shire](#)'s work sheds light on the experience of both coparenting your siblings and raising yourself. Comedy, too, is beginning to reflect and satirise the realities of single parenting, with Katherine Ryan's

standup and series [The Duchess](#), and Diane Morgan's character in Motherland acting as important correctives; while [Anna Härmälä's cartoons](#) are enlightening and laugh-out-loud funny. But we still need more, and more diverse, depictions.

The relationship between a child and their single parent can be very special, and this is something we rarely see. I have spoken to other adult children of single parents and they often reflect on the intimacy and closeness they feel their childhood has given them. Seeing your parent as a flawed and sometimes vulnerable adult can be its own burden, as can the codependency of such a relationship. But at the same time it can give you a far more nuanced understanding of your parent and their inner emotional life. I have hardly seen this specialness depicted anywhere, I suppose because it kicks so hard against the dominant notion that a child is always better off with two parents at home, and that the children of single parents are deprived by default. To be raised by a lone parent can be a joy and a privilege.

It is true that half of single-parent families [live in relative poverty](#), and this year is going to see more and more single parents struggling to keep their children warm and fed. It is important to highlight that and push for better government support for single parents. But it is also crucial to say to single parents that we see them, we support them and we recognise the work they do every day.

What's working

My dad came to visit and gave me some crucial downtime by taking the boy out in his pram, or “walking the songlines” as he calls it, in tribute to Bruce Chatwin’s book on Indigenous Australian song and its connections to nomadic travel. He says that babies are most relaxed when in perpetual movement, and it does seem to be working. I must get out more.

What isn’t

Cars, however, don’t seem to have the same effect. We’ve spent yet another taxi ride with the boy screaming in his car seat, my nerves shot to shreds as we are deposited on the pavement, both of us in tears. I assumed that my customer rating would be through the floor by this point, but I’ve been touched and humbled by how kind cab drivers have been to me, and how

often they have said: “Don’t worry, I have children myself.” In these low moments, small kindnesses really help.

- Rhiannon Lucy Cosslett is a Guardian columnist and author
 - *Do you have an opinion on the issues raised in this article? If you would like to submit a letter of up to 300 words to be considered for publication, email it to us at guardian.letters@theguardian.com*
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[**Opinion**](#)[**Conservative leadership**](#)

If the Murdoch press is so panicked about recession, why did it back austerity and Brexit?

[**Polly Toynbee**](#)



As Liz Truss and Rishi Sunak slug it out for PM, rightwing papers are waking up to the looming economic catastrophe



Supporters of Liz Truss and Rishi Sunak at the Conservative party leadership election hustings in Eastbourne, 5 August 2022. Photograph: Andy Rain/EPA

Tue 9 Aug 2022 05.00 EDT Last modified on Tue 9 Aug 2022 10.12 EDT

The gloves are off and it's bare-knuckle, below-the-belt slugging. Good. High time they grappled with the terrifying enormity of the waves of destitution rolling over millions already neither heating nor eating, facing unpayable bills. Liz Truss stumbled badly by telling the Financial Times she would only help them "in a Conservative way" with tax cuts not "handouts", her gofers explaining she is "enabling people to keep more of the money that they earn". No use now saying she was "misrepresented" yet again: she's been panicked into promising her own emergency budget.

Rishi Sunak in the Sun makes lethal (and true) accusations that "Liz's plan" to deal with rising bills this winter is to "give a big bung to large businesses and the well-off". "Worse still," he writes, "she said she will not provide direct support payments to those who are feeling the pinch most." Scrapping the health and social care levy only gives the average worker £170 and someone on the living wage "less than £60", while "pensioners will not get a penny".

Trevor Kavanagh, old war horse of many Sun extreme conservative campaigns, now, improbably, canters over the horizon [to bat for the have-nots](#). He backs Gordon Brown's call for an immediate emergency budget this week, with no time to wait for this prolix leadership contest to end. Kavanagh is apocalyptic, warning of "the biggest crash since the Great Depression of 1929 ... a national economic emergency ... millions of hardworking families – including Sun readers – face hunger and destitution for the first time in living memory ... money men say the UK economy is heading for years of high unemployment and mass bankruptcies unless there is massive government intervention." He quotes a "seasoned economic analyst" as saying that "It will make the 2008 banking meltdown and the 1973 Oil Shock look like tea parties ... No government can let 10 to 12 million people go to the dogs." (Forget the Sun backed every wicked universal credit and disability benefit cut.)

Pause here to wonder at all who, like the Murdoch press, urged on politicians to bring the country to this plight, with the [slowest growth in GDP, steepest inflation](#) and worst prospects among similar countries – along with shrinking trade and the sinking pound. Traditionally they will blame all that on "global" and "Covid" causes, never on 12 crippling years of austerity or the hammer blows of their own Brexit.

But in this acid backbiting contest of pure personal ambition, the two candidates abandon concern for the political future of their party, gleefully pulling down the Tory temple and priming Labour's electoral cannons with arsenals of ammunition. Truss's crew fight back with a napalm shot of blame that will stick for years. They talk of the "Rishcession" and dub Sunak "the founding father of the recession". Sunak may not score best on personality, but he is winning the argument against tax cuts: a [Times poll](#) finds 64% of voters think inflation is the priority and only 17% choose tax cuts.

On this at least the contenders reach the meat of the matter. But as they scatter an average of [two or three pledges each a day](#) that they won't, can't or certainly shouldn't fulfil, they keep their eyes tight shut to the pile-up of emergencies sitting in No 10's neglected in-tray: the boiling climate, a nonexistent energy or water policy and public services collapsing inside every ministerial portfolio they will be handing out.

Extraordinarily, Steve Barclay, the new health secretary, himself [sounds a klaxon warning](#) that the NHS is in such deep emergency it can't wait for a new prime minister in post. He calls for more visas for foreign staff. One failing service knocks over another: the chief inspector of constabulary reports officers spending [a third of their time](#) on non-policing matters, neglecting crime, as police officers become the "first, last and only resort" to attend cardiac arrests.

Every department is in trouble, but health bites hardest with voters. The fastest easing of the blockage would be by fixing the great social care collapse: last week's [blistering report](#) from the levelling up, housing and communities select committee said there was "no roadmap, no timetable, no milestones, and no measures of success".

I have been talking to care homes closing down beds for lack of staff, while hospitals call them hourly begging them to take patients. The [flight of care staff](#) is accelerating, with 165,000 vacancies and 50,000 staff lost last year. Lynne Taylor of Happy Futures Support Specialists for people with learning disabilities in Devon is mothballing beds, as it's short of 24 staff. She's sending out someone dressed as Superman handing out recruitment leaflets saying "carers are superheroes". She spent £3,500 advertising and got just one part-timer who won't do evenings or weekends. When a group of Scarborough homes held a recruiting open day last week no one came. Why earn £10.10 an hour when there are jobs cleaning holiday caravans for £15 an hour? Recruiting from abroad is no answer: they have to earn £20,480, it's expensive for small homes to import and train people and often doesn't work out, they say.

Here we go: the real world is finally colliding with this government. Wherever you look, in every threadbare service, there is no leeway, no resilience, no slack as the tidal wave of recession rolls in to expose all the damage done by years of austerity and low pay. Now that ministers themselves, these architects of decline, are pressing the panic button, their time is up. There is no plan and no roadmap for anything.

- Polly Toynbee is a Guardian columnist
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Thanks to my feminist principles I kept my name after I married – until I met my mortgage advisor

[Zoe Williams](#)



A paperwork blunder means I have changed my name. Some prices are too high to pay



What's in a name? A mistake on the original mortgage paperwork would have been expensive to fix. Photograph: skyneshher/Getty Images

Tue 9 Aug 2022 02.00 EDT Last modified on Tue 9 Aug 2022 09.56 EDT

The worst imaginable time to have to renew your mortgage would be now, but the second worst time was last week, when interest rates had already risen, but not all the way to here – and everyone knew they were shortly to go up again. Of course that's when I did it, and it's already pretty punishing. Right when everything was signed and sealed, I had a call from the mortgage adviser, wanting to know if, when I said I had never changed my name after getting married, I really meant that.

Well, yes: we had a whole big thing. I was prepared for my partner to change his name to mine, but, unfortunately, he has a real name of his own, and the first part is William. I was prepared to hyphenate, so he would be William Higham-Williams, which I thought sounded incredibly cool, like Ford Madox Ford. But for some reason he didn't go for that either, so I exercised my ancient feminist right to carry on with my original, unoriginal surname.

“Right, so the thing is,” said the mortgage adviser (who, by the way, is brilliant, and this mistake has its roots in my own sloppy paperwork of the

past), “I’ve got you down as Zoe Higham. I could change it, but I’d have to resubmit the application and then you’d be on the new rate.”

I started to ask what he meant because that’s my answer to everything – start talking. But I knew exactly what he meant: I could either change my name or spend a lot more money, every month, for a really long time, on my principles.

I don’t have to change my name at work, apparently, and it doesn’t matter what is on my passport. So I don’t have to change it at the bank, either, and I don’t even have to tell anyone I have a new name; this could just stay a secret between me, the mortgage guy and the lender. But I think I am hereafter kicked out of feminism, which feels like a wrench, after the more important rifts we’ve got through in the past. Also, the kids already had their father’s surname and so now, sadly, the only true Williams left in the house is the dog.

Zoe Williams is a Guardian columnist

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

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[Taiwan](#)

China used drills to prepare for invasion, Taiwan foreign minister says

Tensions high as Taiwan begins live-fire drills and China continues military exercises it started after US speaker Nancy Pelosi visited Taipei last week

China using military drills to prepare an invasion, says Taiwan's foreign minister – video

*Helen Davidson in Taipei
@heldavidson*

Tue 9 Aug 2022 08.26 EDTFirst published on Tue 9 Aug 2022 02.02 EDT

China used its military drills last week to prepare for an invasion of [Taiwan](#), and its anger over US speaker Nancy Pelosi's visit was just an excuse, Taiwan's foreign minister has said.

The minister, Joseph Wu, addressed the media on Tuesday morning, as China's People's Liberation Army (PLA) [continued with military exercises](#) it began last week, and Taiwan started its own live-fire drills. Wu accused China of "gross violations of international law".

"China has used the drills in its military playbook to prepare for the invasion of Taiwan," he said. "It is conducting large-scale military exercises and missile launches, as well as cyber-attacks, disinformation, and economic coercion, in an attempt to weaken public morale in Taiwan."

He said the PLA activities would have taken far longer to prepare than the timeframe of it being a direct response to Pelosi's visit.

Wu said [China's tactics](#), including the firing of ballistic missiles, were "clearly trying to deter other countries from interfering in its attempt to

invade Taiwan”, and also showed that it had much broader geostrategic intentions.

“China’s real intention is to alter the status quo in the Taiwan strait and the entire region.”

Beijing has declared ownership of the Taiwan strait, one of the world’s busiest shipping routes, and aims to influence the international community’s freedom of travel, by controlling the stretch of water and linking the Yellow Sea to the South China Sea, he said.

In the past week the PLA has conducted more than 100 sea and air crossings of the median line, an unofficial border between China and Taiwan which until recently both sides had largely respected.

On Tuesday Wu said China has taken “specific action to break the longstanding tacit agreement of the median line”, and would probably now try to “routinise its actions”.

“Its intentions are not likely to end there,” he said, noting the security agreement with Solomon Islands, and China’s influence across the Pacific, south-east Asia, Africa and Latin America.



Taiwanese soldiers fire artillery during a live-fire drill in Pingtung
Photograph: Ritchie B Tongo/EPA

Last week government websites, convenience stores, and train station signs were targeted by cyber-attacks. Wu said the varying attacks were traced to China and Russia, across several days. Overseas cyberattacks were continuing and Taiwan's authorities remained on "high alert", Wu said, but Taiwan would not be cowed.

"China's continued attempt to intimidate Taiwan will not panic us, nor will they defeat us. The values of freedom and democracy cannot be taken away."

Taiwan began its own live-fire military drills on Tuesday, in Pingtung county in the south of the main island. The exercises are designed to simulate defensive operations against an attack on the island. A Taiwan military spokesperson told AFP the drills were previously scheduled. Taiwan holds annual military drills, traditionally around this time of year. The week before Pelosi's visit, major cities conducted air raid drills for all citizens, and ran large scale military exercises on land and at sea.

Pelosi defended her trip on Tuesday as "absolutely" worth it. "We cannot allow the Chinese government to isolate Taiwan," she told the US broadcaster NBC. "They're not going to say who can go to Taiwan."

On Tuesday Reuters reported Chinese Navy vessels continued to run missions off Taiwan's east coast. Median line crossings by PLA warplanes also continued overnight.

The PLA's Eastern Theatre Command said on Monday it would continue its drills, focusing on anti-submarine and sea assault operations. In contrast to last week, no "notices to airmen" (Notams) have been issued for the new drills, which would warn sea and air traffic where to avoid.

In a press conference on Monday, China's ministry of foreign affairs spokesperson, Wang Wenbin, did not answer whether there would be any information given to civilian shipping and air traffic.

“China’s normal military exercises are open, transparent and professional,” Wang said. “Relevant authorities have issued notices in a timely manner. They are consistent with domestic and international laws, as well as established international practices. This serves as a message of warning to the provocateurs and is also a legitimate move to safeguard our sovereignty and territorial integrity.”

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US returns to Cambodia dozens of antiquities looted from historic sites

Some of the artefacts, which range from the bronze age to the 12th century, were stolen from ancient Khmer capital Koh Ker

'The souls of our culture': US returns looted antiquities to Cambodia – video

Guardian staff and agencies

Mon 8 Aug 2022 22.42 EDT Last modified on Wed 10 Aug 2022 00.17 EDT

The United States will return to [Cambodia](#) 30 looted antiquities, including bronze and stone statues of Buddhist and Hindu deities carved more than 1,000 years ago, US officials have said.

The south-east Asian country's archaeological sites – including Koh Ker, a capital of the ancient Khmer empire – suffered widespread looting in civil conflicts between the 1960s and 1990s.

Cambodia's government has since sought to repatriate stolen antiquities sold on the international market.

Damian Williams, the top federal prosecutor in Manhattan, said the items being returned were sold to western buyers by Douglas Latchford, a Bangkok dealer who [created fake documents to conceal that the items had been looted and smuggled.](#)

Williams said the antiquities, including a 10th-century sandstone statue depicting the Hindu god of war Skanda riding on a peacock and a sculpture of Ganesha, were voluntarily relinquished by US museums and private collectors after his office filed civil forfeiture claims. Both sculptures were looted from Koh Ker, the US attorney's office southern district of New York said.



The antiquities, including a 10th-century sandstone statue depicting the Hindu god of war Skanda riding on a peacock, will return to Cambodia.
Photograph: Seth Wenig/AP

The antiquities repatriated to Cambodia are sandstone and bronze sculptures and artefacts, ranging in age from the bronze age to the 12th century, which were either removed illegally from Cambodia by looters, imported into the US based on false statements to United States Customs and Border Protection, or both.

“These statues and artefacts … are of extraordinary cultural value to the Cambodian people,” Williams said at a ceremony in Manhattan on Monday announcing the return of the antiquities.

Ricky J Patel, acting special agent in charge of homeland security investigations in New York, praised the sculptures for their “extraordinary beauty and craftsmanship”.

“These antiquities we return today were ripped from their country … many are sacred artefacts pried from temples and palaces to be smuggled across borders and peddled by those seeking profit, without any regard to the intangible value they have to the people of their homeland,” he added in a [statement](#).

