

# The Guardian

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## 2022.05.01 - Opinion

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## Names in the newsAlice Oseman

**Thanks in part to Alice Oseman, TV has never been better if you're young and gay**

[Rebecca Nicholson](#)



Heartstopper is just the latest show to portray same-sex romance in a wholesome and sympathetic way



Alice Oseman adapted her graphic novel series for Netflix. Photograph: Alicia Canter/The Guardian

Sat 30 Apr 2022 12.00 EDT Last modified on Sun 1 May 2022 00.07 EDT

I only watched [\*Heartstopper\*](#), the lovely Netflix series about a teenage boy's crush on a male classmate that grows into something more, because I was [reviewing](#) it. I suspect that I might have otherwise assumed the series was for teenagers and skipped past.

In the end, I was very glad I didn't skip it – it is irresistibly sweet and sincere – but I did wonder, at the time, who the audience would be. [Alice Oseman](#) adapted it from her own series of YA graphic novels, which are hugely popular. But would teenagers watch something so wholesome? Would adults watch something so youthful?

Netflix is famously coy about who watches what so this is purely anecdotal, but over the last couple of weeks I have been surprised at how many of my fully grown adult friends have mentioned *Heartstopper*. Perhaps it shouldn't have been such a shock. For years, adults have tentatively admitted to reading YA or even children's fiction – one study, from 2012, found that 55% of YA fiction readers were [over 18](#) – and there have always been adult editions of *His Dark Materials* and Harry Potter, for example, with more

muted jackets. (I loved *His Dark Materials* so much that I named my dog after one of its characters, so I hold my own hand up to that one.)

The reactions have broadly appeared along two lines. One is that older LGBTQ+ viewers are so glad that it exists at all, for the generations that have come after them. To see something so honest about teenagers figuring out who they fancy, and what that means for them, is such a relief. If it helps even a handful of kids not to hate themselves for who they are, then it is a marvel.

But there is a kind of sadness that we didn't have that experience as teenagers. "Can you imagine that being on TV when we were younger?" is what I keep hearing, the gratitude ever so slightly tinged with grief for what we did not have. These days, there are more queer characters on screen than I can recall, but many millennials were starved of "representation", the idea that it matters for viewers to see characters who might be going through what they were going through.

Plenty of us recall watching terrible films or TV shows in the hope that there would be even a hint of gay subtext, only to be disappointed in the end. How amazing, then, that *Heartstopper* exists, and so casually, too. Can you imagine?

## **Kate Middleton: what will she make of her TV portrayal?**



Kate Middleton: required – one lookalike. Photograph: David Hartley/REX/Shutterstock

*The Crown* is finally catching up with itself. According to [\*Variety\*](#), the royal melodrama has put out a casting call for a young Kate Middleton, who will appear in season six. “This is a good role in this award-winning drama and we are looking for a strong physical resemblance,” it said, which does feel like the bare minimum. Mind you, anyone who caught the 2011 TV film *William & Kate* will be aware that the bare minimum should do it.

The fact that they are casting a Middleton means it is getting within touching distance of the present day. Looking at the young Queen’s life had the imperial remove of a period drama, but the closer it gets to events that practically happened last week (if there’s a casting call for Emily Maitlis, then you know it’s getting real), the more strange it all starts to feel. It could embrace that, of course. I would watch an episode of *The Crown* that saw the current royals watching their younger selves on *The Crown*; it would be like an upper-crust *Gogglebox* with a *Being John Malkovich* twist.

The problem it might run into is that people are less forgiving of interpretations of real events when such events are so fresh in the mind. Last week, Viola Davis [defended herself](#) against criticisms of her portrayal of Michelle Obama in the US series *The First Lady*, while also acknowledging

that it was “almost impossible” to play someone so familiar. TV drama is in love with telling true stories right now, but it might find more freedom in making things up again.

## Margot Robbie: she really is a walking, talking living doll



Margot Robbie: pretty in pink. Photograph: Jaap Buitendijk

The biggest news to emerge from this year’s CinemaCon was either the return of *Top Gun* (quite good, apparently) or [Olivia Wilde being served legal papers while on stage](#), which appeared deeply unpleasant and awkward. But the most peculiar news was the confirmation that Hollywood’s oddest-sounding feature film is real and not a figment of fevered imaginations. It feels as if it has been in the works for years, but we finally got a first-look picture of [Margot Robbie as Barbie](#), yes, that Barbie, in the movie that is also called *Barbie* and news that it will be released in cinemas next year.

The picture shows Robbie driving a pink convertible car, so she is sitting down, but even so, it looks as if she is in fact able to walk without her disproportionately tiny bones collapsing under the pressure of standing up, which, in some previous iterations of the doll, did look doubtful.

*Barbie* is directed by arthouse darling Greta Gerwig and co-written by Gerwig and *Marriage Story*'s Noah Baumbach, neither of whom is known for their saccharine streak. I am sort of thrilled by the fact that it is completely impossible to imagine what it is going to be like.

Rebecca Nicholson is an Observer columnist

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## [Opinion](#)[Menopause](#)

# The Observer view on how to solve the postcode lottery of HRT drugs

[Observer editorial](#)

A simple change in the law would address the shortage and give equal access across the country



Hormone replacement therapy tablets in a daily dispenser. Photograph: Realimage/Alamy

Sun 1 May 2022 01.30 EDT

For generations, any talk of “the change”, as it was euphemistically dubbed, was strictly taboo. Millions of women suffering brain fog, sleeplessness and mood swings were forced to soldier on in the face of unsympathetic bosses and partners – while cast as the butt of demeaning jokes.

Worse, this state of affairs was compounded by medical sexism. Lack of training for doctors typically meant women presenting with menopausal

symptoms were given short shrift or misdiagnosed. All this came at a huge cost to women's physical and mental health.

Thankfully, in recent years there has been a cultural shift. Women talk openly about the menopause – TV programmes, books, online forums and podcasts have busted the taboo – and campaign groups and politicians push hard for much-needed changes. A Channel 4 documentary presented by Davina McCall last year aimed to break down the stigma associated with hormone replacement therapy (HRT), which replaces the oestrogen lost by the body during the perimenopause and menopause, and dispel myths about its safety. It led to a [sharp rise](#) in the number of people requesting HRT to relieve many of the worst symptoms.

In the past five years, demand for HRT has [doubled](#). There were 238,000 prescriptions issued in England in January 2017, compared with almost 538,000 in December 2021. Around one million women in Britain take HRT, administered via gels, patches or pills. Now those women face a new challenge. Supply has not kept up with demand. There are shortages of several of the 70 HRT products available in the UK, exacerbated by global supply chain problems. One brand, [Oestrogel](#), is nearly impossible to get.

Tens of thousands of women are affected. Women reportedly meet in car parks to buy or share medicines and travel hundreds of miles on pharmacy crawls. Others ration their doses, resort to the private sector and procure supplies [from abroad](#).

Many are experiencing the return of debilitating symptoms, including night sweats, heart palpitations, hot flushes, anxiety attacks, low mood, joint pains, loss of libido and even suicidal thoughts. Every woman's experience of menopause is different and symptoms can vary at different times. While some manage without medication, others find symptoms wreck their lives. Studies report [14m working days](#) a year are lost to the UK economy as a result of menopause, with [one woman in four](#) having considered leaving her job.

On Friday, the government said it had [appointed Madelaine McTernan to lead](#) an HRT taskforce to identify the cause of the shortages. While we

welcome the move and hope this will solve long-term supply issues, action should have been taken much sooner. Shortages are not new or unexpected. Demand has been steadily increasing for some time, while shortfalls of products have been a problem for years. Many women need their HRT now, not in two or three months' time. An alternative is available but most women can't get hold of it thanks to a postcode lottery. Bijuve, made by Theramex, is in ample supply, but only women in Somerset and Norfolk can access it due to delays in signing off new medicines at local NHS level. Campaigners are calling for a national formulary – or list – of approved HRT treatments, available in warehouses, to ensure women everywhere have equal access.

A simple change to the law on prescribing could also ease the crisis. Pharmacists must currently dispense the exact product and amount of medication on the prescription. Those in England are urging the health secretary, Sajid Javid, to let them make minor changes to a prescription without consulting the GP who wrote it so that they give a suitable alternative when something is out of stock.

The “Davina effect” is expected to strike again after her follow-up documentary tomorrow. The government must be prepared.

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## OpinionCost of living crisis

# The Observer view on the cost of living crisis

[Observer editorial](#)

Cabinet ministers' glib shortcuts are dire response to economic crisis



Wages in Britain have been mostly stagnant since the financial crisis and productivity sits 15% below the United States, Germany and France.  
Photograph: Gary Calton/The Observer

Sun 1 May 2022 01.00 EDT

Living standards are set to fall at their [fastest rate](#) since records began in the mid-1950s. Last month, the Office for Budget Responsibility predicted that real household incomes [will fall by 2.2%](#) this year, as energy and food prices increase but wages fail to keep pace with rising bills.

The impact will not be felt equally. For some, it will barely register. For other families, it will mean difficult decisions about what to cut back on. For others still, it will be profound, stretching precarious budgets in which there

is already no give, forcing impossible choices between essentials such as putting food on the table and keeping the heating on, and sharpening the fear of the unexpected outlay that can trigger a debt spiral from which there is no escape. One estimate suggests lower-income households will face a drop in income of [£1,300 this year](#).

Nadhim Zahawi suggested increasing the maximum number of children an early years worker can be responsible for to reduce childcare costs

Last week, the latest thinking from ministers on how to address this crisis in living standards trickled into the headlines after a cabinet “brainstorming” meeting. Grant Shapps, the transport minister, proposed moving car MOTs from once a year to once every 24 months, saving a one-car household a paltry [£23 a year](#), at the risk of jeopardising road safety. The education secretary, Nadhim Zahawi, suggested increasing the maximum number of children an early-years worker can be responsible for in order to modestly [reduce the cost of childcare](#). Others around the table reportedly suggested unilaterally scrapping tariffs on food imports, which would weaken Britain’s hand in trade negotiations, and scrapping government commitments to reduce carbon emissions, a move that would create significant long-term economic and environmental costs for the UK.

The shallow suggestions reveal the government’s desperation to give voters the impression it is taking action to address these harsh economic circumstances, but without spending any money. They are not serious policies, but fodder for press releases before the local elections.

Britain is experiencing a prolonged [economic malaise](#). Wages have been mostly [stagnant](#) since the financial crisis, productivity has barely grown since then and sits 15% below the [United States, Germany and France](#), and external shocks – the self-inflicted pain of leaving the EU’s single market and customs union, and the war in Ukraine – have sent prices rocketing.

There are no shortcuts to increasing living standards. Any approach has to be three-pronged. First, economic policy needs to target rising productivity

and to ensure the spoils are shared evenly with employees through increased wages, particularly for those in low-paid work. One of the reasons in-work poverty rates have risen is that there are too many jobs that simply do not pay enough to enable people, particularly those with children, to ensure a minimum standard of living. That can be achieved only by narrowing the growth gap between London and the south-east and the rest of the country. It would take, at the very minimum, a radical rebalancing of government investment in transport, infrastructure and skills away from the richest regions of the country, which already receive more investment per capita, towards the poorest. Brexit has only made this task harder; it is forecast to significantly reduce exports and to increase regional inequalities over the long term.

Second, the real-terms cuts to benefits and tax credits of the past decade for low-income families with children must be reversed. In an economy with significant amounts of low-paid work, there will always be a need for government to redistribute income towards low-income parents. Yet successive Conservative chancellors have reduced the value of benefits and tax credits over time, with some families losing the equivalent of thousands of pounds a year from their household budgets, while delivering expensive income tax cuts that have disproportionately benefited more affluent households. This is another key reason why in-work poverty rates have increased and why, in a country as rich as ours, there are people, including those in work, relying on food banks to feed their children. The support that the chancellor, Rishi Sunak, has announced to help families with energy bills is too thinly spread, including across households for whom it is not critical, leaving the poorest families horribly exposed.

More and more people have little hope of ever buying their own home in an overpriced private rented sector

Last, the government needs to implement structural reforms to tackle the high cost of living. The most important of these is housing, the costs of which erode too much of people's pay cheques in one fell swoop. The UK has never built enough housing without significant public sector investment into social housing; yet social housebuilding levels have dropped dramatically since the 1980s, leaving the social housing stock to dwindle as

a result of demolitions and the right to buy. This has pushed more and more people who have little hope of ever buying their own home into an overpriced private rented sector. Britain urgently needs a programme of public investment in housebuilding to create more affordable homes for rent.

These are long-term economic reforms that require sustained investment. Even if put in place immediately, they will take time to fully deliver for the economy. Yet this is a government that swings from crisis to crisis, with little willing or capacity to plan for the next decade and a dearth of ideas to address Britain's very real and structural economic problems. This lackadaisical approach will probably consign us to years more of sluggish growth that drives increasing numbers of families with children into poverty.

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**Observer comment cartoon**

**Conservatives**

## The Tory Commons menagerie – cartoon

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## NotebookArchitecture

# The Tree of Trees jubilee sculpture is yet another mound of ill-judged public art

[Rowan Moore](#)



Thomas Heatherwick has been compared to Michelangelo, but this cartoon version of nature is no David



An artist's impression of the proposed 21m Tree of Trees sculpture that will be created outside Buckingham Palace as a centrepiece of the Queen's Platinum Jubilee weekend celebrations in June. Photograph: Heatherwick Studio for The Queen's Green Canopy/PA

Sat 30 Apr 2022 13.44 EDT Last modified on Sun 1 May 2022 00.07 EDT

The Tree of Trees, an object to be erected outside Buckingham Palace for the Queen's jubilee, is, according to the studio of its designer, [Thomas Heatherwick](#), a "sculpture" that "seeks to put the importance of trees and nature at the heart of this historic milestone". Here I'll pass by the abuse of metaphors (do milestones have hearts?) but not of trees, this being another case of certain designers' mania for picking them up, moving them around and putting them where they don't want to be.

This 21 metre-high steel structure will carry 350 small trees, planted in aluminium pots, which will be distributed around the country after the jubilee. It is approximately tree-shaped, but this awkward, angular construction is not much like an actual living organism. It is a tree emoji realised with structural engineering. It has strong vibes of the Marble Arch Mound, the disastrous artificial hill erected last year. Here, as there, a cartoon version of nature is placed in a London ceremonial space by people who don't seem to have thought much about what it is that makes trees lovely.

Those words from the studio also take liberties with the idea of art. They call the Tree of Trees a “sculpture”. Boris Johnson may once have compared [Heatherwick to Michelangelo](#), but David it is not.

## Trump takes the pip



Tomatoes – ‘dangerous stuff’. Photograph: Helios4Eos/Getty Images/iStockphoto

In other news from the plant kingdom, it has emerged that Donald Trump was so scared of being injured by fruit that he urged his security to attack protesters. “You can get killed with those things,” [he said](#), in a deposition to a New York court. “Tomatoes are bad, by the way. But it’s very dangerous... pineapples, tomatoes, bananas, stuff like that, yeah, it’s dangerous stuff.”

It’s hard not to make a comparison with [Volodymyr Zelenskiy](#), the man whom Trump once tried to bully into manufacturing political smears. The Ukrainian leader braves hit squads and bombs in Kyiv; the former US president cowards from tomatoes.

## Memorial misstep



The proposed UK Holocaust Memorial in London's Victoria Tower Gardens, planning permission for which has been overturned by the high court. Photograph: UK Holocaust Memorial/PA

Last month, the high court [overturned](#) the decision of the government to grant planning permission to the proposed UK Holocaust Memorial and Learning Centre. Its problem was with the location in Victoria Tower Gardens, a small, Grade II-listed park next to parliament. The court found that the proposal breached a 1900 law that required the gardens to be kept as open space. As has been clear since David Cameron [announced the plan](#) more than six years ago, the scale of the proposal would be devastating to a small and vulnerable garden. The biggest problem is not the memorial itself, but the decision to accompany it with a learning centre, which requires the construction of a substantial enclosed building.

It is heart-rending that there has been such a waste of energy, resources and goodwill, through lengthy planning processes and a public inquiry, to reach what should always have been an obvious conclusion.

But there is now the chance to create something worthy of the catastrophe the memorial is meant to remember. The learning centre could be located somewhere else, most obviously the Imperial War Museum, which already has outstanding galleries dedicated to the Holocaust. Conceivably a

memorial, if it consists of a landscape or of one of more objects rather than a building, could yet be built in the gardens without contravening the 1900 law.

On Friday, it was announced that the government has appealed against the high court's decision, which is a pity. It should rather take the opportunity of its verdict to apply the intelligence and sensitivity that it should have shown at the outset.

Rowan Moore is the Observer's architecture correspondent

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[\*\*Opinion\*\*](#)[\*\*Conservatives\*\*](#)

## If the Tories are serious about eradicating misogyny, maybe they should start at the top

[Catherine Bennett](#)



The MP accused of watching porn in the Commons is not exactly an outlier in his party



Boris Johnson ‘likened himself to another deluded leader who lost all authority’. Photograph: James Veysey/REX/Shutterstock

Sun 1 May 2022 02.00 EDT

Not since his horror on hearing that lockdown-breaking parties had happened in his own home have we heard the prime minister so appalled by the behaviour of colleagues. Discovering, last week, that one of them had spoken repellently about [Angela Rayner](#), he tweeted: “I deplore the misogyny directed at her anonymously today.”

Because if you’re going to be misogynistic about female politicians, isn’t it always better to put your name to it, like, say, Boris Johnson when he [analysed female contributions](#) to a Labour conference? “Time and again the ‘Tottymeter’ has gone off as a young woman delegate mounts the rostrum.”

Anonymous remarks – well, certainly ones in which perfectly standard Conservative objectifying have caused civilian offence – are a different matter. It was, [Johnson said, “intolerable”](#). “I have to say I thought it was the most appalling load of sexist, misogynist tripe.” And believing as ever that an unrelated shred of cultural capital adds class to his gibberish, Johnson likened himself to another deluded leader who lost all authority.

Paraphrasing King Lear: “If we ever find who is responsible for it, I don’t know what we will do, but they will be the terrors of the earth.”

Perhaps we can help? Not that it narrows it down much, but could the choice of *Basic Instinct*, so foundational for Johnson’s more furtive cohort, perhaps point to another 50ish man, raised before [Conservatives](#) could enjoy, as they do now, uninhibited workplace access to porn? As for retribution, it is all too clear how Johnson’s party normally deals with a Conservative MP whose misogyny or sexual attitudes make him unfit for public office. It does sod all.

Given the party’s recovery, unabashed, from the sort of #MeToo allegations that forced lasting reform in many other institutions, any terrors would be wildly inconsistent. Even with [three cabinet ministers](#) reportedly among the more than 50 MPs under investigation for sexual misconduct, there is little sign of the party’s accepting – like, however reluctantly, the Metropolitan police – that the risks of sheltering misogynists, predators and creeps may finally outweigh their traditionally respected role in its workforce.

Given the party’s recovery from the sort of #MeToo allegations that forced lasting reform in many other institutions, any terrors would be wildly inconsistent

Just last month, Crispin Blunt MP, well known for his interest in [legalising prostitution](#), declared the conviction of fellow Tory MP Imran Ahmad Khan for the sexual assault of a boy a “[miscarriage of justice](#)”. He remains at work. So do Conservative colleagues Stephen Crabb, whose [sexually explicit texts](#) to a 19-year-old interviewee merely “fell short” of party standards; Damian Green, demoted after [sexual harassment and pornography allegations](#); and [Rob Roberts](#), readmitted – the whip only suspended – after sexually harassing a junior member of staff. David Warburton, [reportedly accused](#) by three women of sexual harassment, is similarly suspended, pending investigation.

Since elaborating on his personal struggles, Jamie Wallis, Westminster’s first trans MP, appears to have been exonerated for his earlier association with a [sugar daddy website](#) (“Are you a student, a single parent or just short of

money?”). Johnson’s long history of workplace affairs with younger staff, right up to the one with a twentysomething favourite from party communications, we know about. [Matt Hancock’s excuse](#) for pandemic priapism: “I fell deeply in love.”

It looked for a while as if porn enthusiast [Neil Parish](#) would loyally take a lead from his leader’s approach to party investigation and wait for an inquiry – this one to tell him if he liked perving at work. That was until he yesterday confessed to his “moment of madness”.

That leaves the *Basic Instinct* briefer who could reasonably expect colleagues to offer at least as much support as was extended to Charlie Elphicke, the convicted sex offender whose wife, Natalie, inherited his constituents. The Conservatives’ signature line in defending the indefensible originates, in fact, well before #partygate, when the whips rescinded Elphicke’s suspension (for being under investigation for sexual assault), so he could vote. The *Sunday Times* reported on the Elphicke [cover-up](#) that five senior Conservative MPs – Mrs Elphicke, Roger Gale, Theresa Villiers, Adam Holloway and Bob Stewart – were subsequently forced to apologise or be [suspended](#) from the Commons “for improperly trying to influence a judge” on his behalf, an act “corrosive to the rule of law”.

So while not, as far as we know, rivalling [Charing Cross police station](#) for professional depravity, the ruling party demonstrates scarcely more interest in respecting either women or normal workplace boundaries. The existence of the latest porn connoisseur was exposed when female Conservative MPs [complained to their chief whip](#) about intolerable sexism and harassment, presumably over and above the [eminent cases](#) of which he will be aware.

Is the Conservative party especially attractive to sexual miscreants or does it take formerly respectful men and make them that way? Whatever the process, it accords with Johnson’s great man theory of history that leadership by a devotee of covert asymmetrical relationships, someone with a documented view of individual women as assemblages of sexual characteristics, would only exacerbate its institutionally sexist culture.

If Westminster harassment is now as pervasive as even [Nadine Dorries](#) can remember, it is hard to see this being corrected while Johnson, with as little

moral authority on this subject as on any other, remains in office.

Under him, his party would seem an outlier on extreme misogyny and sexual harassment if it weren't so redolent of standards recently prevailing in the Metropolitan police. It will be in his nature, as with #partygate, to blame underlings, to attempt piety, to aim his mini-terrors of the earth at men who think identically about younger female colleagues.

Women should demand, instead, the kind of cultural transformation now being proposed by Sir Stephen House, Cressida Dick's acting successor at the Metropolitan police. "There is a significant campaign within the organisation to deal with this completely unacceptable behaviour, to root it out and to exit those people who are exhibiting that behaviour from the organisation as fast as possible and in the right way." But Dick, who'd never even called women "totty", had to exit first.

Catherine Bennett is an Observer columnist

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[\*\*Opinion\*\*](#)[\*\*Universities\*\*](#)

# **Is it fair that we spend so much helping middle-class children into adulthood?**

[\*\*Sonia Sodha\*\*](#)



A university education has many benefits, yet it comes with huge downsides for society



Graduates are disproportionately middle class and the beneficiaries of significant taxpayer cash. Photograph: David Cheskin/PA

Sun 1 May 2022 03.00 EDT

There's a common assumption that when the state gets involved in providing services or investment, it's to act as a leveller. Whether it's schools, hospitals or libraries, the job of government is to redistribute opportunities and provide protection to those who fall on harder times.

Yet there are some clear instances where state spending actually increases inequality. Take public investment in transport and infrastructure: in the five years to 2019-20, the government spent about £12,000 per person in London, the richest part of the UK, compared with just [£8,000 in the north](#).

The most egregious, in-plain-sight example of this is government spending on universities. When young people turn 18, the principle that we should spend more on the education of children from disadvantaged backgrounds gets turned on its head. The state invests an average of £29,000 on the education of each of the [53% of young people who go to university](#). For the rest, there's nothing like that available; many launch straight into full-time

work, which for those without a degree is dominated by low-paid jobs offering few prospects for progression.

It is deeply unjust: significant taxpayer cash channelled towards a disproportionately middle-class group of young people who have enjoyed better opportunities; virtually nothing for those most failed by the school system, such as the relatively high proportion leaving compulsory education without basic levels of [numeracy and literacy](#).

This is why I have some sympathy with Tony Blair's call to increase the number of young people going to university to [70% by 2040](#). The former prime minister, architect of the 50% target he set just over two decades ago, has provoked a similarly mixed reaction with his new proposal. Some thought it "[actively wicked](#)": the state encouraging more young people to take on debt for degrees of questionable value, with one in five young people estimated to be financially better off had they [not gone to university](#), one in three graduates finding themselves in [non-graduate work](#) and degrees a requirement for jobs that wouldn't have asked for them 30 years ago.

But others point out that most graduates earn more than non-graduates, that the UK has significant [skills gaps](#) and that many employers won't look at you unless you have a degree. Would those opposed to expansion recommend against university for their kids?

Neither take is quite right. One of the issues with Blair's original reform was that it took a system of higher education that originated when a tiny proportion of people went to university and expanded it without asking if it needed to be reformed. That has resulted in a system that bakes in existing inequalities much more than it needs to.

What if we allocated £30,000 as a lifetime investment in the professional development of every single 18-year-old?

There are two mechanisms through means by which this happens. First is the social transition to adulthood. For one group of young people, there is government support to move out of home and experience independent living in a safe environment with pastoral care, with people from different

backgrounds. It's an in-between experience, no longer child yet not quite adult. The other group have to carve their route to independence themselves, with no institutional support, in an economy in which the best jobs tend to be in areas with the most extortionate housing prices. Little wonder that education level is fast becoming the most important political divide; new research suggests that going to university is associated with a [decline in racist and authoritarian attitudes](#) (as well as a move to the right on economic policy).

Then there are the extraordinary levels of social stratification designed into the university system. Universities sort young people according to their academic performance. A young person who gets three As at A-level will most likely be siphoned off to a different institution to someone who gets 3 Bs. There is no justification for why we have a school system in which it is widely recognised that mixed-ability, comprehensive schools produce the [best overall results](#), but a university system in which dropping one A-level grade might mean you have to go to another institution altogether.

It comes with huge downsides. [Universities](#) award their own degrees, so a 2:1 from one is not equivalent to that from another and employers use university ranking as a rule of thumb for degree quality. Yet the most selective universities have more students from affluent backgrounds, because bright children from poor backgrounds simply do not get access to the same educational opportunities, depressing their A-level performance. So our university system ends up actively funnelling the most socially advantaged young people into the best graduate jobs, regardless of whether having slightly better A-level grades is an accurate indicator of someone's workplace potential.

Of course, the skills someone develops through learning on their degree are useful for the workplace, whether they are transferable skills such as critical thinking or specific technical skills. But it is difficult to know just how much of the value of a particular degree comes from the social transition to adulthood, or the signal the institution you attended sends to employers, or the academic experience itself.

What if we were to take the £30,000 the government spends per young person on university and allocate this sum as a lifetime investment in the professional development of every 18-year-old? I doubt we would design from scratch the system we have today. Some might go on supporting the social transition of all young people, perhaps by funding expenses-paid opportunities to volunteer together abroad or in different parts of the UK, or helping them relocate to places with jobs in which they are interested. Some would go on intensive support for those who have left school without functional skills. More would go on degree-level apprenticeships, where young people can simultaneously work, earn and learn skills more closely tailored to the gaps employers need to fill. Some would be set aside for lifetime learning, so that post-18 learning is not one-shot, but something people can dip in and out of for the rest of their working lives.

Blair is right that 53% is not enough, but neither is 70%. Instead, we should at least invest the same in every 18-year-old and possibly even tip the balance the other way. But to simply plough the money into an elitist system that shores up class privilege because we lack the imagination to design something different would be a missed opportunity.

Sonia Sodha is an Observer columnist

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[Opinion](#)[Local elections](#)

## The sound you can hear is the dying groans of a clapped-out government

[Keir Starmer](#)



The Tories are a scandal-ridden party that is simply bereft of ideas or direction



‘With nothing left to cut and the economy flatlining, the Tories have decided to place the burden squarely on the shoulders of working people.’  
Photograph: Geoffrey Swaine/Rex/Shutterstock

Sat 30 Apr 2022 14.00 EDT Last modified on Sun 1 May 2022 00.10 EDT

In recent days, people across the country have been receiving their monthly payslips, only to find themselves hundreds of pounds worse off because of the decisions this Tory government has taken.

Boris Johnson’s 15th tax rise since taking office has come at the worst possible time. It has compounded the impact of rising prices, soaring bills and runaway inflation. It has made working people worse off.

It is a betrayal of the promises he made to the British public at the last election and one of the most self-defeating, damaging decisions a prime minister has taken in recent times. It is a policy of such profound stupidity and shortsightedness, only this Tory party and this prime minister could have come up with it.

They cannot say they were not warned. For months, ministers have ignored Labour’s pleas to scrap their tax rise on working people. They have ignored our plans to make oil and gas giants, which have made such incredible

profits they refer to themselves as a “cash machine”, pay their fair share. And they have ignored our calls to cut VAT from household bills – a genuine Brexit benefit the whole country can get behind.

Taken together, these sensible, practical plans could save households hundreds and hundreds of pounds. But when the cabinet finally got round to having a meeting about the issues last week, the big idea that emerged was some nonsense about having fewer MOTs. It would be laughable if it wasn’t so tragic.

During this election campaign, I have been asked time and time again why the government seems so reluctant, so slow, so timid in its response to the issues facing the country. Is it that they can’t act or that they don’t want to? The answer is they simply do not get it. Spending their time defending the indefensible, creating absurd distractions and squabbling among themselves has left them no space to get on with the jobs they were elected to do. It has rendered them incapable of governing.



‘A billionaire chancellor has declared that taking action to reduce energy bills would be “silly”.’ Photograph: Reuters

We have seen the miserable spectacle of a billionaire chancellor – mired in allegations about his family tax affairs and whether he is profiting from

businesses operating from Russia – declaring that taking action to reduce people’s energy bills would be “silly”. We have heard the prime minister talk about being tough on crime while facing allegations that his party ignored calls from the victim of a [Tory MP now convicted of paedophilia](#). This madness cannot go on. Britain deserves so much better.

When Boris Johnson stands in the House of Commons and makes his absurd claims about the state we are in, I see a man who is making it up as he goes along. A man out of touch with the reality of life outside the bubble he operates in. A man who enjoys the trappings of power but is petrified by the reality of it.

But on the thinning benches of MPs behind him, I sense something altogether more profound: the dawning realisation that the game is up. For a decade, the Tories have failed to grow the economy. Wages have frozen. Investment has dried up. Particularly outside the big cities, life has got harder and opportunities have disappeared. With nothing left to cut and the economy flatlining, the Tories have decided to place the burden squarely on the shoulders of working people with tax rise after tax rise.

Every vote for Labour is a vote to say Britain will no longer put up with Tories’ complacency over rising bills

In the absence of any idea about where the country is going, what they want to achieve or how they are going to improve people’s lives, the Tories have resorted to desperate attacks and deflections. Why have they and their camp followers spent weeks wasting police time over Labour activists – including me – stopping for dinner during a campaigning session a year ago? Why are they making anonymous [sexist attacks](#) on female Labour MPs? Because they have nothing else to say. The sound you can hear is the dying groans of a clapped out government.

This Thursday, you have a chance to send the Tories a message. This will not be the sort of local election where vast swaths of councils change hands – but don’t let that put you off. Every vote for Labour is a vote to say that Britain will no longer put up with the Tories’ complacency when it comes to rising bills and prices. That squeezing working people to the pips isn’t a

viable way to run an economy. That the sleaze and scandal this government has dragged us through is no one's fault but their own. Your vote will be heard loud and clear by those enabling this shambolic government. A vote for Labour is a vote for restoring some dignity, pride and honesty to our politics – and for a party that is truly on your side.

Keir Starmer is the leader of the Labour party

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**OpinionBoris Becker**

## **Anyone with a heart is bound to feel sadness at Boris Becker's fall**

**Tim Adams**



The urge to win at everything never left him, long after his sporting career was over



Precociously indomitable: Boris Becker at Wimbledon in 1987. Photograph: John Redman/AP

Sun 1 May 2022 02.30 EDT

Looking back on his young self, all that irrepressible boyish power, [Boris Becker](#) once observed: “When you are a teenager, you are looking for your own identity, and winning is a way of expressing yourself. And because I thought in victory I became somebody, in defeat, it followed I was nobody.”

No doubt, as Becker negotiates his first weekend of a two-and-a-half year [jail sentence](#) in Wandsworth prison – just a [couple of miles](#) from his Wimbledon triumphs – he will have cause, at 54, to examine the true nature of those extremes. The highest level of sporting stardom is the closest contemporary life gets to Greek myth and fatal flaws never make easy viewing.

In passing judgment on the former champion on Friday – Becker was convicted of deliberately hiding several million pounds of assets from a bankruptcy court in 2017 – the judge, Deborah Taylor, told him: “You have not shown remorse... and have sought to distance yourself from your

offending and your bankruptcy. While I accept your humiliation as part of the proceedings, there has been no humility.”

If she had ever seen him play, she would have known that emotion was always the hardest thing for Becker to express. It was also what made him so precociously indomitable. There was no need for any feints or mind games in his early career. His tennis mentor, the Romanian Ion Tiriac, recalled how in “those early years – ’85, ’86, ’87 – Becker was the most natural, crystal-clear youngster I ever saw. He didn’t know how to lie, didn’t need to lie, didn’t need to find excuses or hype... That’s what made human beings around the world identify with him.”

The memory of that honesty on a tennis court was also the thing that made his dissembling in Southwark crown court so tough to contemplate. He stood in the dock in his green and purple All England Club tie, as if it might still hold some magic to protect him from the more brutal realities of the world.

It is a cliche that sportsmen – and tennis is arguably the most mentally fraught of all sports – need the discipline of the game to hold their demons in check. Becker, with his internalised demands of perfectionism that he was determined to take to a new level, was always likely to be exhibit A of that truism.

What the judge described as his “fall from grace” began too neatly even for scriptwriters with a passion for clear story arcs. On the evening of Becker’s final defeat at Wimbledon, after “drinking too much with his buddies”, he found himself in a broom cupboard of Nobu restaurant with the Russian-Algerian model Angela Ermakova. It was “not an affair”, it was “poom-pah-boom!” he later recalled.

The resultant paternity suit and divorce proceedings from his first wife, Barbara, and his habits of denial, began the emptying of Becker’s finances that 23 years on have resulted in his jail term.

Of course, those facts prove that Becker has no one to blame for his predicament but himself. His sentence also sends a welcome message that no one is above the law. But still, anyone with half a heart who thrilled to the

German's unforgettable Centre Court triumphs can feel no schadenfreude at his horrible reversal in fortune, only sadness.

Tim Adams is an Observer columnist

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## [For the record](#)UK news

# For the record

This week's corrections

Sun 1 May 2022 01.00 EDT

We referred to Labour potentially “winning its first byelection victory since 2012” ([Tory MP convicted of sexually molesting boy, 15, fails to keep his promise to resign](#), 24 April, p7). The party has held a number of seats at byelections in the past decade; we meant this would be its first victory in taking a seat from another party.

An article ([Minister plans review of impact of gender dysphoria treatment](#), 24 April, p9) said the interim Cass report on NHS gender identity services had found that “some staff” felt under pressure to adopt an unquestioning affirmative approach to children concerned about their gender. To clarify, that finding related to “primary and secondary care staff”, not those at the Gender Identity Development Service, the specialist provider for England and Wales run by the Tavistock and Portman NHS Foundation Trust.

The memorial service for the *Observer* columnist Katharine Whitehorn took place on 19 April, not 18 April, as an article suggested in referring to “last Monday” ([Notebook](#), 24 April, p42). And the first name of Rev Dr Ifode-Blease, who led the service, is Mariama, not Mariam.

Germany’s economics minister is Robert Habeck, not “Halbeck” ([A divided France and a Germany unsure of its identity threaten Europe’s future](#), 24 April, p44).

The Royal Botanic Gardens at Kew have strict phyto-sanitary controls for their plants, not “photo-sanitary” controls ([The new gold rush](#), 17 April, Magazine, p13).

Other recently amended articles include:

[Surviving the split: Sinn Féin's long road to independence from the IRA](#)

[Britain's Tesla hopes for big things from 'microfactories'](#)

[Nine people found from tour boat that went missing in rough waters off Japan](#)

[Streaming: The Souvenir Part II, Belfast and the best screen memoirs](#)

[Nigel Slater's recipes for asparagus and cannellini beans, and salmon with tomato](#)

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email [observer.readers@observer.co.uk](mailto:observer.readers@observer.co.uk), tel 020 3353 4736*

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## Observer letters**Children**

# Letters: vulnerable children deserve better

Twenty years after the Victoria Climbié report, our social services are still bedevilled by poor practice



Victoria Climbié, whose death in 2000 sparked a report. Photograph: Victoria Climbié Charitable Trust/PA

Sun 1 May 2022 01.00 EDT

I felt a mixture of despair and anger on reading your editorial (“[We've learned so little from these tragedies](#)”). Twenty years ago, I was responsible for implementing the recommendations of Lord Laming’s Victoria Climbié report in a large local authority. It is inexcusable that the same poor practice decisions, lack of management supervision and inadequate resourcing continue to result in the death of vulnerable children. Laming set out numerous recommendations but, if just two of his principles were consistently followed, this would significantly reduce the risks of severe harm or death.