The antiquities will be displayed at the National Museum of Cambodia in Phnom Penh, Cambodia's US ambassador Keo Chhea told Reuters at the ceremony.

"It's like a returning of the souls of our culture back to our people," Chhea added. "We're very grateful."



Ricky J Patel, acting special agent in charge of homeland security investigations in New York, praised the sculptures for their 'extraordinary beauty and craftsmanship'. Photograph: Andrew Kelly/Reuters

In 2014, federal prosecutors returned the Duryodhana, a looted 10th-century sandstone sculpture, to Cambodia after settling with auction house Sotheby's, which had acquired it.

Last year, the Manhattan district attorney's office returned 27 looted antiquities to Cambodia.

Chhea praised the cooperation between the US and Cambodia to enable the return of the antiquities, but he also said they were battling a "global problem" that continues.

He added that "we need to commit and to continue our fight" to prevent further looting and stop the plundering of precious works of art by tools used

by looters, which sometimes results in pieces of sculptures being chopped off.

Reuters and Associated Press contributed to this report

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Anne Heche

Anne Heche is in a coma and has not regained consciousness since car crash

A representative for the actor has described her as being in an ‘extreme critical condition’ following the incident on Friday



Anne Heche, 53, is best known for her roles in films such as Psycho, Donnie Brasco and Cedar Rapids. Photograph: Michael Bezjian/Getty Images for Mammoth Media Institute

[Catherine Shoard](#)
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Tue 9 Aug 2022 05.25 EDT Last modified on Tue 9 Aug 2022 11.51 EDT

Anne Heche has not regained consciousness since shortly after she crashed her car in Los Angeles on Friday.

Initial reports about the actor’s condition said she was “stable” and firefighters said she had spoken to rescuers as she was pulled from the

wreckage.

However, on Monday a spokesperson for Heche, 53, said: “Despite previous reports that Heche was stable, shortly after the accident, [she] became unconscious, slipping into a coma and is in critical condition.”

Heche’s representatives added: “At this time Anne is in extreme critical condition. She has a significant pulmonary injury requiring mechanical ventilation and burns that require surgical intervention.

On Saturday Heche’s publicist had said that her condition was “stable” and her family asked for “thoughts and prayers”. The previous morning, reports suggested Heche had been driving at speed down a street before crashing into a house.

This caused what the Los Angeles Fire Department described as a “heavy fire”, which took a number of firefighters an hour to extinguish.

The occupant of the house escaped without injury but the building was deemed uninhabitable. A [fundraising page](#) has been set up to help the owner replace her belongings and home.

The nextdoor neighbours told Fox News that the car had ploughed right through the house. “The windows were broken, so I opened the back door of the car. She [Heche] answered and said she was not OK, so that was tough. I know they didn’t get her out of the car until the fire was pretty much put out.”

Heche, who has two sons, is best known for her roles in films such as Psycho, Donnie Brasco, Six Days Seven Nights and Cedar Rapids.

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/film/2022/aug/09/anne-heche-is-in-a-coma-and-has-not-regained-consciousness-since-car-crash>

[Taylor Swift](#)

Taylor Swift files in Shake It Off copyright lawsuit: ‘The lyrics were written entirely by me’

Singer had been sued by writers of 3LW’s 2000 song Playas Gon’ Play for alleged plagiarism, and the case is due to return to court



‘I wanted to provide a comedic, empowering approach to helping people feel better about negative criticism’ ... Taylor Swift pictured in 2014.
Photograph: Lucas Jackson/Reuters

[Laura Snakes](#)

Tue 9 Aug 2022 15.36 EDTFirst published on Tue 9 Aug 2022 05.19 EDT

[Taylor Swift](#) has defended herself as the sole writer of her 2014 hit Shake It Off in response to [a lawsuit claiming that she plagiarised lyrics](#) from the 2000 song Playas Gon’ Play by girl group 3LW.

“The lyrics to Shake It Off were written entirely by me,” Swift stated in a sworn declaration filed on Monday. “Until learning about Plaintiffs’ claim in 2017, I had never heard the song Playas Gon’ Play and had never heard of that song or the group 3LW.”

Playas Gon’ Play songwriters Sean Hall and Nathan Butler filed the copyright suit in 2017, citing similarities between the lines “playas gonna play” and “haters gonna hate”.

It was dismissed in 2018, with a judge commenting that the lyrics were “too banal” to be copied, but [resurrected by an appeal panel in 2021.](#)

In December, a judge refused Swift’s request to dismiss the case, citing “enough objective similarities” between the two songs for a jury to settle the matter.

“Our clients are finally moving closer to the justice they so richly deserve,” their lawyer Marina Bogorad said at the time. “The opinion … is especially gratifying to them because it reinforces the idea that their creativity and unique expression cannot be misappropriated without any retribution.”

In writing the lyrics, Swift stated in her motion, she drew partly on “experiences in my life and, in particular, unrelenting public scrutiny of my personal life, ‘clickbait’ reporting, public manipulation, and other forms of negative personal criticism which I learned I just needed to shake off and focus on my music.”

Having started out as a country artist, Swift had become a mainstream pop star after the release of her 2012 album, Red, which brought with it intensive tabloid speculation about her personal and romantic life.

Swift continued: “With Shake It Off, I wanted to provide a comedic, empowering approach to helping people feel better about negative criticism through music, dance, and the personal independence enabling one to just shake off the negative criticism.”

The lyrics also drew from what she called “commonly used phrases and comments heard” throughout her life, including “players gonna play” and

“haters gonna hate”, her awareness of which stemmed back to her school days.

She denied the possibility of having heard the 3LW song, which reached No 81 on the US Billboard charts, in any form of media or social setting. She stated that her parents did not allow her to watch MTV’s Total Request Live until she was “about 13 years old”: the 3LW hit first appeared on an album in 2000, when Swift was 10.

Her mother, Andrea Swift, also filed a statement saying that she “carefully monitored both the television [Swift] watched and the music she heard” as well as the shared home computer. “Taylor did not attend sleepovers at friends’ houses as a young girl because we lived on a farm until she was 10 years old and I always preferred having friends come over to our home.”

In the new motion, Swift’s lawyer, Peter Anderson, wrote: “It is, unfortunately, not unusual for a hit song to be met by litigants hoping for a windfall based on tenuous claims that their own song was copied. But even against that background, Plaintiffs’ claim sticks out as particularly baseless.”

Following publication, Hall and Butler said in a statement: “This is defendants’ fourth attempt to make these claims go away, so defendants’ labelling them as baseless rings hollow at this point.

“The law does not believe in pure coincidences, especially where, as here, the two works are so strikingly similar that Ms Taylor’s denial of access makes no difference to the outcome.

“Plaintiffs are confident that there are abundant factual issues for their claims to reach the jury, as it is not up to the court to weigh in on credibility issues or crown the winner in the battle of the experts.”

This article was amended on 9 August 2022. Swift was aged 10, not 11, when 3LW’s hit appeared on their 2000 self-titled album.

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[South Korea](#)

South Korea: at least eight killed as record rain falls on capital Seoul

Six people remain missing amid fears of further damage with torrential rain forecast in some parts of the country on Wednesday

Floods submerge parts of South Korean capital – video

[Justin McCurry](#) in Tokyo with agencies

Tue 9 Aug 2022 08.56 EDTFirst published on Tue 9 Aug 2022 00.07 EDT

At least eight people have died in [South Korea](#) after record overnight rainfall hammered the capital Seoul, turning streets into rivers, submerging vehicles and inundating metro stations.

Rainfall of more than 100mm an hour was recorded in Seoul, surrounding areas of Gyeonggi province and the port city of Incheon on Monday night, according to the Yonhap news agency. Per-hour precipitation in the Dongjak district surpassed 141.5mm at one point, the heaviest hourly downpour in Seoul for 80 years.

Commuters slowly returned to work on Tuesday after cleanup crews worked through the night, but there were concerns about further damage as torrential rain was forecast for the second day in a row.

The Korea meteorological administration issued heavy rain warnings across the capital and the metropolitan area of 26 million, as well parts of Gangwon and Chungcheong province. It said it expected heavy rainfall in the central region of the country to continue until at least Wednesday.

Officials said six people were missing as of Tuesday afternoon, as images shared on social media showed people [wading through waist-deep water](#),

metro stations overflowing, and cars half-submerged in the upmarket Gangnam district.

"I was near Gangnam station last night when the rainfall intensified, with thunder and lightning striking every 30 seconds," said Lee Dongha, an office worker. "All of a sudden, buses, subway stations and streets were submerged, and that's when I quickly decided to book accommodation as I didn't want to be left with nowhere to go."



A shop owner at a traditional market damaged after torrential rain in Seoul.
Photograph: Kim Hong-Ji/Reuters

According to local reports, three people, including a 13-year-old, in the Gwanak district of southern Seoul died after their semi-basement *banjiha* flat – similar to the one that featured in the Oscar-winning movie Parasite – was [inundated by floodwater](#).

Another woman drowned at her home in the nearby Dongjak district. A public sector worker died while clearing up fallen tires, apparently after he stepped into water that had been electrified by damaged power lines, according to the interior ministry.

Three people were found dead in the debris of a collapsed bus station and a landslide in the nearby city of Gwangju.

The country's president, Yoon Suk-yeol, ordered the evacuation of residents from high-risk areas and encouraged businesses to adjust their employees' commuting times.

"Nothing is more precious than life and safety," Yoon wrote on his Facebook page. "The government will thoroughly manage the heavy rain situation."



More heavy rain is forecast for parts South Korea on Wednesday.
Photograph: Kim Hong-Ji/Reuters

While most of the Seoul metropolitan area's subway services had resumed normal operations on Tuesday, about 80 roads and dozens of riverside parking lots remained closed due to safety concerns.

South Korea is no stranger to heavy rainfall in the summer, but a meteorological administration official said the [climate emergency](#) had caused a sharp increase in precipitation and frequent torrential rains.

"This phenomenon is occurring more often due to climate change, which has resulted in a prolonged summer," the official said on condition of anonymity.

Rainstorms also pounded North Korea, where authorities issued heavy rain warnings for the southern and western parts of the country. The official

Rodong Sinmun newspaper described the rain as potentially “disastrous” and called for measures to protect farmland and prevent flooding on the Taedong river, which flows through the capital Pyongyang.

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/aug/09/south-korea-flood-2022-weather-record-rain-seoul>

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Headlines thursday 11 august 2022

- Extreme weather Firefighters ‘completely unprepared’ for high fire risk in UK, warns union
- Live Tory leadership: Sunak frustrated government attempts to realise benefits of Brexit, Truss allies claim
- Gordon Brown Former PM says energy firms unable to offer lower bills should be temporarily re-nationalised
- Cost of living crisis England NHS trusts offer hardship grants to staff

Climate crisis

UK weather: drought expected to be declared in parts of England on Friday

Drought group preparing to meet as Met Office issues highest fire risk warning for much of England



National Drought Group is expected to declare an official drought for some parts of England. Photograph: Andy Rain/EPA

[Matthew Weaver](#)

Thu 11 Aug 2022 09.59 EDTFirst published on Thu 11 Aug 2022 04.31 EDT

An official drought could be declared for parts of [England](#) on Friday as rising temperatures and tinderbox conditions prompted the Met Office to issue its highest warning under its fire severity index.

The National Drought Group – made up of civil servants, the [Environment Agency](#), water companies and other groups including the National Farmers'

Union – is due to meet on Friday to discuss the longest dry spell since 1976.

The group is expected to declare an official drought for some parts of England such as southern and eastern areas. This will prompt more hosepipe bans and further measures by water companies to manage resources to protect supplies and the environment.

The trade body representing water companies said a decision on the declaration of an official drought was imminent.



Satellite image from the Met Office showing the vast areas in the UK that have been affected by the prolonged dry conditions. Photograph: Met Office/Crown Copyright/PA

Stuart Colville, the director of policy at [Water UK](#), said it was looking “increasingly inevitable” that an official drought would be declared. Speaking to BBC Breakfast, he added this would be the “right decision given some of the pressure on the environment that we’re seeing at the moment”.

Several water companies have imposed [hosepipe bans or are preparing to do so](#), and have been criticised for the failure to prevent leaks. Colville said

companies were in a “constant battle” to stop water leakage but that the industry was doing “everything possible”.

He said: “Although we are currently seeing the lowest level of leakage on record, it is a constant battle because, particularly in hot, dry conditions, what happens is the soil dries out, cracks, and it moves, and that puts additional pressure on the pipes, and that can cause additional bursts.”

Southern Water has implemented a hosepipe ban for customers in Hampshire and the Isle of Wight, and Thames Water, which supplies 15 million customers in London and the Thames Valley, has said it will bring in one in the coming weeks.

It comes as temperatures are set to climb to 34C on Thursday and up to a peak of 36C over the weekend in the areas covered by an amber warning for extreme heat issued by the Met Office for much of England and Wales.

The Met Office’s fire severity index – which gives an assessment of how severe a fire could become if one were to start – is very high for most of England and Wales, and will reach “exceptional”, the highest level, for a swathe of England stretching to the border with Wales at the weekend.

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The Fire Brigades Union has warned that the UK is “completely unprepared” for the fire risk posed by the latest soaring temperatures.

During last month’s record-breaking heatwave, scores of homes were destroyed as dozens of blazes broke out.

Riccardo la Torre, national officer for the Fire Brigades Union, has warned that cuts to services across the UK have left fire service unable to deal with a repeat of those scenes. Speaking to Sky News, he said: “These are brutal, brutal fires to fight. The temperature that they burn at, the speed at which they spread at. The reality is we’ve been left completely unprepared to do that as a fire and rescue service.

“We’ve had over a fifth of the workforce cut since 2010, that’s over 11,500 firefighters cut. Yet we’re asking them to deal with these extreme weather events in increasing regularity and increasing severity.”

La Torre warned the lack of preparation threatened the lives of fire officers. “The professionals on the ground have been warning that these conditions are coming and we very much saw the reality of that in these last few weeks.

“Firefighters have been injured, firefighters have ended up in hospital, we’ve seen families lose their homes, we’ve seen businesses lost, infrastructure burn to the ground, because we simply can’t get to these fires quick enough. When we do, we simply don’t have the resources to deal with them adequately.”

Mark Hardingham, the chair of the National Fire Chiefs Council, said the fire service was “well prepared” to respond to a high volume of calls. But in an interview for the Daily Telegraph, he warned that the prolonged dry and hot spell created an “unprecedented” risk of fires.

He said: “I can’t remember a summer like this and I’ve been in the fire service 32 years.”

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2022/aug/11/firefighters-completely-unprepared-for-high-fire-risk-in-uk-warns-union>

[Skip to key events](#)

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

Rishi Sunak and Liz Truss compete for Tory members' support in Cheltenham leadership hustings – as it happened

The two candidates are bidding for support from Conservative party members ahead of the final vote for the next PM

Updated 2d ago

[Nadeem Badshah](#) (now); [Tobi Thomas](#) and [Andrew Sparrow](#) (earlier)

Thu 11 Aug 2022 16.36 EDTFirst published on Thu 11 Aug 2022 04.23 EDT

Key events

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[Sunak frustrated government attempts to realise benefits of Brexit, Truss allies claim](#)

Liz Truss and Rishi Sunak go head-to-head at Conservative leadership hustings – watch live

[Nadeem Badshah](#) (now); [Tobi Thomas](#) and [Andrew Sparrow](#) (earlier)

Thu 11 Aug 2022 16.36 EDTFirst published on Thu 11 Aug 2022 04.23 EDT

Show key events only

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Live feed

From 3d ago

[13.45](#)

Latest Conservative hustings at 7pm

Rishi Sunak and Liz Truss will go head-to-head in Cheltenham in around 15 minutes, you can follow all of the action here.