First, children at risk should be seen in person and spoken to separately from the parent(s) at regularly intervals by a social worker. Failure to meet the agreed timescales or see the child should result in serious action. Second, directors, senior social work managers and local councillors must spend regular time with frontline child protection workers so that they understand the pressures and complexities of this work and then ensure that staff are well supported and the service adequately resourced.

Providing support for vulnerable families and protecting children from harm should be treated as the highest priority for central and local government. Failure to do so is in itself a form of state neglect.

**Peter Riddle**

Wirksworth, Derbyshire

## Sweet and sourdough

I sympathised with the Ingleton bakers in your article (“[An honest crust? Craft bakeries rise up against ‘sourfaux’ bread](#)”, News). The requests of the Real Bread Campaign seem reasonable. The key feature is that, to make a genuine sourdough bread, it is necessary to blend few natural ingredients and leave them fermented for much longer than other non-artisan breads. Such a process obviously has an impact on the cost. Consumers have to be fully informed about what they are buying, particularly with the growing issue of allergies.

**Maurizio Pirri**

St Albans, Hertfordshire

## Breaking out of the box

I was sorry that in Graham Caveney’s detailed and often harrowing account of the development of his agoraphobia (“[Living inside the box](#)”, Magazine) there was no mention of the usefulness and efficacy of clinical psychology in treating this condition. My mother suffered from it for 30 years, but in her 60s was persuaded to have treatment and within a week of intensive, psychologist-led group therapy could travel on her own on public transport, walk around a lake on her own and never again took a Valium tablet. Better

still for me, it dispelled her often stated belief that psychology was “the painful elaboration of the obvious”.

**Dr Sally Cheseldine**

Balerno, Edinburgh

## Wrong priorities on Ukraine

In Mark Townsend’s report on delays in issuing visas to Ukrainian families (“[Ukrainian refugee plan ‘designed to fail’ – insider](#)”, News), a government source is quoted as saying, by way of explanation for the delays, that safeguarding processes were in place to protect children from trafficking.

Where do you start with this? We are talking about families with children, not adults with random children picked up off Ukraine’s streets. What meaning of “safeguarding” such children validates leaving them in a war zone? These documented families will be coming by a legal route and landing at an airport, not pitching up on a beach in Kent. The time to implement safeguarding processes is when they are safely in the UK.

**John Filby**

Ashover, Derbyshire

## Ireland: an alternative view

Your article about Northern Ireland and whether a win for Sinn Féin would bring a united Ireland closer makes unstated assumptions (“[Future of unionism](#)”, Focus). First, a united Ireland could only be brought about by a vote of people on both sides of the border. Since your point is that unionists and Protestants in Northern Ireland may no longer form a majority, you seem to assume that they would eventually be voted into a united Ireland. That assumes that the electorate in the republic would automatically vote for a united Ireland.

In the event of an actual vote for a united Ireland, voters in the republic would start to consider at least two counterarguments against it: the added tax burden and the possibility of “importing” loyalist terrorism (the Troubles in reverse). Consider instead the following as a distinct possibility: Sinn Féin in power in both Dublin and Belfast with a referendum throughout Ireland

that led to Northern Ireland remaining in the UK.

**Frank Desmond**

Cork, Republic of Ireland

## Levelling up our health

Phillip Inman is correct (“[The key to winning the climate debate isn't economics: it's health](#)” (Business). Surely protection of public health should be the primary purpose of any government, although one would not think so looking at our own. As the result of global warming and air pollution, we will be unhealthier (both physically and mentally), pandemics will be more likely and health inequalities will be exacerbated. Tackling pollution must be central to “levelling up”. As we have found in the pandemic, the economy relies on good public health.

**Dr Stephen Battersby**

Surbiton, London

## Disenfranchised by tech

The subject of the “Ask Philippa” column merits further discussion (“[Technology makes me feel I don't really belong in this world](#)”, Magazine). The speed with which technology has proliferated over the past few years, accelerated by the pandemic, has created an underclass of people who no longer fit in our “advanced” society created by banks, businesses and government departments. Forms have to be completed online and it's increasingly difficult to speak to “real” people for advice on services and benefits.

There is a stratum of citizens who do not have access to technology for a number of reasons: financial, age, lack of support, inability to read/write, dyslexia, mental health issues. I am also aware of a number of people who lost access to computers when public libraries closed during the pandemic. Additionally, not everyone finds it easy to use modern technology.

It is time that proper research was done to identify how many citizens are being disenfranchised in a society seemingly controlled by algorithms and business consultants and whether an underclass is becoming isolated.

**Phil Mills**  
Eastbourne, East Sussex

## No scapegrace, I

Any concerns that the *Observer* may be increasingly pandering to the middle-class intelligentsia could only have been fuelled by some of the answers to last week's speedy crossword, [No 1,386](#). I am no scapegrace (17a) and accept that crosswords should be didactic (12d); however, I think they should contain words in common parlance. The speedy crossword used to be the acme (23a) of my week, but this one sent me scurrying for the shelter of my stoā (21a). I look forward to some good-natured persiflage (5d) in response to this missive.

**Andy Welsh**  
Sudbury, Suffolk

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[Opinion](#)[Boris Johnson](#)

## The red wall? Boris Johnson should worry more about Disgusted of Tunbridge Wells

[Nick Cohen](#)



The only constituency that matters to the PM now is the rightwing press and party MPs



Some MPs say they can see voters in traditional Tory heartlands turning away from the party. Photograph: Geoffrey Swaine/REX/Shutterstock

Sat 30 Apr 2022 16.00 EDT Last modified on Sun 1 May 2022 00.09 EDT

Like a cornered thug lashing out, [Boris Johnson](#) hides his weakness by pretending to be strong. In every respect that matters his administration isn't a government but a taxpayer-subsidised rabble without intelligence or purpose. The prime minister himself staggers from crisis to crisis as drunks roll round a pub. To steady himself he throws out crowd-pleasing punches: dumping refugees in Rwanda, tearing up solemn agreements with the European Union, privatising Channel 4.

His stunts have a one-sidedness that deserves more attention. The only crowd Johnson wants to please is the mob to his right.

At the last election, 13,966,454 people voted Conservative. Many were moderate, educated people in commuter towns and relatively prosperous suburbs. Fear of Jeremy Corbyn and the feeling that the [Conservatives](#) were the party that could best manage the economy gave the Tories their votes. In his moment of crisis, Johnson is taking their support for granted – assuming, that is, he thinks about them at all.

I doubt he does because the one constituency that matters to him now is Tory MPs. If he can persuade them that he will survive a vote of no confidence, and there is thus no point in demanding a leadership election, he will see off a rebellion and live to blight another day. [As Conservative MPs](#) are now more rightwing than ever – further to the right even than the party membership – there's no mileage in appealing to the centre ground. Johnson would commit political suicide if he tried to be reasonable.

The only other bloc he would die rather than alienate is the rightwing press. Read the *Mail*, *Sun*, *Telegraph* and *Express*, and the network of online sites that have abandoned journalism for power-worship, and you will struggle to find a liberal conservative viewpoint. The right is the only place from where opinion can flow. The Tory press is Johnson's world. Writing comment pieces for its editors was the only skill he mastered. He does not just need their approval, he wants it, craves it, as we all want the blessing of our bubbles. Dominic Cummings revealed that Johnson had told him that the *Telegraph* was his “[real boss](#)”. Despite stiff competition, this could be the most demeaning sentence uttered by a British prime minister.

To finish the catalogue of Johnson's failings – I accept that there are many more but my space is limited – Robert Harris once used a [John le Carré line](#) to describe Jacob Rees-Mogg: “He's a barmaid's idea of a gentleman.” Johnson has a posh boy's idea of the working class. He thinks they are a little bit racist and a little bit stupid and care more about culture wars than the crushing price of food and fuel. I think and hope that he's wrong, but time will tell.

What, though, of another side of the Tory coalition? The professional people, who follow procedures and ethical standards and expect others to do the same. They are the men and women who make much of this country work. Keir Starmer doesn't frighten them because he is one of them, while the [Liberal Democrats](#) might have been designed to receive their votes. And vote they do and they know enough about politics to know how to vote tactically, particularly now the Tories no longer appear to care for them.

“Johnson doesn't offer my constituents anything,” a senior Conservative from a southern seat told me. “He just sucks up to his friends in the rightwing media.” David Gauke, the former MP and justice secretary

Johnson purged from the Conservatives for refusing to agree to a hard Brexit, said he could see his corner of Hertfordshire and large parts of southern England turning away from the Conservatives. Liberal graduate couples moving in to escape the punishing house costs of London were transforming the home counties.

I am told that Graham Brady, the chair of the 1922 Committee, fears Johnson will lose him his seat in my home town of Altrincham. When I was a boy, Altrincham was one of the most Conservative areas in the north: the place where suburban Manchester met the north Cheshire gin-and-Jag belt. Now even the golf clubs don't tolerate racism and, Corbyn notwithstanding, the Conservative majority was down to 6,000 at the last election. Labour could take the seat now he's gone.

After 12 years of Conservative rule, we have a social system closer to feudalism than meritocracy

I'm not pretending that middle-class small "c" conservatives are crypto-socialists. They might deplore the brutality and vulgarity of the Johnson government and wish their fellow citizens had never fallen for the Brexit debacle, but they voted Tory for the same reason their predecessors voted Tory: not out of love but because they thought the Conservatives kept taxes low. Twelve years of Conservative rule have given them the heaviest tax burden since the 1940s. A government that has wrenches us out of the EU cannot make the economy work and so must demand we pay more for less.

Or they thought that the Conservatives would allow middle-class income to grow. During 12 years of Conservative rule, average disposable income has barely risen. Millions have not had a real pay rise for a decade.

Or they believed the Conservatives when they said that, if you worked hard and showed talent and drive, the Tories would see to it that you were rewarded. After 12 years of Conservative rule, we have a social system closer to feudalism than meritocracy. Parental wealth always mattered, of course; the class system did not arise from nowhere in the 2010s. But in much of the UK it is now the decisive factor. The poorer they are, the slimmer the chances of the young and middle aged buying a home become.

As the Institute for Fiscal Studies said, the size of the family inheritance you receive will probably mean more than anything you can achieve by your own efforts. No wonder Johnson is waging cultural battles. After the failure of austerity and Brexit, they are all the Conservatives have left.

Like generals, politicians and political commentators fight the last war. Because of the Tory success in capturing white working-class votes in 2019, they obsess about “the red wall”.

At some point in the 2020s, you will hear the shuddering noise of gears being yanked into reverse. Those same politicians and commentators will ask what the hell made the Conservative party of all parties believe it could ignore its core constituency and treat the respectable middle class as if they were “the left behind”.

Nick Cohen is an Observer columnist

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# Headlines

- 'It's just horrific' Non-verbal black teenager who has never left UK detained at immigration centre
- Revealed EU border agency involved in hundreds of refugee pushbacks
- Live Attorney general says some male MPs 'behave like animals' but they are 'small minority'
- House of Commons Tories hit by another scandal after MP accused of watching porn
- Politics Welsh female MP accuses Labour frontbencher of sexist remark

## Race

# Non-verbal black teenager who has never left UK detained at immigration centre

Boy who went missing from hospital arrested and held at Gatwick facility after being wrongly recorded as Nigerian



Brook House immigration detention centre near Gatwick airport, England.  
Photograph: Gareth Fuller/PA

*[Geneva Abdul](#)  
[@GenevaAbdul](#)*

Thu 28 Apr 2022 04.20 EDTFirst published on Thu 28 Apr 2022 04.00 EDT

A woman has described how her 17-year-old black British son was found at an immigration detention centre after going missing while being treated for psychosis.

The boy – who is non-verbal – disappeared from a hospital in Kent, where he had been sectioned under the Mental Health Act, on 7 April. Two days later, he was arrested by British Transport [Police](#) (BTP) at Euston on suspicion of fare evasion, before being detained by Immigration Enforcement near Gatwick, despite being British.

“It’s just horrific,” the boy’s mother said. “Because he’s black they just assumed ‘let’s pick him and put him in a deportation centre’.”

When the boy was returned to the hospital, his clothes contained [Home Office](#) documents that incorrectly stated his name and date of birth, and recorded his nationality as Nigerian.

“How do they know he’s from Nigeria, when he doesn’t even speak to them?” the woman said of her son.

When the hospital became aware of his disappearance, the family, local police and BTP were notified, the woman said, and he was listed as a missing person.

It is unclear where the boy went in the days before his arrest. He is understood to have travelled to Manchester, where the family had previously lived, before trying to return to London without a phone, money or identification.

On the morning of 9 April, BTP said they were notified of a fare evader on board a London-bound train from Manchester. In a statement, BTP said the male provided a false name and date of birth, stating he was 20.

At Euston, he was arrested on suspicion of fare evasion and taken to police custody in Islington, according to BTP, where “officers were unable to engage with the male or verify the details provided despite their efforts, which included attending the address provided”. The boy’s fingerprints were then taken and he was detained by Immigration Enforcement.

Documents apparently prepared at the detention centre, and seen by the Guardian, incorrectly state his name and date of birth, and record his nationality as Nigerian. They describe him as a person who requires leave to

enter or remain in the country, which he does not have. On one document, it states his removal from the UK was “imminent” as he had failed to give “satisfactory or reliable answers” to immigration officers.

The boy is a British citizen and has never left the UK. His mother said he would not have been able to say his date of birth properly, and would never have said he was from Nigeria.

This week, a BTP commander told her that when they searched the Kent address the boy had provided, they discovered a Nigerian family living there. She was told that officers gathered the boy was from a Nigerian background as he had the same accent as the residents. She contested this statement, describing her son’s accent, when he does rarely speak, as Mancunian and London.

James Wilson, deputy director of Detention Action, which works with people facing removal, said unaccompanied minors or children under the age of 18 should not be in detention in the first place. “In theory detention should be an absolute last resort, rather than an early step you would go to,” he said.

A Home Office spokesperson said: “We rely on information provided by our policing partners when an individual is referred to Immigration Enforcement. In this case, the individual declared himself to British Transport Police to be an adult male. Police nurses assessed him and raised no physical or mental health issues.”

The spokesperson said the individual gave no further information to Immigration Enforcement, and once his true identity had been established, he was returned into the care of mental health services.

BTP said they were reviewing the incident internally.

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## Migration and development

# Revealed: EU border agency involved in hundreds of refugee pushbacks

Investigation suggests Frontex's database recorded incidents of illegal pushbacks in Aegean Sea as 'prevention of departure'



Three migrants at sea after jumping off an inflatable boat that was carrying seven people back into Turkish waters, 2 April. Photograph: Turkish Coast Guard

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[Katy Fallon](#) in Athens

Thu 28 Apr 2022 01.30 EDT Last modified on Fri 29 Apr 2022 00.25 EDT

The EU’s border agency has been involved in the pushbacks of at least 957 asylum seekers in the Aegean Sea between March 2020 and September 2021, according to a new investigation.

Frontex, the EU’s best-funded agency with a budget of €758m, is being investigated over previous allegations of [complicity with Greek authorities](#) in illegal pushbacks of asylum seekers, something the organisation has denied.

Now a [joint investigation](#) by Lighthouse Reports, Der Spiegel, SRF Rundschau, Republik and Le Monde has revealed Frontex’s involvement in what appear to be pushbacks, according to its own database. According to the joint investigation, a freedom of information request (FoI) found the agency’s internal incident report database, called Jora, recorded sightings of asylum seeker pushbacks in the Aegean being labelled by officials as “prevention of departure”. The Frontex guidelines define this as an incident when migrants are stopped at sea by non-European country authorities in their territorial waters and sent back to their point of departure.

Frontex provided a redacted version of the database but included descriptions of 145 cases labelled “prevention of departure”, which differed from reports of the same incidents by the Turkish coastguard, witnesses, leaked documents and other confidential sources, when cross-referenced.

In at least 22 incidents, asylum seekers were taken off dinghies, put into Greek life rafts and left adrift at sea.

On 28 May last year, a group of almost 50 asylum seekers who had already landed on the Greek island of Lesbos contacted the Norwegian NGO, Aegean Boat Report, sending photos and a WhatsApp message showing their location near the island’s capital, Mytilene.

Hours later, some of the group were found by the Turkish coastguard at sea in orange life rafts. This case was later recorded in the Frontex database as a “prevention of departure”.

Two Frontex sources claimed to reporters that illegal pushbacks in the Aegean end up in the Jora database as “prevention of departure”. “Why don’t they just call it ‘pushbacks’ and get it over with?” said a Greek coastguard officer.

Human rights groups have called pushbacks in the Aegean “systematic”.

The fresh allegations against Frontex come before a 15 May referendum in Switzerland on the country’s involvement with the EU border agency. In 2021, Switzerland donated 24m Swiss francs (CHF) to the agency and the government plans to increase this donation to 61m Swiss francs by 2027.

But opponents of the agency’s expansion say it would make Switzerland directly responsible for human rights violations taking place on Europe’s borders. The referendum was called after a petition collected more than 62,000 signatures in support of cutting funding for the agency.

Greece and Frontex deny allegations of pushbacks and say their officials comply with human rights legislation, but there has been mounting pressure on [Frontex executive director Fabrice Leggeri](#), and the EU has [frozen part of its budget](#) while allegations are investigated.



Migrants protest against pushbacks at the border with Turkey, near the Greek parliament in Athens on 20 February 2022. Photograph: Louisa Gouliamaki/AFP/Getty Images

Tineke Strik, the Dutch MEP and a member of the Frontex Scrutiny Working Group, called for a suspension of the border agency's operations in [Greece](#).

“A fundamental change in the culture” of the EU border agency was needed, she said, including a change of leadership, because Leggeri has “lost credibility in taking fundamental rights seriously”.

“[Frontex] should suspend operations in Greece,” Strik said. “We have so many credible reports from authorities such as the UN and the European Council, which all say that pushbacks are systematic. More needs to be done, otherwise you become part of the violations and complicit – and this is the problem that Frontex is facing.”

Frontex said it had no power to investigate the actions of individual countries and that it “ensures and promotes the respect of fundamental rights in all its border management activities”. The agency said it was “fully committed to uphold the highest standards of border control within our

operations and our officers are bound by a code of conduct. This is the standard we bring to every one of our operations.”

In a statement, the agency added: “Fundamental rights, including the respect for the principle of non-refoulement, are at the core of all the agency’s activities.”

Non-refoulement is the fundamental principle underpinning international refugee law: a person requiring protection cannot be forcibly returned to a place where they will face harm.

It added that staff were obliged to report any violations of rights and that the agency had more than 20 monitors in place.

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This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/global-development/2022/apr/28/revealed-eu-border-agency-involved-in-hundreds-of-refugee-pushbacks>

[Skip to key events](#)

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

## Tories should act now over MP accused of watching pornography in chamber, says Keir Starmer – as it happened

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- [Starmer says Tories should take action now against phone porn MP](#)
- [Braverman says says some male MPs ‘behave like animals’](#)
- [Welsh female MP accuses Labour frontbencher of sexist remark](#)
- [Labour MP Liam Byrne to be suspended for bullying](#)
- [Tory MP Jamie Wallis charged over car crash](#)
- [MP accused of watching porn in Commons](#)

Updated 3d ago

*[Tobi Thomas](#) (now) and [Andrew Sparrow](#) (earlier)*

Thu 28 Apr 2022 13.25 EDTFirst published on Thu 28 Apr 2022 04.28 EDT



Keir Starmer says the Tory party must take action against the male MP accused of watching pornography in the House of Commons. Photograph: Kirsty Wigglesworth/AP

[Tobi Thomas](#) (now) and [Andrew Sparrow](#) (earlier)

Thu 28 Apr 2022 13.25 EDTFirst published on Thu 28 Apr 2022 04.28 EDT

## Key events

- [3d agoSummary](#)
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- [3d agoCabinet Office says UK firms will save at least £1bn from decision to delay some planned post-Brexit checks on food imports](#)
- [3d agoSturgeon says society will lose out if sexism means women are discouraged from entering politics](#)
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- [3d agoLiam Byrne says he is 'profoundly sorry' for bullying member of staff](#)
- [3d agoConservative MP Jamie Wallis charged with failing to stop after car crash last year](#)

Show key events only

## Live feed

Show key events only

From 3d ago

[08.58](#)

### **Starmer says Tories should take action now against MP accused of watching porn on phone in chamber**

Keir Starmer has told ITV that the Conservative party should take action now against the MP accused of watching pornography on his phone in the Commons chamber. The party has said it wants the matter to be resolved through the independent complaints and grievance scheme (ICGS) – even though that would require one of the female MPs who saw their colleague watching porn to submit a formal complaint, which is not thought to have happened yet. Starmer said the Tories should act more quickly. He said:

This is an unusual case because the Tory party knows who this individual is. I think that they should deal with it, and deal with it sooner rather than later ... They know who this is. They should take action now.

Asked about the report that a member of his own shadow cabinet told an MP that she was an asset because women voters wanted to be her friend and [men wanted to sleep with her](#), he said he was “deeply concerned” about this allegation. He said Labour had a complaints procedure and he hoped the woman would have the confidence to use it. “I would want to get to the bottom of this and do something about it,” he said.

'The Tory party, they know who this is, they should take action now' [@Keir\\_Starmer](#) says the [@Conservatives](#) know which MP was watching porn in the Commons and them to deal with it swiftly

He also responds to claims of sexism against a senior Labour MP  
<https://t.co/XKGYAn1EDt> pic.twitter.com/SL185oQwER

— ITV News Politics (@ITVNewsPolitics) [April 28, 2022](#)

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Updated at 09.40 EDT

[3d ago](#)[12.28](#)

## Summary

- [\*\*Suella Braverman claims sexual misconduct at parliament part of wider problem linked to ‘coarsening of behaviour’.\*\*](#) She said that watching pornography on a phone in the Commons chamber was “absolutely reprehensible”. She added that she did not know the identity of the male Tory MP accused of doing this, and that she was not at the meeting on Monday night when a colleague first spoke about witnessing this.
- [\*\*Conservative MP Jamie Wallis charged with failing to stop after a car crash last year.\*\*](#) The MP for Bridgend and first openly transgender MP was arrested on suspicion of “driving whilst unfit” following the late-night collision when a car hit a lamppost in Llanblethian on 28 November. At the time Wallis said he was “assisting police with their inquiries”.
- [\*\*Liam Byrne says he is ‘profoundly sorry’ for bullying member of staff.\*\*](#)

The Labour MP **Liam Byrne** has issued a statement saying he is “profoundly sorry” for bullying a member of his staff. He said he was glad that the panel that investigated the complaint, and recommended a two-day suspension as punishment, recognised his remorse.

- [\*\*Parliament prorogues.\*\*](#) This involves [a ceremony](#) that sees MPs attending the House of Lords (as they do for the Queen’s speech),

where they listen as a royal commission (five peers, wearing robes and bicorne hats) announces that the current session of parliament is over.

- **Sturgeon says society will lose out if sexism means women are discouraged from entering politics.** Asked at FMQs about sexist attacks on Angela Rayner, the Labour frontbencher, Sturgeon said that she was “absolutely appalled both by the male Conservative MP who thought it was okay to make these pathetic and derogatory comments, but also by the fact that we still live in a society that is deemed acceptable for a story like that to be published in a major newspaper”.
- **The Cabinet Office says UK firms will save at least £1bn from the decision to delay some planned post-Brexit checks on food imports.** Jacob Rees-Mogg, the Brexit opportunities minister, has confirmed that the UK is delaying the introduction of physical checks on fresh food being imported into the country from the EU. As my colleague Lisa O’Carroll writes, it is the fourth time the introduction of these measures – part of the new post-Brexit border controls – has been delayed.
- **Starmer says Tories should take action now against the MP accused of watching porn on his phone in the chamber.** Keir Starmer has told ITV that the Conservative party should take act immediately.
- **Boris Johnson** has said allegations that a Tory MP watched pornography in the Commons chamber are “obviously unacceptable”.

That’s it from us for today. For the latest live news updates, you can follow our Ukraine blog:

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Updated at 13.25 EDT

3d ago **11.24**

**Boris Johnson** has said allegations that a Tory MP watched pornography in the Commons chamber are “obviously unacceptable”.

Asked by broadcasters during a visit to Burnley whether the parliamentarian would lose the Conservative whip if the allegations are proven, the **prime minister** said:

*I think it's obviously unacceptable for anybody to be doing that kind of thing in the workplace.*

*It would be the same for any kind of job up and down the country, let's be absolutely clear about that.*

*What needs to happen now is that the proper procedures need to be gone through, the independent complaints and grievances procedure needs to be activated and we need to get to understand the facts, but, yeah, that kind of behaviour is clearly totally unacceptable.”*

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Updated at 11.28 EDT

[3d ago](#)[11.13](#)

Imran Ahmad Khan has said he has now resigned as Wakefield's MP and will no longer be a parliamentarian from this Saturday, two-and-a-half weeks after being [found guilty of sexually assaulting a 15-year-old boy](#).

**Helen Pidd** reports that Ahmad Khan told the Guardian he had submitted his resignation on Monday and that it was effective from 30 April. That means he will be paid his salary in full for April.

The Conservative party will then choose a date for a byelection, which will probably take place in late June, after the jubilee bank holidays and local elections.

The Treasury has received his resignation letter, the Guardian understands.

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Updated at 11.23 EDT

3d ago11.07

The UK government has acknowledged that processing problems within the [Home Office](#) have led to delays between the approval of visas for Ukrainian refugees and emailed notification that the visas have been granted, preventing many vulnerable people from swiftly making their way to safety.

Politicians from all parties highlighted a variety of serious problems with the Homes for [Ukraine](#) visa scheme during an urgent question in the Commons on the Home Office's handling of the refugee crisis.

**Amelia Gentleman's** report looks at the latest figures, which show that just one in five people issued visas under the Homes for Ukraine scheme had arrived in the UK.

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Updated at 11.25 EDT

3d ago10.43

Some of Britain's biggest seaports are considering legal action against the government to recover the costs of building border control posts they fear will never be used, after confirmation that [post-Brexit import checks will be delayed for a fourth time](#).

Controls on food and animal products would not be introduced until at least 2023, said Jacob Rees-Mogg, the Brexit opportunities minister, in a [written statement](#) published on Thursday.

**Jasper Jolly** reports:

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Updated at 10.48 EDT

[3d ago](#)[10.41](#)

**Senior ministers** hit out at Westminster’s “shameful” culture in which some men act like “animals”, as a Tory MP faces the prospect of being thrown out of parliament for watching pornography in the Commons chamber.

The allegations against the MP are set to be examined under parliament’s **independent complaints and grievance scheme (ICGS)**, which investigates allegations of harassment and sexual misconduct.

**Suella Braverman**, the attorney general, said if the subject of the complaint was found to have been watching pornography it should result in them “no longer holding their privileged position as a member of parliament”.

She added said that while the men she had worked with had been “respectful, courteous and supportive” there was a “very small minority of men – and it is men – who fall short and there are some bad apples who are out of order, who behave like animals, and are bringing parliament into disrepute to be honest”.

**Sajid Javid**, the health secretary, said: “There have been several instances of inappropriate and sexist behaviour recently in parliament. It is shameful.

“Parliamentarians are public servants and it is their duty to set an example of character and integrity. The culture of Westminster needs to change.”

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Updated at 10.46 EDT

[3d ago](#)[10.18](#)

**Caroline Nokes** has said that calls from the chief whip for the complaint to be referred to parliamentary authorities amounted to “kicking it into long grass”.

[Speaking to the PoliticsHome podcast](#), Nokes said she was “disappointed” that no action was taken swiftly against the accused MP the following day.

“I thought I would wake up on Wednesday morning to find somebody had had the whip withdrawn, and that didn’t happen,” she told PoliticsHome.

“We’ve seen the whip withdrawn from colleagues for a variety of reasons over the years. I thought this seemed to be fairly straightforward. It was raised by one colleague, it was corroborated by another. That seems to me perfectly enough to withdraw the whip.”

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Updated at 10.38 EDT

[3d ago](#)**10.06**

The government has said that it has dropped its plans to impose further checks on goods entering the UK from the European Union.

The Brexit opportunities minister, **Jacob Rees-Mogg**, said it would be “wrong to impose new administrative burdens and risk disruption at ports” and added that no further import controls would be imposed on EU goods this year.

The change means restrictions on the imports of chilled meats from the EU and border checks on plant and animal products will not be introduced in July.

Port operators expressed frustration that time and money spent preparing for the new checks has been “wasted”.

Rees-Mogg said a “new regime of border import controls” will be established by the end of 2023.

You can read the full story from **Lisa O'Carroll** here:

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Updated at 10.40 EDT

3d ago 09.58

**Ed Miliband MP**, Labour's shadow climate change and net zero secretary, has responded to the chancellor conceding the case for a windfall tax, saying: "As energy prices for families rocket, Rishi Sunak's words show that the government is simply running out of excuses to oppose a windfall tax on oil and gas companies.

"The truth is that oil and gas companies are spending their record profits on billions in dividends and share buybacks.

"All the while that the government resists a windfall tax, the British people pay the price in the energy bills crisis they face.

"It's time the government dropped their threadbare excuses, did the right thing, and put a windfall tax on oil and gas producers to bring real help to the British people."



Ed Miliband at the FT Weekend Oxford literary festival in March.  
Photograph: David Hartley/Rex/Shutterstock

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Updated at 10.40 EDT

[3d ago](#)09.52



Andrew Sparrow

**Sajid Javid**, the health secretary, has joined those saying the work culture at Westminster needs to change.

There have been several instances of inappropriate & sexist behaviour recently in Parliament. It is shameful.

Parliamentarians are public servants and it is their duty to set an example of character and integrity. The culture of Westminster needs to change.

— Sajid Javid (@sajidjavid) [April 28, 2022](#)

That is all from me for today. My colleague **Tobi Thomas** is taking over now.

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[3d ago](#)[09.40](#)



Keir Starmer campaigning in Workington today. Photograph: Ian Forsyth/Getty Images

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3d ago [09.34](#)

The **Cold Chain Federation**, which represents many firms that transport food goods, has welcomed the government's decision to further delay the introduction of physical checks on EU food imports. (See [1.44pm](#).) These are from **Shane Brennan**, its chief executive.

We welcome this decision by [@DefraGovUK](#) and [@cabinetofficeuk](#) - which marks an ongoing dialogue between [@ColdChainFed](#) and others on the implementation of post-Brexit food import controls - statement 1/6 <https://t.co/Vn8MQI05E3>

— Shane Brennan (@ColdChainShane) [April 28, 2022](#)

Despite all the hard work preparing it was clear that the July vet controls would have had a devastating effect on the ability of our food businesses to import goods that UK consumers want. 2/6

— Shane Brennan (@ColdChainShane) [April 28, 2022](#)

In a thread that continues from these tweets, Brennan says he hopes the government will take the time it now has to rethink the way these controls are implemented.

What we have learnt is that no amount of preparation time can solve the fundamental harm that complex, load by load paperwork processes have on ability and willingness to trade. 5/6

— Shane Brennan (@ColdChainShane) [April 28, 2022](#)

So we can now take the time available to build new, better ways to implement these rules and meet the promise of establishing the most innovative border in the world for our food traders.” 6/6

— Shane Brennan (@ColdChainShane) [April 28, 2022](#)

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Updated at 09.45 EDT

[3d ago](#)09.25



Boris Johnson welcoming Ignazio Cassis, president of the Swiss Confederation, to Downing Street this morning. Photograph: Tayfun Salci/Zuma Press Wire/Rex/Shutterstock

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Updated at 09.31 EDT

[3d ago](#)08.58

# **Starmer says Tories should take action now against MP accused of watching porn on phone in chamber**

Keir Starmer has told ITV that the Conservative party should take action now against the MP accused of watching pornography on his phone in the Commons chamber. The party has said it wants the matter to be resolved through the independent complaints and grievance scheme (ICGS) – even though that would require one of the female MPs who saw their colleague watching porn to submit a formal complaint, which is not thought to have happened yet. Starmer said the Tories should act more quickly. He said:

This is an unusual case because the Tory party knows who this individual is. I think that they should deal with it, and deal with it sooner rather than later ... They know who this is. They should take action now.

Asked about the report that a member of his own shadow cabinet told an MP that she was an asset because women voters wanted to be her friend and men wanted to sleep with her, he said he was “deeply concerned” about this allegation. He said Labour had a complaints procedure and he hoped the woman would have the confidence to use it. “I would want to get to the bottom of this and do something about it,” he said.

'The Tory party, they know who this is, they should take action now' @Keir\_Starmer says the @Conservatives know which MP was watching porn in the Commons and them to deal with it swiftly

He also responds to claims of sexism against a senior Labour MP  
<https://t.co/XKGYAn1EDt> [pic.twitter.com/SL185oQwER](https://pic.twitter.com/SL185oQwER)

— ITV News Politics (@ITVNewsPolitics) [April 28, 2022](#)



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Updated at 09.40 EDT

3d ago 08.44

## Cabinet Office says UK firms will save at least £1bn from decision to delay some planned post-Brexit checks on food imports

**Jacob Rees-Mogg**, the Brexit opportunities minister, has confirmed that the UK is delaying the introduction of physical checks on fresh food being imported into the country from the EU. As my colleague Lisa O'Carroll writes, it is the [fourth time](#) the introduction of these measures – part of the new post-Brexit border controls – has been delayed.

In [a statement](#), the **Cabinet Office** says British importers will save at least £1bn from the move – an effective admission that the Brexit controls planned by government have been a burden for business. The Cabinet Office says:

The remaining import controls on EU goods will no longer be introduced this year, the government has announced today.

Instead, traders will continue to move their goods from the European Union to Great Britain as they do now.

Russia's illegal invasion of Ukraine, and the recent rise in global energy costs, have had a significant effect on supply chains that are still recovering from the pandemic.

The government has therefore concluded that it would be wrong to impose new administrative requirements on businesses, who may pass on the associated costs to consumers already facing pressures on their finances.

The change in approach is expected to save British importers at least £1bn in annual costs.

The government says it will now look at how to introduce the remaining checks “in an improved way”.

After [Brexit](#), the UK and the EU both had to introduce regulations and checks for imports that were not required when Britain was in the single market. Britain has been phasing in its new checks over time, to give businesses a chance to prepare, and in 2022 physical checks on meat were due to come into force from 1 July, on dairy from 1 September and on other food products from 1 November. But now there will be no further changes this year.



Jacob Rees-Mogg. Photograph: Mark Thomas/Rex/Shutterstock

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Updated at 09.27 EDT

[3d ago](#)**08.18**

## **Sturgeon says society will lose out if sexism means women are discouraged from entering politics**



Libby Brooks

**Nicola Sturgeon** has told MSPs that she stands in solidarity with Angela Rayner and called on men to reflect on the impact of misogynistic behaviour.

Asked at FMQs about sexist attacks on the [Labour](#) frontbencher, Sturgeon said that she was “absolutely appalled both by the male Conservative MP who thought it was okay to make these pathetic and derogatory comments, but also by the fact that we still live in a society that is deemed acceptable for a story like that to be published in a major newspaper”.

Referring to a previous Mail article that compared her to the then prime minister Theresa May under the headline “Legs-it”, she added:

Unfortunately, I am all too familiar with – in my case – the Daily Mail’s tactics of attempting to reduce women politicians to their legs, a tactic which, to the best of my knowledge, is never used to dismiss and degrade male politicians.

Sturgeon added that the story highlighted “deep-seated sexism and misogyny in society”, and said she was pleased that her government was now committed to consult on draft legislation to tackle misogyny following the report by Helena Kennedy’s working group on improving the legal system for women facing abuse of all kinds.

Calling on men, specifically, to change their behaviour, she concluded:

We will rue the day we make it more difficult and less attractive for women to come forward for election to public office. It is time to draw a line in the sand and it’s time for men – not all men are misogynist, but misogyny comes from men – to change.



Nicola Sturgeon in the Scottish parliament. Photograph: Ken Jack/Getty Images

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Updated at 08.28 EDT

[3d ago](#)[07.58](#)

## Parliament prorogues

Parliament has just prorogued. This involves [a ceremony](#) that sees MPs attending the House of Lords (as they do for the Queen's speech), where they listen as a royal commission (five peers, wearing robes and bicorne hats) announces that the current session of parliament is over.



The prorogation ceremony in the House of Lords. Photograph: HoL

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Updated at 08.10 EDT

[3d ago](#) [07.45](#)

In [her Mansion House speech last night](#) Liz Truss, the foreign secretary, said that Britain and its allies wanted Russia to leave "[the whole of Ukraine](#)". In interviews this morning **Ben Wallace**, the defence secretary, said this included Crimea, which was occupied by Russia in 2014. He insisted this was not a new demand. He said:

The international community believes Russia should leave Ukraine, the international community has condemned Russia for its invasion of Crimea, which was illegal in 2014. We've constantly said that Russia should leave Ukraine sovereign territory, so that hasn't changed.

But, speaking to Sky News, Wallace also stressed that Crimea was not an immediate priority. He said:

There's a long way to go before Ukraine pushes into Crimea. I think what I would certainly say is, we are supporting Ukraine's sovereign integrity. We've done that all along. That of course includes Crimea.

But you know, first and foremost, let's get Russia out of where they are now in its invasion plans and help Ukraine resolve ... and actually remember the Minsk agreement, which Russia has basically ripped up, was all about trying to resolve those two occupied territories.

In a separate interview, Wallace said that the more violently the Russian invaders behaved, the more the west would support Ukraine with arms. He told Times Radio:

What we were always careful to do is make sure that we calibrated whatever weapons we sent in. It's important to link Russian behaviour with the response. If they do horrendous things, they must recognise that there will be an increase in weapons to the Ukrainians to see them off.

And so, you know, if Russia continues to bomb indiscriminately people from the air – look what it's done in Mariupol, for example – destroyed the city, then of course the west will respond more to Ukrainian requests for self-defence, and sometimes that will include planes and tanks.

He also said that if possible the UK would supply Ukraine with anti-ship missiles.

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Updated at 07.55 EDT

3d ago [07.26](#)

## Liam Byrne says he is 'profoundly sorry' for bullying member of staff

The Labour MP **Liam Byrne** has issued a statement saying he is “profoundly sorry” for bullying a member of his staff. He said he was glad that the panel that investigated the complaint, and recommended a two-day suspension as punishment (see [11.30am](#)), recognised his remorse. He said:

Two years ago at the beginning of lockdown, following a workplace dispute that led me to send the complainant home ... I did not resolve the dispute correctly with a proper disciplinary process, and having nevertheless extended the complainant's contract, thereby failed to fulfil my obligations as an employer and parliament's behaviour code.

This constituted an ostracism which was a breach of parliament's behaviour code which I strongly support, and caused distress for which I am profoundly sorry. I have apologised in full to the individual concerned.

I'm incredibly grateful to the panel for recognising the genuine remorse I felt about the impact on the individual concerned, the steps I have already taken to ensure this never happens again, along with the work still to do, and for concluding that I did not deliberately act to delay the investigation.

This has been a valuable lesson for me and one I am determined to learn, as me and my team seek to offer the best possible service and voice for the residents of Hodge Hill.

A [Labour](#) spokesperson said: “The Labour party fully supports the recommendations of this independent report, including the proposed sanction.”



Liam Byrne. Photograph: HoC

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Updated at 07.32 EDT

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## House of Commons

# Tories hit by another scandal after MP accused of watching porn in Commons

Female MPs complain about sexism and misogyny in Tory ranks in meeting on Tuesday night



The female MPs did not name the man who allegedly watched porn in the Commons. Photograph: Moonstone Images/Getty/iStockphoto

*[Rowena Mason](#), [Aubrey Allegretti](#) and [Jessica Elgot](#)*

Wed 27 Apr 2022 16.30 EDT Last modified on Thu 28 Apr 2022 00.14 EDT

The Conservatives have been hit by yet another [House of Commons](#) sex scandal after a female minister reported seeing a male colleague watching porn on a mobile phone in parliament.

A string of the party's female MPs have complained to the whips about sexism and misogyny within its ranks in a heated meeting on Tuesday night.

It comes just days after the whips said they would try to find out which Tory MPs, in an article in the [Mail on Sunday](#), had falsely accused Labour's deputy leader, Angela Rayner, of a "Basic Instinct" ploy to distract Boris Johnson by crossing and uncrossing her legs in parliament.

Female MPs are also "on the brink of mutiny", according to one senior Tory, over a report over the weekend that three cabinet ministers were among 56 MPs against whom complaints of sexual harassment were made to the independent complaints system.

The female junior minister complained about the pornography viewing to the Commons' chief whip, Chris Heaton-Harris, at a meeting of a new group for female MPs and peers – known as the 2022 – on Tuesday night. A second senior female MP also raised similar concerns about the same male MP.

A whips' office spokesperson initially said the chief whip would be "looking into this matter". "This behaviour is wholly unacceptable and action will be taken," she said. However, later on Wednesday evening, the whips' office said it was up to the female MPs to raise the matter officially with the independent complaints and grievance service (ICGS). "Upon the conclusion of any ICGS investigation the chief whip will take appropriate action," the spokesperson said.

Rachel Maclean, who is the minister responsible for safeguarding women, said the alleged behaviour was "shocking and unacceptable", adding that there should be no place for it in the party or in Parliament and the MP should be expelled from the party if the claims are correct.

When the complaints were raised, others among the group of 40 MPs in attendance were said to have "gone ballistic". One recalled: "We all shouted that they had to be suspended." Another attender said: "I think chief wasn't prepared for strength of feeling, one colleague talked about comments made on her skirt, another at being called 'girls' by whips, another about being sniggered at by male colleagues in chamber."

They also complained that female MPs were being sidelined, with the media dominated by senior Tory men on the morning broadcast rounds and regular

television shows.



Angela Rayner on ITV's Lorraine show on Tuesday. She has criticised claims she viewed 'sexist slurs' as a joke. Photograph: Ken McKay/ITV/REX/Shutterstock

The female MPs did not name the man who allegedly watched porn in the chamber during the meeting. However, there was fevered speculation in Westminster on Wednesday about the identity of the male MP. Several names circulated amid conflicting information about whether this had been a frontbencher.

Female MPs across the Commons are outraged about the treatment of Rayner. But Boris Johnson's spokesperson said on Wednesday the PM was "uncomfortable" that the Speaker had summoned the editor of the Mail on Sunday to discuss its misogynistic treatment of her.

David Dillon, the newspaper's editor, was asked to meet the Speaker, Lindsay Hoyle. But on Wednesday the Mail ran a response from Dillon saying he would not attend the meeting, as well as a story suggesting Rayner had joked about the comparison on previous occasions with Tory MPs as well as on a podcast.

In response, Rayner hit out at claims that she had previously viewed “sexist slurs” made against her as a joke.

Rayner tweeted in response: “I said … in January that the sexist film parody about me was misogynistic and it still is now. As women we sometimes try to brush aside the sexism we face, but that doesn’t make it OK.

“The Mail implies today that I somehow enjoy being subjected to sexist slurs. I don’t. They are mortifying and deeply hurtful. ‘She loves it really’ is a typical excuse so many women are familiar with. But it can’t be women’s responsibility to call it out every time. I don’t need anyone to explain sexism to me – I experience it every day.

“Boris Johnson gave assurances he would unleash ‘the terrors of the earth’ on the Tory MPs spreading this vile sexism. I hope to hear what he’ll be doing about it today.”

Hoyle told MPs on Monday he had arranged a meeting with Dillon after an outcry over the claims in the article. Dillon said he and his political editor, Glen Owen, would not be attending as journalists should “not take instruction from officials of the House of Commons, however august they may be”.

The Conservative MP Caroline Nokes, chair of the women and equalities committee, wrote to Hoyle asking him to consider revoking the Commons pass of the article’s author. However, Hoyle, who met Rayner on Monday, suggested it would not be right to remove his pass.

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**Labour**

## **Welsh female MP accuses Labour frontbencher of sexist remark**

Member of shadow cabinet allegedly told MP she was successful because men wanted to sleep with her



A Welsh MP has alleged that a shadow minister said she was Labour's 'secret weapon'. Photograph: Maureen McLean/Rex/Shutterstock

*[Matthew Weaver](#) and [Aubrey Allegretti](#)*

Thu 28 Apr 2022 10.14 EDTFirst published on Thu 28 Apr 2022 05.52 EDT

A female Welsh MP has accused a member of the shadow cabinet of lewd sexism by stating she would be successful because men wanted to sleep with her, as the attorney general accused some male MPs of acting "like animals".

After the latest allegation of misogyny to hit Westminster, **Labour** promised to launch an investigation if a complaint was made. But the MP told BBC

Wales that identifying herself and making a complaint was not in her best interests.

She alleged an unnamed member of Labour's frontbench described her as a "secret weapon" because, he said, women wanted to be her friend and men wanted to sleep with her.

The Welsh MP said the remark was made at an event when she was praised as a "rising star" of her party. She alleged that before she could reply the shadow minister intervened with the "secret weapon" remark, and added that she was a "vote winner" because of her looks.

A Labour spokesperson said: "The Labour party takes all complaints extremely seriously. They are fully investigated in line with our rules and procedures, and any appropriate action is taken."

The [Women's Equality party tweeted](#): "It's no wonder violence and harassment pervades society when MPs fear reporting misogynistic behaviour more than being an actual misogynist."

The shadow work and pensions secretary, Jonathan Ashworth, suggested Labour should investigate even if a complaint was not raised formally. Speaking to BBC Breakfast, he said: "I have literally just heard about it as I was walking into the studio. Obviously this has to be investigated. We need to find out who these people are. I would now expect the Labour party to look into that."

He also criticised the sexist culture in the Commons. Ashworth said: "All these claims that we are hearing about – it is shocking, foul, disgusting. But it's also utterly depressing. All these stories reveal a misogyny and there's actually also a bullying culture in that place as well."

The Sunday Times reported that 56 MPs had been referred to parliament's independent complaints and grievance scheme over sexual complaints, including three cabinet ministers and two shadow cabinet ministers.

On Tuesday a Conservative MP was alleged to have been [seen looking at pornography on his phone](#) while sitting in the Commons chamber.

The attorney general, Suella Braverman, said it was only a “very small minority” who “fall short” and brought their profession into disrepute. Speaking to BBC Radio 4’s Woman’s Hour, she said: “On no occasion have I been made to feel uncomfortable and all the men that I’ve worked with have been respectful, courteous, and supportive. There is, however, a very small minority of men, and it is men, who fall short and there are some bad apples who are out of order who behave like animals and are bringing parliament into disrepute.”

When it was pointed out that 56 complaints of sexual misconduct were being investigated, Braverman said: “There’s a very big difference between investigations and actually proven complaint … 56 out of 650 MPs is a minority and 56 out of the number of male MPs is a minority.

“We must be careful that this isn’t about demonising all men, this isn’t all men. This is a minority of, as I say, bad apples, who are ruining it for everybody else. I don’t think we should be saying there’s a pervasive culture. That’s not my experience.”

Braverman said she was appalled at reports of a colleague watching porn in the Commons chamber and had spent the past 24 hours thinking about how and why someone would be “so brazen, so reckless, so stupid, so appallingly badly behaved.

“I hope that if this is proven to be true, then we will see the most severe reprimand. I think we would really need to see a situation where the whip should be removed. I’m ashamed that this person is carrying the Conservative rosette. And I think they really do need to be subject to a recall and no longer be holding their privileged position as an MP.”

Downing Street admitted there was “a lot to do to improve the culture in parliament” and that the latest shocking allegations showed improvements to the culture and reporting systems were “obviously not good enough”.

The Labour leader, Keir Starmer, said the Conservatives should “take action now” against the MP who allegedly watched pornography. “I think it’s very good that we’ve got an independent system and obviously that requires

anonymity. This is an unusual case because the Tory party knows who this individual is.

“I think that they should deal with it and deal with it sooner rather than later, and take appropriate action. So, nothing wrong with the independent process, but I think the Tory party, they know who this is, they should take action now.”

The defence secretary, Ben Wallace, speaking on BBC Radio 4’s Today programme, said: “There is no place for pornography in the workplace. It’s really that simple.”

The interviewer, Mishal Husain, asked Wallace what action should be taken against the MP if the allegation was proven. Wallace replied: “I certainly think they should lose the whip.”

He also urged witnesses to call out inappropriate behaviour. Wallace said: “I would absolutely encourage all people to come forward whether they are bullied, whether they’ve been victim of inappropriate behaviour, or indeed this type of example.”

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During and after the interview Wallace was [criticised for](#) repeatedly calling Husain “Martha” in a mistaken reference to another Today presenter, Martha Kearney.

The LBC producer [Shivani Sharma tweeted](#): “Can someone tell Ben Wallace he is speaking to Mishal Husain today. He’s called her Martha twice now, whilst talking about respect for women in the workplace.”

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## 2022.04.28 - Spotlight

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## ‘We Ukrainians know how to turn suffering into strength’: Gogol Bordello’s Eugene Hütz on his musical resistance



‘As always, it’s punk and hardcore that’s way ahead of the others.’ Eugene Hütz in New York. Photograph: Lauren Withrow/The Guardian

The raucous Ukraine-born punk frontman has been a tireless cultural ambassador since the Russian invasion. He talks about his benefit single, growing up under Soviet repression, and ‘freedom-fighter’ musicians doing nothing to help



Amy Fleming

Thu 28 Apr 2022 05.00 EDT Last modified on Fri 29 Apr 2022 09.43 EDT

For the 2005 film [Everything Is Illuminated](#), the Ukrainian-born Gypsy punk rocker [Eugene Hütz](#) returned to his home country to play Alex, a hip-hop-loving, liberty-taking tourist guide for American Jews. The musician’s own life couldn’t be more different – as the frontman for raucous, multicultural band [Gogol Bordello](#), he has been a longtime fixture on the arts scene of the Lower East Side in New York and toured with Madonna. But now, as the world watches Ukraine [defend itself against Russia](#), Hütz finds himself taking on the role of a real-life guide to Ukrainian culture for westerners who have previously shown little interest.

“One of the things that I’m trying to debunk is that I’m some first guy from behind the iron curtain that got into western pop culture,” says the 49-year-old. “Tommy Ramone, who started the Ramones, escaped with his family from Budapest when Russian tanks rolled in there in 1956. He was a political refugee from the east bloc because of communist invasion.” The

late Ivan Král, who collaborated with Patti Smith, Iggy Pop and David Bowie, “was born and raised in Prague and emigrated [to the US] when Russian tanks rolled into Czechoslovakia. People like that, in the very fabric of punk rock, their underdog energy was coming from a real place.”

Ukrainian people can go without comfort, which is unthinkable for people in the west

Hütz has rushed down from a recording session on his roof to talk to me on a video call. “I was trying to find something less bouncy, sound-wise,” he says of the Ukrainian charity song he has created with the Primus frontman, Les Claypool, Sean Lennon and the Police drummer, Stewart Copeland, joined by Hütz’s bandmate Sergey Ryabtsev on violin and [Billy Strings](#) on guitar. [Man With the Iron Balls](#) is a paean to Volodymyr Zelenskiy. This is just one element of his non-stop activity in support of Ukraine since Russia invaded on 24 February, which includes a Gogol Bordello world tour starting in the US on 4 May. It will rip through Europe, with a final date listed, defiantly, on the original published schedule, as the UPark festival in Kyiv on 15 July.

He props his phone up, sits back against a wall of white fitted wardrobes and takes a meditative deep breath through his nose. “A lot of my friends from punk and hardcore bands had songs for Ukraine three days into the war,” he says. Among the first to get in touch was “Jello Biafra from Dead Kennedys. Patti Smith was very supportive – we started a wave of fundraisers pretty much right away. So much respect to legit people like [Pink Floyd](#): Dave Gilmour just put out a song. But, as always, it’s punk and hardcore that’s way ahead of the others on issues like that.”

The Gogol Bordello experience isn’t what you would call hardcore punk. “That’s why I came up with this term ‘joy core’,” says Hütz. He sums this up as a “flamboyant zest” for life. His [first fundraising](#) event in New York, starring Smith, along with Suzanne Vega and Craig Finn of the Hold Steady, raised \$130,000 (£103,000): \$50,000 came from Lennon and Yoko Ono,

who had wanted to attend but couldn't. Smith and Hütz dueted on the Ukrainian national anthem.

Hütz grew up in Kyiv and says his family is a mix of Ukrainian, Romany and Lithuanian, so "all my grandparents spoke very rootical [sic] Ukrainian". Growing up in the Soviet Union, he had to speak Russian, too. "Especially in the capital," he says, "the Russification was very aggressive. The majority of schools were Russian, with some classes of Ukrainian literature and language, just to keep people pacified so they didn't totally freak out and start picking up cobblestones and looting government buildings." But people who spoke Russian or had Russian last names, he says, were rewarded. "They would give them better apartments and better jobs."



Patti Smith with Eugene Hütz during a benefit for Ukraine at City Winery, New York, last month. Photograph: Taylor Hill/Getty Images

In a coded way, he says, teachers were able to "convey that this territory is occupied by emphasising Ukrainian pronunciation of towns, and original costumes and original ways of Ukrainian culture, holidays like Ivana-Kupala [an ancient gathering in honour of Slavic sun gods]. You know, just threading, threading, threading them into our knowledge. There was a part of

the population that was pretty bleached out and Sovietised, no doubt. Luckily, I was not from a family that had any illusions about it.”

He says he lived first in central Kyiv, and then moved to the outskirts, in a place he compares to the Bronx. “Industrial and just sand and cement blocks – not particularly prestigious, very working class. That’s where punk rock flourished.” By 13, he was writing for fanzines and loading other bands’ equipment and “helping organise stuff” on the punk rock scene. People often ask whether it was a big culture shock when he moved to the US in 1990, aged 17. “What culture shock?” he says. “I basically went from lugging a kick drum on my back up the stairs in [Ukraine](#), to lugging a kick drum down the stairs into the basement here. Punk rock is a kind of a cultural corridor.”

Hütz’s family were able to cross the iron curtain, he says, “thanks to Gorbachev – another awesome Ukrainian [his mother was Ukrainian] – who basically debunked the entire false history of the Soviet Union and kind of made it go away … We had enough reasons, as a family with continuous Soviet abuse, to qualify as political refugees.” His father, who was also in a band, was seen as provocative, “a notorious anti-Soviet guy on the block, who always listened to BBC radio and spoke English and listened to rock’n’roll, and was constantly under suspicion that he was some kind of spy. And that can really reflect on your level of life and not being able to really get anywhere.”

Hütz and his parents left Ukraine in 1989 with whatever they could carry in their hands – a few heirlooms, his tapes of Ukrainian punk bands and a brown leather jacket – and lived in refugee camps in Poland, Hungary, Austria and Italy before making it to the US. What does he most remember from that time? “It’s a PTSD kind of thing,” he says. “Time goes on, but I can easily get into that frame of mind. Because it’s the kind of experience that is 100% trauma. But I’m not saying it here for whining reasons.” For him, it’s an illustration of the Ukrainian spirit. “We know how to turn just about any kind of suffering or injustice into a source of strength. What you’re witnessing right now – the heroism of Ukrainian people, the heroism of the president, who just totally rose to the occasion, is mindblowing to the world. It’s more known to Ukrainians themselves – something that we always can count on.”



Gogol Bordello on stage at the Showbox in Seattle, 2016. Photograph: Mat Hayward/Getty Images

It's this resilience that he drew on to keep his underground punk band going for so long, as they toured constantly. He says that, before Gogol Bordello became more widely noticed in 2005, after their fourth album, [Gypsy Punks: Underdog World Strike](#), was released, "the band had been around for almost nine years, with 10 people in a van, sleeping on the floor in one room". The move to the relative comforts that come with international recognition made him realise "all the levels where Ukrainian people can go without comfort, which are unthinkable for people in the west: the minute they don't get the right kind of cream into their coffee, they're like flipping out. It's amusing."

Not that it's not "awesome that life here is so tremendously comfortable. That's a real relief in a lot of ways." But that's no excuse to ignore suffering elsewhere. "I don't care if you grew up with an iPhone implanted in your brain ... people get so lost in '[conspiranoia](#)', where they can't see straight, even with the situation in Ukraine, which is the fight of Ukrainian people against the oppressor that's been going on for hundreds of years." Even intelligent people, he says, "fall into confusion ... People fall for the most moronic notions like, oh yeah, of course the US is behind it. Dude, do you understand how America-centric that idea is?"

There are clips from the frontline of people making music and singing – that's not baffling at all if you're Ukrainian

Hütz visits Ukraine often, witnessing its shift since the fall of the Soviet Union in 1991. It, along with other former Soviet countries, has been reclaiming and celebrating its own culture. “A lot of the things that were branded by Moscow as supposedly Russian are not Russian at all, but usually a cultural theft from a more culturally developed neighbouring country, like Georgia, or Poland, or Finland.” Even Russian dolls, he says, were repurposed from Japan.

“As far as literature goes,” he continues, “Gogol is a Ukrainian writer. Which is why I took the name for the band, to keep telling the story. Chekhov was born in Ukraine. Mikhail Bulgakov, who wrote [The Master and Margarita](#), he’s from Kyiv.” And in the world of painting, “Kazimir Malevich is always called Russian – he was a Ukrainian Polish guy who identified as a Ukrainian Polish guy. The list goes on.” Food comes next. “People go: ‘Oh, I want to get some borsch.’ You want to get some borsch? Go and get it in a Ukrainian restaurant. That’s where it came from.”

And don’t even get him started on dance. “All the supposedly Russian dancing that everybody loves,” he says, “with people doing acrobatic, unbelievable things very high up in the air, wearing red pants? That’s an old Ukrainian fitness programme from the middle ages. That’s Cossack dancing, because that was their way of staying fit, appropriated and stolen by Moscow and branded as some kind of Russian accomplishment. But we’ve already taken that back, firmly.” Even Russia’s favourite folk song, Black Eyes, is, he says, “a song written by a Ukrainian poet on a German melody”.

Music has played a role in the current crisis, in raising money abroad and on the frontline. Westerners have told Hütz they “can’t really process how come there’s so much TikTok, YouTube and Instagram clips from the frontline of people in the trenches with instruments, making music and singing and letting the steam out. They almost find it to be baffling, but that’s not baffling at all if you’re Ukrainian – this is how we do it.” In historical Ukrainian paintings, he says, “you will find scenes where a Cossack is sitting with a sword and a musical instrument across his shoulders”.



Eugene Hütz as liberty-taking guide Alex in the film Everything Is Illuminated. Photograph: Warner Bros/Allstar

Hütz recently posted a [video](#) of a group of women, in matching embroidered deep red costumes, singing the story of the current Russian invasion. They're part of a long tradition of Ukrainian women choirs singing storytelling ballads. A translation he posted with this clip includes the lines: "And armoured personnel carriers were in flames / The Muscovites stood nearby / They were in complete stupor / Burning bastards were in flames."

"That one was a 300- to 400-year-old melody," he says. "Truly archetypal and ancient in the manner of delivery. But very modern in the events described, and using modern slang." The women look so well put together that I assume they were far from the frontline, but Hütz looks at me like I'm crazy. "They're in Kyiv. My whole family is in Kyiv right now."

He's in touch with his relatives on a daily basis and says the bolstering effects of international solidarity should not be underestimated. "When people are driving around rural Ukraine with their children, armed and trying to get to the safe place, or if they're in the trenches fighting, people are prone to feel fractured and disconnected and forlorn. Any bit of information that, hey, out there somewhere in the UK, there is a concert

going on in support of us; in France, people right now are by the embassy demanding support; that there are real people in real time doing something, it still means a lot.”

Does it feel like the first time the world has ever been behind Ukraine? “I mean, it’s never been behind Ukraine. It totally failed to be behind Ukraine in 2014. Same thing happened – it’s not like it’s a new thing.” He believes the current crisis could have been averted if the world had risen to the occasion back then. Even in the music world, he says, “a lot of older supposed freedom fighters, who are the first ones to sing the songs of freedom when nothing’s going on and it’s all peachy – a lot of those people are the biggest fakes in the world, milking the naivety of the coolest audiences. The freedom-fighting image sells well when there’s nothing to fight for. Once it’s really time to step up, you’re gonna need a really big torch to find them.”

Not that Hütz himself originally set out to educate the world about eastern Europe. “Believe me, that’s not really my thing,” he says. “And, truth be told, Ukrainians are pretty humble. Which is probably why things were easily hijacked from them for so long. We’re like, well, we’re rich in culture, so it ain’t gonna hurt us.”

This article was amended on 29 April 2022 to make it clear that the listing, on the original published schedule, of a date for Gogol Bordello on 15 July 2022 in Kyiv was symbolic.

- *Gogol Bordello’s Solidaritine world tour starts on 4 May, with part of the proceeds going to Ukraine*

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## **‘They are totally smashing it!’ Bernardine Evaristo on the artistic triumph of older Black women**



Ingrid Pollard, Kit de Waal, Bernardine Evaristo, Sonia Boyce and Lubaina Himid. Pollard’s show Carbon Slowly Turning is at MK Gallery, Milton Keynes, until 29 May. Composite: Guardian Design; David Levene/The

Guardian; Gary Doak/Alamy; Jeff Spicer/Getty Images; Antonio Olmos/The Observer

Artists, novelists, actors, poets: from the Venice Biennale to Bridgerton, Black women in their 50s and 60s are finally getting the recognition they deserve, says the pioneering Booker winner

*Bernardine Evaristo*

Thu 28 Apr 2022 01.00 EDT Last modified on Thu 28 Apr 2022 23.22 EDT

When I heard, earlier this month, that the fine-art photographer [Ingrid Pollard](#) had made the [shortlist for the Turner prize](#), potentially the most career-changing of art accolades, I was overjoyed, but also astonished. Overjoyed because her art deserves this level of recognition; astonished because it has taken this long for Pollard, whom I have known for 40 years and is well into her 60s, to take her place in the spotlight. The sculptor Veronica Ryan also made the list. Like Pollard, she has had a sustained career as an artist since the 80s.

I delight in the fact that Black female creatives in their 50s and 60s are having a moment. Just this week, it was announced that Sonia Boyce, who also came of age in the 80s and is representing Britain at the Venice Biennale with her exhibition *Feeling Her Way*, [had won the prestigious Golden Lion](#) for best national exhibition. Likewise, Simone Leigh, representing the US, was awarded the Golden Lion for best participant for her bronze sculpture *Brick House*. They are both, shockingly, the first Black women to represent their countries since the biennale's founding 127 years ago.

In other news, Everlyn Nicodemus, who is in her 60s, will shortly be [the first Black woman](#) to have a self-portrait on display in the National Portrait Gallery (established 1856) as part of a scheme to improve female representation in the gallery. What took them so long?

There are those who balk at the idea of paying too much attention to these milestones, as if they are not relevant, but they are, they are. In addressing the historical exclusion of some demographics in creative settings, we need

to know what we are up against. Often, it is only when we crunch the numbers and see the stats laid out before us in black and white on a spreadsheet that the disparity in representation becomes glaringly obvious.



Everlyn Nicodemus at the Richard Saulton gallery, London. She will shortly become the first Black woman to have a self-portrait hang at the National Portrait Gallery. Photograph: David Levene/The Guardian

Recent research in the US revealed that [85% of artists](#) featured in prominent permanent exhibitions are white, while 87% of them are male. I imagine the British story is similar. Certainly, during the first 30 years of the Turner prize (established 1984), it was awarded to 25 male artists – indicative of a male-controlled arts culture that, for most of history, as the predominant arbiter of what constitutes excellence, relevance and importance, placed greater value on the aesthetics, context and, yes, politics of art produced by men.

To those who protest that women were not producing good enough work, it is simply not true. It is all about the value placed on art, and by whom. All of the women mentioned here are, in my opinion, outstanding creatives, offering unique talents and perspectives not offered elsewhere. Quality, however we define it, always comes first.

The Black male artists Isaac Julien, Steve McQueen, Chris Ofili and Yinka Shonibare gained international reputations more than 20 years ago – deservedly so – but Black female creatives have had to operate within not just a white context, but also a patriarchal one. For example, the powerful figurative portrayals of Black women by Claudette Johnson, another 80s alumna, didn't have a hope in hell of garnering the attention they deserved until recently, via a significant exhibition in 2019 at Modern [Art](#) Oxford.

There is always the fear that if you are not an instant success you are destined for the slag heap

In the catalogue, she explained her *raison d'être*: “A very long time ago I started thinking about how women take up space in the world. And about the space assigned to Black women within the media and within British society; I think it is a very small, twisted space that is offered. So I usually invite sitters to take up space in a way that is reflective of who they are and how they would naturally move or stand.”

If I compare the figurative paintings of Lucian Freud with Johnson's, I know that I would place more value – aesthetic, cultural, financial – on her art. Freud's reputation has long been embedded in our culture. His painting of Sue Tilley sold for £17.2m in 2008. Yet I would prefer one of Johnson's portraits on my living room wall any day.

When [Lubaina Himid](#) was anointed with the Turner in 2017, she was 63 – [the oldest person](#) and the first Black woman to win it. It was a momentous occasion, celebrated by many of us. Not only was it her personal win, but it also felt like a win for Black women, for women of colour, for older women and for all those older female artists who were still struggling and felt overlooked. Her eligibility was the result of a decision to drop the under-50 age restriction, one that perpetuated the myth that if an artist hadn't broken on to the “main stage” by the age of 50 they were past it. Granta's Best of Young British Novelists, which comes around every 10 years, works in the same way: only under-40s need apply.



Chila Kumari Singh Burman took over the facade of Tate Britain during lockdown. Photograph: Graeme Robertson/The Guardian

Such age restrictions imply that only younger people are capable of producing fresh and exciting work – they alone are the future. It is true that they have more birthdays ahead of them than their elders, but for every talent that diminishes with age there are many more producing their best work from a foundation of deep lived experience, a lifetime of skill development, a mature understanding of human complexity and an undaunted adventurous spirit. In short, ageing is not synonymous with decay, calcification and irrelevance.

Some of the best debut Black female novelists who have emerged of late have been over 40 or even 50, such as Yvette Edwards, Sara Collins, Kit de Waal and Jacqueline Crooks, whose debut novel, *Fire Rush*, will be published next spring. Second-novel writers, after a long gap, include Jacqueline Roy and Nicola Williams, whose crime novel, *The Advocate's Devil*, is also out in spring 2023.

And let's look no further than Chila Kumari Singh Burman's takeover of the facade of Tate Britain during lockdown. Four decades into her career, she created a dazzling, unparalleled display of radical subversion, colour and energy.

Prizes contribute towards a creative person's success; some more than others. It goes without saying that there are many ways to define the concept of success. Creative ambition, originality and self-fulfilment are foremost, in my opinion, followed by external markers such as critical recognition, financial rewards, influence and audience. Himid, already a successful artist exhibiting globally, reached new heights after winning the Turner; a retrospective showcasing new and old work is on at that British temple of contemporary art, Tate Modern. Another landmark for a Black British female artist.

Sixty years of living without being well known is long enough to feel a deep sense of gratitude when good things happen

The Turner is making up for lost time. Two more older Black women have been the beneficiaries of its largesse of late: Helen Cammock, who won it alongside three other winners in 2019, and Liz Johnson Artur, who was one of the recipients of a Turner bursary in 2020, awarded in place of the cancelled prize.

As the first Black female recipient of [the Booker prize](#) – at the tender age of 60 – it has been career Christmas for me every day since. Winning it at 60 felt like the right time; interviewers are surprised when I don't express regret at not breaking through earlier. Surely it would have been better for my career if I were younger?

That is not how I see it. At my age, I have a body of work behind me, a deeply rooted work ethic, confidence in my creative practice and an ongoing ambition to expand my craft and keep growing. Winning the prize as a “senior” means I have avoided potential pitfalls. It has boosted my career, but I hope it hasn’t inflated my ego, or disengaged me from my community, or made me feel crushed by the weight of expectation. Sixty years of living without being well known is long enough to become rooted in yourself and to feel a deep sense of gratitude when good things happen.

Himid, Johnson, Pollard and Boyce were key figures in the women-of-colour creative community in the 80s to which I belonged as a young theatre-maker and troublemaker. Himid curated three seminal Black

women's exhibitions during this period, a time when women of colour couldn't get a look-in at the celebrated art galleries and museums, except maybe to don a catering uniform and dish up quiche lorraine or nut roast with a salad of rocket and pomegranate seeds.



Adjoa Andoh as Lady Danbury in Bridgerton. Photograph: Liam Daniel/Netflix

Pollard was the photographer and poster designer for Theatre of Black Women, the touring theatre company I co-founded in 1982 with Paulette Randall and Patricia St Hilaire. As I wrote in my memoir, [Manifesto: On Never Giving Up](#), “the artistic community to which we belonged had women at the heart of it. The company was not a collective, but we were connected to a wider community, and so we did not feel isolated, and although we were marginalised as women of colour when we were in white feminist or predominantly male spaces, in our own company, we were at the centre of everything.”

This was central to our survival and formed a solid foundation for our future careers. We were not alone. We did not have to explain to ourselves why we created art from our perspectives and we knew we had an audience for our work, no matter how small. Pollard was a supportive presence around our theatre company. Quiet, reliable, creative, she wore her hair in funky

dreadlocks, as did many of us, but in rebellion against Babylon, rather than as a symbol of adherence to Rastafarianism. In the intervening decades, she never stopped pursuing her craft as a photographer, building up a steady portfolio of solo and group exhibitions, residences and teaching gigs, as well as awards, the most prestigious of which was the Baltic Artists award in 2019.

In addition to all of these women totally smashing it, there are others of a similar vintage who came of age in the Black women's artistic circles of the 80s. Adjoa Andoh, who plays the redoubtable [Lady Danbury in Bridgerton](#) – one of the most successful television series of recent years – began her career in a Black women's play called *Where Do I Go from Here?*, which I saw at Drill Hall theatre in London in 1984. Having enjoyed an increasingly successful career since, including stints with the National Theatre and the Royal Shakespeare Company, she is now a global phenomenon, not as an inexperienced ingenue plucked from obscurity and dazed by the attention, but as a seasoned thesp whose career has suddenly shot skywards. In short, she can handle it.



Jackie Kay, formerly Scotland's makar, was no overnight success.  
Photograph: Denise Else/PA

Jackie Kay has long been a literary star, including five years as [the Scottish makar](#), their poet laureate. We also need to pay attention to older visual artists who are not receiving enough exposure, such as Joy Gregory and Sutapa Biswas. Acclaim should not be contingent on winning big prizes or filling big galleries.

A life in the arts means weathering the inevitable vicissitudes. There might be decades spent watching other creatives racing past you, making you feel left behind. For some, it might mean spending years, even decades, struggling to be creative when self-confidence is at a low, or struggling to find work or gain attention for it. The upside is that we become resilient through adversity and, if determined enough, unstoppable. It might mean developing a portfolio career where most of your income is derived from everything but your own creativity, as was the case with me. For others, there will be instantaneous success and the pressures that come with that when you are new to your professional practice.

Until society becomes less negative towards ageing, especially of women, there will always be the fear that if you are not an instant success then you are destined for the slag heap. Once we hit 80, the myth is that we are supposed to be content with knitting blankets for grandchildren, or dribbling while free-farting in rocking chairs – insentient, incontinent, incoherent.

A life in the arts means weathering the inevitable vicissitudes. There might be decades spent watching other creatives racing past you

Women are still unduly judged on our looks; the younger we appear, the more marketable we are. We are told to expect a loss in energy as we age, but, honest to God, I am the one bounding into the lecture room at 9am in the morning only to be greeted by sleepy-eyed 20-year-olds who can barely speak. And who are the people I see bestriding the parks, fields and hills on long walks, with energy to spare at the end?

Just as women are taught to be ashamed of menstruation and the menopause, so we are taught to be ashamed of our maturation. How sad that 30-year-olds worry about being “past it”. We should celebrate every age and stage of our lives. It is one of my mantras, pounding the concept into my consciousness

to redress a lifetime of being told otherwise. In the past few years, I have so frequently mentioned my age in interviews that it no longer holds any sway over me. I have talked the taboo out of myself. This year I will be 63.

The fact that so many Black women are powering ahead and breaking through when they are older is testament to two things. The first is a lifelong commitment to creativity, to not giving up – and, even if we do, to picking ourselves up again. For some of us, this is yielding the external markers of success. The second is a societal shift where we are finally being seen – noticed, visible – and our work valued more than ever before beyond our own demographic.

I asked Pollard how she felt about her nomination. Her reply was typically modest: “The nomination is a surprise and a vote of confidence, and a plus for photographic practice, which has been my medium for many years. I’ve always told students that they need to turn up for their practice every day. Nominations, awards and commissions are an element of being a visual artist, but after being around the art world for 40 years I have seen this interest come and go.”

But I do think it will be different this time. We have made real progress, although we must never get complacent. We must each take responsibility for speaking out – for ourselves and future generations.

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## ‘People are going to get eaten!’ How to turn adult sci-fi into kids’ TV with bite



‘These aren’t monsters, they’re animals’ ... Jurassic World: Camp Cretaceous. Photograph: Netflix

From bone-crunching dinosaurs to instant space death, the creators of Jurassic World and Star Trek’s child-focused TV show tell all – including

## Spielberg's top advice

Duncan Barrett

Thu 28 Apr 2022 05.00 EDT Last modified on Thu 28 Apr 2022 05.01 EDT

‘Children are *not* allowed on the bridge!’ said Captain Picard in Star Trek: The Next Generation’s pilot episode. Nowadays, that attitude has softened, with Trek about to get its own animated series as an antidote to the smörgåsbord of F-bombs, Klingon boobs and decapitated Romulans that populate its live-action incarnations. Alongside Netflix’s Camp Cretaceous – which turns the Jurassic World franchise into a family-friendly cartoon – it’s part of a trend for creating versions of sci-fi shows for children that haven’t lost their power to shock – but won’t give kids nightmares.