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Updated at 14.00 EDT

Key events

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[Ryanair boss blames Brexit for airport chaos and calls for return of free movement with EU](#)
- [3d ago](#)
[Sunak frustrated government attempts to realise benefits of Brexit, Truss allies claim](#)

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[2d ago](#)[16.20](#)

A summary of today's developments

- In the latest hustings in Cheltenham, Liz Truss has warned the UK is in “real danger” of “talking ourselves into a recession” as she defended her plans to cut taxes. But Rishi Sunak criticised Truss’s approach as he said that he is not willing to “pursue policies that risk making inflation far worse and last far longer”.
- Truss again criticised the media, two days after apologising for criticising the media during the last hustings. The foreign secretary also pledged to “reform the BBC licence fee and I certainly think it is completely wrong that so many women are in jail for non-payment of it”.
- Asked why he believed Tory MP Chris Skidmore had defected from his campaign to Truss’s, Sunak pointed out he “led in every single round” of the parliamentary stage of the contest. The former chancellor said: “We are only half way through this thing. I am going to fight until the last day with everything I have got because I am fighting for what I believe in.”

- Rishi Sunak frustrated government attempts to realise benefits of Brexit, Liz Truss allies claim.
- Number of patients waiting more than 12 hours in A&E in England was up 33% in July from the previous month. A record 29,317 people had to wait more than 12 hours in A&E departments in England in July from a decision to admit to actually being admitted.
- Hospital waiting lists in England reach a record high of 6.7 million. The number of people in England waiting to start routine hospital treatment has risen above previous records.
- Wes Streeting accuses Tory leadership contenders of ignoring “biggest crisis in NHS’s history”. Streeting, the shadow health secretary, accused Truss and Sunak of ignoring what he called “the biggest crisis in the NHS’s history”. He posted this in response to the latest performance figures from NHS England.
- Energy bosses start talks with Nadhim Zahawi and Kwasi Kwarteng. The bosses of some of the UK’s biggest energy companies have started a meeting with the chancellor and the business secretary, who are expected to pressure them to invest in green energy rather than payouts for shareholders.
- Gordon Brown’s call for nationalisation as a possible solution to energy bills crisis receives mixed reception. The former Labour prime minister has used an article in today’s Guardian to propose that the government should halt the increases in the energy price cap planned for later this year and next year and, if necessary, take energy companies into public ownership to ensure that they keep prices down.
- Suella Braverman got £10,000 from climate sceptic for Tory leadership campaign, while Tom Tugendhat raised £120,000, first donation records show.
- Boris Johnson tells energy bosses it will be up to his successor to decide any new announcements on energy bills. Downing Street has released its readout of what happened at the meeting with energy

company bosses this morning. Boris Johnson joined the meeting, which was originally just meant to be hosted by Zahawi and Kwarteng.

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Updated at 16.36 EDT

[2d ago](#)[16.14](#)

And that brings the hustings in Cheltenham to an end.

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[2d ago](#)[16.14](#)

Scrapping the independence of the Bank of England would be “a massive mistake”, according to Sunak.

He said: “I’m very nervous about things I hear elsewhere; about people who seem to think that from Liz’s camp and her that we should scrap Bank of England independence.

“I think that would be a massive mistake for our country and international investors would not look very highly on it at all.”

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Updated at 16.15 EDT

[2d ago](#)[16.09](#)

Sunak was told that as someone who went to a private school he had been afforded opportunities that many people would never have access to.

The former chancellor replied: “Yes I have and ... I am not going to apologise for what my parents did for me, you must be joking.”

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Updated at 16.16 EDT

[2d ago](#)**16.03**

Earlier, Truss criticised the media, two days after apologising for criticising the media during the last hustings.

She said: “Today we’re sponsored by the Telegraph, and I would love the media to spend more time talking about trade deals.”

Following an interjection by the paper’s Camilla Tominey reminding her “you have written for us about trade deals”, the foreign secretary said: “I have written for you on trade deals.

“But the point is that trade deals open the doors for business, but then we need to help businesses actually get their product into market.

“We set up the exports support service to help do that, but I would love to see the press write about that rather than about political rows.”

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[2d ago](#)**16.00**

Asked if he had spoken to Boris Johnson since he quit as chancellor, Sunak said: “I have messaged and called but unsurprisingly he hasn’t returned my calls.”

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[2d ago](#)[15.56](#)

Asked how he would help families dealing with rising energy bills, Sunak cited his proposed cut to VAT on energy bills .

He said he would also bring forward help for the most vulnerable and pensioners.

Asked what specifically he could do for those groups, Sunak said he would provide “direct financial support to those groups of people”.

He warned that Liz Truss’s plan of favouring tax cuts instead of direct support could “leave millions of incredibly vulnerable people at the risk of real destitution”.

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[2d ago](#)[15.49](#)

Now it is Sunak’s turn for some questions.

Asked why he believed Tory MP Chris Skidmore had defected from his campaign to Truss’s, Sunak pointed out he “led in every single round” of the parliamentary stage of the contest.

The former chancellor said: “We are only half way through this thing. I am going to fight until the last day with everything I have got because I am fighting for what I believe in.”

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Updated at 15.54 EDT

[2d ago](#)[15.42](#)

Truss, who says she will not have an election before 2024, has dismissed suggestions she might be modelling herself on Margaret Thatcher, insisting: “I am my own person.”

“Don’t get me wrong, I’m a massive fan of Mrs Thatcher, but we live in different times.”

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[2d ago](#)[15.36](#)

Answering questions from the public, Truss said “I absolutely don’t support” a windfall tax on oil and gas firms.

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Updated at 15.41 EDT

[2d ago](#)[15.31](#)

Truss was asked what she would consider success to be after her first 90 days in Downing Street if she wins.

She said she would want to show that the UK is “moving in the right direction” and that pressures on household finances are “being reduced”.

The foreign secretary said she would also want to see evidence of growing investment in the UK and to “get a grip” of [NHS](#) waiting lists.

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[2d ago](#)[15.22](#)

Will she scrap the BBC licence fee, Truss replied: “I will reform the BBC licence fee and I certainly think it is completely wrong that so many women are in jail for non-payment of it.”

Truss also vowed to keep the net zero pledge.

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Updated at 15.41 EDT

[2d ago 15.21](#)

Truss was asked a series of yes/no questions.

On cutting foreign aid, she said: “I will keep it as it is.”

Leave the ECHR: “If we need to, but I’d rather legislate through the British Bill of Rights.”

Will she sack 91,000 civil servants: “I will certainly reduce the size of the civil service over time.”

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[2d ago 15.20](#)

Truss was asked if she is the sort of politician who changes her position to suit her ambitions having been a Lib Dem and also supported Remain before becoming a Brexiteer.

Truss replies she was “pretty equivocal at the time” on Brexit in the run up to the 2016 referendum and she “wasn’t sure”.

She said she was “concerned about potential disruption” of leaving the EU.

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[2d ago](#)**15.18**

Truss insists she is “low tax, pro growth, pro opportunity” and she wants to ensure the UK is open for business.

Asked if she is therefore “low tax and high borrowing” to pay for it, she said: “My tax cuts... will cost £30 billion. That is affordable within our current budget... I am afraid to say the plans of raising taxes are likely to lead to a recession...”

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Updated at 15.21 EDT

[2d ago](#)**15.16**

Truss said there is a “real danger of us talking ourselves into a recession”.

Asked if he she is for or against “handouts” to help with energy bills, she said “my first preference is always to reduce taxes” but stressed she cannot write or announce the contents of a budget now.

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Updated at 15.41 EDT

[2d ago](#)**15.15**

We now move onto the questions.

Truss is asked how she would lower people’s energy bills.

She said her starting point would be helping people through tax cuts and that we “shouldn’t be taking money off people in taxes and then giving it back as

benefits”.

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[3d ago 15.05](#)

On tackling inflation, Sunak said: “We have seen this story before. Inflation is the enemy that makes everyone poorer.”

On Liz Truss’s tax cutting pledges and plan for the economy, the former chancellor said: “What I will not do is pursue policies that risk making inflation far worse and last far longer...”

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[3d ago 15.01](#)

Sunak said his three main goals as Tory leader would be to “restore trust”, “rebuild the economy” and “reunite our country”.

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Gordon Brown

Gordon Brown says energy firms unable to offer lower bills should be temporarily re-nationalised

Former PM calls for energy price cap to be scrapped and new lower prices renegotiated by government



Gordon Brown warns time for action on cost of living hardships is slipping away, saying crises ‘don’t take holidays’. Photograph: Simon Dawson/Reuters

[Jessica Elgot](#), [Peter Walker](#) and [Ben Quinn](#)

Wed 10 Aug 2022 16.01 EDTFirst published on Wed 10 Aug 2022 15.21 EDT

Energy companies that cannot offer lower bills should be temporarily brought into public ownership, Gordon Brown has said, in a stark challenge

to political leaders on the day Liz Truss signalled a [climtdown](#) on help for households.

Writing for the Guardian, [Brown called for the energy price cap to be cancelled](#) and for the government to negotiate new lower prices with the companies, comparing the situation to the 2009 banking crisis where some banks were temporarily nationalised to protect consumers.

He warned the time for action was slipping away and major decisions had to be made within days. “Time and tide wait for no one. Neither do crises. They don’t take holidays, and don’t politely hang fire – certainly not to suit the convenience of a departing PM and the whims of two potential successors.”

The intervention of the former prime minister and chancellor came as Truss said she had never ruled out giving direct help with energy bills. She would not make further commitments until her proposed September budget, though hinted she would be prepared to look at cutting VAT on bills.

Her leadership rival, [Rishi Sunak](#), said the change showed Truss had made “a serious moral and political misjudgment on a policy affecting millions of people”.

Writing on the day after annual bills were [forecast to top £4,200](#) by January, Brown said the government should “pause any further increase in the cap” and then negotiate separate company agreements to keep prices down after examining profit margins and available social tariffs.

He said that the government should consider bringing into public ownership companies who could not meet that requirement, comparing it to what his government did “as a last resort” in 2009 with banks.

He said before taking that step, the government should offer guaranteed loans and equity financing but “if this fails, then, as a last resort, operate their essential services from the public sector until the crisis is over”.

Brown wrote: “Families of 2022 are about to suffer more than in 2008-09 and only bold and decisive action starting this week will rescue people from

hardship and reunite our fractured country.”

The fleshed-out plan goes far further than Labour has gone on how to tackle the autumn crisis – though the party is said to be working on a new policy offer.

Brown said there were urgent decisions that could not wait until the end of the Tory leadership race. Those include:

- Cancelling the energy cap before the official announcement on 26 August
- Agreeing October payments for vulnerable households
- Finding urgent new supplies of gas and storage
- Voluntary energy cuts like Germany’s to prevent blackouts

He said spending should be paid in new “watertight windfall tax” on oil and gas and a new tax on the high levels of city bonuses which he said were pushing up wage inflation. Those measures could raise £15bn, he said, enough to give nearly 8 million low income families just under £2,000 each.

The business secretary, Kwasi Kwarteng, will meet energy providers on Wednesday, amid divisions over the future of a windfall tax which Sunak has hinted could be extended.

Labour also gave its first hint of how it would frame its offer on the cost of living, after attracting some external criticism for being slow to produce an alternative plan for the winter crisis while Keir Starmer is on leave. Rachel Reeves said Kwarteng should close loopholes in the [energy profits levy](#) where investment allowances give firms back more than 90% back in tax relief.

Brown’s intervention came as the war of words escalated between Truss and Sunak over the energy crisis. In a softening of her stance, Truss said she would do “all that I can to help struggling households” – a move which

Sunak's campaign claimed was a U-turn from her previous comments about preferring tax cuts to "[handouts](#)".

Truss has taken a firm stance against further windfall taxes but gave the first hint of a U-turn on direct grants early on Wednesday, insisting "that's not what I said" when asked if she was ruling out any form of grant. "I'm not going to announce the contents of a budget in the future at this stage," she said.

Later, her campaign released details of how plans already announced by Truss would help families – including cancelling the national insurance rise and a one-year moratorium on the green energy levy. A campaign source said Truss had "been consistently clear" she would look at what more she could do.

But the figures in Truss' release highlight how her offer is likely to be dwarfed by the scale of the rises. The suspended levy would save families £153 a year on average on their energy bills and the national insurance cut would save someone on the typical median full-time pay £240 a year. Households will also get £400 under existing schemes.

On GB News, Truss was confronted by a social housing manager who said he was looking for a second job to pay his own family's bills. Challenged to get rid of VAT on gas and electricity, she said that all issues should be under consideration in an emergency budget.

The chief secretary to the Treasury, Simon Clarke, a vocal backer of Truss, said that work was already under way on cost of living support. He tweeted: "Of course, the government is working up a package of cost of living support that the next prime minister can consider when they take office."

The new language from Truss brought a scathing response from Sunak's campaign who compared it to a previous U-turn.

"It's all very well offering empty words about 'doing all you can'. But there aren't lots of different ways to act on this," Sunak's spokesperson said. "Taking action means providing direct support, which Truss had previously dismissed as 'handouts'.

“Twice now, Truss has made a serious moral and political misjudgment on a policy affecting millions of people, after last week reversing plans to cut the pay of teachers and the armed forces outside London. Mistakes like this in government would cost the Conservative party the next general election.”

Sunak has committed to increasing a £15bn support package he drew up earlier this year, though has said further help should be targeted at the most vulnerable.

A Truss campaign spokesperson highlighted Sunak’s record of raising taxes. “Rishi Sunak wouldn’t know how people benefit from a tax cut because he has never cut a tax in his life. People didn’t vote for the Conservative party to be subjected to old fashioned [Gordon Brown](#) style politics of envy.”

In an interview broadcast on BBC One on Wednesday evening, Sunak again hit out at Truss, criticising what he called policy based on “starry-eyed boosterism”. He said: “I’m prepared to lose this contest if it means that I’ve been true to my values and I’m fighting for the things that I think are right for this country. I’d rather lose on those terms, than win by promising false things that I can’t deliver.”

The host, Nick Robinson, said Truss had also been invited to appear for a similar interview but had thus far declined.

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NHS

NHS trusts in England offer staff hardship grants amid cost of living crisis

Hospitals say grants, food banks and travel subsidies are ‘sad indictment of the challenges we face’ but a ‘moral responsibility’



Staff at Leeds teaching hospitals trust can apply for a £500 hardship grant from its employee support fund. Photograph: Oli Scarff/AFP/Getty Images

[Denis Campbell](#) Health policy editor

Thu 11 Aug 2022 01.00 EDT

NHS trusts are giving their staff hardship grants, low-cost meals and money to buy their children’s school uniforms to help them cope with the deepening cost of living crisis.

Others have set up food banks, are subsidising public transport fares and advising hard-up frontline personnel how to access supermarket vouchers to help feed their families.

The initiatives are part of what Clare Teeney, the chief people officer at the acute hospitals trust in Leicester, said was the NHS's "moral responsibility" to assist a workforce whose real-terms earnings had declined as a result of years of pay freezes and below-inflation salary rises.

For example, Derbyshire community health services trust has set up a service where if staff are in urgent need of money they can apply for a fast-track grant of up to £500 from its charitable funds. Some have begun applying and the trust expected numbers to increase in the autumn as the energy price cap is raised, forcing households to pay more for their gas and electricity.

"Cost of living hardship can hit anyone and we have been clear that nobody should feel stigma about coming forward for help," said Darren Tidmarsh, the trust's deputy chief executive.

"We've set out to provide practical help to people and to be upfront in saying: we know it is a very uncertain time for everyone." It is also providing £100 salary advances so staff can buy fuel, and free car parking in its car parks and has increased its mileage allowance for those working in the community, all as ways of putting more money in their workforce's pockets.

Staff at Leeds teaching hospitals trust can apply for a £500 hardship grant from its Covid-instigated "employee support fund" and can do so more than once, depending on their circumstances.

Teeney said: "As NHS leaders I think we have a moral responsibility to support our colleagues through this challenging period." Her trust has set up a staff food bank at each of its three hospitals – Leicester Royal Infirmary, Glenfield and Leicester General – and is helping workers buy uniforms and equipment to help them prepare for the new school year.

It has also cut the cost of food in its canteens and allowed staff's children to eat there for £1 each, lets staff travel free on hospital buses and arranged discounts on other services.

Overall, 29% of the Leicester trust's staff earn a low wage. They are on NHS Agenda for Change pay bands one to three, which means they earn an annual salary of at most £23,177.

Trusts have begun putting in place a range of support to help staff negotiate soaring inflation amid reports that doctors and nurses have been "selling" their days off – forgoing leave to work extra shifts – and seeking emergency advances on their salary to generate cash to help pay their bills.

Derbyshire, United Hospitals of North Midlands and the Rotherham, Doncaster and South Humber trusts are among those that are allowing workers to receive an advance on their salary.

Staff of the Yorkshire trust can buy cheap frozen meals and fresh food at its cafe in Doncaster. Chicken curry, bean lasagne and Lancashire hotpot are among the frozen dishes available at £2 for a small, £4.50 for a medium and £5.50 for a large portion.

Barking, Havering and Redbridge (BHR) trust in London has set up a cost of living project team to devise ideas to relieve the financial burden on staff. It is giving out school uniform vouchers worth up to £30 a child and hosts uniform "swap shops" at its hospitals, starting on Thursday, in which staff can take home what clothing they need without having to bring any themselves.

BHR and Leeds are among many trusts that are putting on regular financial advice clinics for staff, sometimes in conjunction with Citizens Advice or money-saving experts.

Cambridge University hospitals, which runs the city's Addenbrooke's hospital, is spending £2m to help subsidise public transport for staff coming to and from work. In addition, lower-paid personnel – those earning up to £45,000 – can apply for a small loan.

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“Like many people, NHS staff, including nurses, paramedics and healthcare assistants, are struggling with soaring bills and rising prices. Trust leaders know staff finances will only get worse in the coming months with energy costs and inflation expected to rocket further,” said Saffron Cordery, the interim chief executive of the hospitals group NHS Providers.

“Trust leaders have stepped in to support their staff during the biggest financial squeeze in decades. We’re seeing trusts roll out initiatives ranging from formal hardship funds and supermarket vouchers, to school uniform banks and salary advance schemes to help their staff make ends meet. But there is a limit to what any individual trust can do.”

The NHS in [England](#) is facing a potential series of strikes this winter by unions, which have dismissed the government’s recent offer of an average £1,400-a-year pay rise. The Royal College of Nursing and Unite this week initiated moves to ballot their members.

Cordery added: “The fact that this is happening at all is a sad indictment of the challenges we face. We know pay is a key factor in recruiting and retaining staff in the NHS and yet this year’s pay rise fell short of addressing the cost of living crisis we’re facing.”

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‘I’m just trying to make the world a little brighter’: how the culture wars hijacked Drag Queen Story Hour



Sab Samuel AKA Aida H Dee meets his audience at a reading. Photograph: Drag Queen Story Hour UK

Show featuring drag queens reading to young children have proven increasingly popular - but they are also attracting angry protests. How have we reached a place where these joyful events are seen as a threat to infants?



[Tim Jonze](#)

[@timjonze](#)

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In February 2020, I took my three-year-old daughter to a local pub for an event that sounded intriguing. It was called [Drag](#) Queen Story Hour. I thought it may be right up her street – glitter, stories, wigs – and offer her the chance to learn something about difference and respect along the way. I also liked the idea of doing something different, although the main appeal was free child entertainment and the fact that my partner and I could have a roast and a pint of Guinness while we watched.

As predicted, the kids in attendance went absolutely wild: screaming and dancing during the interactive bits, rushing to get their pictures taken afterwards with Aida H Dee, a fabulous character whom my daughter insisted was a “dragon queen”. Two years on, she still does a good impression of the funny voices Aida H Dee would adopt for the characters.

I might not have thought of that day again, but Drag Queen Story Hour has recently been hauled into a culture war. This summer, groups including the far-right and conspiracy theorists calling themselves “sovereign citizens” have been holding up signs saying “Welcome groomers” and “Nonce upon a time” outside libraries in places from Bexleyheath to Reading when Drag Queen Story Hour events were due to take place. Parents entering the libraries had questions shouted at them about why they were taking their children to see a paedophile. Videos of the protests in Reading were posted online and looked terrifying. It was a scene you might expect to see in the US, where homophobic Christian groups have long maligned large parts of the LGBTQ+ movement and their allies as “groomers”. But in *Reading*?

Then I realised the drag queen at the centre of it all was Aida H Dee, the same performer who had entranced my daughter two years earlier. How could such a joyful event be causing such controversy?

When I first make contact with Sab Samuel, the 27-year-old who performs as Aida H Dee, he sounds flustered. “The main thing you need to know is I am safe and the events are still going ahead,” he says, hurriedly. It turns out he has just escaped another protest, this time in Bristol, where protesters met counterprotests from antifascist and gay rights groups. He was whisked off to safety.

When we speak again, he is in a car returning from a successful event – and feeling great. “People think I must be stressed, but I’m actually totally fine,” he says over a video call. However, he worries about protesters trying to film the children at Drag Queen Story Hour shows: one snuck into an event to try to livestream it. But, in general, the groups are easy to keep at bay with a few well-timed misdirections, he says. “Often, they’re protesting outside the wrong buildings, celebrating that they’ve cancelled events that are actually happening elsewhere. We prepare ourselves for degree-level protesters, but they rock up as year 7s,” he says, with perfect drag-queen sass.

I got a message from one parent saying their kid asked: Why are these angry people shouting at us?

Aida H Dee



Chapter and verse ... Sab Samuel AKA Aida H Dee gives a reading for children. Photograph: Drag Queen Story Hour UK

Still, this is not exactly what Samuel signed up for when, in 2017, he became the first drag artist in the UK to read stories to children in libraries. (Drag Queen Story Hour was established in San Francisco in 2015.) It is not what the parents signed up for, either. “It must be daunting,” he says. “I got a message from one, saying their kid asked: ‘Why are these angry people shouting at us?’”

So, why carry on? As a child, Samuel struggled with autism and ADHD (hence his drag name) and found sitting crossed-legged in silence for story time boring. “Pantomime was the best thing *ever*, because it was colourful and I got to shout. So, I love being able to join those two together.” He also wants to teach children who might be gay that they can love themselves. “It’s something I didn’t get to do until I was much older, because of the world we live in.”

Samuel describes himself as a victim of section 28. “The teachers saw a camp boy, but couldn’t help me. I feel robbed of a childhood, in some way.” A pivotal moment came at 13, when he was cast as an evil villainess in a school play. He got a standing ovation, but, more importantly, was praised by a boy who had bullied him. It made him realise that not only could he

inspire people like him, but he could also change the attitudes of those who were not.

Now, all he wants to do is continue reading his stories to children in peace. “I didn’t choose to be an activist,” he says. Why, after years of drag culture becoming increasingly mainstream, is this happening now? Samuel believes it is a knock-on effect of the normalisation of anti-LGBTQ+ attitudes in the wider world: the high-profile [anti-drag protests by Proud Boys](#) in the US; [the exclusion of transgender people](#) from the UK’s ban on “conversion therapy”; [the ban on trans female athletes](#) competing in certain events. “All these things validate these people, and the people in power should know better,” he says.

Drag is more diverse than the stereotype suggests, with non-binary performers showing how diverse gender can be

Leila Rupp



Supporters of Drag Queen Story Hour stand side by side with protesters in Brighton. Photograph: Martin Pope/Getty Images

The protesters who turn up seem to skew towards the conspiracist right. Piers Corbyn was present at an event in Brighton, chanting: “Your parents were straight,” standing next to a placard that read “End the corruption of

childhood innocence". But others have joined this moral panic. On Mumsnet, there are multiple threads calling for the end of Drag Queen Story Hour. The story has hit a nerve with some – but by no means all – gender-critical feminists, who believe some trans-rights issues are incompatible with women's rights and have incorporated an anti-drag stance under that umbrella.

"Drag at its core is misogynistic," wrote the pseudonymous Dr Em in the Critic magazine earlier this year. "It is men portraying women as sexually objectified caricatures. Drag performers frequently reduce women to hyper sexualised, big breasted, big haired bimbos." The former Olympic swimmer [Sharron Davies took it further in 2019](#) when she tweeted: "Am I the only person fed up of drag shows? A parody of what a real woman is, like black face."

But others dispute the idea. "That criticism is not new and relies on the idea of men dressed as women mimicking and exaggerating femininity," says Leila Rupp, a professor of feminist studies at the University of California, Santa Barbara. "But drag is far more diverse and complicated than that stereotype suggests, with non-binary and gender-fluid performers showing how diverse gender can be. Surely the lesson that people can express femininity or masculinity or anything in between is an important lesson for all children."

The blackface comparison seems particularly wrongheaded. "It is completely unacceptable to compare drag with blackface," says Nishant Upadhyay, an assistant professor of ethnic studies at the University of Colorado Boulder. "Drag is an exploration of gender, while blackface is rooted in violent histories of anti-blackness. White and many non-black folks have used blackface to stereotype, ridicule and ostracise black communities, historically as well as currently. It is an assertion of racial power over black folks, whereas drag is a challenge to patriarchy. The comparison is ahistorical."

Of course, drag has long played a role in British society, from Shakespeare's time, when women were banned from the stage and men wore female costumes to play their parts, through to the pantomime dame. It has also

helped gay men – in particular, gay men of colour – find a place for themselves in societies that reject homosexuality.

Politically speaking, drag queens and kings have been at the forefront of the LGBTQ+ movement for some time; [Marsha P Johnson](#) was one of the prominent figures during the 1969 Stonewall riots in New York City. Drag has long had a presence in mainstream UK pop culture, from Les Dawson to Lily Savage. It is not just about fabulous queens competing on [RuPaul's Drag Race](#); even Mr Tumble performs in drag on CBeebies. So, how have we reached a place where a man in a dress is automatically deemed to be a threat to children?

For six years, without incident, Matthew Cavan has been reading stories to children in Belfast as the drag queen Cherri Ontop. Then, last week, protesters appeared at his show. The morning I speak to him, he says he has just learned that a “paedophile hunter” group has been given his details and is on the lookout for him. “I’ve found this week incredibly difficult,” he says. “There’s been a lot of hatred and it’s really got to me. It’s heartbreakingly that someone can take a gorgeous and special thing like this and tarnish it.”

His voice is full of emotion when we speak. “These are events for wee tiny kids. They shouldn’t have to hear fascists screaming: ‘Stop sexualising our kids’ ... They don’t hear that inside.” Cavan says the protesters in Northern Ireland are largely people who “wrap themselves up in Christianity”, but are ultimately recycling homophobic tropes from previous eras: “‘Why would a gay man want to be around children?’ That kind of thing.”

Cavan was diagnosed with HIV when he was 21 and says the outlet of performing as Cherri Ontop saved his life. Now, though, some people are using his HIV status to scaremonger. “They’re claiming that children will be smitten with a disgusting disease if they’re in the same room as me,” he says. “It’s 80s shit.”

I am with these children for an hour: I’m not going to try to tackle gender-identity issues

Cherri Ontop



Turn the page ... Cherri Ontop at a storytelling session for children at the MAC in Belfast. Photograph: Chris Wilson/The MAC

Cavan is dyslexic and has always struggled to read. “But I would go to a library and a woman in a patchwork coat would read stories to me, so I know how important that is. She was lovely and felt like a nanny, but if I’d seen a *drag queen* come in ...”

The misinformation surrounding Drag Queen Story Hour gets Cavan down. “I have these children for an hour: I’m not going to try to tackle gender identity issues. My aim is just to give them little bits of information to try to make their world a bit brighter. I tell them that, growing up, I was considered very different, but now I get to wear what I want – and look at how fabulous I am! I let them know that being different is really cool, and so is being normal ... and we can live in society together.”

This week, he will be dressing as Pinocchio and reading stories in a shopping centre, wearing makeup and wood-effect leggings: “Nobody will protest against that. But put a dress on my body and it turns it into something seedy and sexual?”

When I supported Drag Queen Story Hour on social media, I got a hostile reception from some women who claimed their opposition was about

safeguarding. But Cavan says he is given a safety check for every job and is never left alone with the children: “They’re always with their grownup. It all needs to be above board, because we are dealing with little people. There are drag queens out there who have turned out to be absolute creeps. So I understand why people would be somewhat on the backfoot. But are they happy enough to send their kids to Sunday school? Do they vet every parent in a soft-play area? It’s so easy to dress homophobia and transphobia up as concern for children.”

Samuel says that he pays for a full DBS (Disclosure and Barring Service) check for any drag queens who want to perform under the Drag Queen Story Hour name. He also makes sure they are well prepared for awkward situations that might arise. “Basic stuff like: never to respond to a young fan on social media, or what to do if they pose certain questions,” he says. “Often, we’re asked if we are a boy or a girl. Rather than get into that, I say: ‘I am whatever you want me to be.’ That means I’ve been called a robot, a fairy and a caterpillar.”

The furore doesn’t look like it will die down any time soon. Last month, the Labour MP Stella Creasy tweeted about taking her infant son to [an event hosted by the drag queen Greta Tude](#), and faced a barrage of criticism online for doing so (as well as much support). Reading borough council was happy to defend its events, with a statement that noted: “We are pleased to say those who attended the performances have given positive feedback, saying that the content is both entertaining and age-appropriate.” But only this week, Rochdale borough council pulled its three planned Drag Queen Story Hour events for safety reasons relating to protests.

Yet Samuel and Cavan say they have a renewed sense of purpose and are determined to carry on reading to children. So far, the publicity has only made the events more popular.

“If anything, the negatives are just stoking the fire of: ‘Fuck you, I am going to do this bigger and better and prouder than I was before,’” says Cavan. “I’m now in a place I wasn’t expecting. It’s not just a lovely wee event any more, it’s become more political; so I will be in it for the long haul, to make this place a better place for everyone.”