It’s a move that raises all sorts of questions. How scary is too scary? Who is allowed to die? And how do you stay true to the essence of a long-running franchise for grownups while reimagining it for a far younger audience?

For the creators of Star Trek: Prodigy, the latter question was easy to address. They introduced a holographic version of one of Trek’s most popular characters – Voyager captain Kathryn Janeway – to help guide the group of alien kids who find themselves commanding an experimental Federation starship. For Prodigy’s writers, she was the perfect choice for a show catering to children.

“She was our first female captain,” says Shawna Benson, who works on the show with her sister, Julie, “and she has a kind of Mama Grizzly protectiveness to her, especially with these kids.”

Actor Kate Mulgrew, however, took a little more convincing. “I hesitated at first,” she tells me at Prodigy’s UK premiere in London. “Because Janeway was very significant to me. I thought, is this reductive? But then a lot of people said to me: ‘Are you crazy? Children will adore this, and their mothers will share it with them.’ So I called them back and said I’d love to do it.”



‘People can get chomped, as long as nothing bad happens to the dinosaurs’  
... Camp Cretaceous. Photograph: Netflix

For Mulgrew, reprising her steely captain for a young crowd means modulating her vocal performance. “I bring a sense of delight to my voice,” she says. “While the fear is real, I don’t want to scare them. I want them to understand we’re in a difficult situation, but we’re going to get out of it. Because if you go too far, children will back up.”

When the creators of Camp Cretaceous were developing a kid-friendly version of the Jurassic World movies, they decided to do it by asking existential questions. “We asked ourselves, what is the DNA of the Jurassic franchise? Why do people watch these films?” says Zack Stentz, creator of Camp Cretaceous. “We decided you need those scary action beats, but you also need Spielbergian moments of awe and wonder.”

Getting those scary moments right is a tricky balancing act when it comes to writing for kids. It can’t be *too* scary, but you also can’t go too far the other way – particularly if you’re being given input by the creator of Jurassic Park. “Everything to do with the Jurassic franchise goes to Steven Spielberg,” he says. “He’s shot down attempts to do animated shows in the past, and he only agreed this time on one condition: ‘Make it scary!’”



None of the kids have ended up as lunch – yet ... Camp Cretaceous.  
Photograph: Netflix

For Stentz, this means finding new ways to present the same action we have seen at the cinema. “You keep the scariness but dial down the goriness,” he says. “People are going to get eaten, but not on camera. We play it on the reactions of the others, and you might hear a crunch. It’s very clear not everyone makes it out alive.”

But there must be some red lines? After all, none of the kids end up as lunch.

“*So far!*” Stentz laughs. I’m at least 90% sure he’s joking.

In any case, children exist in their own, sometimes baffling, moral universe. A fellow parent told me her dino-obsessed five-year-old loves the Jurassic movies. “He doesn’t mind the people getting chomped,” she says. “As long as nothing bad happens to the dinosaurs.”

It’s a view shared by the Camp Cretaceous writers, who take their lead from Jurassic World director Colin Trevorrow. “Colin always emphasises these aren’t monsters, they’re animals,” says Stentz. “In later seasons, the kids go from strict survival to the idea that they have a responsibility to the dinosaurs. We try to include an ecological consciousness, without hitting people over the head with it.”

Prodigy takes a tamer approach. Over the past five decades, Star Trek might have included its fair share of nasty moments (particularly the terrifying alien earwigs from The Wrath of Khan that have lived rent free in my head for 30 years), but for the Benson sisters, working with Nickelodeon meant treading a fine line. “They have a very clear rule-set of what is and isn’t allowed,” says Julie. “It’s hard in a show where you’re in space and if you open a door you’re dead, but they were keen that it felt real without being too scary.”



In charge at last ... Star Trek Prodigy. Photograph: Nickelodeon

Rather than scares, morality takes a major role, with Prodigy wearing its sense of right-and-wrong on its sleeve – in finest Trek tradition. “We talked in the writers’ room about what we wanted kids to take out of each episode as a lesson,” says Shawna. “Working as a team, or being honest. They’re pretty basic tenets, but when you drill down you realise kids kind of know this stuff, but they kind of don’t.”

In a move familiar to anyone brought up on classic cartoons such as He-Man and Captain Planet, every Prodigy episode is accompanied by a clip in which Mulgrew discusses its core lesson. “Those were new to us, but I think they’re wonderful,” says Julie. “They are so on the mark in terms of what we felt each episode was about.”

The attempt to turn grown-up sci-fi franchises into kids' TV series isn't new. Back in the 1970s, a cheaply animated 24-minute cartoon rather boldly titled Star Trek continued the adventures of the original Enterprise after the live-action show's cancellation. By the late 1980s, it seemed every movie franchise had its own kid-friendly spin-off, from The Real Ghostbusters and Ewoks to distinctly improbable retoolings of Robocop and Rambo.

But now, with Prodigy, Camp Cretaceous and even a Fast and Furious spin-off, Spy Racers, it seems kid-friendly adaptations are in for a major revival. This time, though, they're being created by people who were raised on the originals.

"We were total Trek nerds growing up," says Shawna. "I had all the episodes taped on VHS, time-stamped with the name of each episode. If you gave me a stardate, I could tell you which one it was!"

"We never really had to think about how to write Star Trek for kids," says Julie. "We just made the show we knew the eight- and 10-year-old us would have wanted." And now, children are not just allowed on the bridge – they're commanding it.

*Star Trek: Prodigy is on Nickelodeon now. Camp Cretaceous seasons 1-4 are on [Netflix](#).*

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## Local elections

# London galling: could Partygate sink the Tories' Wandsworth flagship?

‘It’s not Boris on the ballot paper,’ activists campaigning for the local elections are having to tell voters



The Conservative party is facing one of its toughest electoral tests in the capital. Photograph: Guardian

*Aubrey Allegretti*

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Boris Johnson used to be king of the capital. As a politician who presented himself as metropolitan and socially liberal, he gave the Conservatives their first control of London-wide government for 30 years by winning the mayoralty in 2008.

But now the party is facing one of its toughest electoral tests in the city, and the prime minister risks insurrection from his own backbenchers if the Partygate investigations threaten to hit them at the ballot box too.

In the Tories' flagship council of Wandsworth, voters are mulling whether the party's headline pledge to keep council tax low is attractive enough during the cost of living crisis to keep them from staying at home or giving [Labour](#) a chance.

While Labour inched ahead in the popular vote by just a few hundred votes at the last council elections, the [Conservatives](#) still clinched the highest number of councillors.



Conservatives canvassing in Wandsworth. Photograph: Graeme Robertson/The Guardian

“It doesn’t matter if we make great gains or even win overall control of a few other areas; if Wandsworth falls, that will be the narrative of the night,” admitted a minister who had been out campaigning in the area.

Ruth, who lives in Battersea and used to be a Conservative member, said that as a barrister, she was deeply unhappy with the prime minister’s breach of Covid laws.

“I usually would vote Conservative. But while it’s led by a man I don’t consider has integrity, I wouldn’t vote for them,” she said.

Speaking as she was canvassed by a Conservative councillor at her home in south-west London, Ruth spoke plainly about the message she wanted to send.

“I thought voting Conservative at the moment would seem an endorsement of the national party because it is being reported in the media that if there are bad local election results for Boris, then people may move against him, which is what I want to happen.”

She admitted she was “very pleased with how the local party is acting”, but added: “The leader is such an important issue that you’ve just got to change that.”

Margaret, who lives nearby and works as a teacher, is less concerned with Partygate and says she normally votes Conservative, but this time she is wavering. “I just think there’s so much nonsense with the party at the top,” she said. “It’s nothing to do with Partygate, it’s just that I don’t think he’s very competent.

“I think he’s a bit of a disappointment. I had good hopes when he came in and I just think he’s really disappeared into the background. You hear nothing from him any more – other than when he’s made a mistake.”

Margaret said she would probably abstain because she was unimpressed by Keir Starmer’s Labour, and added: “I’m a little bit disillusioned at the moment.”

Lauren, who works for Citizens Advice, said she would normally vote Liberal Democrat and was tempted to vote for the Conservatives locally since it is a Labour-Tory toss-up. “It’s a challenge in your head to distinguish between the national party,” she said.

Activists pounding the streets have lines at the ready for wavering voters such as Ruth, Margaret and Lauren.

“It’s not Boris on the ballot paper,” is a common refrain. As is the argument that even if wealthier residents do not rely on Wandsworth’s lower council tax, their harder-pressed neighbours might.

But it can still be a tough sell. In a nod to Geoffrey Howe’s criticism of Margaret Thatcher, one council candidate in the Lambeth and Southwark Conservatives WhatsApp group complained it would be “easier if the national party doesn’t break our local bats at the crease”.

A Tory MP also privately moaned: “It’s like Downing Street hate Tory councillors and are figuring out how to have as few as possible.”



Labour is reminding voters that only a few hundred votes could make all the difference. Photograph: Graeme Robertson/The Guardian

Johnson certainly still has some supporters in London. When a Conservative canvasser knocked on Peter’s door and asked if he had any concerns about the party nationally, he said he did not and that the attention given to Covid rule-breaking was “a distraction”.

“We’re in a proxy war with Russia,” Peter said. “And the prime minister’s essentially leading the free world.”

And there are many pressing local issues that affect residents, from recycling to schools, crime and libraries.

One resident, Antonietta, was desperate for the council and the police to crack down on motorcyclists driving dangerously fast along the pavement in front of her house.

“If you do something about the road, you might have my support, otherwise, I’ll have to vote for somebody else,” she said when asked who she would back on 5 May.

For Labour, the challenge is to remind voters that only a few hundred votes could turn the council red.

While the number of volunteers offering to help with canvassing has plummeted since 2018 when a larger membership under Jeremy Corbyn was mobilised, fewer voters are now said to slam doors shut when activists arrive.

“I’d say it’s going to be incredibly tight. It still looks like it’s on a knife-edge, genuinely a 50-50 election,” said Simon Hogg, Labour’s leader on Wandsworth council.

He said the Conservative campaign was “just based around that single issue of council tax, whereas we’re matching that council tax, but we’re also having ambitious policies on the environment, on housing, on crime and on education as well”.

Hogg admitted it was “a key issue in the election, whether Labour can be trusted with your money”, and understood concerns given Labour-run Croydon council was teetering on the edge of bankruptcy.

But he insisted Labour had a “serious, ambitious, costed manifesto, that we’re going to tax fairly”, and would “spend wisely”. He claimed the credibility of the Wandsworth Conservatives was dropping and that they no longer ran a tight ship.

Hogg’s insistence the race appears to be on a knife-edge is not hyperbole.

Aled Richard-Jones, a Conservative councillor up for re-election, said Wandsworth's reputation for having the lowest average council tax in the UK was "at the front of people's minds" during the cost of living crisis.

He told the Guardian that Labour had "a real credibility issue" on council tax, pointing to its support for increases in previous years.

"Wandsworth is used to thinking about local issues when it comes to council elections," Richard-Jones added. "That's why our MPs over the decades have swung between Labour and the Conservatives, but the council has stayed Conservative for 44 years."

Jonathan Carr-West, the chief executive of the Local Government Information Unit, said that while polls suggested the Conservatives could lose control of the council, "it's certainly close, both in terms of seats and in terms of the majorities within some seats".

He said: "Given Wandsworth's prominence as a Conservative flagship, its loss would be seen as a serious blow to the government and will feed directly into the conversation about the prime minister's future.

"At the same time, it would be part of a longer-term trend in which Labour has tightened its grip on inner London.

"Over the last decade, we have seen an increasing polarisation, with the Labour vote concentrated in large cities and university towns and Conservative support spread across the rest of the country. Wandsworth and Westminster have resisted this but the margins have been getting narrower."

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**Politics Weekly UK**

**Plymouth**

# We went to Plymouth ... to see if Boris is finished

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## 2022.04.28 - Opinion

- In an era of electoral fragmentation, Labour must learn to embrace power-sharing
- Finally, this reckless government faces a reckoning for Covid deaths in care homes
- Risk of recession in Europe, US and China is rising by the day
- My Fair Lady has its problems but I still idolise Eliza Doolittle

[Opinion](#)[Electoral reform](#)

## In an era of electoral fragmentation, Labour must learn to embrace power- sharing

[Martin Kettle](#)



The French election showed how electoral systems shape politics. In the UK, abandoning first past the post could be transformative



Illustration by Bill Bragg.

Thu 28 Apr 2022 03.00 EDT Last modified on Fri 29 Apr 2022 07.34 EDT

You have got to hand it to Charles de Gaulle. The electoral system he created for France's Fifth Republic has stood the test of time. More than six decades on, [this week's re-election](#) of De Gaulle's latest successor, Emmanuel Macron, is a reminder that the particularities of electoral systems can set the terms of a nation's politics more lastingly than we sometimes allow. There's a message for Britain there too, but we will come on to that.

[De Gaulle's constitution](#), constructed between 1958 and 1962, aimed at two goals in particular. The first was to empower De Gaulle and his successors to govern as executive presidents, embodying what the general's biographer Julian Jackson, echoing De Gaulle's own phrase for his book's title, called "[a certain idea of France](#)". The second aim was to keep the French left, and the Communist party in particular, out of power for as long as possible.

The system worked well for more than two decades, especially while the imperiously charismatic De Gaulle was still alive, before François Mitterrand deftly reshaped the left while the communists slid into history. Since Mitterrand's era, however, both the old left and the old right have fragmented into multiple smaller parties. Yet De Gaulle's electoral system

was still robust enough this week to dispatch France's extreme right very effectively, and for the third time since the millennium. *Chapeau* to the general for that.

Much of the assessment of the 2022 election has been [rather grudging](#) about Macron's victory. It has concentrated on his personal aloofness, on the economic and social problems ahead, on the decline in his majority since 2017, and on the 41.5% share achieved by Marine Le Pen in the second round. These are important things. The [national assembly elections](#) in June will be much messier. But the judgments on the presidential contest underplay both the role of the Gaullist constitution itself and of Macron's success in mastering it, something which eluded his two predecessors, Nicolas Sarkozy and François Hollande.

Macron's re-election shows that De Gaulle's system still has gas in the tank. His 28% vote [in the first round](#) on 10 April was at the upper end of the first-round scores achieved by most recent French presidential victors, though a world away from De Gaulle's own 45% in the first round in 1965. In almost any other democracy, Macron's 17-point margin of victory over Le Pen in the second round would be regarded as spectacular. But the results obscure what is wrong with the system.

The two-round electoral mandate remains De Gaulle's ambivalent legacy to French politics. His constitution gives presidents an authority that is both real (because it produces a clear winner) and illusory (because most people vote for someone else or don't vote at all). The combination of that mixed mandate and executive power survives – for now. Yet it is an increasingly unstable one, especially in a country with France's vigorous tradition of street politics. The system gives a voice to the diverse political stances characteristic of any modern democracy, while also covering them over.

Electoral fragmentation is now an embedded feature of many 21st-century democracies. The divide in the first round of France's presidential elections is like many similar ones among today's European electorates. [Last year's German election](#) was a particularly notable case. Topically, it also bears comparison with the divide in the run-up to Northern Ireland's [crucial assembly election](#) next week.

Many people are still tempted to treat politics as a battle between a large party of the left and a large party of the right. Many facts and figures belie this. In France, the four strongest finishers on 10 April captured 28%, 23%, 22% and 7% of the vote respectively. In Germany last year, the top four had 26%, 24%, 15% and 13%. In Northern Ireland (where the divides are not merely left-right), the [latest polls](#) show the four strongest parties are Sinn Féin on 26%, Democratic Unionists 19%, Alliance 16% and Ulster Unionists 13%.

If [Northern Ireland](#) was electing a president under the French two-round system, this would mean there would be a second-round run-off between Michelle O'Neill of Sinn Féin and Jeffrey Donaldson of the DUP. That's never going to happen, fortunately for Northern Ireland, because it would fuel a wholly sectarian dynamic. But it illustrates the inbuilt weakness of any electoral system, such as France's, which translates minority support in the first round into a majoritarian mandate in the second.

Northern Ireland's very deliberately does not do this. It is rooted instead in the power-sharing principles and practicalities of the 1998 Good Friday agreement. This means that Sinn Féin's expected first-place finish on 5 May would in reality be a victory of only a limited kind, albeit one with headline-news value worldwide and enormous symbolic meaning. That a territory that was [created 101 years ago](#) specifically to cut itself adrift from Irish republicanism should now elect a first minister from that same republican tradition is a milestone in anyone's language.

In those circumstances, though, the chances of the DUP agreeing to nominate a deputy first minister to work alongside O'Neill as first minister are remote. The same goes for the possibility of an early referendum on Irish unification. It is much more likely that the failure of the two main parties to work together (both of them may lose share of the vote since the last contest in 2017) will hasten the return of direct rule from London. If the UK government also shreds the Northern Ireland protocol, as Lord Frost [urged it to do](#) in a speech on Wednesday, power-sharing will again be left high and dry.

Electoral systems matter. Germany, France and Northern Ireland illustrate some of the different ways this works. But they are not unusual. Electoral

systems do not only reflect politics; they also shape the way politics is conducted. This goes for Britain too. The first-past-the-post system routinely turns an electoral minority into a constituency victory or a parliamentary majority. It is part of the reason why our politics looks and sounds the way it does. And it is increasingly indefensible in the pluralistic political climate of the 21st century.

Britain's next general election may return another hung parliament, in which the electorate votes for change but does not give any one party the mandate to govern. Replacement of the first-past-the-post system will never be a big doorstep issue. But it would be a transformative act for Britain, and one that a minority [Labour](#) government could deliver. This country's damaged democracy is in need of its own form of power-sharing. It would be a huge step towards creating anew a certain idea of Britain.

- Martin Kettle is a Guardian columnist

This article was amended on 29 April 2022 to include the detail that Julian Jackson's reference to "a certain kind of France" was an echo of Charles De Gaulle's own words.

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## OpinionCoronavirus

# Finally, this reckless government faces a reckoning for Covid deaths in care homes

[Charlie Williams](#)

The high court ruling that sending untested patients into care homes in early 2020 was unlawful gives those of us who lost loved ones some hope



Then health secretary Matt Hancock at the opening of the NHS Nightingale hospital at the ExCel centre, London, 3 April 2020. Photograph: Alberto Pezzali/AP

Thu 28 Apr 2022 01.00 EDT Last modified on Thu 28 Apr 2022 09.03 EDT

Joy. Anger. Sadness. I felt every emotion you could think of when I heard the news that the government's early policy on care homes in England – when elderly and vulnerable people were discharged from hospitals into care homes without being isolated – had been [ruled unlawful](#).

The sadness was because it was a reminder that many of us had lost people needlessly. The anger rose because the ruling is proof that our government was so extraordinarily reckless. After all, it only took the common sense of your average human being to realise that you do not send untested patients into care homes. One of the first things we learned about Covid-19 was that the most vulnerable people in our society were at the greatest risk.

And yet somehow the government thought it appropriate to put them at the absolute highest risk by sending such patients into care homes alongside them. To this day, I'm still speechless when I think about it.

For me, this isn't abstract. It's real. In early 2020, my father was quite happily living in his care home, with no issue. In fact, when the pandemic hit, I assumed that he would be safer than everyone else and that I would be left to worry about my mother, who's not in a care home.

Then I got a phone call saying that my father's health had suddenly deteriorated, that he had a chest infection and suspected Covid-19. I didn't believe them at first; it didn't make sense. I was told that there were no known cases of Covid-19 in the care home.

Fast forward, and we have since learned that there was indeed Covid-19 in his care home. In fact, the official figure for deaths with suspected or confirmed Covid-19 between April 2020 and March 2021 at the home is 22. This was confirmed when the CQC [finally released the data](#).

My father, Vernute Williams, known to all as Rex, died on 20 April 2020 at the age of 85.

Matt Hancock, the then secretary for health, said that he had tried to throw a "protective ring" around our care homes. Protective ring. This phrase always sickened me from the day he said it. Even yesterday, after this judgment, Hancock is still saying that [he did nothing wrong](#). He doesn't feel he owes families such as mine an apology. He's still in total denial.

I've spoken about anger and sadness. But there's one thing missing: the joy. Where is that coming from?

I feel joy because we're finally getting somewhere. My view is that this government is guilty of gross negligence and the manslaughter of my father. I've said that from day one and I'm still saying it today. The judgment gives me a little hope in terms of the progress we're making in holding this government to account.

It's a legal judgment from the high court. It means something. We campaigned tirelessly for a judge-led inquiry into the UK's handling of the pandemic, which we should have had years ago. It's now going to [start next year](#). This will allow us to shed even further light on what happened. For now this judgment, for all those who had family members in care homes, is a big step forward.

So yesterday stands as one of the most momentous days of our campaign for justice so far. But I've always believed that the day will come – no matter how many PR stunts that this prime minister pulls out of the hat – when this government is finally forced to face up to what it did.

- Charlie Williams is a spokesperson for Covid-19 Bereaved Families for Justice UK
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[Project Syndicate economists](#)[Global economy](#)

## Risk of recession in Europe, US and China is rising by the day

[Kenneth Rogoff](#)

Threat of synchronised global downturn may recede by late 2022 but collapse in one region will affect others



China is finding it difficult to sustain growth in the face of Covid-19 lockdowns, with Shanghai already having been brought to a halt.  
Photograph: Alex Plavevski/EPA

Thu 28 Apr 2022 02.00 EDT

Is the global economy flying into a perfect storm, with [Europe](#), China, and the US all entering downturns at the same time later this year? The risks of a global recession trifecta are rising by the day.

A recession in Europe is almost inevitable if the war in Ukraine escalates, and Germany, which has been [fiercely resisting](#) calls to pull the plug on Russian oil and gas, finally relents. China is finding it increasingly difficult to sustain positive growth in the face of draconian [Covid-19 lockdowns](#), which have already brought [Shanghai](#) to a screeching halt and now threaten [Beijing](#). In fact, the Chinese economy may already be in [recession](#). And with US consumer prices currently increasing at their [fastest rate in 40 years](#), prospects for a soft landing for prices without a big hit to growth look increasingly remote.

Private and official [economic forecasts](#) have recently started to highlight growing regional risks but perhaps underestimate the extent to which they multiply each other. Widespread lockdowns in China, for example, will wreak havoc with global supply chains in the short run, raising inflation in the US and lowering demand in Europe. Normally, these problems might be attenuated by lower commodity prices. But with no clear end in sight in Ukraine, global food and energy prices are likely to remain high in any scenario.

No amount of careful macroeconomic stewardship can save the day if the Chinese leadership has made the wrong call on Covid-19

A recession in the US, especially if triggered by a cycle of interest rate rises by the [Federal Reserve](#), would curtail global import demand and trigger chaos in financial markets. And although recessions in Europe normally radiate globally mainly through reduced demand, a war-induced slowdown could radically shake business confidence and financial markets worldwide.

How likely is each of these events? China's growth trajectory has long been slowing, with only a combination of luck and mostly competent macroeconomic management preventing a severe downturn. But no amount of careful macroeconomic stewardship can save the day if the Chinese leadership has made the wrong call on Covid-19.

Most Asian countries have now exited zero-Covid strategies and are moving on to regimes that manage Covid-19 as an endemic threat but do not treat it

as a pandemic. Not China. There, the government is spending massive sums to convert empty downtown office buildings into quarantine centres.

Perhaps the new quarantine centres are a brilliant idea, providing a way to redirect China's bloated construction sector toward more socially useful activities than piling more new projects on top of years of overbuilding (something that the International Monetary Fund economist Yuanchen Yang and I warned of in 2020). Perhaps China's leaders know something their western counterparts don't about the urgency of preparing for the next pandemic, in which case the quarantine centres could look positively visionary. More likely, however, China is tilting at windmills in trying to tame the increasingly contagious virus, in which case the centres will prove to be a vast waste of resources, and the lockdowns futile.



A US recession, especially if triggered by a cycle of interest rate rises by the Fed, would curtail global import demand and lead to chaos in the markets.  
Photograph: Jonathan Ernst/Reuters

The risk of a US recession has surely soared, with the main uncertainties now being its timing and severity. The sanguine view that inflation will decline significantly on its own, and that the Fed will therefore not have to raise interest rates too much, is looking more dubious by the day. With savings having soared during the pandemic, the more likely scenario is that

consumer demand will remain strong, while supply chain problems become even worse.

True, the US government appears to be scaling down its stimulus policies, but that will increase recession concerns even if it helps mitigate inflation somewhat. And if stimulus programmes continue full throttle – and, in an election year, why would they not? – it will make the Fed's job even tougher.

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As for Europe, blowback from economic slowdowns in China and the US would have threatened its growth even without the war in Ukraine. But the war has greatly amplified Europe's risks and vulnerabilities. Growth is already weak. If the Russian president, Vladimir Putin, resorts to using [chemical](#) or tactical nuclear weapons, Europe will be forced to cut the cord decisively, with uncertain consequences for its economy and the risk of further escalation, which might mean imposing sanctions on China as well. Meanwhile, European governments are under considerable pressure to increase significantly their spending on [national defence](#).

Clearly, emerging markets and poorer developing economies will suffer mightily in the event of a global recession. Even energy and food-exporting countries, which until now have benefited economically from the war because of high prices, would probably have problems.

With luck, the risk of a synchronised global downturn will recede by late 2022. But for the moment, the odds of recession in Europe, the US, and China are significant and increasing, and a collapse in one region will raise the odds of collapse in the others. Record-high inflation does not make things any easier. I am not sure politicians and policymakers are up to the task they may soon confront.

*Kenneth Rogoff is professor of economics and public policy at Harvard University and was the chief economist of the International Monetary Fund from 2001 to 2003*

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## Theatre

# My Fair Lady has its problems but I still idolise Eliza Doolittle

[Vikki Stone](#)

Audrey Hepburn's performance as the noisy, funny Eliza made this musical a childhood favourite – I'm all for the new revival



'Draggle-tailed guttersnipe!' ... Audrey Hepburn as Eliza in *My Fair Lady*.  
Photograph: Warner Bros/Sportsphoto/Allstar

Thu 28 Apr 2022 02.00 EDT Last modified on Thu 28 Apr 2022 07.13 EDT

I have seen *My Fair Lady* an alarming number of times but never on stage. The musical is coming to the [Coliseum in London](#) and, when this was announced, I learned that Amara Okereke, who is playing Eliza Doolittle, is reported to have watched the film version [more than 200 times](#). Now, it's not a competition, but I reckon I'm up there with those sorts of numbers.

I'd not seen the film for years, as I did most of my watching in early childhood while I was being looked after by my grandma. Back then, grandmas weren't armed with the same childcare tools. There was no on-demand kids' TV, iPads or YouTube so she had to rely on the humble VHS to entertain a preschooler. She narrowed the suitability of her video collection down to a fairly small number of classic musicals. My Fair Lady was a weekly watch.

Other musicals in my gran's collection included Carousel, Oklahoma! and Oliver! but My Fair Lady was my favourite. I reckon it could be because the female protagonist felt different from others of the era. Eliza is outspoken, noisy and funny, and transforms herself to become princess-like with real poise and beauty.



Amara Okereke, who will play Eliza in the forthcoming production at the London Coliseum, is said to have watched My Fair Lady 200 times.  
Photograph: Kim Hardy

Eliza is not treated well by the male characters but as a younger person I don't think the misogyny really registered. A child may not have a nuanced view on Professor Henry Higgins's treatment of women but is more likely to really enjoy Eliza shouting "COME ON, DOVER! MOVE YOUR

BLOOMIN' ARSE!" Arse is simply a fantastic word for a female protagonist to shout, and that moment in the film is as joyful to me now as it was 30-odd years ago.

On a rewatch as an adult, it's clear Higgins has contempt for all women, except, maybe, his mother. He is awful to Eliza and not much better to his housekeeper, Mrs Pearce. He sets out to dehumanise Eliza by calling her a "presumptuous insect" or a "draggle-tailed guttersnipe". His treatment of her is horrendous, but the writer in me can't help but enjoy his choice of words. It feels like the very definition of a guilty pleasure, to listen to a tirade of sexist insults that includes language such as: "You squashed cabbage leaf, you disgrace to the noble architecture of these columns, you incarnate insult to the English language." You dislike him for how he treats her but he's hugely entertaining as a wordsmith, and when he expresses himself through song, thanks to Rex Harrison's performance you like him even more.

You want Eliza to succeed and to win, but I found myself also wanting Higgins and Colonel Pickering to go off into the sunset holding hands. The song Why Can't a Woman Be More Like a Man? seems to me to emphasise that Pickering might be the perfect partner for Higgins, rather than that Eliza is not right for him, and you want them to live in a world where they could openly explore that.

As for the show's conclusion, it would be satisfying if Higgins met with a grizzly end, as described in the revenge song Just You Wait. I don't think modern audiences would want Eliza to end up with any of the male characters. You want a man for her who has the intellect of Higgins but the heart of her younger love interest, Freddy.

Freddy has one of the best numbers – The Street Where You Live – but you can understand why it's a no from Eliza, because not even a cracking song can save you when you have the personality of a dishcloth. I think the future that modern audiences would want for Eliza would be for her to keep kicking her way through those class barriers and go it alone; she's ready for it.

My Fair Lady is from an era of musicals that provoke valid discussion as to whether or not they should be revived, mostly because they do not conform to modern standards. I don't think My Fair Lady quite falls into this category. Yes, it has its problematic bits, but I still think there's good reason to revive it for years to come, and I look forward to finally seeing it on stage this summer.

- Vikki Stone is a writer, composer, comedian and musician
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[China](#)

## Beijing halts weddings and funerals and closes schools in Covid fightback

Stockpiling rife as city acts in attempt to avoid Shanghai-style lockdown



Beijing residents queue outside a supermarket in the capital as stockpiling led to shortages. Photograph: Mark Schiefelbein/AP

[Helen Davidson](#) in Taipei and [Oliver Holmes](#)

Thu 28 Apr 2022 12.01 EDTFirst published on Thu 28 Apr 2022 03.59 EDT

Beijing has closed schools and suspended weddings and funerals in the city of 22 million in a whirlwind effort to avoid plunging China's capital into a Shanghai-style Covid lockdown.

[Fears that Beijing could soon be in lockdown](#) have already prompted widespread stockpiling, leading to shortages in some supermarkets.

The city's Education Bureau ordered all city schools to end classes from Friday and said it had not determined when they would be able to resume.

Beijing has moved faster than other places in China to impose restrictions while case numbers remain low. Authorities announced only 50 new cases on Thursday, bringing the total in the latest wave of infections to about 150.

The government is desperate to avoid sweeping measures imposed on Shanghai over the past month, which have caused frustration about shortages of food and basic supplies. Across China, authorities have said they are cracking down on price gouging.

On Wednesday, the Ministry of Public Security said any individuals taking advantage of outbreaks to make a profit would be dealt with strictly, with fines of up to 3m yuan (£363,400).

In Shanghai, one man faced punishment for “fabricating and disseminating price increase information and disrupting market price orders”. He was accused of buying produce and reselling it online at prices increased by up to 360%. Another was accused of renting someone else’s business licence and selling produce and food online at inflated prices, making a \$230,000 (£180,000) profit. Last month, Shanghai’s market supervision authorities said they had already issued about 20,000 warning letters over price gouging.



A woman in quarantine talks to a visitor during the lockdown in Shanghai.  
Photograph: Alex Plavevski/EPA

“People are in an area without the epidemic, and they came back to the vegetable market today. The price of eggs has gone up, and the price of meat has gone up, and the potatoes are still there, but their value has doubled,” said one Beijing resident on Weibo. “I didn’t panic, but this is urging me to panic.”

Authorities have ordered [mass testing of more than 20 million people across Beijing](#) this week. As well as city schools, restrictions were placed on some individual residential buildings, office blocks and a university and some public spaces and venues have been closed.

Analysts estimate that more than 340 million people in China are under full or partial lockdowns in 46 cities.

The southern manufacturing hub of Guangzhou cancelled hundreds of flights and ordered mass testing of about 5.6 million people after it detected one suspected case. Meanwhile, Shanghai reported its lowest daily case numbers in more than three weeks on Thursday, with 9,330 asymptomatic diagnoses. Authorities said they would make more resources available to

improve vaccination rates among elderly people, but have not shown signs of lifting the lockdown.

The city's 25 million residents have been in lockdown for weeks, with food shortages and delivery disruption. Among the complaints are accusations over the government's insistence on supplying households with millions of doses of Lianhua Qingwen – a [traditional Chinese medicine \(TCM\)](#) being used as a Covid-19 treatment. Residents said delivery of the unrequested doses appeared to be prioritised over food.

Grocery haul vlog shines a light on price gouging in locked-down Shanghai – video

TCM is backed by China's central and local governments and is among the products Beijing has donated to other countries to combat Covid. However, Lianhua Qingwen has become controversial, with signs that criticism of it is not tolerated as [authorities seek to contain dissent](#).

Wang Sicong, a well-known figure and son of one of China's richest men, was banned from Weibo and his account shut down on Wednesday after apparently questioning the efficacy of Lianhua Qingwen. In a post to about 40 million followers, Wang had asked whether the product had been approved by the World Health Organization. In a since-deleted post he also reportedly urged China's regulators to investigate the manufacturer, Shijiazhuang Yiling Pharmaceutical. After Wang's post, shares in the company plummeted 35%, [Bloomberg reported](#).

A notice on Wang's suspended account said only that it had “violated related laws and regulations”. Yiling Pharmaceutical said it would take legal action against defamatory statements. On Wednesday, Wang's account was deleted entirely.

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Wang's posts were among the most high-profile examples of growing discontent in China, as lockdowns and harsh zero-Covid measures continued, especially in Shanghai.

The WHO has examined TCM as a treatment, finding “promising data” that it helped reduce progression of the disease, [Quartz reported](#). But Lianhua Qingwen is not recommended as a Covid-19 treatment, even in some places where TCM is widely used. Singapore has only approved it as a cold and flu treatment but is now running trials for Covid-19. It is banned from being imported to New Zealand, Sweden, the US and Australia.

*Additional reporting by Xiaoqian Zhu and Chi Hui Lin. The Associated Press contributed to this report.*

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**Pope Francis**

## Be kind to your mother-in-law, the victim of ‘cliches’, urges Pope

Pontiff offers advice to ease family tensions, telling daughters-in-law to ‘make them happy’ and mothers-in-law to ‘be careful how you express yourselves’



Pope Francis during his general audience in St Peter's Square at the Vatican on Wednesday. Photograph: Evandro Inetti/ZUMA Press Wire/REX/Shutterstock

*Agence France-Presse*

Wed 27 Apr 2022 20.17 EDT Last modified on Thu 28 Apr 2022 13.47 EDT

Pope Francis has urged Catholics to honour the elderly and take care of family bonds, also taking the opportunity to return to the thorny subject of mothers-in-law.

Devoting his general audience in St Peter's Square on Wednesday to the relationship between generations, the Argentine pontiff made a long digression on the “mythical character” of the mother-in-law and said they were often the victim of “clichés”.

He added: “I’m not saying we see her as the devil, but she is always presented in a pejorative way. But the mother-in-law is the mother of your husband and the mother of your wife.”

Equally, he urged daughters-in-law to take care of their relationships with their mothers-in-law. “... they gave birth to your spouse,” he said. “At least make them happy.”

The pope also had advice for mothers-in-law themselves. “I tell you, be careful how you express yourselves,” he said.

The 85-year-old pope added: “We say to ourselves ‘the further away your mother-in-law is, the better’. But no – she’s a mother, she’s an elderly person. One of the most beautiful things for a woman is to have grandchildren. When her children have children, it brings her to life again.”

It is not his first foray on the subject. In 2015, Francis told a crowd of thousands in the US: “Families quarrel and sometimes plates can fly and children bring headaches, and I won’t speak about mother-in-laws.”

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[France](#)

## Macron dodges tomatoes in post-election walkabout

Triumphant French president promises to listen as he chooses working-class Cergy for first public appearance since vote

Tomatoes hurled at French president Emmanuel Macron – video

*[Angelique Chrisafis in Paris](#)*

*[@achrisafis](#)*

Wed 27 Apr 2022 12.04 EDT Last modified on Thu 28 Apr 2022 00.11 EDT

Emmanuel Macron narrowly missed being hit by a bag of tomatoes during a surprise visit to a working-class area north of Paris, as he promised a new style of “listening to people” after [his re-election](#) as president.

In his first public appearance since Sunday’s vote, Macron strolled around a food market in the town of Cergy, north-west of Paris, shaking hands and posing for selfies. Most people were friendly, some shouted congratulations and others asked for help in finding a job, dealing with health problems or making ends meet.

But at one point there were briefly boos, and a bag of tomatoes was thrown towards Macron’s back but missed. A bodyguard opened an umbrella to shield the president, who quickly sidestepped the projectile and continued to greet people and shake hands.

The Élysée Palace said the trip was Macron’s way of “listening to people’s concerns, expectations and needs”. He told local young people that he wanted to get out on the ground “from the start”. One young woman replied: “Don’t just come here for the photos.” Another onlooker said: “It’s good that he’s getting out of the Élysée.”

Macron won a second term at the weekend, beating the far-right candidate Marine Le Pen [by 58.5% to her 41.5%](#), but on the campaign trail he faced accusations of being haughty and aloof and of not understanding people's [concerns about the cost of living](#), housing, jobs and poverty. He had struggled to shake off the tag of "president of the rich".

Macron said in Cergy: "I want to give a message of respect and consideration to these areas that are among the poorest in the country, right from the start of my mandate."



Bodyguards protect Emmanuel Macron with an umbrella after tomatoes were thrown at him during his Cergy visit. Photograph: Benoît Tessier/AP

He acknowledged that deprived, high-rise neighbourhoods surrounding Paris had some of the highest [abstention rates](#) in the presidential vote. Macron said "life was hard" there and some people felt angry or cut off from politics, and not enough progress had been made in recent years to improve their lives.

He said there were problems of discrimination, and a need for training schemes, more doctors and better health care in these areas, as well as job creation. "We've brought down unemployment here, but it's still above the

national average because of discrimination and not enough training,” he said after meeting young local entrepreneurs.

Macron, the first French leader to be re-elected for a second term in 20 years, is now focused on parliamentary elections in June. He will need a centrist majority in the 577-seat house in order to put in place his manifesto plans, including overhauling the benefits system and raising the pension age. Pollsters believe he has a good chance of winning a majority.

Cergy is a leftwing area where the radical-left leader [Jean-Luc Mélenchon](#) topped the presidential vote’s first round. Mélenchon is attempting to strike alliances with other parties on the left to challenge Macron’s centrists in the parliamentary elections.

Mélenchon’s party, La [France](#) Insoumise, which has 17 seats in parliament’s lower house, wants to expand by hundreds more to win a majority for the left. The Socialist party and the Greens (EELV) on Wednesday began talks on possible parliamentary alliances with Mélenchon to increase the number of seats on the left.

Hurdles remain. The Socialists are traditional rivals to La France Insoumise, and some older Socialists warn against “surrendering” the party’s principles. The Greens favour an alliance, but some Green figures have said they will not compromise on their pro-Europe and anti-nuclear stance.

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## The Pacific projectSolomon Islands

# **Solomons PM could use Chinese police to stay in power, key provincial adviser fears**

Celsus Irokwato Talifilu says ordinary people also worried about being caught in a conflict between China and the US



Solomon Islands prime minister Manasseh Sogavare could use the recently signed security deal with China to keep himself in office, a key advisor to the premier of the country's most populous province says. Photograph: Mark Schiefelbein/AP

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Wed 27 Apr 2022 22.22 EDT Last modified on Wed 27 Apr 2022 22.53 EDT

A key adviser to the premier of the most populous province in [Solomon Islands](#) has expressed concern that the China-Solomons security deal could enable the prime minister, Manasseh Sogavare, to use Chinese armed police and military personnel to quash democratic dissent and hold on to power for years to come.

Celsus Irokwato Talifilu, who is an adviser to Daniel Suidani, the premier of Malaita province, said that while it was “fair” that Australia, the US and other regional partners had focused their attention on [the prospect of a military base](#) on the islands, the major fear for many in Solomon Islands was the erosion of democracy.

“My main fear is [Chinese military or police personnel] put [Sogavare] in power for a long time,” he said. “People say we are a democratic country, of course it is. But when you have a force bigger than anyone else in the Solomons, it will be easy for him to use that force to support him and his

ministers or those who are in government to ensure they come back at the next elections.”

The comments came as Australia’s spy chief said Canberra was concerned Chinese police deployed to Solomon Islands under a new security pact could use “ruthless” techniques previously used to quell anti-government protests in Hong Kong.

“In such a fragile, volatile country Chinese policing techniques and tactics that we’ve seen deployed so ruthlessly in Hong Kong, for example, are completely inconsistent with the Pacific way of resolving issues and could incite further instability and violence in the Solomon Islands,” said Andrew Shearer, the director general of the Office of National Intelligence, who travelled to the [Pacific islands](#) nation in March in a failed attempt to persuade Sogavare not to sign the agreement.

The text of the security deal, which was signed last week, has been kept secret, with Sogavare saying he will only release it with China’s permission, something that has alarmed Solomons MPs who have called for it to be made public.

A leaked draft of the deal detailed broad conditions under which Solomon Islands could call upon China for armed police and military personnel, including “to assist in maintaining social order, protecting people’s lives and property, providing humanitarian assistance, carrying out disaster response, or providing assistance on other tasks agreed upon by the parties [to the agreement]”.

Talifilu was speaking as he accompanied Suidani on a tour of Malaita, which is home to roughly a quarter of Solomon Islands’ population.

There are tensions between the national government and Malaita, which has serious economic challenges and does not feel it has received adequate support from the national government to address them. Malaita did not support the Sogavare government’s decision in 2019 to [switch diplomatic allegiance from Taiwan to China](#). Unhappiness with Sogavare over the switch was part of the motivation for riots in Honiara in 2021.

Talifilu said that during the tour, many people across the province had raised the issue of the China security deal.

“People ask about it,” he said. “And they are fearful to be honest … It’s a big discussion in communities, wanting to know how is this going to affect us.”

Talifilu said the fears boiled down to two things: firstly that in the event of hostilities between the US and China, “we will be caught in the conflict”.

Secondly, the prime minister’s ability to call on the Chinese for support to deal with internal security issues was seen as targeted at Malaita, given the historical tensions.

“It’s known that Malaita province stood against China coming into our province … so they know that the emphasis on security, internal security, is an emphasis against Malaita,” he said. “So if it so happens that the Chinese are in Honiara or are invited to do things, it will be against Malaitans.”

These concerns were echoed by the opposition leader Matthew Wale, who told the Guardian: “I think the deal is targeted at Malaita and that’s also the perception on Malaita.

“So that is a real threat to the unity of this country and certainly internal stability.”

Talifilu said that it was understandable that foreign countries like Australia had focused on the prospect of a Chinese naval base being built on Solomon Islands.

He warned that while Sogavare had repeatedly said there would be no Chinese military base, the assurances should not be trusted, as the prime minister had “not been truthful” in the past, including in the lead-up to the change in diplomatic allegiance in 2019.

“He promised people, including foreign governments, before any switch that there would be thorough consultations and that includes reports from within government to inform the government of the pros and cons or the switch

from Republic of China to PRC. He ended up not doing that. So those experiences for me have taught me that this man is the kind of person that you can't trust.

"It's fair to say that people should be worried. Why? Because why should we trust him now?"

Sogavare, prime minister of Solomon Islands, was contacted for comment.

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## Solomon Islands

# Australia's foreign minister denounces China's 'secret' security deal with Solomon Islands

Marise Payne says other members of the 'Pacific family' share concerns but she rejects claims her government 'dropped the ball' in the region

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Foreign affairs minister Marise Payne addressed the United States Studies Centre on Thursday. She said China's security deal with Solomon Islands was 'not transparent'. Photograph: Dan Himbrechts/AAP

*[Daniel Hurst](#) Foreign affairs and defence correspondent  
[@danielhurstbne](#)*

Thu 28 Apr 2022 01.57 EDT Last modified on Thu 28 Apr 2022 03.39 EDT

Marise Payne has denounced the “secret” terms of China’s security deal with [Solomon Islands](#), while insisting “no document signed and kept away from public view” would change Australia’s commitment to answering Pacific countries’ needs.

The foreign affairs minister said the agreement was “not transparent” – unlike Australia’s existing security treaty with Solomon Islands – and was also being hidden from other Pacific countries.

As the Coalition continues to reject Labor’s claims it presided over the [worst Australian foreign policy failure in the Pacific](#) in decades, Payne said other members of the “Pacific family” shared Australia’s concerns about the secretive arrangement.

The prime minister, Scott Morrison, has relied on the public promises of his counterpart, Manasseh Sogavare, that Solomon Islands would not allow a Chinese military base or a persistent military presence.

But Payne revealed on Thursday Australia had “continued to seek assurances on that and we will be doing so into the future”.

Payne made the remarks during a significant pre-election foreign policy address, during which she warned “we’ve entered a period that is becoming more dangerous, less stable and less prosperous”.

She called for “rules over anarchy” and argued the Coalition’s hard line against Beijing’s “growing assertiveness” had been vindicated.

“We have led on this,” Payne said at a United States Studies Centre event in Sydney.

“There is now strong agreement from amongst the Australian people that standing firm on our values and principles, even in the face of pressure, is the right approach for our long-term future.”

In a reference to [China](#), Payne said “a region in which an authoritarian power is dominant doesn’t get us closer” to Australia’s goal of a freer, more open Indo-Pacific.

But China’s signing of the security agreement with Solomon Islands, 1,600km from Cairns, has [complicated the Coalition’s push](#) to project a strong message on national security before the 21 May election.

On Thursday a key adviser to the premier of the most populous province in Solomon Islands also [expressed concern that the deal](#) could enable Sogavare to use Chinese armed police and military personnel to quash democratic dissent and hold power for years to come.

Payne implicitly rejected claims Australia had “dropped the ball” in the region.

Australia had been dealing with security developments “consistently for some time”, including discussions about China’s desire to establish a security presence in the region, she said.

Those conversations had enabled Australia to “even more readily” deploy Australian federal police and Australian defence force personnel in response to unrest in Honiara in November and December, together with New Zealand, Papua New Guinea and Fiji.

“It’s important to acknowledge that that is a Pacific family security response that worked, that was immediate, that addressed the needs of the Solomon Islands,” Payne said.

But she said “ultimately a security arrangement kept secret at the insistence of a partner is what we are dealing with now”.

Payne acknowledged that Solomon Islands had made a sovereign decision but added: “We know other members of the Pacific family share our concerns.”

When asked late on Wednesday whether Beijing planned to disclose the whole treaty, a Chinese foreign ministry official said the two countries would “act in accordance with international customary practice on the basis of bilateral consultation”.

The official, Wang Wenbin, said “some Australian politicians” were “seeking their own political gains by making denigrating remarks against China”. He accused the US and Australia of “pure double standards”.

“The US shows no openness and transparency when it conducted nuclear tests and dumped nuclear wastes in the South Pacific region and when Aukus opened the Pandora’s box of nuclear proliferation in the [Asia Pacific](#) region,” Wang said.

Labor’s home affairs spokesperson, [Kristina Keneally](#), echoed Payne’s concerns about the secrecy surrounding the deal.

“We have already now got China dictating terms to a member of our Pacific family,” Keneally told reporters in Sydney.

But Donald Rothwell, a professor of international law at the Australian National University, said reports that China had advised Solomon Islands it did not wish the treaty to be publicly released at this time were “not exceptional”.

Rothwell said there was no requirement under international treaty law that a treaty be immediately made publicly available.

“Some care needs to be taken to applying Australian standards to this treaty, especially when it is asserted it is ‘secret’,” he said.

“Australian treaty practice in this regard is generally considered to be world leading, but I would observe that in my experience there is always a time lag between an announcement that a treaty has been signed and when it becomes publicly available.”

Keneally continued to prosecute the argument Morrison “has been caught asleep at the wheel and as a result Australia is less secure”.

She cited “extraordinary” remarks from the head of Australia’s Office of National Intelligence, Andrew Shearer, denying that the deal reflected an intelligence failure.

“That means it was a government failure,” Keneally said.

Keneally accused Karen Andrews of indulging in “conspiratorial fantasies and unhinged commentary about foreign interference” after the home affairs minister implied on Wednesday China might have timed the announcement to influence the Australian election outcome.

Keneally said Andrews had yet to reply [after she wrote to the minister on Wednesday reminding her](#) of “the vital convention that opposition is briefed on any developing matters of national security” during the election campaign.

Andrews has not responded to Guardian Australia’s questions about the matter.

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# Headlines

- [Live Jack Dorsey backs Elon Musk's Twitter deal, but CEO warns of uncertain future](#)
- [Elon Musk World's richest man reaches deal to buy Twitter for \\$44bn](#)
- [Chaotic and crass Brief timeline of Elon Musk's history with Twitter](#)
- [Technology Jeff Bezos questions China's influence over Elon Musk's Twitter](#)

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

## EU warns Elon Musk that Twitter must stick to digital rules – as it happened

Rolling coverage of the latest economic and financial news, including the latest on Elon Musk's takeover of Twitter

- Shares in Tesla sink 12%; Twitter closes lower
- Moody's may downtrade Twitter over deal
- [EU: Twitter must stick to digital rules](#)
- [Jack Dorsey: Musk Is the ‘Singular Solution I Trust’ for Twitter](#)
- CEO Parag Agrawal: We don't know what direction Twitter will go
- [Human rights groups concerned about changes to moderation](#)
- [Elon Musk, world's richest man, reaches deal to buy Twitter for \\$44bn](#)

Updated 4d ago

[Graeme Wearden](#)

Tue 26 Apr 2022 16.25 EDTFirst published on Tue 26 Apr 2022 03.09 EDT



The world's richest person is taking control of the influential social media platform in a \$44bn deal  
Photograph: Stanislav Kogiku/AFLO/REX/Shutterstock

Graeme Wearden

Tue 26 Apr 2022 16.25 EDTFirst published on Tue 26 Apr 2022 03.09 EDT

## Key events

- [4d ago Closing post](#)
- [4d ago Wall Street tumbles](#)
- [5d ago Schumer: I hope Twitter doesn't get any darker under Musk](#)
- [5d ago WHO warns of dangers of health misinformation](#)
- [5d ago Moody's could downgrade Twitter over Musk deal](#)
- [5d ago Twitter shares dip in early trading](#)
- [5d ago EU warns Elon Musk that Twitter must stick to digital rules](#)

Show key events only

## Live feed

Show key events only

[4d ago](#)[16.24](#)

## Closing post

Time to wrap up - here's a round-up of our coverage of the [Twitter](#) takeover:

Goodnight. *GW*

- 
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Updated at 16.26 EDT

[4d ago](#)[16.21](#)

This is (quite predictably) excellent:

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[4d ago](#)[16.17](#)

**Twitter** shares have ended the day down 3.9% at \$49.68 each, as the gap to Elon Musk's agreed takeover offer widened.

**Tesla** kept sliding, and has closed 12% lower at \$876, amid concerns that Musk might need to sell billions of dollars' worth of shares in the carmaker to fund the deal.

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[4d ago](#)[16.14](#)

# Wall Street tumbles

**Ouch. The Nasdaq Composite has closed at its lowest level since December 2020, in its worst session since September 2020.**

The tech-focused Nasdaq shed almost 4%, as fears over rising interest rates and slowing global growth hit Wall Street.

It's lost more than 20% so far this year, as inflationary worries hit growth stocks.

Nasdaq 100 Total Returns...

2009: +55%  
2010: +20%  
2011: +4%  
2012: +18%  
2013: +37%  
2014: +19%  
2015: +10%  
2016: +7%  
2017: +33%  
2018: +0.04%  
2019: +39%  
2020: +49%  
2021: +27%  
2022 YTD: -20%\$NDX

— Charlie Bilello (@charliebilello) [April 26, 2022](#)

The broader **S&P 500** also had a rough day, sinking by 2.8%, while the **Dow Jones Industrial Average** of 30 large stocks shed 809 points, or over 2.3%.

As well as the tech sector, there were losses among companies reliant on discretionary consumer spending, communications firms, financial stocks and industrial companies.

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#### 4d ago 15.57

He's [\\$TSLA](#)'s CEO, SpaceX's CEO, and after acquiring [\\$TWTR](#), Elon Musk is now America's most leveraged CEO, CNBC's [@robtfrank](#) reports. "Depending on how much cash he's already taken out, he could wind up leveraging between 35% and more than 80% of his [\\$TSLA](#) stake." [pic.twitter.com/sSYQ3PXbU8](https://pic.twitter.com/sSYQ3PXbU8)

— TechCheck (@CNBCTechCheck) [April 26, 2022](#)

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#### 4d ago 15.56

Journalist Jon Ronson, who has spent [many years investigating and reporting on conspiracy theories](#), fears 'free speech absolutism' will lead to a flood of misinformation on Twitter:

Watched [@elonmusk](#)'s fascinating conversations with [@TEDchris](#). EM talked a lot about how he's pathologically interested in "the truth". I'd love to know how that tallies with his free speech absolutism. Won't Twitter soon be flooded more than ever with things that aren't true?

— jon ronson (@jonronson) [April 26, 2022](#)

The libertarian counterargument, I think, is that false claims would be called out and exposed. But experience suggests that untrue or misleading content is propagated and reinforced within groups. Algorithms then feed people more of this content (as that's what they're interested in), ultimately giving it credibility and leading people to share it (etc etc).

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[4d ago](#)[15.45](#)

It's been a rather gloomy day in the tech space, with the Nasdaq Composite now sliding by 3.5% in late trading....

Tech stocks are plunging □ <https://t.co/mZTel7jL9A>  
<pic.twitter.com/WyIBVYwrz2>

— Bloomberg (@business) [April 26, 2022](#)

.. while bitcoin has dropped around 5% to around \$38,000.

Bitcoin continues its plunge, falling 5% <https://t.co/Iqy1RkWRhF>  
<pic.twitter.com/jSWp3ymgmK>

— Bloomberg (@business) [April 26, 2022](#)

Investors are piling into the US dollar, on fears that Covid-19 lockdowns in China will slow the global economy, and in anticipation of aggressive interest rate hikes by America's Federal Reserve.

This has sent the pound sprawling to its weakest level since summer 2020, down 1.2% at below \$1.26 tonight.

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[5d ago](#)[15.10](#)

**Schumer: I hope Twitter doesn't get any darker under Musk**

**US Senate Democratic leader Chuck Schumer says he hopes Twitter doesn't become an even 'darker' place under Elon Musk's control.**

Asked about Musk's purchase of the social media company, Schumer gave a sobering verdict on the platform, telling reporters:

On Elon Musk I would say, look, in many ways Twitter has been a dark, dark place. I hope it doesn't get any darker.

.@SenSchumer on @elonmusk buying @Twitter: "I would say, look, in many ways Twitter has been a dark, dark place. I hope it doesn't get any darker." [pic.twitter.com/GNzzYaEAnz](https://pic.twitter.com/GNzzYaEAnz)

— CSPAN (@cspan) [April 26, 2022](#)

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[5d ago](#) [14.49](#)

## **WHO warns of dangers of health misinformation**

**Since the start of 2020, the Covid-19 pandemic has shown the importance of reliable, trustworthy information online, and [the risks created by false claims](#).**

And one World Health Organization official has today warned of the dangers of health and vaccine misinformation on social media, Bloomberg reports:

Misinformation costs lives, Mike Ryan, executive director of the health emergencies program at the WHO, said Tuesday in response to a reporter's question regarding the offer from Musk, a self-described free-speech absolutist, to buy Twitter for about \$44 billion.

"When anyone reaches a position in life where they have so much influence over the way information is shared with communities, they

take on a huge responsibility,” Ryan said at the media briefing in Geneva.

“We wish Mr. Musk luck with his endeavors to improve the quality of information we all receive.”

Ryan added that in the pandemic, good information is life-saving while “bad information sends you to some very bad places”. [More here](#).

“In the case of this pandemic, good information is life-saving,” a WHO official said in response to Elon Musk buying Twitter  
<https://t.co/bmmjQo0Yc2>

— Bloomberg (@business) [April 26, 2022](#)

A report from the Center for Countering Digital Hate (CCDH) last year showed that Facebook, Google and [Twitter](#) had all failed to satisfactorily enforce policies against vaccine misinformation.

Just 12 people were responsible for a majority of Covid-19 anti-vaccine misinformation and conspiracy theories, CCDH found.

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[5d ago](#) 14.33

Elon Musk has just tweeted, accusing critics of the deal of an ‘extreme antibody reaction’.

The extreme antibody reaction from those who fear free speech says it all

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

But as we've been covering through the day, groups such as Amnesty are very concerned that [Twitter could tolerate violent and abusive speech against users](#), if Musk pushed through changes to moderation rules.

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Updated at 14.56 EDT

[5d ago](#)[14.19](#)

## **Moody's could downgrade Twitter over Musk deal**

**Rating agency Moody's have put Twitter's credit rating on review for a possible downgrade.**

Moody's is concerned that Elon Musk's \$44bn leveraged buyout would materially weaken Twitter's 'credit metrics', due to the \$12.5bn of extra debt which will be added to its balance sheet.

Twitter is currently rated as Ba2 by Moody's, the second-highest junk (or non-investment grade) rating.

Moody's Places Twitter's Ba2 Ratings On Review For Downgrade Following Agreement To Be Acquired By Musk For \$44 Billion[\\$TWTR](#)

— OnlyOptionsTrades (@OnlyOTrades) [April 26, 2022](#)

The review will focus on the new capital structure and its impact on credit metrics and cash flow. It will also consider Musk's strategic changes to the social media platform, and whether it will have financial flexibility to grow.

Moody's says:

Musk cited strategic objectives as part of his offer, including: "global free speech as a societal imperative for a functioning democracy;"

“platform health and improving the signal-to noise ratio;” and “revamping Twitter Blue and exploring other non-advertising initiatives.” Moody’s believes that any success in improving the company’s operations and diversifying the company beyond its heavy reliance on advertising, from which it generates about 89% of revenue, would be credit positive.

Twitter’s governance risk is moderately negative (G-3). The company’s present management and board of directors have a track record of sustaining moderately conservative financial policies. However, the company faces challenging regulatory and political relationships, exhibits weak transparency and has no stated credit metric targets. Elon Musk plans to acquire all of Twitter and take the company private, making Musk the only shareholder. It is unclear what impact, if any, this will have on Twitter’s operating policies, but given the committed financing package, the company’s financial policies will be more aggressive and with a single shareholder, there is greater risk associated with a controlled board.

Moody's has placed Twitter's [\\$TWTR](#) Ba2 credit rating on review for a downgrade following Elon's deal to acquire the company

— Stock Market News (@StockMKTNewz) [April 26, 2022](#)

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[5d ago](#)[14.03](#)

**Elon Musk’s takeover of Twitter is at best a distraction for Tesla ([-11%](#)), and at worst a real business risk, our financial editor Nils Pratley writes:**

One obvious risk is sales of Tesla stock by Musk to fund the \$21bn equity portion of the \$43bn Twitter takeover package. Another is spill-over political effects, in the US and elsewhere. Jeff Bezos, another tech tycoon turned media owner, [referenced the latter mischievously](#). “Did

the Chinese government just gain a bit of leverage over the town square?” tweeted Amazon’s founder.

[Twitter](#) is blocked in China because the social media company, rightly, refuses to bow to Beijing’s security laws on what can be said about, say, the strangulation of democracy in Hong Kong or the persecution of Uyghur Muslims.

But Musk, wearing his Tesla hat, is a beneficiary of Chinese largesse in the form of financial incentives to build cars in China. Rich Chinese consumers are also big buyers of Teslas and key kit for the batteries comes from the country. What would happen if Beijing were to suggest that Twitter might wish to give the Chinese Communist party an easier ride in the interest of smooth commercial relationships for Tesla? Chinese officialdom, one suspects, won’t distinguish between Musk’s ownership of Twitter (100%, if everything proceeds) and that of Tesla (17% currently).

Bezos’s answer to his own question was that “the more likely outcome in this regard is complexity in China for Tesla, rather than censorship at Twitter”. The first part of that guess should still sound scary to the car company’s shareholders. In extremis, would a “free speech absolutist”, as Musk describes himself, be prepared to close factories rather than concede an inch to Chinese bullies?

[Here’s the full piece:](#)

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[5d ago](#)[13.32](#)

Tesla’s shares are now down 11%, as some traders ponder whether Musk might have to sell some of his stake to fund the Twitter deal ([see earlier post](#)).

That knocks around \$100bn (or two Twitters!) off Tesla's market capitalisation.

IMHO [\\$TSLA](#) falling on trader /shorts speculation fueled by the media that Elon will have to sell some TSLA shares to come up with \$21B equity for [\\$TWTR](#) deal since he gave no detail on how he would raise the \$21B in his revised 13D filing last night. Doesn't make it true.  
[pic.twitter.com/U6wWHCCr46](https://pic.twitter.com/U6wWHCCr46)

— Gary Black (@garyblack00) [April 26, 2022](#)

There's also the possibility that Musk could be distracted from his duties at the electric car company once he has Twitter to deal with.

Plus, \$12.5bn of the \$44bn takeover deal is in loans secured against his Tesla stock.

If you're wondering why Tesla is down today, I guess the market has a dim view on the potential for forced selling of around 6-10% of outstanding float by its largest shareholder if we return to May 2021 prices.

— Lily (@nope\_its\_lily) [April 26, 2022](#)

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[5d ago](#) [12.26](#)

Twitter's shares remain lower today, now down 3% at around \$50.

Reminder: you can still buy [@twitter](#) shares today and see their price fluctuations on the [@NYSE](#), because Elon Musk does not own it yet  
♂ [pic.twitter.com/PMCyPreEIK](https://pic.twitter.com/PMCyPreEIK)

— Gavin John Adams (@gavinjohnadams) [April 26, 2022](#)

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[5d ago](#)[11.56](#)

**Scott Kessler, global lead analyst for TMT sector companies at research firm Third Bridge, suspects there could be job losses at Twitter after the deal.**

Elon Musk's push for 'free speech' could mean less content moderation, Kessler points out, although that could also scare off advertisers.

Also, Musk may need to use Twitter's cash flow to service the debt he's using to partly fund the deal.

Kessler explains:

- Yesterday's press release indicated that Musk would use more than \$25bn in debt and margin loan financing to buy Twitter. It already has \$6bn in debt. However, the company generated only around half a billion dollars in adjusted free cash flow over the past three years combined. Last year Twitter generated negative adjusted free cash flow of more than \$350m. Pre-pandemic, in 2019, the company generated less than \$800m in adjusted free cash flow. This suggests that Musk may look to layoffs to help generate cash flow.
- Twitter has some 7,500 employees, and prioritizing free speech and open source algorithms could lead to considerable layoffs, especially around content moderation efforts. Musk would be able to build out his vision and save money at the same time. Experts we've spoken with have indicated that the health and safety initiatives within the company have taken up considerable resources.

- However, the potential importance of cash flows could cause Musk to be less aggressive in terms of shifting Twitter's business model from advertising to subscriptions. Nonetheless, less content moderation may prompt advertisers to pause or reduce their spending on Twitter.
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[5d ago](#)[11.43](#)

### **Shares in Tesla have tumbled over 9% today as investors fret about the impact of the [Twitter](#) deal on the electric car maker.**

Elon Musk's financing package includes a \$12.5bn loan secured against his Tesla stake. It also includes \$21bn of cash, which has raised the possibility Musk might need to sell some Tesla shares to raise equity if he doesn't line up other investors.

The FT has more details:

In morning trading on Tuesday, more than 18mn Tesla shares changed hands, worth more than \$16bn. That was more than four times the level of the next highest traded stock by value: iPhone-maker Apple.

Musk and his bankers at Morgan Stanley have been sounding out other investors who may want to invest in a privately held Twitter alongside him, which would reduce the size of the cheque he ultimately has to write himself, according to people briefed on the matter.

Tesla shares slid more than 9 per cent on Tuesday, wiping about \$97bn off the electric automaker's valuation, a day after the company's chief executive and largest shareholder Elon Musk clinched a deal to buy Twitter - in [@FT](#) <https://t.co/07Gh4HSkZK>

— Murad Ahmed (@muradahmed) [April 26, 2022](#)

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[Twitter](#)

## Elon Musk, world's richest man, reaches deal to buy Twitter for \$44bn

Tesla chief executive will gain control over social network he has criticized over its handling of 'free speech'



Elon Musk has described himself as a 'free speech absolutist'. Photograph: Hannibal Hanschke/AP

*[Dan Milmo](#) Global technology editor and [Kari Paul](#) in San Francisco*  
Mon 25 Apr 2022 17.26 EDTFirst published on Mon 25 Apr 2022 14.55 EDT

Elon Musk has reached a \$44bn deal to buy Twitter in a takeover that will give the world's richest man control of a social network with more than 200 million users.

The sale will put the Tesla chief executive in charge of a company that he has frequently criticized, claiming it has not lived up to its potential as a

platform for “free speech”.

The deal on Monday comes after a dramatic few weeks of speculation about Twitter’s future, triggered by Musk’s emergence as the platform’s largest single shareholder [on 4 April](#). He then declared a takeover bid [on 14 April](#), offering to buy all Twitter’s shares for \$54.20 each.

At first, Twitter’s board seemed opposed, enacting an anti-takeover measure known as a poison pill that could have made a takeover attempt prohibitively expensive. But its initial reluctance to accept a transaction appeared to fade after Musk [confirmed a funding package for the deal](#) – including \$21bn of his own money, alongside debt funding from Morgan Stanley and other financial institutions – and shareholders warmed to it.

“Free speech is the bedrock of a functioning democracy, and [Twitter](#) is the digital town square where matters vital to the future of humanity are debated,” Musk said in a statement posted to Twitter. “Twitter has tremendous potential – I look forward to working with the company and users to unlock it,” he added.

████♥ Yesss!!! ♥████ [pic.twitter.com/0T9HzUHuh6](https://pic.twitter.com/0T9HzUHuh6)

— Elon Musk (@elonmusk) [April 25, 2022](#)

Twitter said the transaction had been unanimously approved by its board of directors and was expected to close in 2022, pending regulatory sign-off and the approval of shareholders. The platform has 217 active daily million users.

“Twitter has a purpose and relevance that impacts the entire world,” Twitter’s chief executive, Parag Agrawal, said in a tweet confirming the sale. “Deeply proud of our teams and inspired by the work that has never been more important.”

The Musk takeover has been [unexpected and controversial](#) amongst Twitter employees. Speaking at an all-hands meeting on Monday following news of

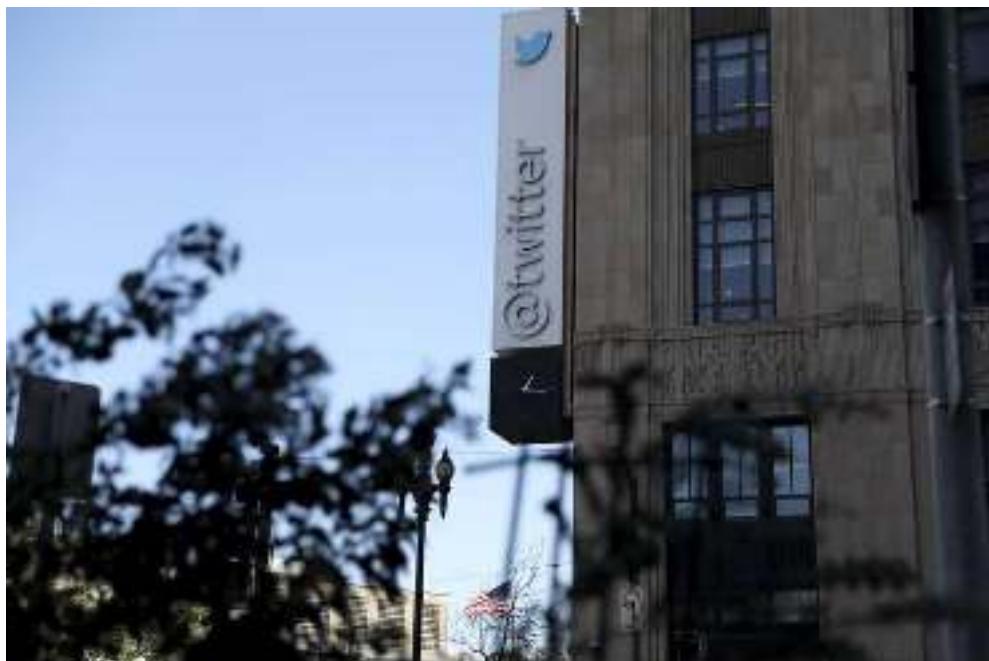
the deal, Agrawal told employees that the future direction of the social network was uncertain.

“Once the deal closes, we don’t know which direction the platform will go,” Agrawal said. Musk will join Twitter staff for a question-and-answer session at a later date, the company told employees.

The company, which launched in 2006, currently has a market cap of nearly \$40bn. Its co-founder Jack Dorsey stepped down as chief executive officer in November 2021, handing the reins to Agrawal, the company’s former chief technology officer.

Musk is himself a prominent user of the app, with 83m followers, and [tweeted](#) as early as 2017 expressing interest in buying the company. He has signalled that Twitter needs to be transformed as a private company in order to build trust with users and do better at serving what he calls the “societal imperative” of free speech.

“I hope that even my worst critics remain on Twitter, because that is what free speech means,” he tweeted on Monday.



The Twitter headquarters in San Francisco. Photograph: Jed Jacobsohn/AP

It remains to be seen how Musk will reshape the company, but the billionaire has proposed several changes in recent weeks. They include relaxing its content restrictions, ridding the platform of fake and automated accounts, and shifting away from its advertising-based revenue model.

Elaborating on his goals, Musk added [on Monday](#) that he wanted to “make Twitter better than ever by enhancing the product with new features, making the algorithms open source to increase trust, defeating the spam bots, and authenticating all humans”.

Musk has long been a popular if contentious figure on the platform. And despite claiming to be a “free speech absolutist”, Musk regularly blocks social media users who have criticized him or his company and has used the platform to bully reporters who have written critical articles about him or his company.

The deal is not expected to face serious scrutiny from US competition authorities because Musk’s other major business interests – Tesla, an electric car company, the SpaceX rocket business, and the tunnelling firm the Boring Company – do not compete with Twitter.

It is, however, likely to draw comment from politicians and campaigning bodies given Twitter’s influence as an information source and Musk’s stance on free speech. The purchase also comes amid intensifying criticism of big tech’s power and underscores the ability of wealthy executives to control platforms used by millions.

“No matter who owns or runs Twitter, the president has long been concerned about the power of large social media platforms,” the White House spokeswoman Jen Psaki [commented](#) on the purchase on Monday.

Senator Elizabeth Warren called the deal “dangerous for our democracy”. “Billionaires like Elon Musk play by a different set of rules than everyone else, accumulating power for their own gain,” [she tweeted](#).

Rebecca Allensworth, professor of law at Vanderbilt University, described the deal as “troubling” due to the amount of power now wielded by Musk, a

concern shared by many others.

“There is something deeply troubling about a privately-held company holding the power Twitter does over public speech, especially if Twitter will be controlled by someone with as idiosyncratic views about speech as Musk. American free speech law is essentially just the first amendment, which only constrains government actors, not a company like Twitter or a person like Elon Musk,” she said.

Speculation has already begun as to whether Musk will reinstate high profile accounts that have previously been removed for violating community guidelines, including that of Donald Trump. Trump was permanently banned from Twitter in 2021 for his use of the platform to incite unrest at the US capitol.



Elon Musk’s takeover of Twitter has raised concerns about the future direction of the platform. Photograph: Scott Olson/Getty Images

After the deal was announced, the NAACP released a statement that urged Musk not to allow the 45th president back on to the platform.

“Disinformation, misinformation and hate speech have NO PLACE on Twitter,” the civil rights organization said in a statement. “Do not allow 45

to return to the platform. Do not allow Twitter to become a petri dish for hate speech, or falsehoods that subvert our democracy.”

Trump has so far said he would not return to Twitter if his account were reinstated, telling Fox News on Monday: “I hope Elon buys Twitter because he’ll make improvements to it and he is a good man, but I am going to be staying on Truth,” a reference to his [own startup Truth Social](#).

Suzanne Nossel, chief executive officer of PEN America, a non-profit organization that works to protect freedom of expression in the US, and a member of the Facebook Oversight Board, warned Musk against indulging in a “fantasy” of dismantling moderation guidelines.

“Elon Musk will learn the same lesson about self-governing social media as he has about self-driving vehicles, which is that they unavoidably crash. Musk is right that our current systems of content moderation are biased and flawed, but the idea that the rules can be swept away wholesale is fallacy,” Nossel said.

Musk is the world’s wealthiest person, according to Forbes, with a nearly \$279bn fortune. He began building his wealth in 1999 when he sold Zip2, an online mapping and business directory, for \$307m. He used his share to create what would become PayPal, sold to eBay for \$1.5bn in 2002.

That same year, Musk founded Space Exploration Technologies, or SpaceX, after finding that cost constraints were limiting Nasas interplanetary travel. The company eventually developed cost-effective reusable rockets.

In 2004, Musk was courted to invest in Tesla, then a startup trying to build an electric car. Eventually he became CEO and led the company to success as the world’s most valuable automaker and largest seller of electric vehicles.

Some have questioned how Musk will divide his time and attention between all the companies he operates, though his track record of successful ventures is also seen as a positive for Twitter.

Shares of Twitter rose 5% on Monday to \$51.50 per share after news of the sale.

### *Agencies contributed reporting*

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## Elon Musk

# Chaotic and crass: a brief timeline of Elon Musk's history with Twitter

The billionaire's purchase of humanity's 'digital town square' is a culmination of his controversial past on the platform



Musk has been a vocal critic of the platform in the past. Photograph: Adrien Fillon/ZUMA Press Wire/REX/Shutterstock

### Kari Paul

Tue 26 Apr 2022 01.00 EDT Last modified on Tue 26 Apr 2022 10.42 EDT

One of Twitter's most controversial users became its owner on Monday, after [Elon Musk](#) brokered a \$44bn deal to buy the company.