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

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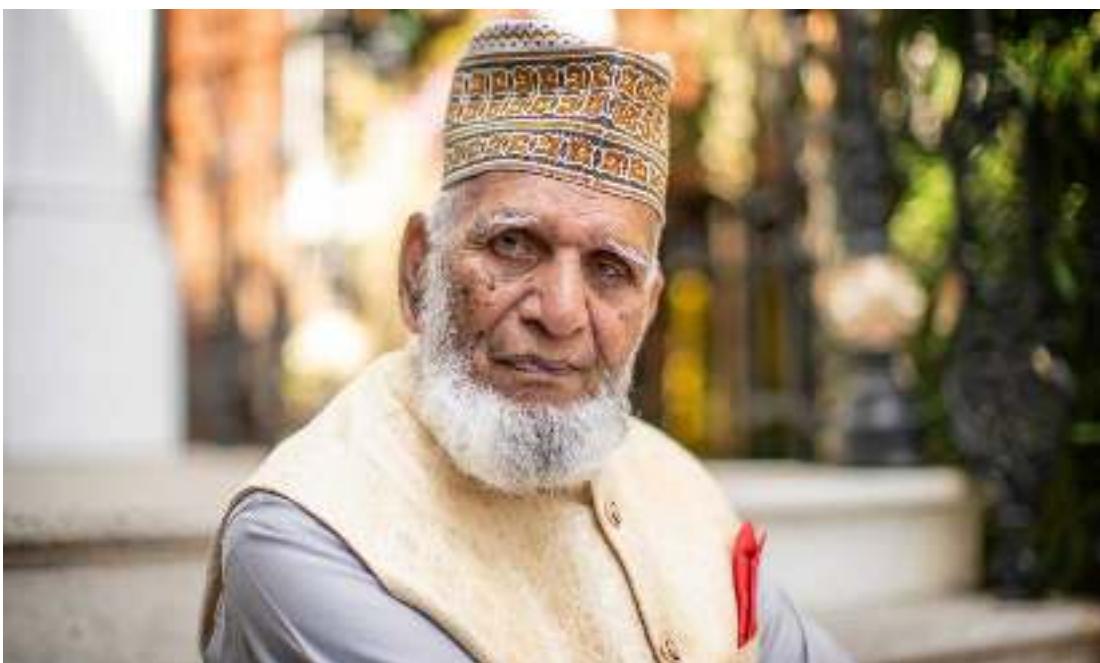
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‘A Sikh soldier pulled me out of the rubble’: survivors recall India’s violent partition – and reflect on its legacy



‘It was heartbreakng to watch our Hindu brothers and sisters leave their home town’ ... Dabirul Choudhury. Photograph: Anna Gordon/The Guardian

Seventy-five years ago, India was carved up in a matter of months and the new states of East and West Pakistan were formed by lines drawn on a map by a man who had never visited the country. Here, three people who witnessed the huge upheaval and terrible sectarian violence tell their stories

Aina J Khan and Thaslima Begum

Thu 11 Aug 2022 05.00 EDT Last modified on Fri 12 Aug 2022 14.10 EDT

The story of India's bloody partition in [August 1947](#), that led to the deaths of at least [1 million](#) Indians and the displacement of [around 15 million](#), is a very British one. In what was to become the British Raj's swan song after two centuries of colonial rule, Cyril Radcliffe, a British judge who had never visited colonial India before, was appointed in July 1947 to carve through the ancient land within weeks. The borders for two independent states were drawn on religious lines: Hindu-majority India, and Muslim-majority West Pakistan and East Pakistan (now Bangladesh).

In just a few months, thousands of years of cultural exchange and co-existence between India's Hindu, Muslim and Sikh communities, nightmarishly unravelled into panic, then terror, with millions rushing for the hastily established new borders as violence erupted.

Seventy-five years after partition, the generation who lived through it are dying out. In Britain today, [almost half](#) of Black, Asian and Ethnic Minority (BAME) communities are from Pakistani, Bangladeshi and Indian backgrounds, but few speak about the horrors they witnessed. Here, three of them do.

'My mother was beheaded in front of me': a survivor recalls India's violent partition

Zareena Parveen

Zareena Parveen was born in 1935 into a Muslim family in the Indian city of Patiala, Punjab. When the 87-year-old remembers growing up in the "princely state" – the largest Sikh state in India – she thinks of small trinkets

of gold her grandfather was given by the Sikh maharajah, Bhupinder Singh. He worked as a guard for the prince, who once [commissioned Cartier](#) to craft one of the most expensive pieces of jewellery ever made: the diamond Patiala necklace.

Muslims made up about [a third](#) of the state before it was folded into India. “Before partition, our Sikh and Hindu neighbours were more like brothers and sisters,” Parveen says. “My best memories are travelling with my grandfather all over India and visiting its many hill stations,” she adds, describing journeys to Kalka, Nainital and Shimla, which were built at higher altitudes by the British Raj to escape the blistering Indian summer.

By the 1940s, anti-colonial revolts had swept across India and defiant calls for Indian independence had reached a deafening roar. About 40km east of Patiala, Parveen recalls travelling to the city of Ambala, a hotspot for independence rallies. There, she saw two titanic politicians speak: Muhammad Ali Jinnah, the leader of the Muslim League, who was pushing for a Muslim nation-state as a sanctuary for India’s religious minority; and Mahatma Gandhi, of the Hindu-dominated Congress party, who wanted a unified India.

“Quaid-i-Azam [Jinnah’s title of ‘great leader’] said: ‘We can eat frugally, we can eat just lentils and roti, but at least we will have [Pakistan](#),’” Parveen says. “Gandhi said: ‘Muslims, Sikhs, Hindus, Christians: we must stay together under one India, because we are all brothers.’”

As Indian independence and partition became a possibility, whispers that mobs might attack Muslim families in an undivided India crept into Patiala. Parveen and her family, along with about 200 relatives, fled to a large building inside the city, hoping they would find safety in numbers.

Then, one day in June 1947, the full horror of partition rained down on the 12-year-old Parveen. A mob of Hindu and Sikh men began targeting Muslim-owned properties in the city. When they arrived at the building Parveen’s family were sheltering in, they poured petrol over its walls, and set it alight, before bursting in her home. They surrounded her mother, Sharifa, hit her on the head with swords and sticks, and killed her.



Families fleeing in the wake of partition, November 1947. Photograph: Margaret Bourke-White/The LIFE Picture Collection/Shutterstock

“My mother was slaughtered in front of my eyes,” Parveen says, her voice quivering. She lay trapped beneath her corpse, while her five older siblings, aunts and uncles, were murdered. With fire rippling up the walls, other relatives were stuck inside when the roof collapsed. “I was trapped under those bodies for three days,” Parveen says. “There was a little airway in the rubble where I could breathe.”

Parveen’s family were among some of the [14,000 Indian Muslims](#) who were killed in the state of Patiala. As reports of the massacre reached the Indian army, Gurkha soldiers arrived, sifting through the charred, mutilated bodies for survivors. “A Sikh soldier pulled me out of the rubble, and gave me food from his tiffin,” Parveen says. “He was wearing a dark blue and green uniform.” She can’t remember his name, but all these decades later, she says: “I still pray for him.”

He got Parveen transported to Bahadurgarh fort on the outskirts of Patiala, where [tens of thousands of Muslim refugees](#) were sheltering under [Indian military guard](#). There, she stumbled across her mother’s sister, who was still alive. Around a month later, they were transported to a second refugee camp in the state of [Malerkotla](#), west of Patiala, where they spent the next six

months, edging at a snail's pace towards the border of a nascent Pakistan in a military vehicle, with little to no food.

"We forgot what chapati was," Parveen says. "For six or seven months, we had dirty water. We had dry corn to eat, nothing else." Finally, in January 1948, she and her aunt crossed the border at Wagah into Pakistan in an army vehicle. "When the people in the truck realised they had reached the border, some of them prostrated themselves, then died. They were starving," she says. As Parveen made her way to the now Pakistani city of Lahore inside an Indian military vehicle, she describes watching a line of refugees stretching for miles, and women who were snatched and raped by Hindu and Sikh rioters, as well as uniformed Indian soldiers.

Partition map

Parveen eventually settled in Lahore, and married a Pakistani journalist. Her mother-in-law, a headteacher, took Parveen under her wing, teaching her Urdu, basic Swahili and some European history. "God took away my mother and father, but then gave me my mother-in-law," she says.

Now, Parveen is a great-grandmother to third-generation British-Pakistani children. Looking back, who does she think was to blame for one of the bloodiest periods in modern history? "The British Raj caused this bloodshed," she says firmly, blaming the British for pitting communities against each other. "The British government cut us first, and then they put a Band-Aid on," she adds, referring to the hurried withdrawal and carving up of India. "There should be an apology."

Parveen never found out what happened to her father and paternal grandfather, who were working in the neighbouring city of Saharanpur when the massacre happened. It appears that Parveen, the youngest child in her family, is the sole survivor. She sits in her passageway surrounded by the green vines of a pothos, a resilient plant that can survive without direct sunlight. The darkness of being trapped under rubble and the corpses of her family in 1947, haunts her still. "I feel that loss from my life every day," she says, and still has nightmares about what she witnessed in 1947. "I've seen so much in my life," she adds, smiling at her great-granddaughter, Amal,

who watches on quietly. “But I am grateful, because I carry the legacy of my ancestors.”



‘There was a bloodbath at every stop’ ... Nilima Lamba. Photograph: Alicia Canter/The Guardian

Nilima Lamba

When sectarian violence broke out in 1947, 18-year-old Nilima Lamba had just finished her studies at Kinnaird college in Lahore, and was staying in nearby dorms. Now 93, Lamba, who was from an affluent Sikh family in Rawalpindi, a bustling town in the Punjab province of Pakistan, had heard about the horror of Thohā Khalsa months earlier. Sikh women had been forced to convert to Islam, but many chose to kill themselves instead, in a mass drowning in a well. When their bodies were found, they had risen to the surface; pale, ghost-like figures floating beneath the murky water.

It is estimated that between [75,000](#) and 100,000 women from both sides were abducted and raped during partition, resulting in premeditated suicide and so-called honour killings by male family members. Terrified by the increasing violence and targeting of women, Lamba knew she had to get out. “All of a sudden, everything had changed,” she recalls from her home in

Northwood, Middlesex. “I was just a schoolgirl in a place I considered my home, but it was no longer safe.”



Lamba with her husband Jagjit, on their wedding day in Lucknow, India, 1952. Photograph: Alicia Canter/The Guardian

Her father was friends with a chief engineer at the railway station, whose son Jagjit Singh was also studying in Lahore at the time. After speaking on the phone, the parents made discreet arrangements for Jagjit, his sisters and Lamba to escape Lahore on the next train to Delhi. Armed with a pistol, Jagjit had strict instructions to shoot his sisters and then himself if they were met with danger.

When their train reached Gujranwala, the violence from the streets had already spilled on to the railway. “People were being murdered in cold blood in front of our eyes,” says Lamba. “We remained hidden in our cabin, too afraid to make a sound.” Suddenly, an Indian army officer and his wife ran past, trying to escape. “We pulled them into our cabin, where they hid for the rest of the journey,” says Lamba. The group watched in terror from their cabin window the horrific scenes unfolding at each station the train passed: “There was a bloodbath at every stop.”



Refugees flee by train, September 1947. Photograph: AP

After a few days, the train reached India. Lamba knew she was lucky to have escaped and was grateful to Jagjit for helping her. “I didn’t know it at the time but this man who had saved my life would later become my husband,” she says with a smile. The pair married, five years after partition, when their families had settled in the city of Ambala.

Jagjit joined the Indian air force, where he received an award for gallantry. After retiring, they moved to England, where they lived happily until 2020, when he passed away. “My husband was a brave man and would go to any length to protect his family,” says Lamba.

Today, remnants of the Sikh and Hindu communities that once occupied Rawalpindi remain, in the form of abandoned havelis (traditional mansions), temples and gurdwaras throughout the city. “Though we never returned to Pakistan, I will always remember it as the place where we first met and where our story began,” says Lamba.



‘To move forward, we must do so with compassion’ ... Dabirul Choudhury.
Photograph: Anna Gordon/The Guardian

Dabirul Choudhury

On a hot summer’s day in Stoke Newington, north London, Dabirul Choudhury, is sipping a cold glass of lemonade. “We believed in many things,” says the 102-year-old. “But partition wasn’t one of them.”

“Our home in Sylhet was surrounded by orange orchards and the smell lingered in the air for miles around,” recalls Choudhury, a devout Muslim. Even today, the smell of oranges brings back sweet pre-partition memories. “We would often share such fruit among our Hindu neighbours, who we lived with peacefully, side by side.”

When the riots first began, Choudhury was in his 20s and had been studying literature at Murari Chand college. A lover of words, Choudhury feels the trouble that followed came down to a barrier in communication. “People suddenly stopped speaking to each other. Neighbours, friends – even strangers who would otherwise greet one another in the street,” says Choudhury. “This created an air of mistrust. Nobody really knew what everyone else was thinking.”

Choudhury's older brother had started a grassroots movement to campaign against the break-up of India and made Choudhury attend protests with him. "There was always a big turnout: men and women, young and old, Hindu and Muslim, would march through Sylhet together in procession, shouting anti-partition slogans."

After partition, Choudhury recalls empty classrooms. "Our college, the first in Sylhet, had been founded by a local Hindu nobleman and was attended by people from all walks of life," says Choudhury. "It was heartbreakingly to watch our Hindu brothers and sisters leave their home town, since most of them didn't want to."

For Sylhetis like Choudhury, the history of partition which mainly focuses on India and Pakistan, often overlooks their unique experiences. After partition, the north-east of India was transformed into a geographical oddity. A Muslim and Bengali-majority district in Assam province, Sylhet held a referendum after Assam announced it would join India and it remained part of Assam until it joined East Pakistan in 1947. "We didn't have to migrate to be impacted by the 1947 partition," says Choudhury. "Partition came to us – in several forms, over the course of several years."

The creation of East Pakistan demonstrated just how difficult it was to translate the dream of a Muslim homeland in India into a [geographical](#) reality. Despite sharing an Islamic identity, East and West Pakistan were not only divided by thousands of miles of Indian territory, but were very different in terms of language, ethnicity and culture.

West Pakistan soon began imposing its language and customs on the East, which led to rising tensions between the two. Mass protests in the East were brutally suppressed by the Pakistani army, which responded with a violent crackdown. An open revolt by Bengali's against West Pakistan resulted in armed conflict; culminating in the creation of an independent [Bangladesh](#) in 1971.

Choudhury moved to England with his wife in 1960, where they settled in St Albans with their three children. Last year, Choudhury was awarded an OBE for raising £420,000 for charity after walking laps in his garden while fasting during Ramadan. "Even after all this time, I wonder, was it worth

it?” he asks. “It’s difficult to look back without horror at the savagery that took place during partition. But to move forward, we must do so with compassion. We are defined not by our borders but ultimately how we treat one another.”

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

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Hospitality industry

‘Home for hell-raisers’: new owners of Groucho Club seek young blood

Exclusive: Private members’ club that takes pride in being a ‘hub for creatives’ to consider international expansion



The Groucho Club in Dean Street, Soho. Photograph: Chris Lawrence/Alamy

Nadia Khomami Arts and culture correspondent

Thu 11 Aug 2022 03.58 EDT Last modified on Fri 12 Aug 2022 00.24 EDT

The international gallerists behind [Hauser & Wirth](#) have bought the Groucho Club, the private members club in Soho that has acted as a spiritual home for artists, writers, musicians and media workers for almost 40 years.

The takeover of the club by [Artfarm](#) – Manuela and Iwan Wirth’s independent hospitality and development company – marks a new chapter

for the Groucho that could include a drive to recruit younger members and international expansion.

Located in Dean Street, the Groucho Club has a storied history, becoming a “home for hell-raisers” and the in-crowd.

Founded in 1985 by a group of publishers and agents including Carmen Callil, Ed Victor, Liz Calder, and Michael Sissons, it was the benchmark for a new generation of members clubs.