The move was in many ways the culmination of the billionaire's long history with the platform. Musk has been on Twitter since 2009 and [tweeted as early as 2017](#) expressing interest in buying it. He has also been a vocal critic of

Twitter, calling for changes including rolling back content moderation and prioritizing a “societal imperative” of free speech.

A prolific user, Musk has 84 million followers on his account – with whom he shares memes, news about his electric vehicle company, Tesla, and, like the majority of Twitter users, [pithy commentary](#) on his day-to-day life.

But Musk’s tweets are not all fun and games. The executive has faced backlash – and in some case legal action – for his activity online.

Here are some notable moments in Musk’s [Twitter](#) history.

## A \$40m tweet

Musk’s activity has in some cases cost him dearly.

In August 2018, he [posted](#) that he had funding to take Tesla private at \$420 a share – a joking reference to marijuana. But the Securities and Exchange Commission (SEC) concluded after investigation the tweets had no basis in fact and hurt investors, issuing two separate fines to Musk and Tesla of \$20m.

The penalty marked a “warning for all those who make public pronouncements without regard for either the accuracy or impact of their words”. (Musk [maintains](#) that the joke was “worth it”).

Part of that 2018 settlement included a clause that Musk would have legal counsel approve tweets about Tesla in advance to ensure they do not contain market-moving news. Musk, unsurprisingly, has not abided by those conditions, flippantly [wiping \\$14bn](#) off Tesla’s value in 2020 with a tweet stating that “Tesla stock price is too high”.

Musk again ran into SEC troubles when in 2021 he [tweeted](#) a poll about whether to sell his stock and proceeded to do just that. The Tesla CEO and his brother [are now under investigation](#) for insider trading relating to whether Musk told his brother in advance that he would tweet the poll.

The frequent investigations and legal actions have rankled Musk, whose lawyer said in a legal filing in March that the SEC investigations constitute “outsized efforts calculated to chill [Musk’s] exercise of First Amendment rights”.

## Cave diver drama

Musk’s Twitter feuds brought him into a Los Angeles courtroom in 2019, where he [faced trial](#) for defamation relating to tweets and other statements he made about the British cave diver Vernon Unsworth.

Musk had grown angry after the caver ridiculed him over his plans to rescue a team of young footballers from a cave system in Thailand, baselessly calling Unsworth a [“pedo guy”](#) in a tweet to Musk’s then 22 million followers.

The Tesla executive later apologized and deleted the tweets after intense criticism from the public and his investors, but re-upped the baseless claims in [another series of tweets](#) about a month later and doubled down on them in an on-the-record email to a BuzzFeed reporter.

Musk testified in court that he had not meant to be literal in his tweet and that he was upset at the time at what he called “an unprovoked attack on what was a good-natured attempt to help the kids”.

“It was wrong and insulting, and so I insulted him back,” Musk said. He was ultimately exonerated.

## Unhappy shareholders

Backlash from Musk’s tweets has also come from shareholders. He is being sued in an ongoing lawsuit filed by investors who say his 2018 “420” tweet [was inaccurate](#) and hurt the company.

Another suit filed by a shareholder in 2021 [claims](#) that Musk’s tweets had caused “billions of dollars in losses”, and specifically references a feud between Musk and Senator Elizabeth Warren, which allegedly drove down

the stock price another 9.6% in December as well as the poll over whether to sell stock.

“Musk remains undeterred and continues to post on Twitter and social media on matters that are material to Tesla and its stockholders, and which ultimately have an impact on Tesla’s stock prices,” the lawsuit says.

## Meeting Grimes

The platform has also played a large role in Musk’s personal life: he reportedly met his former partner Claire Boucher (known as Grimes) via Twitter.

When the couple went public with their relationship in 2018, Page Six [reported](#) they met when Musk went to tweet an elaborate pun about artificial intelligence and found Boucher had already made the joke years earlier.

The pair, who have since communicated publicly on Twitter often, have two children together. An SEC filing said Musk even made his infamous 420 tweet in 2018 because he “thought his girlfriend ‘would find it funny’.”

## Covid-19 controversy and other antics

Even when they are not moving markets, Musk’s tweets are often chaotic and crass (he said he [sends](#) them mostly from the toilet). He has received criticism for a number of tweets [downplaying](#) the severity of Covid-19 and [speaking out](#) against lockdowns. He tweeted (then deleted) a meme comparing the Canada prime minister Justin Trudeau to Hitler [over](#) Covid-19 vaccine mandates.

Elsewhere over the years, Musk has promised Tesla vehicles would be purchasable in Bitcoin and then walked back that announcement, joked [about](#) quitting his job and becoming an influencer, and [mused](#) about nuking the planet Mars.

Musk’s freewheeling personal style on Twitter has caused many to express concern about his takeover of the company, and whether his “free speech” mentality will translate to harmful policies.

“Musk hasn’t just purchased another expensive play toy, but a global online community that includes about 330 million regular users,” said Jessica J González, co-chief executive of the media reform advocacy non-profit Free Press. “With control of such a massive platform comes great responsibility – and Musk hasn’t shown he has the capacity to be accountable to this diverse online community.”

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[Twitter](#)

## Jeff Bezos questions China's influence over Elon Musk's Twitter

Amazon founder raises concerns after Tesla boss strikes \$44bn deal to buy social media platform



Jeff Bezos: 'The more likely outcome is complexity in China for Tesla, rather than censorship at Twitter.' Photograph: David Ryder/Getty Images

[Dan Milmo](#) *Global technology editor*

Tue 26 Apr 2022 02.33 EDT Last modified on Tue 26 Apr 2022 17.11 EDT

Jeff Bezos has questioned whether China will lean on Elon Musk's Tesla business to quell criticism of Beijing on Twitter.

The world's second richest man posted a tweet raising concerns over potential Beijing influence on Twitter several hours after the Tesla chief executive, and current holder of the No 1 wealth spot, [reached a \\$44bn](#)

[\(£34bn\) deal](#) with the Twitter board to buy the influential social media platform.

Bezos quoted a post from a New York Times reporter that listed the importance of China to Tesla's business, including the fact that it was the electric carmaker's second largest market. The tweet said China may now have leverage over [Twitter](#).

Bezos responded with: "Interesting question. Did the Chinese government just gain a bit of leverage over the town square?" Musk called Twitter the "digital town square" after striking a deal on Monday and has made his belief in open debate a central purpose for the acquisition.

The agreed takeover has triggered debate over the implications of a powerful and wealthy individual, with multiple business interests, owning a platform used by 217 million people that plays a key role in shaping the political and media agenda in the US and elsewhere.

Interesting question. Did the Chinese government just gain a bit of leverage over the town square? <https://t.co/jTiEnabP6T>

— Jeff Bezos (@JeffBezos) [April 25, 2022](#)

Bezos, the founder and executive chair of Amazon, clarified his comments in subsequent tweets and said any Chinese pressure was unlikely to result in censorship. "My own answer to this question is probably not. The more likely outcome in this regard is complexity in [China](#) for Tesla, rather than censorship at Twitter."

He added: "But we'll see. Musk is extremely good at navigating this kind of complexity."

The White House has declined to comment on the Twitter sale, but said that Joe Biden has long been concerned about the power of social media platforms. "Our concerns are not new," said White House spokesperson Jen Psaki on Monday. "The president has long talked about his concerns about

the power of social media platforms, including Twitter and others, to spread misinformation.”

The Musk takeover, which must first be approved by Twitter shareholders before being completed this year, has proved controversial among Twitter employees. Speaking at an all-hands meeting on Monday after news of the deal, Parag Agrawal, the chief executive of Twitter, told employees that the future direction of the social network was uncertain.

“Once the deal closes, we don’t know which direction the platform will go,” Agrawal said.

Musk will join Twitter staff for a question-and-answer session at a later date, the company told employees.

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## 2022.04.26 - Spotlight

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Interview

## Suki Waterhouse: ‘I was carrying a lot of shame around myself for a long time’

[Emma Garland](#)



Gloves off ... Suki Waterhouse. Photograph: Dana Trippe

From the catwalk to the tabloids, the model and actor always felt ‘muted’. But with a debut album of widescreen Americana, has she found her voice?

Tue 26 Apr 2022 03.00 EDT Last modified on Tue 26 Apr 2022 06.40 EDT

This is not a golden era for women writing love songs about men. With the exception of [Lana Del Rey](#), the last decade of female-fronted pop has been defined by revenge anthems and breakup bangers, with “dump him” a common refrain. But Suki Waterhouse isn’t sold.

“I find the whole ‘dump him’ thing very toxic,” she whispers into her oat milk latte in a quiet nook of Notting Hill’s Electric cinema in west London. “I get it, but it’s important not to underestimate how incredible it is to be with somebody. And also how yummy and wonderful masculinity can be when it’s the good kind, when it’s warm and protecting … ” She pauses, smiling knowingly. “Anyway, let’s not go on that tangent!”

Sign up to our Inside Saturday newsletter for an exclusive behind-the-scenes look at the making of the magazine’s biggest features, as well as a curated list of our weekly highlights.

This week, Waterhouse is releasing her debut album, [I Can’t Let Go](#), through Sub Pop. Produced by Brad Cook, the man Pitchfork called “indie’s secret weapon” (he has worked on albums by Bon Iver and the War on Drugs), it is 10 tracks of sweeping Americana, with heart-on-sleeve lyrics that land somewhere between Taylor Swift’s simplicity and Del Rey’s fatalism (“I believe in old-fashioned things / Imagining us,” she sings on the lead single, Melrose Meltdown).

“So much of my life has been this weird blur,” says Waterhouse, running her hands through her hair – dishevelled but somehow still immaculate. I ask whether romance is the biggest force behind her songwriting. “It’s literally how I remember everything,” she says. “Who I was in love with at the time, how we broke up, and what happened after.”

Waterhouse has been in the public eye since she was 16, starting her career as a model in the late 2000s. For more than a decade she has been a fixture

on runways and magazine covers, a bona fide “it girl”, regularly papped with her friends and fellow models [Adwoa Aboah](#) and [Cara Delevingne](#). Then there’s the acting career, which has seen her appear in a mishmash of blockbuster romcoms ([Love, Rosie](#)), cult black comedies ([Assassination Nation](#)) and documentary-style TV series (the upcoming *Daisy Jones & the Six*). Throw in a photography exhibition here, an accessories brand there – not to mention a slew of high-profile relationships with the likes of Bradley Cooper, Diego Luna and, currently, the Batman himself, Robert Pattinson.

It is hard not to feel that this latest addition to her pop-cultural portfolio is a little ... low stakes? “I’m really aware that it’s like: ‘Oh, you’ve done modelling, you’ve done acting, and now you’re gonna give me this album.’ I’m really wary of people just being like: ‘Fuck off!’” she admits. “I totally get it.”

Waterhouse turned 30 in January. The celebrations were low key – dinner with a friend followed by a “girly evening” in a hotel room with margaritas – but the milestone helped to quash some of her anxieties around releasing music. “I think I was carrying a lot of shame around myself for a long time,” she says.

As a model, Waterhouse is used to people looking at her, but not so used to being seen. For years she felt “muted” and “quiet”, struggling to know how to connect to herself and others. She tried to start bands at school in west London, after she got her first guitar around the age of 13, but no one would turn up for practice. Her father, a cosmetic surgeon, and mother, a cancer care nurse, didn’t gift her with the “knowledge of music”, either. Her love of music developed in tandem with modelling. It was an era when the two worlds were intertwined; when [Kate Moss](#) and Pete Doherty were constantly hanging out of windows. “Whatever was going on, I was prepared to take an hour-long bus ride and walk 30 minutes in a pair of seven-inch heels,” she says.



Waterhouse at this year's Vanity Fair Oscars party. Photograph: Danny Moloshok/Reuters

Even then her role was more observant, being unable to see a way into music for herself. "A lot of the last few years has been me coming out of a time where I was trying to escape the need to fill these voids, and starting to look at myself and my own sabotage," she says. To that end she has been testing the waters at the rate of approximately one song a year since 2016, unsure if there would even be any appetite for them, although the comments under her YouTube videos are full of fans gushing over her "retro vibes" and "gorgeous voice".

Rather than manifesting a sudden burst of confidence, *I Can't Let Go* came together like a photo album: snapshots of different times, places and people. The breathy acoustic track *Slip* was written during a trip to Montreal, where she went to work with a chef-cum-musician on the recommendation of someone she met on a night out; the reverb-heavy ballad *My Mind* was written during the pandemic in her west London flat, where building work meant the windows were blacked out for months; *Melrose Meltdown* was inspired not by the trip she took with a friend to Bhutan ("We were drinking too much and feeling a bit shit"), but by a text she read on the plane home. "She was showing me some messages and I was moved by her alcoholic ex-boyfriend, who's really quite a good poet in a way."

The album has a rose-tinted energy, with restrained backdrops that marry 60s girl-group sentiments with dreamy modern pop and lyrics that would be at home on early 2010s Tumblr – there's plenty of “crying on your milk-white sheets” and getting “faded into oblivion”. It's very two drinks into an evening, when emotions are generous and arise as if out of nowhere.

“I definitely approached it thinking quite cinematically,” she says, citing *Thelma & Louise* and *Fruits of My Labor* by the country singer Lucinda Williams as inspirations for her goal of making something that “sounds good in the middle of the desert”. Fittingly for the subject matter, the space they were meant to record in fell through and they ended up in a wedding hall, with Cook and members of Bon Iver bringing Waterhouse's demos to life in a bridesmaids' room crowded with makeup lights and “Live, Laugh, Love” cushions.

“I think that struggle to connect is what this has all come from,” she says, “and this is how I want to tell people about myself: through music. For me it's just the best way.”

*I Can't Let Go* is out now on Sub Pop.

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## [TV review](#)[Television](#)

# Navalny review – one of the most jaw-dropping things you'll ever witness

As Putin's nemesis Alexei Navalny phones up the secret agent who put Novichok in his pants, this terrifying documentary enters the realms of the far-fetched spy thriller – and yet it's all true



‘As I became more famous, I was sure my life was becoming safer. I was very wrong’ ... Navalny. Photograph: Courtesy of Dogwoof

*[Phil Harrison](#)*

Mon 25 Apr 2022 17.35 EDT Last modified on Mon 25 Apr 2022 18.25 EDT

‘Let’s make a thriller out of this movie,’ suggests [Alexei Navalny](#) to his director, Daniel Roher. ‘And then, if I am killed, you can make a boring movie of memory.’ It’s typical of the man: for someone in a situation of such precarity, Navalny seemingly struggles to take anything too seriously.

It's clearly a defence mechanism – and in the circumstances, who can blame him? The alternative might involve surrendering to despair, and that would help no one.

And anyway, Navalny has been living on the edge for long enough to be used to it. This startling, terrifying documentary (BBC Two) offers up a [potted history of Navalny's anti-Putin](#), pro-democracy activism. At times, he seems like a one-man opposition: equal parts politician, provocateur and investigative journalist. He's not ideologically bound – in fact, there's an interesting segment where Roher probes his brief, pragmatic-going-on-troubling alliance of convenience with the far right. But mainly, he's portrayed in the mainstream Russian media as that most dreaded of things: a liberal.

Navalny is very much a figure of his era. He namechecked The Wire and enjoyed social media discourse with its creator, [David Simon](#). Much of his most successful work has involved exploiting social media and mobile filming technology, which is partly why his name has spread so far beyond Russia. For Navalny, social media is a weapon and a shield. When, for example, he and his wife, [Yulia](#), board the plane that is returning them to Moscow, he is relieved rather than irritated to be greeted by a forest of filming phones. When you oppose a regime that shrouds its deeds in darkness, there cannot be too much light. But did Navalny overestimate the protection his fame – and people's fascination with him – was offering? "As I became more famous, I was sure my life was becoming safer. Because it would become problematic for them to kill me." He pauses for a moment before remarking wryly: "I was very wrong."



When you oppose a regime that shrouds its deeds in darkness, there cannot be too much light ... Navalny boards a plane greeted by a forest of filming phones. Photograph: Courtesy of Dogwoof

Yes he was. Navalny's 2020 near-death experience occasioned by Russia's signature nerve agent novichok is the heart of this film. While recovering in Germany, he joins forces with [Bellingcat](#) investigative journalist Christo Grozev ("a nice Bulgarian nerd with a laptop") in an attempt to dig out the facts about his poisoning. What ensues is remarkable – the point at which Navalny enters the realms of the entertaining but far-fetched espionage thriller. With a surprising degree of ease, Grozev and Navalny's small team uncover the identities of the Federal Security Service ([FSB](#)) agents sent to kill him. They even get their phone numbers. And then, Navalny rings them, one by one, to ask why they did it.

At first, it doesn't go well, mainly because Navalny can't resist saying who he is. The agents simply hang up. Eventually, though, he poses as a Kremlin investigator, looking to explore the reasons for the mission's failure. Soon enough, one of his would-be assassins is singing like a canary. The ensuing conversation is one of the most jaw-dropping things you'll ever witness – it's clearly all in a day's work for the agent who, as Navalny fights to keep the incredulous glee out of his voice, drones on about dosage, the exact placement of the poison in Navalny's underpants and the annoyingly quick

reactions of the emergency services. “Poor guy,” smirks Navalny at the end of the conversation. “They will kill him.”

Navalny’s resistance cell has a small, charmingly ad hoc air about it. But the film brilliantly captures the innate foolishness of his opponents, too – the absurdity as well as the darkness. There is always, in the end, something innately laughable about autocracies – probably because the distortions necessary to sustain their poisonous fictions can eventually only play out as either horror or comedy. At one point, a Kremlin-endorsed talkshow posits liberals’ “endless homosexuality” as an explanation for Navalny’s weakness and near-death. Vladimir Putin goes to ridiculous lengths to avoid even saying Navalny’s name, which, believe it or not, doesn’t cut the mustard as a public power-play. His persona couldn’t seem more of a contrast to Navalny’s robustness – the impression of Putin is overwhelmingly one of fragility and paranoia.

In fact, Navalny’s sturdiness is such that it’s faintly surprising when events play out as we know they must. Navalny seems the moral winner throughout. His calm confidence is infectious. But he’s still in prison, facing up to 20 years. Sometimes, sadly, realpolitik trumps narrative justice. The film ends in a darkness that is all the more pronounced for our knowledge of where Putin is about to take Russia and the world. In the end, if this story is a thriller rather than Navalny’s “boring movie of memory”, it will need another chapter to reveal its happy ending.

- *Navalny* is available now on BBC iPlayer in the UK and CNN+ in the US. It will be on HBO Max in the US from 26 May. An Australian airdate has yet to be announced.

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## **‘It’s like young love with the brakes off’: Bennifer and the couples who get back together**



Laying the groundwork ... Ben Affleck and Jennifer Lopez in 2003.  
Composite: Patrick McMullan/Getty Images/Guardian Design

Ben Affleck and Jennifer Lopez are back together after 19 years – and they aren't the only ones. Why do some pairings work better the second time around?



[Zoe Williams](#)

[@zoesqwilliams](#)

Tue 26 Apr 2022 01.00 EDT Last modified on Tue 26 Apr 2022 07.30 EDT

It is the latest revival from the carefree early 00s to brave the fire-scorched hellscape of the 21st century. The relationship between Ben Affleck and Jennifer Lopez, AKA Bennifer, has roared back with a vengeance, with Lopez [announcing their re-engagement](#) this month, almost 19 years after they called off their wedding.

When we talk about a couple's chemistry, we usually mean something about sex. It is more literal with Affleck and Lopez, who create a compound that is far more compelling than Affleck or Lopez as single atoms.

Here is a precis for those who weren't alive or paying attention two decades ago. The couple met in 2001, while filming the universally panned romcom *Gigli*. Their subsequent romance led to Bennifer being defined on Urban Dictionary as “an attractive couple that have money, fame and beauty yet are

still universally hated” and a “combination of two things that separately suck but when put together can achieve a level of sucking not understood by physics”.

But that was just how the cool kids saw it. To the mainstream media, the pairing was blessed, recalls Marie O’Riordan, who was then the editor of the lifestyle magazine Elle. When two extremely famous people fall in love, “the story takes on its own momentum”, she says. “‘Will they break up?’ ‘Oh, they’ve got engaged?’ ‘What are they wearing?’ ‘Where’s the wedding going to be?’ It all plays out in front of you.”

Perhaps in response to the pitiless scrutiny of their engagement – performed to an unblinking audience, like Cinderella in a carriage of glass – they went a bit bonkers. Affleck popped the question in late 2002 with an engagement ring that was reported to cost \$2.5m; Lopez called it “the most magnificent thing I’ve ever seen”. (She didn’t actually finalise her divorce from her previous husband until 2003, but it is not bigamy if you only get engaged.)

In 2003, they postponed their wedding “due to the excessive media attention”. By 2004, they had split up. She married Marc Anthony that June to become Anthopez, while Affleck married Jennifer Garner in 2005 to become Affgar. Neither of those titles took, but the relationships lasted well into the 10s.



Jennifer Lopez and Ben Affleck in Los Angeles in February 2022.  
Photograph: Valérie Macon/AFP/Getty Images

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‘Excessive media attention’ is a bit of a red herring. It is possible that the real problem was our general overinvestment in the romance, as with Posh and Becks (married 1999, still together) and Jennifer Aniston and Brad Pitt (married 2000, divorced 2005). When everyone is wishing so hard upon a pair of stars, it must be hard to tell which feelings are real and permanent and which have been generated by the crowd.

O’Riordan was at Lopez’s second wedding, in Lake Como in 2001, to the dancer Cris Judd. “Quite a lot of the senior British press were invited and we were all dancing round the top table, going: ‘But they don’t even know me.’ They didn’t even look happy.”

When a couple is kiboshed by a context they can’t control, there may still be life left in the relationship. But is it a good idea to return to an old flame? How do you know whether you are rekindling something genuine or splashing around the lighter fluid of your life’s disappointment in an effort to reanimate something long since expired?

Susanna Abse has been a marriage counsellor for decades and is releasing a book on the subject, *Tell Me the Truth About Love*, next month. She has

never seen one of these back-together couples professionally. “That’s an interesting thing in itself,” she says. “They’re not a very large demographic going to couples’ therapy.” But there is a richness to a shared history that we all instinctively understand, she says. “I once did a lecture series on intimacy and I had pictures of different kinds of couples – a couple in a sexual embrace, couples in families with their children, then older couples, laughing with each other. I asked people what they thought was the most intimate picture. It clearly wasn’t the sexual picture; it was this couple laughing together. That sense: ‘We shared something. We know each other. We have a special “in”. I can stretch all the way back to the essential you.’”



‘I didn’t think we’d be married 25 years later’ ... Kate and Jamie Laverty with their children, Otis and Etta. Photograph: Peter Flude/The Guardian

This feeling can be amplified if the first time you got together was also the first time you fell in love. Details will have etched themselves into your memory, making that person part of your identity for ever, regardless of whether you have maintained a friendship.

Aled, 53, and Jem, 49, got back together in 2014 after meeting in 1995, when they had a blissful year of freedom, hitchhiking up and down the UK, going to gigs and festivals, at one point following Patti Smith to every date she played in the country. “It was one of those moments of illumination,”

says Jem. “We were at the last Patti Smith gig in London and he’d gone off for a little bit and came back with a backstage pass, but there was only one. And I thought: ‘Shit. I love him so much that I want him to have it. Because it means so much to him. I can just wait in the bar.’ I was quite surprised at myself – I was only 22 and I was being quite mature. Then he grinned and held up a second pass.”

Often, if you don’t remember things the same way, it adds texture to the memory. “There was a really bright, effervescent, easy feeling about being around each other,” Aled says. Jem disagrees: “It wasn’t easy at all. I felt absolutely tongue-tied. I thought you were just so cool.”

There can be a distinctive sweetness, a lack of consequence, to these memories. Abse says they “return you to a place, emotionally, prior to all the knocks and betrayals of life”.

When a couple is kiboshed by a context they can’t control, there may still be life left in the relationship

Kate and Jamie Laverty, both 44, have been married for 13 years and have two children, but they first dated in 1994, when they were 16. “Jamie joined my friend’s terrible indie band. He came on stage and I said: ‘Who’s he? He’s not in the band,’ and he heard me. That was so embarrassing.” Only 16-year-olds are capable of that exquisite cringing over moments that are really not that embarrassing.

If celebrity relationships can crumble not because of incompatibility so much as the weight of public expectation, regular ones can fall apart simply because you don’t have much agency in that decade of transition – call it 15 to 25 – from childhood to adulthood. Jem was going back to art school and wasn’t looking to settle down; neither was Aled. Kate and Jamie talked about going to adjacent universities, but then she didn’t get into Manchester, he didn’t get into Oldham and nobody had a mobile phone. She says: “I was really excited about university and I thought it would be sad to be thinking about someone else and not being able to see them. I just thought it would be a rubbish experience. And I didn’t think we’d be married 25 years later.”

Love is wasted on the young, because they don't know anything. It is like giving a baby a mango – how are they supposed to know it is any more exotic than an apple? “There was a bit of a failure to recognise how brilliant our connection was – how rare and how precious,” Aled agrees.

If what turns out to have been a really important relationship was discarded for a relatively trivial reason, you can try to pick it up again, but it is unlikely to be on friends-with-benefits terms. “I thought if we got back together it would be instantly a serious relationship,” says Kate. “You couldn’t casually date someone who was your first love 13 years earlier. And it was like that.”



First time around ... Kate and Jamie in the 90s. Photograph: Supplied image

Jamie got back in touch with her via Facebook. “It came over quite quickly that he was thinking about the past,” she says. “If someone in online dating had sent these messages to me, three messages in, that would have been a red flag. But because I already knew him so well ...” He came over for dinner and they were pretty much engaged before she produced the noodles (well, within six months). “It definitely felt romantic, it definitely felt like this was meant to be: this person from my past has swept back into my life.”

Jem and Aled started messaging privately on Twitter when, Aled says, “we were both just out of relationships where we were not treated as well as we might have been”. They didn’t meet for months, as Jem was living abroad with two children, but they were messaging constantly, Jem remembers: “Once, we counted 200 messages in a day.” Aled adds: “It was so intense; I wasn’t sure you were real. I thought I might have a split personality and discover a second phone somewhere.”

They finally met when Jem came to England to visit him. “It was like a 90s romcom,” Aled says. “The PA in the airport was playing Be My Baby.” Jem adds: “It was very difficult to make eye contact at first. It’s like young love with the brakes off, because you know who you are.”

These memories can return you to a place, emotionally, prior to all the knocks and betrayals of life

### *Susanna Abse*

Aled says there was a “weird intensity to it”. “You’ve got all the fizz of new love that has really blossomed, but you’ve also got this deep, anchoring weight, the trust, the familiarity, the integrity of really knowing who that person is,” he says.

By the time they resumed their relationship, Jem was identifying as non-binary. “But I’d always known that – the only difference was that I now had a vocabulary and context for what I’d always felt,” they say. Aled adds: “It was more like: ‘Now there’s a name for that thing that’s always been true.’ It’s not like they’d converted to Christianity.”

Part of the instantaneous trust – which would probably be an illusion, a mirage or at least a punt in a regular love affair – is knowing the central pillars of each other’s lives, says Abse: “I know where you come from, I knew your mum and dad, I remember where you lived.”

All of that is great, but now you have to see each other’s parents again for the first time since you were a kid – and maybe one of you (Jamie, say) used to have long hair and is now bald. “It was weird getting back together and seeing his family again, but his parents were so warm; I could do no wrong,”

says Kate. “It didn’t hurt that his mum really didn’t like his ex. She wouldn’t even say her name – it was always ‘her’. And I was the reason he’d moved back nearer to them, rather than living in the Midlands with *her*.<sup>”</sup>

Jem’s dad, meanwhile, had leaned over to their mum in the middle of their first wedding and said: “It ought to be Aled,” but they found this out only when they got back together. “There was only one person who was surprised and that was an ex of both of ours,” Jem says.

A quick corrective, before this all becomes too panglossian: life changes don’t always make us better at relationships. “There’s always the quest for the new when you’re young,” Abse says. “Twenty years later, you might think: ‘I’ve had a look round – it’s really nice back home.’<sup>”</sup>

The flip side of this is that you may be set in your ways – as Carol found when she got back together with her former flame Steve in 2014. By this point, she had two children and “was definitely in love with him. I was mid-40s, thinking: ‘It would be lovely to have another baby.’<sup>”</sup> At this point in our video call, her 19-year-old daughter is making an internationally recognised hand signal for “crazy” behind her. “He was late 40s, had never had children and was completely freaked out by just how structured life with kids is; how much things have to be planned.”

When they were having their breakup chat, he raised an incident he had found problematic – when she hadn’t been able to go to a gig on the day of her daughter’s birthday party. “He was never going to get priority and, in good faith, he just didn’t understand that. I thought: ‘My God, if I’d known you didn’t understand that I had to be there for that, I would never have got into this.’<sup>”</sup>

Perhaps reunited couples who *do* work out are aware of how much could have gone wrong – they seem to be much more expressive in their gratitude to the universe. As J-Lo said recently, comparing this iteration of Bennifer with the one two decades ago: “There’s more of an appreciation and a celebration for it, which is nice. It was: ‘Oh wow, we’re not used to this and it’s really beautiful.’<sup>”</sup>

Jem says: “It doesn’t feel like we wasted time. I learned a lot. I made a load of mistakes. It’s made me who I am now, and who I am now is what I want to bring to the relationship.”

Aled says: “These days, I recognise love while it’s happening. I’m appreciative, I can see it. There is a conscious joy at the start and end of every day, because I recognise the love for what it is.”

*Some names have been changed*

This article was amended on 26 April 2022. Lopez’s marriage to Cris Judd was her second, not her first, which was to Ojani Noa.

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# The lost Jews of Nigeria

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**The long read**

## **The Jewish community of Nigeria – in pictures**

Moshe Ben Avraham outside his Aaron Hakodesh Synagogue in Port Harcourt, Nigeria. Photograph: Emeke Obanor/The Guardian

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## These shocking stories show mental health is still not being taken seriously in England

[Owen Jones](#)



We're paying £2bn a year to subsidise private mental health hospitals – that's the cost of government negligence



‘The Tory-led coalition government announced that mental health would be granted parity of esteem with physical healthcare more than a decade ago.’  
Photograph: Keith Morris/Alamy

Tue 26 Apr 2022 02.00 EDT Last modified on Tue 26 Apr 2022 09.48 EDT

Last summer, a young man – let’s call him Daniel – walked into a hospital A&E department in England and told doctors that he had schizophrenia. He had struggled with his mental health for years, and now he wanted help. But after he was briefly seen by an early intervention team, he was discharged. A few days later, he stabbed a stranger whom he deemed to be a threat to his life, and now he’s locked away in a prison cell. “I’m devastated for him,” his mother tells me, “and concerned for others in similar situations.”

It’s worth pointing out that the vast majority of people with schizophrenia are not violent. And this is not about the NHS’s overworked and underpaid army of staff, who overwhelmingly do their best in unnecessarily challenging circumstances. It is instead a plea for attention to solve one of the great under-discussed crises of modern Britain: the mental distress that blights the lives of millions of citizens, and the lack of provision to tackle it.

According to the charity Mind, there are not just 1.6 million people languishing on mental health waiting lists, there are another 8 million who

would benefit from treatment, but can't make it on to those oversubscribed waiting lists because of high eligibility thresholds. The Guardian recently revealed that [the NHS in England is paying £2bn a year](#) to private hospitals to care for mental health patients because of the lack of its own beds – another striking example of lights flashing red on the dashboard. For those who shrug their shoulders, believing the use of the private sector is just a pragmatic solution to help those in need, consider the fact that one in four non-NHS psychiatric facilities have been judged “inadequate” by Care Quality Commission inspections. “If taxpayers’ money is being spent on poor-quality care in some cases,” says Mind’s head of policy, Vicki Nash, referring to recent deaths in private mental health services, “we need to ask ourselves: is that money better spent elsewhere?”

Our rulers will undoubtedly rebut these criticisms. After all, the Tory-led coalition government announced that mental health would be granted parity of esteem with physical healthcare more than a decade ago, and more investment has been ploughed into the sector, [including £500m last year](#) in response to the pandemic. As the King’s Fund thinktank has argued, while demanding parity of esteem is useful – not least in a country in which suicide is the [biggest killer of men under 50](#) – it needs to be matched with [adequate funding](#) and better joined-up working between different NHS services.

What we do know is increased investment has been offset by surging need. Calls to the helpline of anti-suicide charity Campaign Against Living Miserably, for instance, surged by 40% when the pandemic began, while there has been a 100% increase in the number of 16- to-24-year-olds accessing its website. The trauma unleashed by the pandemic and the drastic measures needed to contain it cannot be understated: according to the World Health Organization, cases of anxiety and depression [jumped](#) by a quarter across the globe in the first year alone.

The testimonies of those working in crisis-ridden mental health services tell their own story. One mental health professional with decades of experience tells me: “It is now at the worst point I can remember due to a staffing crisis that has been a problem for well over five years now, and probably closer to 10 years.” Staffing issues had led them to start locking up patients at night,

they tell me, and while a new unit being built should be a cause for celebration, it causes them dread, since staff are leaving in droves.

Another worker tells me of a child patient with a history of being abused who fell off a waiting list because their working mother had missed a call from mental health services. One of their female patients who suffered abuse from her parents and then partners has suicidal tendencies, they say, but waiting lists mean having to wait months to get an assessment, and then another 18 months before getting help. One mother of a suicidal teenage boy was made to put in a referral to child and adolescent mental health services in writing, told there would be two weeks until an urgent appointment was possible, and felt there was no choice but to take him to a chaotically busy A&E department. “My son feels his life isn’t worth bothering with, and feels even more hopeless,” she tells me. If you speak to anyone who has been through our struggling mental health system, you’ll hear the term “waiting lists” comes up again and again.

Why do we put up with such chronic and systemic failures, many of which undoubtedly lead not just to unnecessarily prolonged misery, but in all too many cases loss of life? Perhaps the sheer number of crises afflicting modern Britain is crowding out the space to talk about it. Whatever the answer, avoidable misery is imposed on the lives of millions because of a recurring failure to match need with provision – and the human cost is incalculable.

- In the UK and Ireland, Samaritans can be contacted on 116 123 or email [jo@samaritans.org](mailto:jo@samaritans.org) or [jo@samaritans.ie](mailto:jo@samaritans.ie). In the US, the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline is at 800-273-8255 or chat for support. You can also text HOME to 741741 to connect with a crisis text line counselor. In Australia, the crisis support service Lifeline is 13 11 14. Other international helplines can be found at [www.befrienders.org](http://www.befrienders.org)
- This article was amended on 26 April 2022 to provide more context about schizophrenia.
- Owen Jones is a Guardian columnist

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2022/apr/26/shocking-stories-mental-health-england-2bn-a-year-private-hospitals>

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**Opinion**[Child protection](#)

## How many more children must die before we fix England's social services?

[Polly Curtis](#)

A system eroded by austerity has been further stretched by the pandemic. The tragic consequences are all too plain to see



‘Arthur Labinjo-Hughes’s relatives had called social services and offered photographic evidence of his injuries – but social workers concluded there were “no safeguarding concerns”.’ Photograph: Family handout/PA

Tue 26 Apr 2022 05.03 EDT Last modified on Wed 27 Apr 2022 07.19 EDT

Something is going badly wrong in children’s social care, a system scarred by the names of murdered children. The deaths of [Victoria Climbié](#), [Peter Connelly](#) and [Daniel Pelka](#) over the past 20 years prompted round after round of inquiries, reviews and reforms. But still the list of dead children grows.

In recent days and weeks more small lost lives have been added to this grim toll: Logan Mwangi, Arthur Labinjo-Hughes, Star Hobson, Kyrell Matthews and Hakeem Hussain. Three of those children, Arthur, Star and Logan, died during the pandemic. The descriptions of their lives and manner of their deaths are painful to read.

We know that these children were failed by social services. The authorities were aware of Logan's numerous injuries in the run-up to his death and allegedly of [threats made](#) against him, but they didn't act. Arthur's relatives had called social services and [offered photographic evidence](#) of his injuries – but his stepmother coached him to lie to social workers, who concluded there were "no safeguarding concerns". Social workers decided to [wait until Monday](#) to intervene to help Hakeem, despite warnings he would not survive the weekend. He didn't. Social services [closed Star's case](#) 15 days before she died.

In each case, decisions were taken that led to missed opportunities to protect these children – but we don't know why these decisions were made. That will be revealed in safeguarding reviews that are under way.

But we do know that lockdown put huge strains on families and made it harder for social workers to see what was going on. We know that children [slipped from view](#) as schools closed. Teachers stopped referring children to the authorities, but more families (including in these cases) were calling social services to report abuse. With that came a more difficult task for social workers: to sift through and weed out vexatious accusations from real concerns, a result of social services having become increasingly weaponised in family disputes.

There is now [cold, hard evidence](#) of the effect of that rise of abuse during lockdown. Between April and September 2020, there were 285 serious incidents of children dying or being seriously harmed by neglect or abuse, up from 225 the previous year. They included 20 additional child deaths.

There will be policy consequences, as Patrick Butler [wrote last week](#). The safeguarding reviews into Arthur and Star's deaths, expected in a matter of weeks, will reveal why those chances were missed. Then, by the end of May,

a [national review of children's social care](#) in England will report on how the whole system – from family support and early help, to child protection and fostering and adoption services – should change. This should be a chance for real reforms.

But to fix this system, we have to decide what the problem that we're fixing is – and make sure that the pandemic doesn't mask the longer-term trends. I spent three years researching the children's social care system for my book and found a system that is so [decimated by austerity](#), the relationship between communities and the authorities now so corrupted by distrust, that in some parts of the country it is no longer able to identify the children most at risk.

Social workers have caseloads of dozens of children, starving them of the time needed to get to understand what's happening in a family. In the absence of the capacity to make sound judgments, systems have been put in place that reduce nuanced, human judgment to tick-box exercises that devious parents can see straight through and outmanoeuvre. Meanwhile, budget cuts have removed housing support, help for those experiencing domestic abuse, and assistance for people facing drug and alcohol or mental health problems – the very issues that underly so many of these cases. With fewer resources to support families to stay together safely, more children, having reached a point of crisis, have been removed from their families. We actually now have [more children in the care system](#) than ever, yet they are still dying.

A good social care system would take faster, more decisive action to protect children: take them away from abusive families and offer better support and services to help other families stay together safely. We have created a cycle that is doing both badly: we are removing too many children and still missing others like Arthur, Star, Logan, Kyrell and Hakeem. It is a breathtaking double failure.

The result is that in the past 10 years, the bill for children's social care has soared. Money for support, help and social work for families has been slashed. But the actual bill for care (fuelled in part by a scandalous [privatisation of the care system](#)) has just grown and grown.

Children's social care is going badly wrong, and we need to be clear about the true complexity of the problems before we decide how to fix it. The pandemic may have made it harder to identify children at risk, but we should not allow that to mask the deeper problem: the steady erosion of the state's ability to do this vital job well.

This article was amended on 27 April 2022 to correct a mention of Arthur Labinjo-Hughes's mother, which should instead have referred to his stepmother.

- Polly Curtis is a former Guardian journalist and author of Behind Closed Doors: Why We Break Up Families and How to Mend Them
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## Culture

# From The Simpsons to Iron Man: Elon Musk's Twitter takeover is just his latest desperate bid for celebrity

[Sian Cain](#)

For years everyone's favourite billionaire has been making pop culture cameos to poke fun at how nice and smart he is

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The Twitter account of the world's richest man, and Twitter owner, Elon Musk. Photograph: Dado Ruvic/Reuters

Tue 26 Apr 2022 05.24 EDT Last modified on Tue 26 Apr 2022 21.48 EDT

Finally, we have arrived. We're on the most cursed timeline, where the man who once [paid \\$20m for a single bad tweet](#) now owns Twitter. [Elon Musk](#)

[has spent \\$44bn – half of which is his own money](#) – to take over the social media platform where #AmberTurd regularly trends.

This news has prompted a mass exodus as believable as that time in 2016 when all American liberals were apparently moving to Canada. But how surprised can we be that the idiot's favourite smart guy has forked out so much for control over public discourse?

This is the man who has repeatedly inveigled his way into pop culture, turning up in everything from South Park to Iron Man 2, in his desperation to reinvent himself as a celebrity. Musk is truly the people's billionaire, in that he has billions of dollars and he's not a Russian oligarch no one had ever heard of before February.

Celebrity cameos are like soft diplomacy: we're a Pacific island and Musk is the BBC World Service. Except Musk isn't a celebrity, even if he shares their fondness for thin women and secret babies: he's a rich man who has put great amounts of time and energy in confecting his own image.

By Musk's telling, he 'twas but an 'umble street urchin with a talent for coding; his father, Errol, who at one point co-owned a Zambian emerald mine, once said: "[We had so much money at times we couldn't even close our safe](#)." And like a man who might have a complex about having a really full safe and an African emerald mine in the family, Musk has worked for years to make himself the guy who pokes fun at how rich, smart and kind he is.

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"I've got an idea for an electric jet," he tells Tony Stark in his 10-second scene in Iron Man 2, billionaire playboy to billionaire playboy. Director Jon Favreau once praised Musk for letting him film at SpaceX for nothing: as if having superhero film made in your office was pure generosity on Musk's

part, and not an enormous ego boost for a guy who has the energy of both the most divorced man and the most bullied child. (On that note, [check out the dedicated Wikipedia page for Donald Trump's cameos](#).)

In South Park, Musk gives Cartman a tour of SpaceX. In Rick and Morty he plays Elon Tusk, a tech billionaire who – wait for it – has tusks and is from – wait for it – “the Tusk Dimension” and works for – yeah – Tuskla. (The show is much better and smarter than that would have you believe.) In The Big Bang Theory, he’s shown volunteering in a shelter at Thanksgiving.

“It feels great to come here and help the less fortunate,” says the man who once offered to end world hunger if the UN tell him “exactly how” his billions would be spent – and then didn’t respond [when they did](#).

But perhaps the most fawning example is his Simpsons episode: season 26’s The Musk Who Fell to Earth, which is truly all his, because how else to explain why this episode exists? In it Musk is introduced as “the man who’s revolutionized the car industry.” “Henry Ford!” exclaims Mr Burns. “Good to see you, as healthy and vibrant as Detroit itself!” Musk then goes on to use Burns’ money to – you guessed it – try to save the world.

Longtime Simpsons producer Al Jean – who [uploaded a photo of himself beaming alongside Musk](#) on Tuesday – said the episode, which Musk helped script, [wasn’t “kiss ass”](#) because “Burns tries to kill him, and we reveal Musk’s master password”. That password is MUSKRULZ. Ahoho! Good thing Musk has experience dealing with [exploding batteries](#), how else would he cope with such a blistering burn?

But it is all for nothing. Because nothing in a script will be funnier than the time he tried to demonstrate how strong the glass on the Tesla Cybertruck was [by having a guy smash right through it in front of a crowd](#). Or the time he made a April fool’s joke about Tesla going bankrupt and [share prices tanked](#).

Elon, you’re a billionaire! We’ll always be fascinated by your various planes and thoughts about pyramids. Just stop turning up in our shows and films.

Be free! Free from the disdain people have for someone who, say, spends \$44bn on a social media platform and not on, I don't know, anything else.

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# Helping Mum canvass for Labour in the 80s, I think I actually turned people Tory

[Zoe Williams](#)



I'm unconvinced that knocking door to door works in bagging undecided voters, but it sure got easier after the rise of Amazon



Former Labour leader Ed Miliband canvasses in Sheffield for the May local elections. Photograph: Anthony Devlin/Getty Images

Tue 26 Apr 2022 02.00 EDT Last modified on Tue 26 Apr 2022 12.49 EDT

With the [local elections](#) looming, there's a ward in the borough next to mine that is apparently Labour's No 1 target. "Win this ward," said a text-plea for canvassers, "and we see the 50-year rule of the Tories next door end." Obviously, I'd have signed up straight away, except that ward is the borough I grew up in, and I feel moderately confident that I and my ilk made it even more Tory by canvassing there in the first place.

In the 80s, I used to go door to door with my mother. I honestly don't know if anyone undecided has ever, genuinely, had their mind changed by a party member arriving with a rosette, but I can say with moderate certainty that there is nothing more annoying than being canvassed by a kid from the opposite side, even one accompanied by an adult. Torn between wanting to be rude, and not wanting to be seen as the kind of person who would be rude to a child, Conservative voters would wave us off through a door opened no more than an inch, saying: "True blue, I'm afraid." Granted, I have no data on this, but the vibe was very much: "You've made me 10 times more Conservative than I was five minutes ago."

For a brief period just before 1997, there was an air of inevitability around a Labour victory, and then canvassing was more like being an employee from the council, standing in a shopping centre with a questionnaire of the bleeding obvious: “Would you like better air quality, or worse?”; “Do you think the future should be brighter, or less bright?” Still, in this pocket of south London, the Conservatives held the council.

There followed a few years when people just wouldn’t answer the door, the citizenry having finally woken up to the fact that, if you aren’t expecting anyone, it’s either going to be a canvasser or someone selling you a cleaning product. Now, of course, everyone answers because they are waiting for an Amazon package, so their first experience of the political interaction is disappointment that you’re not the speciality lightbulb they have been waiting for.

The main purpose of talking to people on the doorstep, now, is for canvassers to be able to parlay what they heard into a point that begins: “What I’m hearing on the doorstep ...”

- Zoe Williams is a Guardian columnist
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- US Trump disinfectant claim 'a tragedy on many levels' – ex-Covid adviser

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## **Marjorie Taylor Greene texted Trump chief of staff urging martial law to overturn election**



Marjorie Taylor Greene: ‘The only way to save our Republic is for Trump to call Marshall [sic] law.’ Photograph: Getty Images

Records Mark Meadows turned over to committee investigating attack are missing texts from critical 12-day period

*[Hugo Lowell](#) in Washington*

Tue 26 Apr 2022 01.00 EDT Last modified on Tue 26 Apr 2022 08.24 EDT

Days before Joe Biden's presidential inauguration, Republican congresswoman Marjorie Taylor Greene appeared in a text to White House chief of staff Mark Meadows to press for [Donald Trump](#) to overturn his 2020 election defeat by invoking martial law, new messages show.

The message – one of more than 2,000 texts turned over by Meadows to the House select committee investigating January 6 and [first reported by CNN](#) – shows that some of Trump's most ardent allies on Capitol Hill were pressing for Trump to return himself to office even after the Capitol attack.

"In our private chat with only Members several are saying the only way to save our Republic is for Trump to call Marshall [sic] law," Greene texted on 17 January. "I just wanted you to tell him. They stole this election. We all know. They will destroy our country next."

The message about Trump potentially invoking martial law, earlier [reported by CNN](#) on Monday and confirmed by the Guardian, came a month after the idea had been [raised in a heated Oval Office meeting](#) a month before, where Trump considered ways to overturn the 2020 election.

Meadows did not appear to respond to Greene's text. But the messages Trump's top White House aide was receiving shows the extraordinary ideas swirling around Trump after he and his operatives were unable to stop the certification of Biden's election win on January 6.

Greene – one of Trump's fiercest far-right defenders on Capitol Hill – also texted Meadows days before the Capitol attack asking about how to prepare for objections to Biden's win at the joint session of Congress, the text messages show.

“Good morning Mark, I’m here in DC. We have to get organized for the 6th,” Greene wrote on 31 December. “I would like to meet with Rudy Giuliani again. We didn’t get to speak with him long. Also anyone who can help. We are getting a lot of members on board.”

That text message from Greene, who had not yet been sworn in as a member of Congress, a week before the Capitol attack also underscores her close relationship with the Trump White House and an extraordinary level of coordination to obstruct Biden being certified as president.

But the text messages that Meadows did not turn over to the select committee – as opposed to the communications he agreed to produce for the investigation – were perhaps more notable as the panel investigates connections between the White House and the Capitol attack.

The panel is aware, for instance, that Meadows had contacts through December 2020 and January 2021 with organizers of the Save America rally at the Ellipse that descended into the Capitol attack as well as with Trump campaign officials, say sources close to the inquiry.

Yet none of the text messages Meadows produced to the select committee through a cooperation deal agreed last year and in response to a subpoena show any such contacts, raising the specter that he might have deliberately withheld some communications.

The former White House chief of staff appears to have ultimately turned over no text messages between 9 December and 21 December, a critical time period in the lead-up to the Capitol attack during which a number of key moments took place.

Meadows appeared to be aware of efforts by the White House and others, for instance, to send fake Trump slates of electors to Congress. The idea was to have “dueling” slates of electors force then-vice president Mike Pence to discount those votes and return Trump to office.

That scheme – which the select committee believes [was coordinated in part by the Trump White House](#), the sources said – appeared to occur on 14

December, the deadline under the Electoral Count Act for states to send electoral college votes to Congress.

Meadows also was in close contact with Trump's attorney Rudy Giuliani and others after [the contentious Oval Office meeting](#) with Trump on 18 December, as he sought to bar onetime Trump campaign lawyer and conspiracy theorist Sidney Powell from the White House.

But Meadows appears to have turned over no text messages from that crucial period, as allies of the former president started to set their sights on January 6, including the Stop the Steal movement that started to plan a protest at the Capitol around that time.

The seeming omission may be explained in part by the fact that Meadows was communicating about those plans on his personal cell phone – against which the select committee issued a subpoena contested by Meadows in federal court as “overly broad”.

The absence of messages between 9 December and 21 December may also be explained more straightforwardly by the fact that Meadows did not receive any messages during that period. Meadows' lawyer could not immediately be reached for comment.

House investigators are not convinced they have been given all the text messages relevant to their subpoena, according to one source with knowledge of the matter, and expect to continue pursuing Meadows' documents and personal communications in court.

In a motion for summary judgment with respect to Meadows' records, the select committee [said in a 248-page court filing](#) late on Friday that it believed Meadows' claims for withholding material from the investigation on grounds of executive privilege were baseless.

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## [Donald Trump](#)

# **Donald Trump held in contempt in New York attorney general's investigation**

New York judge holds former president in contempt of court for failing to comply with a subpoena for documents



Donald Trump speaks at a rally in Delaware, Ohio on Saturday. Photograph: Aaron Josefczyk/UPI/REX/Shutterstock

*[Adam Gabbatt](#) in New York and agencies*

*[@adamgabbatt](#)*

Mon 25 Apr 2022 14.42 EDTFirst published on Mon 25 Apr 2022 12.59 EDT

A New York judge has held [Donald Trump](#) in contempt and fined him \$10,000 a day, following the former president's failure to hand over documents to prosecutors investigating his business practices.

Letitia James, the [New York](#) state attorney general, had asked for the contempt finding this month stating that Trump had not complied with a subpoena requiring him to produce documents and information.

[James' civil investigation](#) has focused on whether the Trump Organization misstated the values of its real estate properties to obtain favorable loans and tax deductions. Earlier in April James said investigators had found “significant evidence” of wrongdoing.

In a court filing then, the New York attorney general said Trump failed to abide by his earlier agreement to comply “in full” with her subpoena for documents and information by 31 March.

On Monday, Judge Arthur Engoron, a New York state supreme court judge, agreed with James that Trump was in contempt of court.

“Mr Trump, I know you take your business seriously, and I take mine seriously. I hereby hold you in civil contempt and fine you \$10,000 a day,” Engoron said in a hearing.

James previously said her investigation had found evidence suggesting that for more than a decade the company’s financial statements “relied on misleading asset valuations and other misrepresentations to secure economic benefits”.

In mid-April, an attorney for Trump said his team had tried to comply with the subpoena, but despite “a diligent search”, the legal team had found Trump “is not in possession of any of the requested documents”.

CBS News [reported](#) that Alina Habba, Trump’s attorney, said Trump’s company might have the requested documents, which include tax audit materials, instead.

Trump has repeatedly denied any wrongdoing and has not been accused of criminal wrongdoing. He has called the investigation a “witch-hunt”.

In a court filing then, James said Trump had failed to abide by his earlier agreement to comply “in full” with her subpoena for documents and information by 31 March.

James asked that Trump be fined \$10,000 a day until he complied.

“The judge’s order was crystal clear: Donald J Trump must comply with our subpoena and turn over relevant documents to my office,” James said in a statement.

James’s three-year investigation and a parallel criminal inquiry led by the Manhattan district attorney, Alvin Bragg, have focused on whether the Trump Organization misstated the values of its real estate properties to obtain favorable loans and tax deductions.

Bragg has been dogged, however, by [resignations by senior prosecutors](#) involved in the case, while insisting his investigation was continuing.

Trump’s [legal woes](#) are rapidly engulfing him.

Earlier, James said her investigation had found “significant evidence” suggesting that for more than a decade the company’s financial statements “relied on misleading asset valuations and other misrepresentations to secure economic benefits”.

On Monday, James said in a statement after Engoron’s ruling: “Today, justice prevailed. For years, Donald Trump has tried to evade the law and stop our lawful investigation into him and his company’s financial dealings. Today’s ruling makes clear: no one is above the law.”

The contempt finding by the judge came despite a spirited argument by Habba, who insisted repeatedly that she went to great lengths to comply with the subpoena, even traveling to Florida to ask Trump specifically whether he had in his possession any documents that would be responsive to the demand.

“The contempt motion is inappropriate and misleading,” she said. “He complied ... There are no more documents left to produce by President Trump.”

She also derided the James investigation as “political” and “truly a fishing expedition,” saying Trump and his companies had turned over more than six

million documents and paperwork related to 103 Trump entities over an eight-year period.

Trump spokespeople did not immediately respond to a request for comment on the James case or [his other legal challenges](#).

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## [Donald Trump](#)

# Trump disinfectant claim ‘a tragedy on many levels’, ex-Covid adviser Birx says

White House pandemic coordinator says press conference was lamentable but does not regret taking position on Trump’s team



Birx at a White House press briefing in April 2020. She said that when Trump made the disinfectant suggestion, she wanted to fall through the floor.  
Photograph: Tom Brenner/Reuters

[Maya Yang](#) in New York

Mon 25 Apr 2022 12.23 EDT Last modified on Mon 25 Apr 2022 13.02 EDT

The former White House Covid response coordinator, Deborah Birx, has decried the press conference in 2020 during which, in her presence, Donald Trump [floated the idea](#) of the injection of disinfectant to treat coronavirus – calling the episode a “tragedy on many levels”.

In an [interview](#) with Good Morning America, Birx said she does not regret taking on the role in Trump's team, even though she [received criticism](#) for not standing up to his misinformed comments more forcefully at the time.

Birx is promoting her new book, Silent Invasion: The Untold Story of the Trump Administration, Covid-19, and Preventing the Next Pandemic Before It's Too Late, which is released on Tuesday.

When asked how she felt during the moment Trump [promoted](#) the use of disinfectants to treat the virus, Birx said: "At the beginning, I didn't even know what was happening." She said scientists and Trump had a discussion before the press conference about a study on how light and disinfectants could help kill the virus on outer surfaces.

She writes in her book that when Trump looked at her as he was talking about the subject, while she sat to the side, she had wanted to fall through the floor.

"This was a tragedy on many levels," she told GMA host George Stephanopoulos.

She continued: "I didn't realize ... that scientists went into the Oval Office and they started that discussion there, and they continued it in front of America."

"This was a tragedy on many levels": Dr. Deborah Birx recounts to [@GStephanopoulos](#) the press conference where former Pres. Trump floated the idea of injecting disinfectant to treat COVID-19.  
<https://t.co/oI7HetPjm4> [pic.twitter.com/jN5tTtpA8K](https://pic.twitter.com/jN5tTtpA8K)

— Good Morning America (@GMA) [April 25, 2022](#)

Birx went on to explain that she spoke to Trump's staff members immediately after the press conference, telling them that his statement was incorrect and had to be reversed.

“Many people don’t know me, but I’m a pretty direct person, so I immediately went to his most senior staff and to Olivia Troye [a former aide to the White House coronavirus taskforce] and said: this has to be reversed. And by the next morning the president was saying this [what he had said] was a joke.”

Birx was widely criticized for not flatly and emphatically contradicting Trump on the spot to the public, as he not only mused on the very dangerous concept of ingesting bleach to cure Covid, but also downplayed the virus and predicted that it would disappear.

Birx also revealed that she had a “pact” with “all the doctors in the doctors’ group,” including Anthony Fauci, Robert Redfield and Stephen Hahn, all of whom were on Trump’s Covid taskforce.

“It was if any one of the individuals were under so much pressure and they were fired, that we would all leave together from the taskforce,” she said, adding, “I think that was really important, because I really wanted to protect Bob Redfield and Steve Hahn and they were under enormous pressure.”

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# Headlines

- [Westminster sexism Keep your hands in your pockets, minister tells male MPs](#)
- [Live Cabinet minister ‘pinned against wall’ by male colleague as Tory porn scandal continues](#)
- [Elon Musk Billionaire sells almost \\$4bn worth of Tesla shares after Twitter deal](#)
- [Coronavirus South Africa may be entering fifth wave earlier than expected](#)
- [Covid External blood oxygenation saved hundreds of lives – study](#)

## [House of Commons](#)

# Keep your hands in your pockets, minister tells male MPs amid sexism row

Anne-Marie Trevelyan says all women in parliament have been subjected to ‘wandering hands’



Anne-Marie Trevelyan said some MPs thought being elected made them ‘God’s gift to women’. Photograph: Tayfun Salcı/Zuma Press Wire/Rex/Shutterstock

*[Jamie Grierson](#)*

*[@JamieGrierson](#)*

Fri 29 Apr 2022 04.42 EDTFirst published on Fri 29 Apr 2022 03.35 EDT

The UK international trade secretary, Anne-Marie Trevelyan, has urged male colleagues to “keep your hands in your pockets” as she said all women in parliament have been subjected to “wandering hands”.

Speaking on Sky News on Friday, Trevelyan, the MP for Berwick-upon-Tweed, said allegations that a Conservative MP watched pornography in the Commons chamber were “completely unacceptable” but declined to say whether they should be sacked.

She said some men in Westminster thought being elected made them “God’s gift to women”, although the vast majority were “delightful, committed parliamentarians”.

She later revealed on LBC Radio that a number of years ago she had been “pinned up against a wall by a male MP” who no longer serves, who said she must “want him because he was a powerful man”.

“These sorts of things, these power abuses, that a very small minority, thank goodness, of male colleagues show is completely unacceptable,” she said.

The Tory chief whip [issued a statement](#) on Wednesday suggesting the allegation that a Conservative MP watched pornography in parliament should be referred to the [Independent Complaints and Grievance Scheme \(ICGS\)](#), which deals with sexual harassment and other disciplinary matters.

Senior Tories [questioned why he had not taken action directly](#) against the MP, whose alleged behaviour was witnessed by two female colleagues in recent months.

Asked about the broader culture in Westminster, Trevelyan said: “All of us as women in parliament have been subjected to inappropriate language, to wandering hands, as my granny used to call it, it doesn’t change. The vast majority of the men I work with are delightful. They’re committed parliamentarians, they’re passionate about the causes they fight.

“But there are a few for whom too much drink, or indeed a sort of view that somehow being elected makes them God’s gift to women, that they can suddenly please themselves, that is never OK.”

She said there were a number of ways to help women report their experiences, which had been set up in the wake of the MeToo movement.

“Fundamentally, if you’re a bloke, keep your hands in your pockets and behave as you would if you had your daughter in the room,” she said.

Trevelyan said she was comfortable “calling out anybody who thinks their wandering hands are OK” and that she had done a number of times. She questioned why the Tory MP accused of watching porn in the Commons had the time to do it, as well as why he thought it was acceptable.

“I haven’t had the chance to talk to the chief whip, and I know the ladies in question who apparently saw this completely, completely inappropriate activity have been encouraged to use the formal system in the [House of Commons](#) to be able to report it and I hope very much that they will or indeed have, I don’t know, and that the system will demonstrate if that was the case, exactly what the punishment should be for that sort of inappropriate behaviour,” she said.

Questioned about the drinking culture in the House of Commons, Trevelyan said: “Responsible drinking has to be the way forwards.”

The identity of the MP is known to party whips, it is understood.

Misogyny and sexism in parliament have come under close scrutiny in recent days, after a widely criticised Mail on Sunday story claimed [Tory MPs believed Labour’s deputy leader, Angela Rayner, crossed and uncrossed her legs](#) to distract Boris Johnson at prime minister’s questions.

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[Skip to key events](#)

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

## Tories tried to ‘cover up’ porn MP scandal by not naming Parish earlier, says Labour – as it happened

This live blog is now closed, you can [read more about Neil Parish and the investigation into whether he watched pornography in the Commons here](#)

Updated 2d ago

[\*Andrew Sparrow\*](#)

Fri 29 Apr 2022 12.50 EDTFirst published on Fri 29 Apr 2022 04.27 EDT



Neil Parish, who has been suspended from Tory party. Photograph: Commons TV

[\*Andrew Sparrow\*](#)

Fri 29 Apr 2022 12.50 EDTFirst published on Fri 29 Apr 2022 04.27 EDT

## Key events

- [2d ago Afternoon summary](#)
- [2d ago Labour's Jess Phillips says men should take responsibility for their behaviour instead of blaming Westminster 'culture'](#)
- [2d ago Starmer strongly rejects Daily Mail claim that he's guilty of hypocrisy over lockdown breaches](#)
- [2d ago Johnson should tell Neil Parish to resign immediately, say Lib Dems](#)
- [2d ago Labour accuses Tories of trying to 'cover up' porn MP scandal by not naming Parish earlier](#)
- [2d ago What Neil Parish said when asked earlier this week to react to news Tory MP has been seen watching porn in Commons](#)
- [2d ago Neil Parish suspended from Tory party after being named as MP seen watching porn in Commons chamber](#)

Show key events only

## Live feed

Show key events only

From 2d ago

[11.13](#)

## Labour accuses Tories of trying to 'cover up' porn MP scandal by not naming Parish earlier

Labour has accused the Conservatives of trying to cover up the scandal of the MP accused of watching pornography in the Commons chamber. Responding to the news that Neil Parish has now been named as the MP - four days after [a meeting](#) where a female Tory MP told the chief whip about seeing a colleague watching porn on his phone in the chamber, without naming him - **Thangam Debbonaire**, the shadow leader of the Commons, said:

The Conservatives knew for days about the disgusting behaviour of one of their MPs and tried to cover it up. From the Owen Paterson scandal to their failure to act against their paedophile MP Imran Ahmad Khan, this is a government rotting from the head down. Britain deserves better.

Although Chris Heaton-Harris, the chief whip, condemned the MP's behaviour earlier this week, after the original story became public, he said that the incident should be investigated through the independent complaints and grievance scheme, which was set up to investigate sexual misconduct allegations at Westminster, but which is secretive and time-consuming. [Labour](#) said that the Conservative party should deal with the matter quickly, through its own disciplinary processes.

The whips' office only named Parish, and said that he was now being investigated by the Commons standards committee, in response to an approach by the Telegraph.

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Updated at 11.16 EDT

[2d ago](#)[12.50](#)

## Afternoon summary

- [Neil Parish, the Conservative MP for Tiverton and Honiton, has reported himself to the parliamentary authorities over allegations that he watched pornography in the House of Commons chamber.](#)

The former Labour deputy leader, **Harriet Harman**, told Times Radio that this was a “new low” for the House of Commons and that Parish should resign immediately. **Karen Bradley**, the Conservative former cabinet minister, minister, told the BBC’s PM programme she hoped Parish would “do the right thing and not come into parliament” while being investigated. The Liberal Democrats said Boris Johnson should

force Parish to resign now (see [4.16pm](#)) and the Labour party accused the government of trying to cover up the scandal, because Parish's name could have been released earlier. (See [4.13pm](#).)

- [Boris Johnson is allowing a “wild west” culture of misogyny to grow in Westminster by failing to tackle “the arrogance of privately educated men,” Tracy Brabin, England’s only female metro mayor, has said.](#)
- [Britain will send investigators to Ukraine to help gather evidence of war crimes, including sexual violence, the foreign secretary, Liz Truss, has said.](#)
- [The National Crime Agency has launched a potential fraud investigation into a PPE company linked to Michelle Mone and searched the Tory peer’s shared home.](#)
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Updated at 14.00 EDT

[2d ago](#)[12.15](#)

**Labour's Jess Phillips says men should take responsibility for their behaviour instead of blaming Westminster 'culture'**

Keir Starmer suggested earlier today that sexism at Westminster was linked to a problem with the culture there. (See [4.46pm](#)) Ben Wallace, the defence

secretary, made [a similar argument yesterday](#). But the Labour MP **Jess Phillips** told Times Radio today that she thought there was a much simpler explanation for men engaging in sexist behaviour. She explained:

*One thing I'm going to say about the culture in Westminster, and I have been asked this week over and over again, 'Is it a toxic environment for women?' And the answer is no, it isn't a toxic environment for women.*

*I go about my business working in Westminster perfectly reasonably. There's dreadful sexism, dreadful abuse, dreadful power imbalance, all of those things definitely exist.*

*But I am a tiny bit irritated by the idea that it is a pervading culture, that people can't fight against it, the reason that somebody thought it was okay to watch porn in the chamber is because of the late nights and the drinking and the culture in Westminster - utter rubbish. The reason that person did that is because, for want of a better word, they're an arsehole. And they should take personal responsibility for their behaviour.*

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Updated at 12.43 EDT

[2d ago](#)[11.46](#)

## **Starmer strongly rejects Daily Mail claim that he's guilty of hypocrisy over lockdown breaches**

In an interview in Scotland, recorded before [the Neil Parish story](#) broke, Keir Starmer said politicians needed to listen to women and change the culture at Westminster. Talking about the problem with sexism in politics, he said:

I think we need to listen to women on this, particularly MPs and their staff in parliament. And obviously each allegation has got to be looked

into properly and thoroughly with an outcome. We also need to change the culture in parliament.

In his interview he also strongly rejected the claims from the Daily Mail that he was guilty of hypocrisy over breaches of lockdown rules. (See [12.57pm](#).)

He said that whether or not Angela Rayner attended the event where he had a drink while having a meal “makes absolutely no difference” because the gathering has already been investigated, and was within the rules, he said. He said this was in “stark contrast” to what was happening at No 10.

Everything that we the Labour party did was in accordance with rules. That is a huge contrast to the position of the government. We now know that there have been 50 fines issued in relation to goings-on in Downing Street. That makes it probably the most fined workplace in the whole United Kingdom.

Now I know what’s going on here. We’re a few days away from local elections and Conservative MPs are trying to throw as much mud as possible.

What I’d suggest is that they focus on the issue that is burning across Scotland, across the rest of the United Kingdom, which is the cost of living crisis. Because this week in their pay packets people have realised that the government’s tax has left them with even less money than they had before, in the middle of a cost of living crisis.



Keir Starmer Photograph: Sky News

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Updated at 11.52 EDT

2d ago**11.34**

From the Mirror's **Pippa Crerar**

Tory MP Neil Parish has mentioned “broadband” in the House of Commons 58 times, mainly to decry the slow speeds we have in this country...

— Pippa Crerar (@PippaCrerar) [April 29, 2022](#)

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2d ago**11.28**

As **Krishnan Guru-Murthy** from Channel 4 News points out, Neil Parish cannot technically refer himself to the Commons standards committee. Complaints submitted through the standards process go to the parliamentary commissioner for standards, Kathryn Stone, first. She in effect triages them, deciding what merits investigation and what does not. If a complaint is valid, she investigates and produces a report, which then goes to the standards committee (MPs and lay members) who take the final decision about what punishment to recommend.

You can't refer yourself to the Standards Committee. Top line of their website says : The Committee on Standards cannot take on complaints about Members of Parliament. Such complaints should be directed to the Parliamentary Commissioner for Standards  
<https://t.co/bGgyaKdgGr>

— Krishnan Guru-Murthy (@krishgm) [April 29, 2022](#)

Parish is actually referring himself to the commissioner, ITV's **Anushka Asthana** reports.

They've clarified it is the parliamentary commissioner - Kathryn Stone  
<https://t.co/kF5bNvYRXd>

— Anushka Asthana (@AnushkaAsthana) [April 29, 2022](#)

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Updated at 11.47 EDT

[2d ago](#)[11.20](#)

**Harriet Harman**, the former [Labour](#) deputy leader, has said in an interview with Times Radio that Neil Parish should resign immediately. These are from **Ed Brown** from Times Radio.

Harriet Harman tells [@cathynewman](#) [@TimesRadio](#) that if Neil Parish allegations are true "he should resign immediately"

— Ed Brown (@Edsbrown) [April 29, 2022](#)

Slow investigations in Parliament over allegations such as this "undermine democracy" she adds

— Ed Brown (@Edsbrown) [April 29, 2022](#)

The whips have got to recognise that they have a "responsibility to the whole of Parliament" not just their parties says Harriet Harman

— Ed Brown (@Edsbrown) [April 29, 2022](#)

"This is a new low for the House of Commons and we ought to come down on this like a ton of bricks" says Harriet Harman on Neil Parish allegations

— Ed Brown (@Edsbrown) [April 29, 2022](#)

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[2d ago](#) [11.16](#)

## **Johnson should tell Neil Parish to resign immediately, say Lib Dems**

Boris Johnson should tell Neil Parish to resign immediately, the Liberal Democrats say. **Daisy Cooper**, the Lib Dem deputy leader, said in a statement:

If Boris Johnson had any shred of decency left, he would tell Neil Parish to resign immediately.

In any other workplace this would count as gross misconduct and the person responsible would lose their job. parliament should be no different.

We don't need to insult the women MPs who witnessed this with a lengthy investigation. All his bosses need to do is ask for his devices and look at his viewing history, this isn't rocket science.

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[2d ago 11.13](#)

## **Labour accuses Tories of trying to 'cover up' porn MP scandal by not naming Parish earlier**

Labour has accused the Conservatives of trying to cover up the scandal of the MP accused of watching pornography in the Commons chamber. Responding to the news that Neil Parish has now been named as the MP - four days after [a meeting](#) where a female Tory MP told the chief whip about seeing a colleague watching porn on his phone in the chamber, without naming him - **Thangam Debbonaire**, the shadow leader of the Commons, said:

The Conservatives knew for days about the disgusting behaviour of one of their MPs and tried to cover it up. From the Owen Paterson scandal to their failure to act against their paedophile MP Imran Ahmad Khan, this is a government rotting from the head down. Britain deserves better.

Although Chris Heaton-Harris, the chief whip, condemned the MP's behaviour earlier this week, after the original story became public, he said that the incident should be investigated through the independent complaints

and grievance scheme, which was set up to investigate sexual misconduct allegations at Westminster, but which is secretive and time-consuming. [Labour](#) said that the Conservative party should deal with the matter quickly, through its own disciplinary processes.

The whips' office only named Parish, and said that he was now being investigated by the Commons standards committee, in response to an approach by the Telegraph.

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Updated at 11.16 EDT

[2d ago](#) 10.57

## **What Neil Parish said when asked earlier this week to react to news Tory MP has been seen watching porn in Commons**

**Neil Parish** was interviewed by GB News earlier this week and asked for his reaction to the news that a Tory MP had been accused of watching pornography on his phone in the chamber.

When the presenter, **Darren McCaffrey**, asked Parish for his reaction to the story, and if he agreed the culprit would have to have the whip removed, **Parish** replied:

I think the whips' office will do a thorough investigation and we will wait and see that result, and I think from that the decision will have to be made what action to be taken.

**McCaffrey** then asked if Parish thought there was a problem with the culture in parliament. **Parish** replied:

If you've got sort of 650 members of parliament in what is a very intense area, you are going to get people that step over the line ... I don't think there's necessarily a huge culture [problem] here, but I think it does have to be dealt with, and dealt with seriously. I think that's what the whips will do in our whips' office.

'You are going to get people that step over the line.'

Neil Parish, who has had the whip removed following accusations he watched pornography in the Commons, spoke to Darren McCaffrey earlier this week and denied there was a cultural problem in Parliament.  
[pic.twitter.com/bHHQedHpdo](https://pic.twitter.com/bHHQedHpdo)

— GB News (@GBNEWS) [April 29, 2022](#)

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Updated at 11.18 EDT

[2d ago](#) 10.43

From **Tim Durrant** from the Institute for Government

I think that's now 5 Conservative MPs that have had the whip removed - 4 for sexual misconduct of different kinds (Neil Parish, Imran Ahmad Khan, David Warburton and Rob Roberts) and 1 for voting against the government (Anne Marie Morris).

Have I missed anyone?

— Tim Durrant (@timd\_IFG) [April 29, 2022](#)

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2d ago **10.40**

## **Neil Parish suspended from Tory party after being named as MP seen watching porn in Commons chamber**

The Conservative MP **Neil Parish** has been identified as the backbencher accused of watching pornography in the Commons chamber, [the Telegraph reports](#). He has had the whip withdrawn, and has reported himself to Commons standards committee.

A spokesperson for the chief whip, Chris Heaton-Harris, said:

Having spoken to the chief whip this afternoon, Neil Parish MP is reporting himself to the Standards Committee of the House of Commons.

Mr Parish has been suspended from the Conservative Whip pending the outcome of that investigation.

The Telegraph says Parish, who represents Tiverton and Honiton in Devon and who chairs the Commons environment committee, reported himself to the committee after a conversation with Heaton-Harris.

Originally the Tory whips said the allegation about the MP watching porn in the chamber should be dealt with through the independent complaints and grievance scheme, but this led to complaints that the party was seeking to bury the controversy. Keir Starmer said [the Tories should deal with the issue themselves.](#)



Neil Parish. Photograph: Commons TV

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Updated at 10.54 EDT

2d ago **10.03**

## Covid rates in Britain continuing to fall, says ONS

Coronavirus rates are continuing to fall in Britain, according to the latest results from the [Office for National Statistics' infection survey](#), which is seen as the most reliable guide to the prevalence of the virus in the community. But in Northern Ireland it is less clear what the trend is.