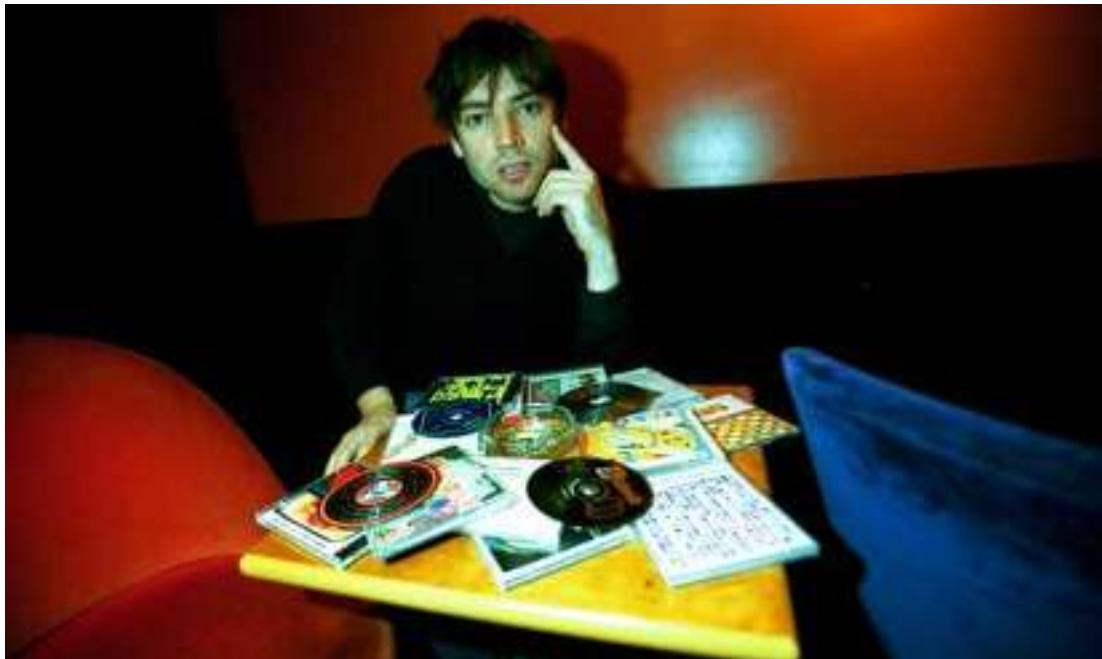
When Fleet Street suddenly broke up in the 80s, the Groucho provided a “congenial refuge” for its more literate and articulate drunks, according to the journalist Roy Greenslade. Most importantly, it welcomed women as equals, which stood it in stark contrast to the archaic gentlemen’s clubs that lined Pall Mall.

“We’re deeply fond of the Groucho Club,” said Ewan Venters, the CEO of Artfarm and Hauser & Wirth. “It’s famed for being a hub for creatives. We also love the genesis, that it was founded out of a desire for women to have somewhere they could go to meet like-minded people, in a city that was dominated by men’s clubs.”

The Groucho’s name derives from the Groucho Marx quip – “I don’t want to belong to any club that will accept me as a member” – and down the years, that maverick spirit has been kept alive by successive generations of artists, writers and musicians.

“There is some special magic that no one can put their finger on,” the artist Gavin Turk said, while Blur’s Alex James once recalled how to climb across the Soho roofs from the Colony Room down the road into the Groucho’s snooker room window.

It is where Damien Hirst celebrated his Turner prize by putting his £20,000 winnings behind the bar; where Bono once sang Happy Birthday to Bill Clinton around a piano that had been painted by Peter Blake; and where the film producer Bradley Adams and the actor Robbie Coltrane once got into an argument over an unwelcome gesture.



Alex James once described how to climb into the venue from the roof of another Soho drinking club. Photograph: David Sillitoe/The Guardian

“Francis Bacon, Jeffrey Bernard and Dan Farson were sitting at the bar and Coltrane sent a glass of brandy down to Bacon,” Adams told the Evening Standard a few years ago. “Bernard stood up and said: ‘You fucking cunt. You don’t send a glass to one person, you send one to all three.’ He threw the glass, it flew past my nose and hit Robbie on the side of the head. I thought: ‘This is the club for me.’”

But celebrity did not always equal membership, and membership did not always equal entry. At the height of their fame, the Spice Girls were rejected by the membership committee, while Al Pacino and Eric Clapton were turned away at reception unrecognised. Rules were established by Stephen Fry, who enforced a ban on mobile phones in the bar and the wearing of string vests, which he called “fully unacceptable” because “there is enough distress in the world already”.

Venters said he understood the “special place” the Groucho occupies in London’s cultural landscape and that Artfarm would respect its history and traditions. But looking forward was just as important as looking back, he said. “Whenever the Groucho is referred to, it’s to great names and moments

in the past, and I'm a huge believer in looking to the future and making sure we're creating new history."

There are about 150 artworks in the Groucho collection, including pieces from members Bacon, Blake, Turk, Tracey Emin and Gordon Cheung. Venters said he hoped new ownership would spark a renewed interest among members, drive awareness to a younger generation of creatives and open the door to new territories.

"It's been the membership's desire to see the club go international," he said. "Though no decision has been made at this point, we are an international business with experience operating in Asia, America, Europe and the UK. It would be obvious that in our thinking, we would be looking to see whether the Groucho Club could expand in the future."

The Groucho's ownership has changed several times since the 1980s. After a failed [takeover attempt by Benjy Fry](#), it was sold to Joel Cadbury, Matthew Freud and Rupert Hambro in 2001. In 2008 they sold it to Graphite Capital, who then sold a majority stake to a group of private investors led by Alcuin Capital, a fellow private equity firm.

Nick Hurrell, chair of the Groucho Club, said Artfarm were "the perfect owners" for the club. "Their mix of cultural engagement, pedigree in art and excellence in hospitality sits very well with the particular spirit of a members club that has been an important part of London's cultural life for many years," he added. "To our 5,000 members around the world, I'd say that the future has never looked brighter."

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2022.08.11 - Opinion

- Liz Truss is a Gen-Xer like me. We shouldn't be the ones in power right now
- We must tax profits now, freeze energy prices – and if necessary bring suppliers into the public sector
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Opinion**Liz Truss**

Liz Truss is a Gen-Xer like me. We shouldn't be the ones in power right now

[Rafael Behr](#)



The relative global stability that I grew up with is long gone, yet one of my peers is carrying on like nothing has changed



'From another era' ... Liz Truss. Photograph: Jacob King/PA

Thu 11 Aug 2022 05.00 EDT Last modified on Fri 12 Aug 2022 00.38 EDT

The next prime minister will be the wrong age for the job, by which I don't mean lacking the necessary experience, although that may also be true. I mean roughly the same age as me. It was bound to happen. I am used to babyfaced police officers and teachers who don't look old enough to have left school. Seeing one of my peers in Downing Street was, quite literally, a matter of time. There is nothing freakish about fortysomething prime ministers. [David Cameron](#) was 43 when he took the top job. I was 36 when he became prime minister, not a spring chicken, but springier than politics makes me feel today.

Tony Blair was also 43 when he came to power 25 years ago. Take 25 from 1997 and you land in 1972, before either of today's Tory leadership contenders was born. When Rishi Sunak and Liz Truss perform their [Margaret Thatcher](#) karaoke tribute acts, they are dancing to a tune that is as pertinent to the challenges Britain faces today as the Suez crisis was to New Labour. That isn't to say the past is irrelevant. But history should inform the present, not hold it hostage.

Sunak was 10 when Thatcher resigned. Truss was five years older. She and I were at the same Oxford college at the same time, but studying different things, moving with different crowds. There is a flicker of recognition when I see the pictures of Truss in the mid-90s, and the viral video of her [addressing a Liberal Democrat conference](#). It's definitely the same Liz Truss, to the extent that anyone in middle age is the same person they were in their early 20s.

When I see pictures of myself from that time (mercifully there are no videos), all I can think is that I was still a child, playing at being a grownup, and that I can't pinpoint when it stopped being a pretence or be sure that it ever fully did.

“One of the mixed blessings of being twenty and twenty-one and even twenty-three,” wrote [Joan Didion](#), “is the conviction that nothing like this, all evidence to the contrary notwithstanding, has ever happened to anyone before.”

That is not entirely a delusion. The world into which each adolescent generation emerges has its unique properties. For mine, it was the [Great Moderation](#) – a long period of economic expansion, coupled with a relative absence of global conflict. The end of the cold war produced a budget-swelling peace dividend and a tepid liberal consensus that many found stultifying without knowing what a blessing it was to be safely bored by politics.

When Blair used D:Ream’s song Things Can Only Get Better for his 1997 campaign anthem, it felt true. When he described New Labour as “the political arm of none other than the British people as a whole” it sounded bombastic but neither sinister (as an equivalent boast might in today’s populist climate), nor preposterous. A rising national tide was obviously coming to sweep the Tories away.

Truss had by then quit the Lib Dems and joined the [Conservatives](#), which testifies to strong ideological commitment. It wasn’t a choice any twentysomething of our generation made to be cool. Or maybe it was a shrewd political investment decision, buying shares in a blue chip institution

at the bottom of the market on the bet that they will eventually rebound. She might have hit the jackpot.

Truss might also count as the first prime minister from Generation X. It depends how you measure it. We are the baby boomers' children. Cameron, born in 1966, is on the statistical cusp. All of these labels are fictions that capture, at best, a mythology that people who were young around the same time tell about themselves. (Or sometimes, as with millennials, it is a snarky mythology that resentful older people tell about feckless youth.)

The term Generation X was coined by the US cultural critic [Paul Fussell](#). He defined us by a restless compulsion to escape through “back doors of those theatres of class which enclose others”. The impulses driving that flight were “insolence, intelligence, irony and spirit”. I take that as a compliment, although I’m not sure it is methodologically robust.

The more salient feature of the Gen X experience is probably being the last humans to grow up without the internet. Mobile phones were still a novelty, and not smart, when Truss was clambering aboard John Major’s sinking ship. Our adult lives will be lived in the digital age, but we are old enough to remember analogue ways.

I wonder if that in-between condition makes us especially prone to nostalgia, or arrests our political development in some way. It surely defines us as much as the benign geopolitical climate at the turn of the millennium – the optimistic equilibrium that we thought was normal but turns out to have been an anomalous blip. We were lucky to be young in the blip, and maybe also unlucky that our good fortune lulled us into a complacency that equipped us poorly for the return of volatility.

The caricature of the Gen-Xer would lean into that deficiency with sardonic self-awareness. We should be observing our unreadiness for the 21st century with slacker detachment, chipping in unhelpful commentary from the sidelines. (At least, that’s how I ended up.)

But Truss has a steely confidence in her worldview that seems to come from a different era. Maybe that’s what politics makes of people, or maybe that kind of person is made for politics. Either way, I find it kind of impressive

and alarming at the same time. I don't know how anyone, still less an exact contemporary of mine, has that much belief in their prescriptions for a country in the grip of complex, interlocking crises. I can remember thinking I knew all about the world in the 1990s. But we were so much older then. I can't help thinking we should be younger than that now.

Rafael Behr is a Guardian columnist

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OpinionUK cost of living crisis

We must tax profits now, freeze energy prices – and if necessary bring suppliers into the public sector

[Gordon Brown](#)



Without urgent action, families are seeing nothing more than pain now and pain later. There is a way through



The energy cap has to be suspended before 26 August, the date on which an approximately 80% increase in our energy bills is expected to be announced.

Photograph: Peter Byrne/PA

Wed 10 Aug 2022 14.07 EDT Last modified on Wed 10 Aug 2022 15.59 EDT

Time and tide wait for no one. Neither do crises. They don't take holidays, and don't politely hang fire – certainly not to suit the convenience of a departing PM and the whims of two potential successors and the Conservative party membership. But with the country already in the eye of a cost of living storm, decisions cannot be put on hold until a changeover on 5 September, leaving impoverished families twisting in the wind.

The energy cap has to be suspended before 26 August, the date on which an approximately [80% increase](#) in our energy bills is expected to be announced. The Department for Work and Pensions computers, which adjust universal credit and legacy benefits, have to be reprogrammed in the next few days if help is to be given to all who need it when prices rise on 1 October. Voluntary cuts in energy usage – good for our green agenda – should, as has happened in Germany and France, be agreed upon now when the weather is good if we are to prevent rationing later when the weather turns bad. And windfall profits and bonuses have to be properly taxed now before the money flees the country.

There were two great lessons I learned right at the start of the last great economic crisis in 2008: never to be behind the curve but be ahead of events; and to get to the root of the problem. And it is not tax cuts or, as yet, a wage-price inflation spiral that are the most urgent priorities for action, but dealing with the soaring costs of fuel and food: the cause of [half of our current inflation](#).

So it is indeed urgent that the candidates to be prime minister – and the current prime minister and chancellor – meet to make not just one or two but several urgently needed decisions: to suspend and fundamentally reform the energy price cap; to agree October payments for those who will not be able to afford to turn up their heating; to home in on alternative supplies abroad and open up appropriate storage facilities at home; to agree voluntary energy reductions; and to help pay for these measures with a watertight windfall tax on energy companies and a tax on the high levels of City bonus payments. For if we could remove the opportunity to avoid or opt out, as we did when imposing the windfall tax on privatised utilities in 1997 and the banker bonus levy of 2009, we could raise not just [£5bn but as much as £15bn](#). This would be enough, for example, to give nearly 8 million low-income families just under £2,000 each.

All these measures should be based on a clear set of principles: that the right to a warm home is a human right; that we should do most for those who have least; and that no energy retailer should be allowed to additionally profit from the crisis.

What's more, British ministers – and no one has yet grasped this – should also be leading the way, as we did in 2009, in demanding coordinated international action with an emergency G20 early in September to address the fuel, food, inflation and debt emergencies. These are global problems that can only be fully addressed by globally coordinated solutions.

Tuesday's forecast from Cornwall Insight of a [£4,266 average annual energy price](#) by January is remarkable. It means, as an immediate analysis carried out by Jonathan Bradshaw and Antonia Keung shows, that more than half of British households, 54%, will be in fuel poverty by October and two-thirds, 66%, by January. Six million households, an astonishing number, will be

forced to pay an unprecedented 25% of their income in fuel costs and 4.4 million will be subject to a virtually unaffordable 30%.

So instead of allowing [Ofgem](#) to announce an increase on a scale that will send shock waves through every household, the government should pause any further increase in the cap; assess the actual costs of the energy supplies being sold to consumers by the major companies; and, after reviewing the profit margins, and examining how to make standing charges and social tariffs more progressive, negotiate separate company agreements to keep prices down. They should work with businesses to cut consumption, as is happening in France and Spain, which have imposed their own cap on energy prices, dictated more by what people can afford than the current wholesale gas price in the marketplace.

And if the companies cannot meet these new requirements, we should consider all the options we used with the banks in 2009: guaranteed loans, equity financing and, if this fails, as a last resort, operate their essential services from the public sector until the crisis is over.

With one of our main suppliers, Norway, seeking to retain its own gas for domestic use and France [running into problems](#) with its nuclear reactors, we are already running out of time to negotiate new deals with other international suppliers. And we are already missing out of additional capacity from Qatar, which has gone to mainland Europe. Over time, we can and must increase domestic production, and agree on a home insulation programme with the same urgency as our vaccination programme.

It's true that Britain's decade-long low growth, caused by low investment, has made us vulnerable to skill shortages and supply-side bottlenecks and thus higher inflation than our competitors. But most of the current rise in inflation has been generated from energy and food prices caused by the war in Ukraine and so removing the Bank of England's independence is merely an exercise in blame shifting, as is direct criticism of the Treasury which, in my view, will take its lead from ministers.

It is the government that sets the inflation target and appoints the Bank's main decision-makers. And it is the duty of government in a crisis to send the Bank an open letter telling it to set out a clear pathway over the coming

years to return to stable prices. On the basis of an agreed inflation trajectory back to 2%, we should consider agreeing year-on-year wage settlements – starting with a flat rate of between £2-3,000 this year – so that hardworking families, especially those on the lowest incomes, can afford their energy bills without being plunged into poverty.

The truth is that without a plan the government is lurching from one crisis to another, failing to address the anxieties of families who see nothing more than pain now and pain later. But there is a way through from pain today to gain tomorrow, not just through the immediate relief I propose but in a clear strategy to move us from the 1.4% annual growth that the [Conservatives](#) have achieved back to a 2.5% trend growth rate. This is the one way to permanently end the cost of living crisis that British families have had to endure through an austerity decade.

No one can be secure when millions feel insecure and no one can be content when there is so much discontent. Churchill once said that those who build the present in the image of the past will utterly fail to meet the challenges of the future. Only bold and decisive action starting this week will rescue people from hardship and reunite our fractured country.

- Gordon Brown was UK prime minister from 2007 to 2010
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[Opinion](#)[Mental health](#)

Need one more thing to worry about? You are probably daydreaming wrong

[Emma Beddington](#)



A new study has found if yours are ‘maladaptive’ they can risk your mental health – so what does it say that mine are of death, illness and vengeance?



‘I’m about ready to give up on reality and surrender to my daydreams.’
Photograph: Justin Paget/Getty Images

Thu 11 Aug 2022 02.00 EDT Last modified on Thu 11 Aug 2022 16.45 EDT

There’s something else for us to worry about (definitely what this summer was lacking): daydreaming. According to the [New Scientist](#), the pleasant reverie in which you imagine yourself in the Desert Island Discs studio modestly explaining your myriad achievements to Lauren Laverne might be bad for you.

“Normal” daydreaming is still fine: it fosters creative and lateral thinking, and letting the mind wander could enhance our capacity to learn. But when daydreams prevent you from engaging with life and interfere with your ability to make and maintain relationships, work or learn, researchers call them “maladaptive”.

Maladaptive daydreamers use fantasy as a release from stressful thoughts and a difficult present; loneliness, distress and boredom are triggers. Given all that, I don’t suppose you’ll be surprised to hear maladaptive daydreaming seems to be becoming more prevalent. A 2020 study covering 70 countries found participants were more likely to struggle with intense, all-consuming daydreaming in lockdown than during normal life. A 2021 survey of 6,000

Italians found that 17% were atypically preoccupied with their fantasy life. You wouldn't bet against it reaching epidemic proportions as 2022 staggers on.

I wonder if maladaptive is the right characterisation. Who are you calling maladapted? Isn't retreating to a gentler imaginary world an entirely appropriate way to cope with financial and ecological catastrophe, war playing out around an actual nuclear power plant, Covid, monkeypox and langya (the new zoonotic virus on the block, do keep up)? The typical themes of maladaptive daydreams are, apparently, "love, friendship, self-idealisation, social support and imaginary family". It would be nicer if we all felt we had those in real life, of course, but who can blame anyone for dreaming of them as the world burns?

I'm about ready to give up on reality and surrender to my daydreams, but before I do, I need to train myself to have nicer ones. Mine are all of death, illness, destruction and the bitter settling of scores; day-mares, really. Imagining things are even worse than they actually are: now that's really maladaptive.

- Emma Beddington is a Guardian columnist
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[Opinion](#)[Couriers/delivery industry](#)

Yes, I can get a can of chickpeas brought to my door in moments. But what have I lost?

[Emma Brockes](#)



New York's ubiquitous 'instant delivery' apps are almost certainly making us worse, more useless, people



‘There are more bikes on the street, tearing at breakneck speed to make tiny delivery windows.’ Photograph: Anadolu Agency/Getty Images

Thu 11 Aug 2022 03.00 EDT Last modified on Thu 11 Aug 2022 12.44 EDT

I remember very clearly my first pineapple on ice at a corner deli in [New York](#). It was on the north-east corner of Columbus and 57th Street, a sprawling store front spilling flowers and fresh produce that, along with the diner next door, stayed open all night. There is pineapple in London, and 24-hour shops, but this was different. In the first flush of enthusiasm for my new city, everything about that deli seemed outlandishly great. Abundance! Convenience! Pineapple, freshly cut and packaged on ice! I might as well have arrived from somewhere still under rationing.

Fifteen years later and the city has changed. (I have, too. I would never buy cut fruit from a deli these days; I’m far too fussy about whether the prep area meets food safety standards.) Corner delis remain, but under pain of competition from a new generation of delivery alternatives that make getting up off the sofa to walk half a block for some milk seem like Captain Oates striking out on the ice floe. And it’s not only Instacart and FreshDirect, with their lumbering two-hour delivery windows. It’s the new fleet of bike-enabled apps – among them GoPuff and Getir – that promise to deliver any item within 15 minutes.

This kind of service is referred to as the “instant needs” market, a misnomer that, given the hyperbole of startups, one should at least admire for resisting the word “emergency”. One ingredient down for your stew? No need to turn off your stove and put on your shoes! Instead, for a nominal fee, order a person to your door bearing a single can of chickpeas. One of these services – which has already gone bust in the face of so many others in New York – was branded Fridge No More, but might as well have been called Legs No More and been done with it.

The decadence of these services, and their reversal of the ethos of the bulk-buying years during which, it seemed to many of us, it was a good idea to get in 75 cans of chickpeas while we could, are changing cities at the level of landscape. In the US, hyper-fast delivery has sprung into a multibillion dollar business that is spreading, via companies such as [Gorillas and Weezy](#), to the UK. It means more bikes on the street, tearing at breakneck speed to make tiny delivery windows. It means large areas of real estate being turned over to so-called “[dark stores](#)”, centrally located mini-warehouses that you walk past every day on your way back from the subway, but can only buy from via an app once you’re home.

The threat to New York’s iconic delis remains indistinct. In Britain, corner shops have gone into partnership with some of the rapid delivery services such as Deliveroo to survive the drop in trade. In the US, this seems not to be happening; most of the hyper-fast delivery services in New York won’t deliver from local delis. And yet, despite witnessing nearly every shade of business, from diners, to bookshops and even banks close their doors over the last 10 years, only the New York delis, with their mysterious economics and even more mysterious single-brown-snacks-in-cellophane at the counter, remain largely untouched.

Still, the pressure must be intense. Mission creep from companies such as UberEats, which won’t just deliver your curry, but will go to the 7-Eleven or the pharmacy for you en route to delivering your curry, is extensive. Our own expectations are changing as the Overton window (for laziness) expands. Just as reliance on satnav destroyed our ability to remember directions, read maps, or know where we are or where we’re going, so instant delivery is, one assumes, making us slightly worse and more useless

as people. I'm not proud of this, but last week, when I discovered I'd run out of milk and couldn't leave my sleeping kids to run out, I ordered the delivery of a single coffee from Starbucks.

I gave myself a pass because it was coffee. But if these things are quicker and more convenient, they're also sadder and stripped of the bare minimum of human contact needed to hold neighbourhoods together. And, like so much innovation in technology, they can run counter to the point of the very thing they enable. It's like that moment on the beach when your Kindle runs out and you think: wouldn't it be amazing if there was a way to read stories that didn't require a charger and was impervious to sand? Wouldn't it be great if you could shop for stuff in advance and actually see the state of the vegetable you're buying?

- Emma Brockes is a Guardian columnist
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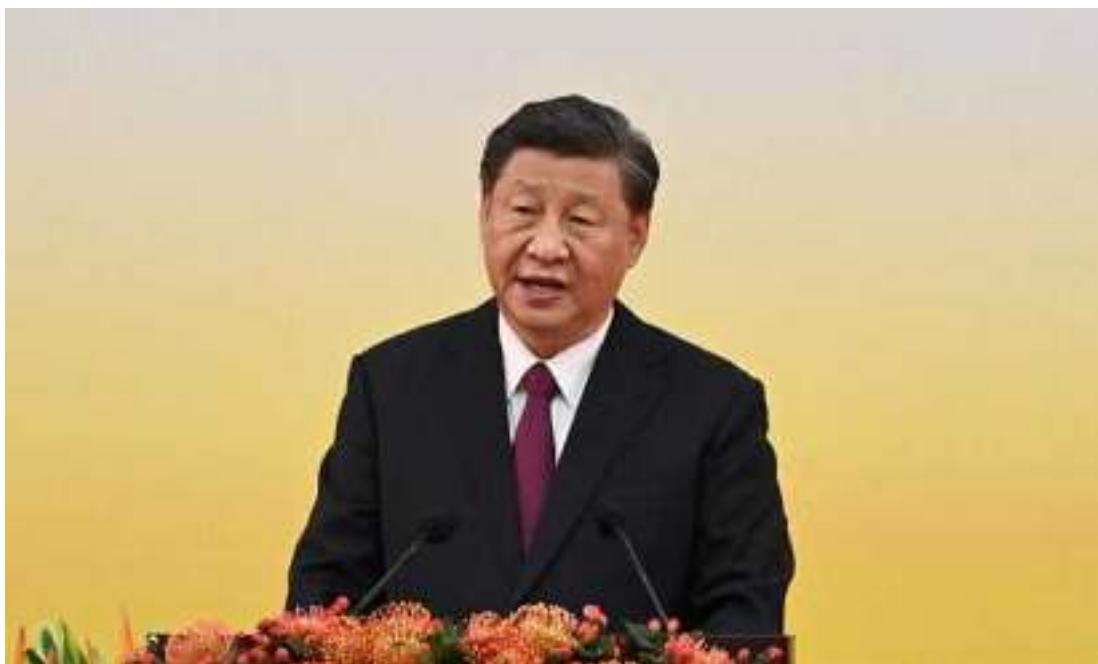
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[**China**](#)

Chinese president Xi Jinping expected to visit Saudi Arabia next week

The planned gala reception is in stark contrast to the low-key audience afforded Joe Biden in June, as ties between China and the kingdom grow closer



China's president Xi Jinping. His visit to Riyadh is likely to be the most significant since Trump's arrival in May 2017. Photograph: Reuters

[Martin Chulov](#), Middle East correspondent

Thu 11 Aug 2022 02.00 EDT Last modified on Thu 11 Aug 2022 06.41 EDT

The Chinese president Xi Jinping is expected to visit Saudi Arabia next week, where plans are under way for a gala reception to match that given to [Donald Trump](#) on his first trip abroad as president.

The welcome being prepared for the Chinese leader is in stark contrast with [that afforded to Joe Biden in June](#), when the US president received a low-

key reception, reflecting strained ties between the two countries and personal distaste between Biden and the de facto Saudi leader, Mohammed bin Salman.

Xi, however, is instead expected to receive a bells-and-whistles welcome intended to consolidate ties between Beijing and Riyadh and reinforce the image of China as an ally of [Saudi Arabia](#), as ties with Washington continue to drift.

China and Saudi Arabia have been growing closer over two decades, but ties have deepened as Prince Mohammed accumulated power in the kingdom from 2016 onwards. Riyadh has defended China's treatment of its Uyghur Muslim minority and Hong Kong's draconian national security law, placing it at odds with the US on key human rights issues.

Trade ties between the two countries have forged ahead at the same time as Washington has pivoted away from the Middle East.

“China is Saudi Arabia’s largest trade partner. It is the largest buyer of Saudi oil,” said Mohammed Alyahya, a fellow at the Harvard Belfer Center’s Middle East Institute and senior fellow at the Hudson Institute. “China is very important in the region geopolitically. It has been eyeing military bases in Africa and elsewhere. In the past its interests had been purely mercantilist, focused entirely on commerce. Now they’re increasingly looking at things through a strategic lens.

“They are particularly interested in ensuring the free flow of oil. This is the same for China as the US. The Americans say there is a diversion of bandwidth away from the region to focus on countering China in a “pivot to Asia”. The Chinese however seem to consider the region to be a primary theatre for great power competition.

“China is America’s primary competitor in the region. They’ll clearly be watching very carefully.”

Xi was first invited to Riyadh in March. His visit is likely to be the most significant to the kingdom since [Trump’s arrival in May 2017, months after](#)

[his inauguration](#), where he was received with silver swords, [a glowing orb](#), extravagant gifts and a rollout of Saudi and Arab royalty.

That visit set the tone for the Trump administration's disposition towards Riyadh, an era when the ambitious crown prince was given repeated cover by Trump and his senior officials and formed deep ties with Trump's son-in-law, Jared Kushner.

China made no public comment about Saudi Arabia's invasion of Yemen, its boycott of Qatar, or the murder of dissident, [Jamal Khashoggi](#), which led to strong condemnation in the US and Europe.

China is increasingly seen as stepping into a regional vacuum created by waning US interest and power projection. Biden's June visit yielded few dividends, and did not succeed in convincing Prince Mohammed to boost oil supplies – a move that would have helped reduce bowser prices in the US in the run-up to mid-term elections.

In preparation for the visit, which is expected to take in Riyadh, Jeddah and the planned megacity of Neom on the western Saudi coast, plans were under way to hoist thousands of Chinese banners and receive hundreds of dignitaries.

Prince Mohammed has appeared emboldened by Biden's visit, telling allies that it succeeded in reasserting Riyadh's influence on a global stage, and displaying a sovereign footing. Critics of the visit have claimed that the US helped rehabilitate Prince Mohammed nearly four years after the Khashoggi killing – which was carried out by Prince Mohammed's security aides – while receiving little in return.

"Saudi has its swagger back," said one senior Saudi official. "We engage with our friends on equal terms. Friends don't just arrive here, demand things and give nothing back."

Prince Mohammed recently travelled to Greece and France, ending years of isolation. "That visit was made possible by the Biden visit," said the Saudi official.

This article was amended on 11 August 2022 to add the word “expected” to the headline and first paragraph.

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Coronavirus

Global weekly coronavirus deaths have fallen 9%, WHO reports

New deaths in Africa plummet 70% but rise 19% in Middle East, as World Health Organisation urges countries not to drop their surveillance of virus

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Residents line up for coronavirus mass testing in Lhasa, Tibet, on Tuesday. Global coronavirus deaths have fallen in the past week, with new cases remaining stable. Photograph: Reuters

Associated Press
Wed 10 Aug 2022 22.37 EDT

The number of coronavirus deaths fell 9% in the past week while new cases remained relatively stable, according to the latest weekly pandemic report

released by the [World Health Organization](#).

The UN health agency said on Wednesday there were more than 14,000 Covid-19 deaths in the past week and nearly 7 million new infections.

The number of new deaths rose 19% in the Middle East, while dropping more than 70% in Africa, 15% in Europe and 10% in the Americas.

The western Pacific reported a 30% jump in cases while Africa reported a 46% drop. Cases also fell more than 20% in the Americas and the Middle East.

The WHO cautioned that its assessment of Covid-19 trends remains compromised by countries dropping many of their testing, surveillance and sequencing efforts as most countries have relaxed pandemic controls.

[WHO figures](#)

The World [Health](#) Organization (WHO) said the Omicron subvariant BA.5 remains dominant globally, accounting for nearly 70% of all virus sequences shared with the world's biggest publicly available virus database. The agency said other Omicron subvariants, including BA.4 and BA.2, appeared to be decreasing in prevalence as BA.5 takes over.

Chinese authorities have announced new restrictions this week, after finding coronavirus cases in the tourist island of [Hainan and in Tibet](#). Earlier this week, the Chinese government shut down Lhasa's Potala palace, the traditional home of the Dalai Lama, and also locked down Haikou, the capital of Hainan, in addition to several other cities including the beach resort Sanya.

About 80,000 tourists were stranded this week in Sanya after Chinese officials declared it a Covid-19 hotspot and required people to test negative five times within a week before being allowed to leave.

On Tuesday, the Chinese government sent a first plane load of 125 tourists out of Sanya and said other flights would be organised to fly out tourists in

batches once they fulfilled the criteria to leave.

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South Korea

Seoul to phase out Parasite-style semi-basement flats after storm deaths

Properties seen in Oscar-winning film to be curbed after three people drown in South Korean capital



A Seoul resident in her semi-basement flat. More than half of these properties, known as *banjiha*, are in the South Korean capital. Photograph: Ahn Young-joon/AP

[Justin McCurry](#) in Tokyo

Thu 11 Aug 2022 05.30 EDT Last modified on Thu 11 Aug 2022 23.22 EDT

Authorities in Seoul will phase out semi-basement flats after three people drowned inside one of the cramped properties during [record rainfall](#) in the South Korean capital this week.

Banjiha, which gained global recognition in the 2020 Oscar-winning film [Parasite](#), are usually occupied by people on low incomes and have come to

symbolise the [growing inequality](#) in [South Korea](#), Asia's fourth-biggest economy.

But anger over the dangers facing *banjiha* residents in the capital has prompted a rethink among officials, who said the city would no longer grant permits to build the homes and existing apartments would be converted over time.

Two sisters in their 40s and a girl identified as the younger sister's 13-year-old daughter drowned on Monday as the heaviest rainfall to hit Seoul for 115 years sent torrents of water along streets, inundating apartments and subway stations. A fourth person living in a *banjiha* also died in the flooding, media reports said.

The three victims, who lived in the city's Gwanak district, pleaded for help as water surged into their flat, but emergency workers were unable to reach them, the Yonhap news agency said. Their bodies were found after police and firefighters had finished draining the apartment, it added.

The Seoul government had already promised help for families living in *banjiha* after the flats featured in Parasite, Bong Joon-ho's film about the Kims, a poor family whose mouldy basement flat contrasts with the sprawling mansion owned by their employers, the Parks. In one scene, the Kims' toilet spews filthy sludge during a flood.

Speaking before Parasite became the first foreign-language film to win best picture, Bong spoke of the "subtle nuances" found in *banjiha*. "People live underground but want to believe that they are above the ground because they have a moment when sunlight comes into their room," he said.

"But at the same time, they are afraid of falling into a complete underground situation if things get worse."

Under the new proposals, landlords will be given 10-20 years to convert *banjiha* for non-residential use.

According to official data, Seoul was home to about 200,000 semi-basement flats in 2020, comprising 5% of all households in the city. Well over half of

the country's *banjiha* are in the capital, where soaring property prices were a key issue in this year's [presidential election](#).

The South Korean president, Yoon Suk-yeol, apologised to residents during a visit to the flat where the three victims lived, and promised to help them recover from the disaster, which killed at least 11 people and left eight others missing.

Civic groups demanded an overhaul of housing policy and called on the government to help residents of semi-basement flats move out.

"We condemn the government's negligence on those marginalised in housing for this tragedy," the Citizens Coalitions for Economic Justice said in a statement published in the Korea Herald.

"As rainfall becomes stronger and more frequent as a result of climate change, it must embark on a fundamental change of its approach to semi-basement residents."

Another group urged the government to build affordable housing so people on low incomes no longer needed to live in dangerous semi-basement flats.

Ha In-sik was among the *banjiha* residents taking stock of the damage to their homes in Sillim, a deprived district of south-western Seoul.

"I've got no money, nothing," said Ha, 50, who used a plastic bowl to scoop the water from his lower-ground apartment. "I had come here to live in this basement as it was the only way I could live with my daughter."

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"But I'm hopeless now," he said, adding that it would take about 10 days to make the flat habitable again. "Everything is gone, there's no help and I don't even have a spoon to eat with."

Banjiha appeared in 1970 after the government made basement floors mandatory in new construction projects. Although it was illegal to live below ground, the subterranean spaces attracted residents as the city's

population swelled during a period of rapid growth in the South Korean economy.

Building regulations were relaxed in 1984 to allow developers to build flats higher up, with half of the property located below ground and half above ground, according to Yonhap.

Reuters contributed, reporting from Seoul

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Iran

Tehran museum unveils western art masterpieces hidden for decades

‘Deviant’ works by artists including Picasso and Warhol return to display at exhibition in Iranian capital



A visitor looks at a creation by the American artist Sol LeWitt at the Tehran Museum of Contemporary Art. Photograph: Vahid Salemi/AP

Associated Press in Tehran

Thu 11 Aug 2022 03.44 EDT Last modified on Fri 12 Aug 2022 00.24 EDT

Some of the world’s most prized works of contemporary western art have been unveiled for the first time in decades in Tehran.

The Iranian president, Ebrahim Raisi, a hardline cleric, rails against the influence of the west. Authorities have condemned “deviant” artists for “attacking Iran’s revolutionary culture”. And the Islamic Republic has

plunged further into confrontation with the US and Europe as it rapidly accelerates its nuclear programme and diplomatic efforts stall.

But contradictions abound in the Iranian capital, where thousands of well-heeled men and women looked at 19th- and 20th-century American and European minimalist and conceptual masterpieces on display this summer for the first time at the Tehran Museum of Contemporary [Art](#).

On a recent August afternoon, art critics and students looked at Marcel Duchamp's see-through 1915 mural *The Large Glass*, long interpreted as an exploration of erotic frustration.

Also on display was a rare 4-metre (13ft) untitled sculpture by the American minimalist pioneer Donald Judd and one of Sol LeWitt's best-known serial pieces, *Open Cube*, among other important works. The Judd sculpture, a horizontal array of lacquered brass and aluminium panels, is estimated to be worth millions of dollars.



Works by the German artists Bernd and Hilla Becher. Photograph: Vahid Salemi/AP

“Setting up a show with such a theme and such works is a bold move that takes a lot of courage,” said Babak Bahari, who was viewing the exhibit of

130 works for the fourth time since it opened in June. “Even in the west these works are at the heart of discussions and dialogue.”

The government of Iran’s western-backed shah, Mohammad Reza Pahlavi, and his wife, the former empress Farah Pahlavi, built the museum and acquired the multibillion-dollar collection in the late 1970s, when oil boomed and western economies stagnated.

Upon opening, it showed works by Pablo Picasso, Mark Rothko, Claude Monet, Jackson Pollock and other big names, enhancing Iran’s cultural standing on the world stage.



A Marilyn Monroe portrait by the US artist Andy Warhol, on display at the museum. Photograph: Abedin Taherkenareh/EPA

But just two years later, in 1979, Shia clerics ousted the shah and packed away the art in the museum’s vault. Some paintings – cubist, surrealist, impressionist, pop art – were unseen for decades to avoid offending Islamic values and catering to western sensibilities.

But during a thaw in Iran’s politics, the art started to resurface. While Andy Warhol’s paintings of the Pahlavis and some nudes are still hidden in the basement, much of the artist’s collection has been brought out to great fanfare as Iran’s cultural restrictions have eased.

The ongoing exhibition on minimalism, featuring 34 western artists, has captured particular attention. More than 17,000 people have viewed the works since the launch, the museum said, nearly double the footfall of previous shows.



Frank Stella's *Sinjerli Variations No 1-5* (1977) on display for the first time in the Iranian capital. Photograph: Vahid Salemi/AP

The curator Behrang Samadzadegan credits a recent renewed interest in conceptual art, which first shocked audiences in the 1960s by drawing on political themes and taking art out of traditional galleries and into the wider world.

The museum's spokesperson, Hasan Noferesti, said the size of the crowds coming to the exhibition, which ends in mid-September, showed the thrill of experiencing long-hidden modern masterpieces.

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It also attests to the enduring appetite for art among Iran's young generation. More than 50% of the country's 85 million people are under 30 years old.

Despite their country's deepening global isolation, and fears that their already limited social and cultural freedoms may be further curtailed under the government elected a year ago, young Iranians are increasingly exploring the international art world on social media. New galleries are buzzing. Art and architecture schools are thriving.

"These are good works of art, you don't want to imitate them," said Mohammad Shahsavari, a 20-year-old architecture student standing before LeWitt's cube structure. "Rather, you get inspiration from them."

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[Gaza](#)

Israel's ceasefire with Islamic Jihad holds as PM's bet on Hamas pays off

Yair Lapid enjoying bounce in polls following Operation Breaking Dawn in Gaza



An Israeli Iron Dome air defence system launches a missile to intercept rockets fired from the Gaza Strip, on the outskirts of the southern Israeli city of Ashkelon, on 7 August. Photograph: Jack Guez/AFP/Getty Images

[Bethan McKernan](#) and [Hazem Balousha](#) in Rafah, Gaza Strip

Thu 11 Aug 2022 00.30 EDT Last modified on Fri 12 Aug 2022 00.24 EDT

A [ceasefire between Israel and Palestinian Islamic Jihad](#), the second-largest militant group in the Gaza Strip, appeared to be holding this week, ending three days of cross-border fighting that killed dozens of Palestinians.

In Rafah, the desert town at the intersection of the Gaza Strip, [Israel](#) and Egypt, a stream of empty Palestinian petrol tankers and flatbed trucks

rumbled through the border gate towards the Israeli crossing for commercial goods; after a week of tensions, the return of fresh produce and fuel to the besieged territory was welcome.

The weekend's [surprise Israeli airstrikes](#), codenamed Operation Breaking Dawn, marked the sixth round of fighting between Gaza's militant groups and Israel since Hamas took over the strip in 2007, and the worst episode of violence in the coastal enclave since an 11-day war last May. The bloodshed did not escalate into another all-out conflict, however, owing to a major gamble: that Hamas would resist being drawn into the fray.

The bet paid off handsomely for Israel's caretaker prime minister, Yair Lapid, who is enjoying a bounce in the polls before the country holds its fifth tightly contested election in less than four years this November.

Islamic Jihad fired at least 1,000 rockets into southern Israel in retaliation for what Israel described as a "[pre-emptive](#)" offensive to thwart a planned major attack by the militant group before Egypt and Qatar brokered a ceasefire on Sunday night. Before then, the Israel Defence Forces (IDF) managed to kill two senior Islamic Jihad commanders, on top of arresting another, Bassam al-Saadi, in the occupied West Bank city of Jenin last week. Saadi's arrest sparked the current tensions.

Sixty people in Israel suffered minor injuries, but the majority of Islamic Jihad's projectiles were intercepted by the Iron Dome missile defence system, leading Israel's defence establishment to hail the operation as a major success, and boosting the credentials of centrist Lapid, a former television show host.

As ever, the toll in [Gaza](#) was much greater. According to the local authorities, 47 Palestinians, among them 16 children, were killed, 360 people were injured, and more than 650 housing units were damaged over three days.

Though Hamas issued statements announcing its support for Islamic Jihad, it refrained from intervening. As a social movement and de facto government responsible for the strip's 2.2 million people, Hamas has less room to

manoeuvre than Islamic Jihad, which is backed directly by Iran and focusses solely on armed resistance to Israel.

Hamas is also still recovering from the 2021 war, and not ready for a new round of conflict. The group is loath to give Israel a reason to cancel the 14,000 Israeli work permits issued for Gaza since last year, or shut down the more consistent supply of electricity that currently reaches the strip's sole power plant; both measures have made small but significant improvements to quality of life for the area's impoverished population.

In an interview in his office in Gaza City on Tuesday, Basem Naim, head of Hamas' political division, dismissed reports of friction between the two groups after Breaking Dawn.

“The leadership of Hamas and Jihad works together. Many Palestinian factions are present in Gaza and we don't see them as rivals ... Some are Islamist, some are Communist, but we have the same goal, which is to get rid of the occupation,” he said.

“Maybe they were in the front, and we stayed at the back, but we didn't leave Jihad to stand alone. It was not in our interest to escalate this time; this is one battle of many. Responses must be weighed against many complex factors.”

The Israeli operation had been calculated to serve domestic political ends, he added.

“Negotiations with Israel over prisoners [including Bassam al-Saadi, the Islamic Jihad commander arrested in the West Bank] were continuing right up until an hour before the Israeli attack started ... Jihad fired rockets at Israel last month and there was no response. So while we are not surprised by any Israeli aggression, we did not expect it now in this form, assassinating Jihad leaders.”

Commenting on Naim's claim, spokesperson for the Israeli embassy in London, Ohad Zemet, said: “The operation started in order to eliminate imminent and concrete threats by the Islamic Jihad terrorist organisation.

There are clear statements from senior Islamic Jihad officials issuing those threats, supported by their actions on the ground.”

Citing army sources, local media reported on Wednesday that Islamic Jihad had planned anti-tank missiles at cars in Israeli in retaliation for Saadi’s arrest.

On the Palestinian street, it is not yet clear what impact the fighting has had on Islamic Jihad’s popularity. At a mosque in Gaza City known to be affiliated with the group, several worshippers said the recent fighting and the strip’s dire economic situation, would continue to strengthen the movement’s public support.

But in Rafah, where an airstrike killed Islamic Jihad commander Khaled Mansour, two more fighters and five civilians, the mood was more hostile. Mohammed Moussa, a nurse at a small hospital in the town, said the facility struggled to cope with the aftermath of the Israeli attack on Saturday. There were only seven empty beds available for 48 injured people, and a 14-year-old boy had died of preventable causes because staff could not treat him in time.

“Islamic Jihad support here has declined after this round of fighting. People are looking at their capabilities compared with Hamas, and there’s no competition,” said a local man who gave his name as Khaled.

“I saw some Islamic Jihad supporters after the Israelis killed Mansour, and I told them, ‘You are losers; you handed the guy to the occupation, and you didn’t say anything, you didn’t do anything, you just shed tears.’”

Few expect that negotiations with Israel after the latest fighting will significantly change the status quo in the Gaza Strip, where the 15-year-old Israeli-Egyptian blockade has left about 50% of the population unemployed and turned electricity and clean water into scarce commodities. Peace talks are nonexistent, and the next flare-up is never too far away.

“It’s not the first time we have had to deal with something like this,” said Mousa, the Rafah nurse. “You just have to keep going.”

This article was amended on 11 August 2022 to correct a misspelling of Yair Lapid's name.

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The long read How Bolivia’s ruthless tin baron saved thousands of Jewish refugees

‘I’m just trying to make the world a little brighter’ How the culture wars hijacked Drag Queen Story Hour

‘A Sikh soldier pulled me out of the rubble’ Survivors recall India’s violent partition – and reflect on its legacy

‘Home for hell-raisers’ New owners of Groucho Club seek young blood

2022.08.11 - Opinion

Liz Truss is a Gen-Xer like me. We shouldn’t be the ones in power right now

We must tax profits now, freeze energy prices – and if necessary bring suppliers into the public sector

Need one more thing to worry about? You are probably daydreaming wrong

Yes, I can get a can of chickpeas brought to my door in moments. But what have I lost?

2022.08.11 - Around the world

Xi Jinping Chinese president to visit Saudi Arabia next week

Coronavirus Global weekly deaths fall 9%, WHO reports

South Korea Seoul to phase out Parasite-style semi-basement flats after storm deaths

Iran Tehran museum unveils western art masterpieces hidden for decades

Gaza airstrikes How Yair Lapid’s bet Hamas would not get involved paid off