Here are the figures for the week ending last Saturday, nation by nation

### *England*

**One person in 25 infected** – equivalent to 2,408,300 people.

The previous week it was one in 17.

### ***Wales***

**One person in 18 infected** – equivalent to 172,300.

The previous week it was one person in 15.

### ***Scotland***

**One person in 25 infected** – equivalent to 218,000 people.

The previous week it was one person in 19.

### ***Northern Ireland***

**One person in 25 infected** – equivalent to 74,700 people.

The previous week it was one person in 30.

(Although this looks like an increase, the ONS says the trend in Northern Ireland is uncertain.)

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Updated at 10.11 EDT

[2d ago](#)[09.25](#)

## **UK sending war crimes experts to Ukraine to help investigate Russian atrocities, Truss says**

A team of British war crimes experts is being sent to Ukraine to help investigate atrocities committed by Russian troops, **Liz Truss**, the foreign secretary, [has announced](#). She said:

Russia has brought barbarity to Ukraine and committed vile atrocities, including against women. British expertise will help uncover the truth

and hold Putin's regime to account for its actions. Justice will be done.

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[2d ago](#)[08.58](#)

## **Labour has biggest lead over Tories on best party for taxation for 10 years, poll suggests**

Some workers will today be getting pay packets showing the impact of the national insurance hike that comes into force at the start of the month, and [Labour](#) has been highlighting this in its local election campaigning.

Today pay packets will be squeezed even tighter by the Tories.

You deserve better. Labour has a sensible, costed plan including cutting home energy bills by up to £600 and scrapping the National Insurance rise. [pic.twitter.com/3USAAn0wveV](https://pic.twitter.com/3USAAn0wveV)

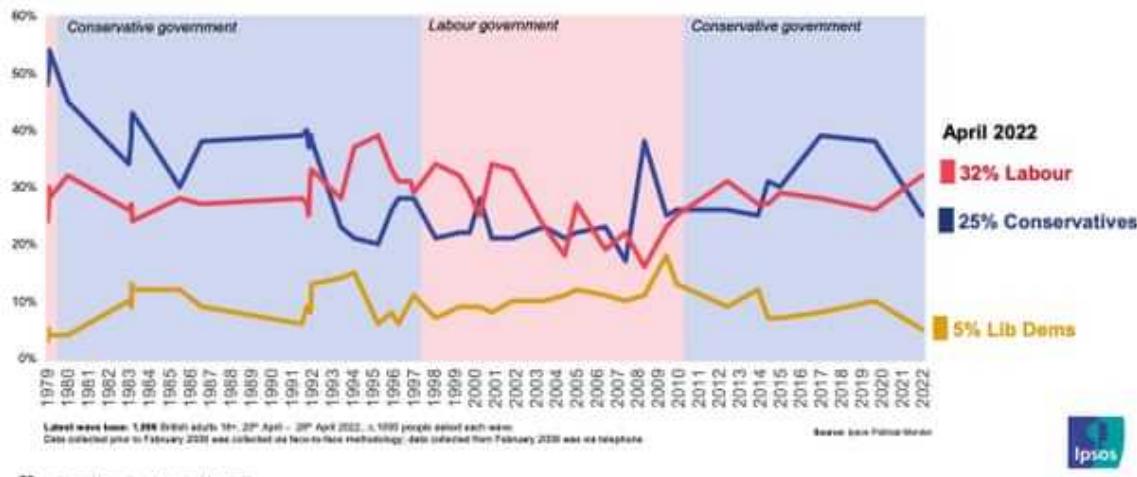
— The Labour Party (@UKLabour) [April 29, 2022](#)

The party will be buoyed by polling from Ipsos Mori showing Labour has its highest lead over the Tories on taxation for 10 years. This is one of the findings from Ipsos's [latest monthly political monitor report](#), which is a trove of good data. Here are some of the key findings:

- **Labour is ahead of the Tories on best party for taxation by seven points, the poll suggests - its highest lead on this measure for 10 years.** Labour is on 32% and the Tories on 25%. At the last election the Tories were ahead by 12 points on this.

## Best party on taxation: 1979-2022

Which party do you think has the best policies on taxation, the Conservatives, Labour, Liberal Democrats or some other party?

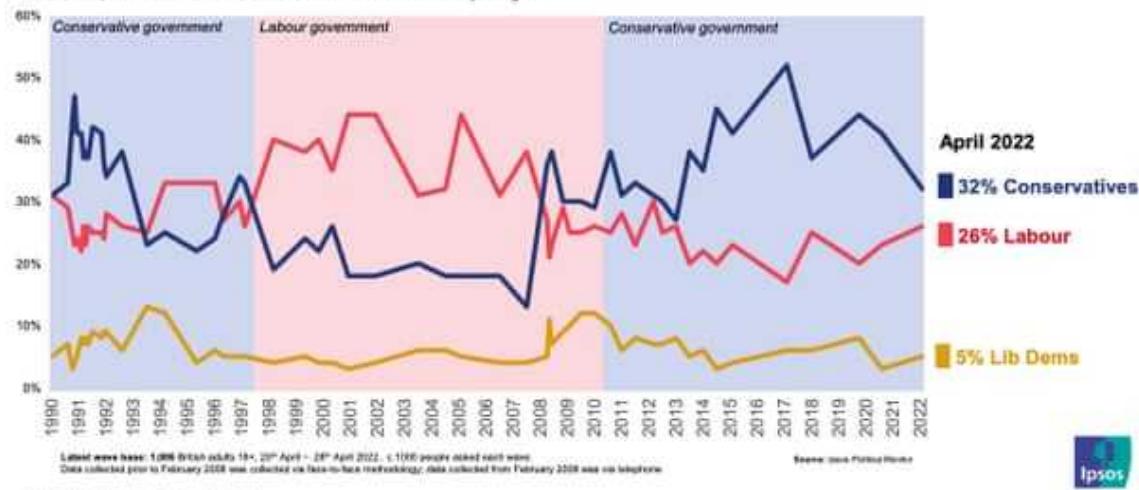


Polling on taxation. Photograph: Ipsos MORI/Ipsos Mori

- The **Conservatives** still lead Labour on managing the economy, the poll suggests. But their lead is just six points. At the 2019 election, they had a 24-point lead on this. Although voting-intention polling results attract most attention, often the indicators that provide the most reliable guides as to which party will win are the polling figures on the economy, and on leadership.

## Best party on managing the economy: 1990-2022

Which party do you think has the best policies on managing the economy, the Conservatives, Labour, Liberal Democrats or some other party?

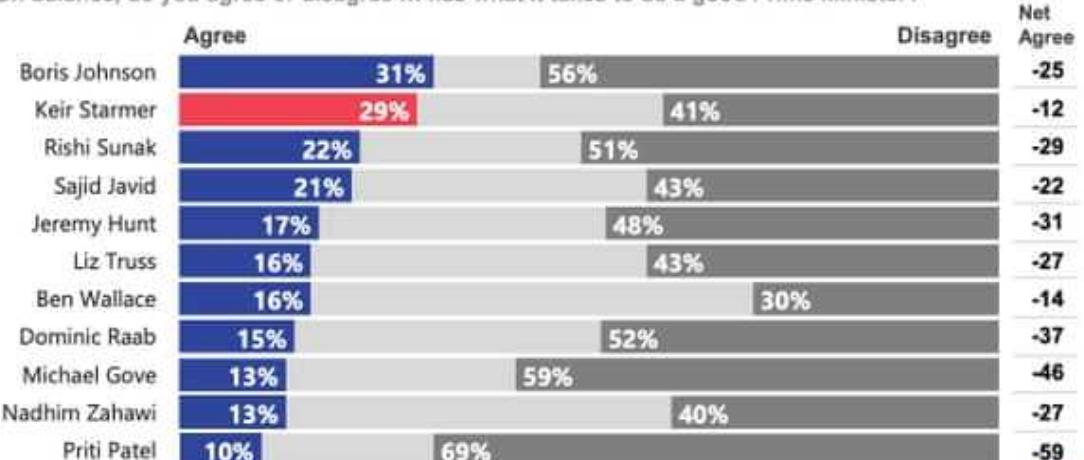


Polling on managing the economy. Photograph: Ipsos MORI/Ipsos Mori

- The proportion of people who think the Conservative party should replace Boris Johnson as leader before the next election has fallen by six points since January, the poll suggests - but it is still 55%. Theresa May's ratings on this measure were never as bad as this.
- Keir Starmer has better net ratings on who has what it takes to be a good prime minister than Johnson or any of his senior Tory colleagues, the poll suggests. Rather, Starmer's ratings are less bad than anyone else's, because all of them are negative. Johnson has a higher positive rating than Starmer, but his net rating is lower because he also has more people giving him a negative appraisal. Ben Wallace, the defence secretary, is the Tory doing best on this measure - not because his positive ratings are high, but because his negatives are low; many people do not have a view on him either way.

## Prime Minister material?

On balance, do you agree or disagree ... has what it takes to be a good Prime Minister?



Base: 1,000 British adults 16+, 20<sup>th</sup> April - 29<sup>th</sup> April 2022.

Source: Ipsos Political Monitor



© Ipsos | Issue: Political Monitor | April 2022

Polling on having what it takes to be good PM. Photograph: Ipsos MORI/Ipsos Mori

- Labour has a five-point lead over the Conservatives on voting intention, the poll suggests. Labour is on 40%, up one point from March. The Conservatives are on 35% (no change).
- The cost of living is by far the most important issue for voters in the local elections, the poll suggests. It is cited as a factor by 67% of people – before dealing with asylum seekers and climate change, the next highest issues, both on 47%.

The Evening Standard has written up the polling [here](#).

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Updated at 09.33 EDT

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[scandal-westminster-sexism-boris-johnson](#)

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## Elon Musk

# Elon Musk sells \$8.5bn-worth of Tesla shares after Twitter deal

Carmaker's shares fell this week over concerns CEO would offload stock to help fund takeover of platform



Tesla's share price has fallen by a fifth since Elon Musk first revealed he had taken a stake in Twitter earlier this month. Photograph: Aly Song/Reuters

*[Dan Milmo](#) and [Mark Sweney](#)*

Fri 29 Apr 2022 11.54 EDTFirst published on Fri 29 Apr 2022 03.00 EDT

Elon Musk has sold \$8.5bn (£6.8bn) worth of shares in Tesla as the world's richest man raises cash after reaching a deal to [buy Twitter](#).

The [Tesla](#) chief executive has committed \$21bn of his own money to the funding package for acquiring the social media platform, which he agreed to buy for \$44bn on Monday. Since then Musk has sold 9.6m Tesla shares, or

about 5.6% of his stake in the business, according to filings with the US financial regulator.

Musk did not confirm the purpose of the sale but he took to his Twitter account late on Thursday to announce that he planned no further sales of shares in the electric carmaker “after today”. Tesla stock [had fallen sharply](#) on Tuesday – wiping \$126bn off the value of the company – amid investor concern that the world’s richest man would offload stock in the company to help fund the all-cash deal for Twitter.

After the latest share sale, Musk’s Tesla stake is worth about \$147bn and he remains the largest shareholder with a stake of about 15.6%.

Alongside \$21bn of his own cash, Musk is borrowing \$12.5bn to fund the takeover. A bank consortium led by Morgan Stanley is providing a further \$13bn. It was not immediately clear how the billionaire would raise the remaining equity financing. Musk holds a 43.6% stake in unlisted rocket company SpaceX, which is reportedly valued at \$100bn. Musk’s current wealth is about \$250bn, according to the [Bloomberg billionaires index](#).

No further TSLA sales planned after today

— Elon Musk (@elonmusk) [April 29, 2022](#)

The share sales were confirmed as it emerged that [Elon Musk](#) could charge websites a fee for quoting viral tweets from verified Twitter accounts if he completes the acquisition, according to a report.

The Tesla chief executive is also considering a crackdown on executive pay and has a new chief executive lined up to replace the incumbent Parag Agrawal.

In an effort to convince banks to part-fund the takeover, Musk said he planned to grow revenue by developing new features such as charging for embedding or quoting popular tweets, [said Reuters](#). This would involve charging a fee when a third-party website wants to quote or embed a tweet from verified individuals or organisations.

Musk also told banks he could crack down on executive and board pay at the company, according to Reuters, as he sought to convince lenders that he could find the cashflow to service the debt underpinning the bid.

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The report added that Musk does not have confidence in Agrawal and has an as-yet-unnamed candidate in mind to replace him. Agrawal replaced Jack Dorsey, Twitter's co-founder, in November last year but is to leave when the sale completes. Other changes to [Twitter](#) flagged by Musk in recent weeks include removing advertising from its premium service, Blue.

Twitter makes 90% of its annual revenue of \$5bn from advertising, although Blue is only available in a handful of countries including the US and Australia. The \$13bn loan from banks is equivalent to seven times Twitter's 2022 projected earnings before interest, taxes, depreciation and amortisation.

The sale of 9.6m shares, made at prices ranging from \$872 to \$999 a share, were the first by Musk since a spree late last year that raised more than \$16bn, which came after he asked his more than 80 million Twitter followers whether he should sell 10% of his stake in Tesla.

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This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/technology/2022/apr/29/elon-musk-sells-almost-4bn-worth-of-tesla-shares-after-twitter-deal>

## South Africa

# South Africa may be entering fifth Covid wave earlier than expected

Rise in infections appears to be driven by Omicron sub-variants, say health officials



South Africans wait to be vaccinated at an ambulance converted into a mobile Covid-19 vaccination site in Cape Town. Photograph: Nardus Engelbrecht/AP

*Reuters*

Fri 29 Apr 2022 05.42 EDT

South Africa may be entering a fifth Covid wave earlier than expected after a sustained rise in infections over the past 14 days that seems to be driven by the BA.4 and BA.5 Omicron sub-variants, health officials and scientists have said.

The country that has recorded the most coronavirus cases and deaths on the African continent only exited a fourth wave around January and had predicted a fifth wave could start in May or June, early in the southern hemisphere winter.

### South Africa Covid-19 cases chart

The health minister, Joe Phaahla, told a briefing that although hospitalisations were increasing there was so far no dramatic change in admissions to intensive care units or deaths.

He said at this stage health authorities had not been alerted to any new variant, other than changes to the dominant Omicron variant circulating.

The infectious disease specialist Richard Lessells told the same briefing that waning immunity from previous waves could be contributing to the earlier-than-expected resurgence in cases.

He said the rising share of infections attributed to the BA.4 and BA.5 sub-lineages of Omicron suggested they had a growth advantage over other Omicron sub-variants such as BA.2.

So far there was no sign that BA.4 and BA.5 were causing significantly more severe disease, said Waasila Jassat from the National Institute for Communicable Diseases.

South Africa has reported more than 3.7m Covid cases and more than 100,000 deaths during the pandemic. On Thursday, the WHO's Africa office flagged the rise in South Africa's infections as the main driver of an increase on the African continent.

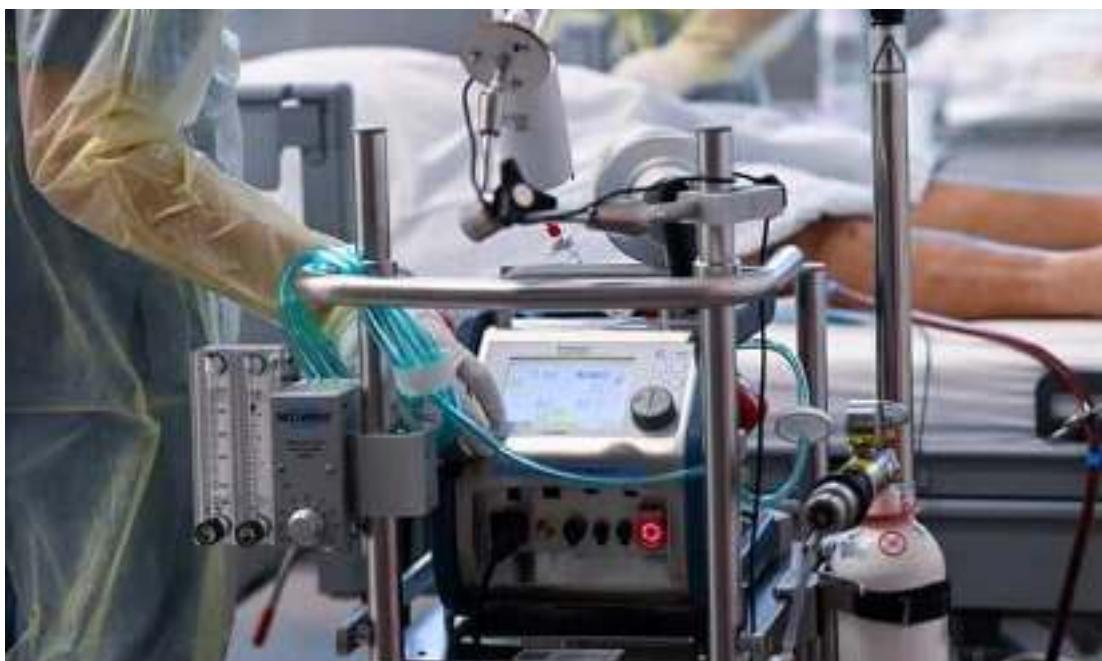
Senior health official Nicholas Crisp also said on Friday South Africa had enough vaccine doses and was not planning to procure more. He added the government was not intending to buy Pfizer's Covid treatment pill Paxlovid for public sector patients, partly because it was very expensive.

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**NHS**

## External blood oxygenation saved hundreds of Covid-19 sufferers – study

Adding oxygen to blood using ECMO process found to cause big increase in survival rate in severe UK cases



In the ECMO process oxygen is added to a patient's drawn blood before it is reinserted into the body. Photograph: Ina Fassbender/AFP/Getty Images

*[Denis Campbell](#) Health policy editor*

Fri 29 Apr 2022 02.00 EDT Last modified on Sat 30 Apr 2022 04.27 EDT

Scores of severely ill Covid-19 sufferers survived because they were given the NHS's highest form of intensive care in which an artificial lung breathes for them, a [study](#) has found.

Patients in the UK who underwent extracorporeal membrane oxygenation (ECMO) were more likely to survive than those who did not have the treatment, according to the research.

People whose breathing capacity had collapsed were more likely to stay alive if they had ECMO rather than only a spell on a mechanical ventilator.

That is the key finding of an analysis of 1,363 people treated for severe Covid using a ventilator in the UK in between March 2020 and February 2021. They included 243 who were taken by ambulance to either Guy's and St Thomas' or the Royal Brompton and Harefield hospital trust in London to try to save their lives using ECMO.

The other 1,120 were known as what doctors called “perceived futility” cases – those it was deemed inappropriate to put on ECMO because they were considered too old and sick to survive Covid, and ECMO was thought unlikely to change their outcome. Doctors also had to consider who would benefit most from the limited availability of artificial life support, which is costly and labour-intensive, at the two specialist centres.

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The 243 were matched by computer analysis for their similarity of personal profile and symptoms with 206 of the 1,120 patients who did not receive ECMO to compare their outcomes.

The study, which has been published in the journal Intensive Care Medicine, found that 44% of the non-ECMO group died, while mortality was much lower among those who had the treatment at 26%.

During ECMO, blood is taken out of the unconscious patient’s body, put into an oxygenator, has oxygen added and carbon dioxide removed, and is then reinserted into the patient. The hope is that the extra oxygen will improve patients breathing enough to help them pull through.

“ECMO had a substantial effect at saving lives in the UK. Lives were saved due to the significant effort on the part of [NHS](#) staff to ramp up ECMO provision to provide service for as many [patients] as possible,” said Dr Luigi Camporota, a consultant in intensive care medicine at Guy's and St Thomas' who was one of the co-authors.

“Our findings suggest that ECMO delivery at specialist SRF [severe respiratory failure] centres confers significant survival benefit, compared to matched patients who received conventional therapy in referring centres,” he said.

NHS bosses believe ECMO saved several hundred lives during the pandemic.

Prof Stephen Powis, NHS England’s national medical director, said: “This study is a testament to the incredible hard work of NHS staff over the last two years who have treated more than 700,000 Covid-19 patients in hospital including on ECMO machines, which have helped save hundreds of lives.”

The survival from Covid thanks to ECMO seen in the study is higher than in other studies of its use conducted in other countries. However, the results are not directly comparable because of differences between them such as in the selection criteria for deciding which patients received ECMO and whether people were treated in a general hospital or specialist centre, such as the two hospital trusts in the capital.

In this study, 22.9% of the ECMO and 52.9% of the non-ECMO patients died during the first wave of Covid. Mortality rose in both during the second wave, which occurred during winter 2020-21, to 26.1% and 62.4% respectively.

This article was amended on 29 April 2022. Carbon dioxide is removed from the blood during ECMO, not added as an earlier version said.

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This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/society/2022/apr/29/external-blood-oxygenation-saved-hundreds-of-covid-19-sufferers-study>.

## 2022.04.29 - Spotlight

- 'I live on crumbs' Why older Algerians are risking the small boats to Spain
- You be the judge Should my husband spend less time playing video games?
- Neil Gaiman 'Whatever I loved about Enid Blyton isn't there when I go back as an adult'
- Experience I bake recipes I find on gravestones

## Global development

# ‘I live on crumbs’: why older Algerians are risking the small boats to Spain

Nouara is 65 but ready to join thousands of others who burn their ID and pay traffickers for a chance of a new life in Europe



Sablettes beach in Algiers. The pace of illegal migration has intensified, despite prison terms of six months for those arrested by the coastguard.  
Photograph: Zineb Bettayeb/Guardian

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*Zineb Bettayeb in Algiers*

Fri 29 Apr 2022 03.15 EDT

At 7am on a clear day in Algiers, Nouara looks out of her window to the narrow street below that leads to the market, and declares: “I can’t stand living here any more.”

Nouara, 65, wants nothing more than to leave her country, and is now considering boarding one of the boats that carry migrants on the often deadly crossing over the Mediterranean to Spain. “I’ve lost the tiny hope I had in this country,” she says.

Nouara, who preferred not to give her full name, lost her husband, Foudhil, to Covid in 2020. He was one of more than 6,800 Algerians [reported to have died](#) so far.

“Despite his advanced age, he was a man in good condition – healthy and active,” she says. “He died overnight, after a drastic lack of oxygen.”



Nouara in her flat in Algiers. She is considering whether to make the perilous journey by boat from Algeria to Spain. Photograph: Zineb Bettayeb/The Guardian

Nouara is struggling. The antique wooden table in her living room is covered in papers: visa application forms and copies of her birth certificate.

The couple had no children, but Foudhil had some from a previous marriage. “My husband’s children cut off his retirement allowance and I am now living on crumbs. If my visa application to France gets rejected, I will sell this small apartment and board the speedboat.

“I know it is illegal and unsafe,” she says. “But I am seeking a decent place where I can spend what remains of my life in dignity.”

According to the Spanish authorities, [at least 10,000 Algerians](#) reached the Spanish coast this way between January and December 2021 – 20% higher than the previous year. Most depart from the western coast, from cities including Oran, Chlef and Maghnia, mainly in summer when the sea is calmer. The shortest distance between Algeria and the Spanish coast – Oran to Almeria – is 150km (90 miles).

Smugglers charge between €2,000 (£1,670) and €7,000 for one person. The

higher the price, the bigger the engine and quicker the crossing, which can take from three hours to three days.

My mother needs money for dialysis. But I can see no future here. El Harga is my only route

*Nabil, unemployed graduate*

*El Harga* means “the burning”, describing the act many illegal travellers go through of setting fire to their identity papers to stay anonymous and avoid repatriation if they get arrested in [Europe](#).

The pace of illegal migration has intensified recently, despite a 2009 law that can impose six-month jail terms on those arrested by the coastguard. Smugglers can get up to five years.

In response to the soaring numbers, the Algerian government established the [National Assembly for Raising Youth Awareness on the Dangers of Illegal Migration](#) (ANSJIC) in 2018, to seek measures to solve the problem. More than 20 national organisations, officials from the interior ministry, local authorities and experts have participated.



Identity documents destroyed during ‘El Harga’ in the surf at Sablettes beach in Algiers. Photograph: Zineb Bettayeb/The Guardian

The ANSJIC, which has run meetings and workshops along some coastal cities to persuade people not to risk their lives, is considered a pioneering organisation.

“The aim is to raise awareness about the danger of El Harga, and preserve the country’s human resources,” said Samir Zoulikha, president of ANSJIC. “We are involving schools, mosques, sport clubs and families.”

Nabil, who prefers to use one name, is also considering El Harga. He failed to find a job in his field after graduating from the National Institute of Marine Sciences and Coastal Development and makes a living by doing odd jobs. “I spent four years applying for different employment, without any success,” says Nabil, now in his 30s.



Samir Zoulikha, who is leading efforts to raise awareness of the risks of illegal migration, on the waterfront in Algiers. Photograph: Zineb Bettayeb/The Guardian

“I started losing hope when I saw some university colleagues holding positions in some important institutions and bumped into the sad reality that I am not a descendant of a senior official.”

His despair is clear. “The ambitions I had for coastal development have melted away. I was fascinated by the sea and its enigmas.

“My mother needs money for dialysis,” he adds. “But I can see no future here; El Harga is my only route to shape a good future for me and my family.”

Zoulikha has persuaded Nabil to take part in an ANSJIC conference aiming “to train young volunteers on the proper ways to approach people who are considering fleeing the country illegally, not only to raise awareness of the dangers but to listen to their concerns and offer solutions,” he says.

“His attendance would give the conference a new dimension,” says Zoulikha. “The previous meetings were mainly addressed to civil society and authorities. A face-to-face dialogue between officials and youths might lead to practical and tangible solutions.”

Nouara has a visa appointment at the French embassy. She is excited. “I am planning to head to Belgium after landing in France. My cousin offered to let me stay in her house there. I will try to find a job or at least volunteer at any civil society organisation. I can help with the skills I acquired as a teacher.”

But France has recently decided to halve the number of visas it grants to people from [Algeria](#), Morocco and Tunisia, because of the north African governments’ refusal to take back illegal migrants.

“If plan A doesn’t work, illegal migration will be my last refuge,” says Nouara.

Zineb Bettayeb is an Algerian IT specialist and a former cultural journalist

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[You be the judge](#)[Life and style](#)

## You be the judge: should my husband spend less time playing video games?

She wants quality family time; he wants to wage magical warfare in the wilds of Valoran. We ask you to take charge of the controller and deliver a verdict

[If you have a disagreement you'd like settled, or want to be part of our jury, click here](#)



Illustration: Joren Joshua/the Guardian

*Interviews by [Georgina Lawton](#)  
[@georginalawton](#)*

Fri 29 Apr 2022 03.00 EDT Last modified on Fri 29 Apr 2022 21.27 EDT

### The prosecution: Marlene

*He spends all his evenings in the corner of our dining room, immersed in a fantasy world*

My husband Jim is obsessed with video games. When I get home from work after him, I know that I'll find him on the desktop in the corner of our dining room immersed in a fantasy world. When it's dinner time, it's a struggle to get him off and to sit at the table with me and our son. He says, "OK, I'll pause it after this battle." It's a bit disruptive to our evening. Sometimes Jim comes to bed really late after playing games – one time he didn't come upstairs until 2am.

I'd like there to be a bit more routine after school, or time for us to enjoy more leisure time as a family

Jim plays games with dragons, tanks, battles and soldiers. They're all very noisy. Sometimes if I'm washing up after dinner and Jim is still playing, I'll ask him to turn it down. He reluctantly obliges, but I know he prefers to play them at full blast. Sometimes he puts up a bit of resistance and says that I'm "ruining the experience" for him. He won't get headphones. Although Jim and I both do our share of the housework, there are times I have to say, "Can you help me with this?" He'll say, "One minute," but that minute never comes.

Jim works hard in a government job. When he comes home from work he wants to switch off. He's a very hands-on father, but our son, who is seven, is starting to copy Jim and likes sitting alongside him while he plays. Boys will be boys, I suppose. But I'd like there to be a bit more time for us to enjoy more leisure time as a family. After dinner and homework, they play games together for hours. I usually go into the next room and watch television. They stay in the same spot all evening. Perhaps I'm a bit jealous. I have absolutely no interest in computer games, but sometimes I'd like the boys to come into the sitting room and for us all to chat together while watching a film.

Jim should try and ration the computer games on weekdays at least. Dinner together is nice but we need more time without the video games in the background. I don't want Jim to set a bad example for our son, and for him not to develop any other hobbies.

## The defence: Jim

*After work I need to switch off, but I only play after I've made dinner and helped our son with homework*

I have to admit, I do love playing my video games. They require zero concentration, are lots of fun and I don't have to communicate with anyone. After a day of work, I need to switch off. When I watch a film with Marlene, she wants to talk every two seconds about what's happening, or who the main character is. When she watches her soaps there's also a lot of commentary too – that's why I don't really enjoy it. Playing games is a solitary affair, and I like that.

I'd be more than happy to get her involved. She hates it, though. She says it's "a man thing"

Marlene has her way of switching off and I have mine. What's the issue? And our son likes to get involved with my games now, too. I think Marlene envies the fact that we are both really into gaming. I enjoy spending time with him while we play. Marlene could always ask me to teach her how to play, too, then we could do it together. I'd be more than happy to get her involved. She hates it, though. She says it's "a man thing".

During the week, I always make sure I've done our son's homework with him before we play. I also cook dinner most nights. Marlene may complain, but everything that needs to be done for the family is done first, and the gaming comes second. If Marlene needs a hand with something, I'm always available . Sometimes she asks me to turn the volume down, if the music or the fighting sounds are annoying her, and I always do. Headphones aren't really something I find comfortable wearing. And anyway, if I did, Marlene would probably get more annoyed as I'd be shutting her out completely.

It's rare that I keep Marlene awake with my gaming. The one time I went to bed at 2am I simply got carried away. I apologised the next morning, and it hasn't happened since. However I do enjoy the nights after everyone has gone to bed and I'm alone with the computer. I get to play League of Legends or Age of Empires, undisturbed, for hours. It's bliss.

I think we have a good balance in our house. I don't think reducing my time on the computer is necessary.

## **The jury of Guardian readers**

### **Should Jim spend less time gaming?**

Jim sounds like a very attentive father, bonding well with his son and doing his share of the housework. However, Marlene needs family time, too, and blasting out gaming soundtracks is a bit much, as is refusing to use headphones. As a lockdown guitarist, I know headphones help make a happy home. And as for offering to teach Marlene how to play? Well, that's just insulting.

**David, 51**

Video games are irrelevant to the fact that they're both guilty. Jim, it's time you realised that being in a relationship means carving out some time for your partner. Marlene, complaining about what Jim likes will only make him defensive. Try expressing your legitimate need for attention. It might work!

**Catherine, 58**

Jim is entitled to time alone, but Marlene feels left out, so there must also be activities involving her that can help him switch off – they should make an effort to spend time together in ways they both enjoy. Solo late-night gaming is great fun though. I think Jim is innocent.

**Matt, 21**

Jim should understand that his video game enthusiasm is hardly the most healthy pursuit; and after all, Marlene is only asking him to ration his game playing. Hopefully the lighter, warmer evenings will make staring at a screen a little less attractive for Jim. Guilty.

**Anouk, 42**

I'm a gamer but not obsessive about it because I like physical activities more. Marlene is being reasonable and Jim would do well to listen to her.

**Tiffany, 29**

## You be the judge

So now you can be the judge. In our poll below, tell us: should Jim spend less time playing video games?

We'll share the results on next week's You be the judge.

**The poll will close on Thursday 5 May at 9am BST**

## Last week's result

We asked if Drew should start binge-watching television dramas, because his wife Claire is desperate they watch them together.

8% of you said no – Drew is innocent.

92% of you said yes – Drew is guilty.

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## The books of my lifeBooks

# **Neil Gaiman: ‘Whatever I loved about Enid Blyton isn’t there when I go back as an adult’**

The author on his early love of the Narnia Chronicles, the allure of spontaneous combustion – and one of the great neglected children’s authors of the 20th century



Neil Gaiman ... ‘I was convinced The Lord of the Rings was the best book anybody ever would write.’ Photograph: Murdo Macleod/The Guardian

[Neil Gaiman](#)

Fri 29 Apr 2022 05.00 EDT

### **My earliest reading memory**

I was three years old, we lived in Purbrook, near Portsmouth, and if I had been remarkably good my mother would order a book at the local bookshop

and a month later we would go and pick it up. I remember a children's Hiawatha, a beautiful edition of The Pied Piper of Hamelin illustrated by Margaret Tarrant, and an illustrated Mikado – I'd learn the words of the songs without tunes: "Awaiting the sensation of a short, sharp shock from a cheap and chippy chopper on a big black block" and so on. Gloriously morbid stuff for a three-year-old.

### **My favourite book growing up**

If you'd asked me at seven or eight it would have been the Narnia books, which I found infinitely re-readable – I wanted to live in them. But if you had asked me at nine or 10 it was The Lord of the Rings. I was convinced it was not only the best book anybody had ever written but that it was the best book anybody ever would write. I just had to find out how it ended, as my school only had the first two books. When I won the school English prize, I asked for The Return of the King as my prize book.

### **The book that changed me as a teenager**

Roger Zelazny's novels Lord of Light and Creatures of Light and Darkness. He was a beautiful writer, with a marvellous prose style, and he just made it look so much fun to write. I'd already wanted to write, but Zelazny made it a certainty.

### **The writer who changed my mind**

It wasn't until I was 22 that I realised I could stop dreaming of being a writer and instead be a writer. It was Harlan Ellison's fault, from his introduction to a short story called Count the Clock that Tells the Time, in a collection called Shatterday. He wrote about wasting time, how you look around and time's gone. It plugged straight into everything I had ever thought or dreamed about becoming a writer and in that moment I was determined to become a writer. I thought better to try and fail than not to try and let the time blow past.

### **The book that made me want to be a writer**

I don't recall there being a time that I ever didn't want to be a writer, but CS Lewis and his Narnia books definitely made me realise that these stories I loved were being written by a person. Lewis wasn't pretending to be

invisible, he was very happily there in the text, making these lovely friendly asides to the reader. I loved that so much, and loved the idea of doing it too.

### **The book I came back to**

Gene Wolfe was an author I respected but didn't love, and when I was 20 I struggled to read the first in The Book of the New Sun series, *The Shadow of the Torturer*. I don't know why I picked it up again, perhaps a year later, but I was surprised to find that it was now the most interesting book in the world.

### **The book I could never read again**

I find it very hard to go back to Enid Blyton. I even find her hard to read to my kids. It's weird because I remember just how much I loved Blyton, and I'm somebody who loves going back to beloved children's books, and yet whatever I loved isn't there when I go back as an adult.

### **The book I discovered later in life**

Charles Dickens's *Bleak House*, a book I only came to in my late 40s. I suspect I was only there for the spontaneous human combustion, which really isn't a terribly important part of the novel. But I fell deeply in love with the book – the plotting, the prose, the techniques – the whole thing, – and rediscovered a childhood fondness for Dickens.

### **The book I am currently reading**

I'm enjoying Penn Jillette's forthcoming novel *Random* enormously. And on Audible, I'm revisiting *The Black Ridge: Amongst the Cuillin of Skye* by Simon Ingram, narrated by Richard Burnip, a glorious book about Skye and the Cuillin Hills and the people who climbed them. I'm enjoying it so much as an audio experience, if only because everything gets pronounced correctly, which wasn't the case when I read it to myself.

### **My comfort read**

Wolfe's *The Book of the New Sun*. I read it each decade and find new things in it. Although a couple of years ago, during lockdown, when I was on my own for many months, my comfort reads tended to be books I'd loved as a child. The most interesting of the books I rediscovered were by Nicholas Stuart Gray, who is now unfairly forgotten, but who was, at his best, one of the most brilliant children's authors of the 20th century.

Chivalry by [Neil Gaiman](#), illustrated by Colleen Doran, is published by Headline.

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## ExperienceFood

# Experience: I bake recipes I find on gravestones

A woman in Alaska got a whipped cream logo carved on her headstone



‘So far, the recipes have all been on women’s graves’: Rosie Grant at Rock Creek Cemetery in Washington DC. Photograph: TJ Kirkpatrick/The Guardian

*Rosie Grant*

Fri 29 Apr 2022 05.00 EDT

It all started during lockdown. Like many people, I tried baking for the first time and got a TikTok account. Less commonly, I started learning a lot about cemeteries. I’m studying to be an archivist, and when the pandemic began I had just started an internship at Congressional Cemetery in Washington DC, one of the oldest cemeteries in the US.

Soon my interest became about more than just work. During the pandemic, my local cemetery was one of the few places I could go for a daily walk and I began to see how interesting cemeteries are as repositories for history: you can see how gravestone styles have changed over the years, how different symbols have become more or less important, and also what kind of information people choose to put on their gravestones. In the past it was all names and dates, genealogical stuff, but nowadays people like to add their hobbies or something more personal such as their sexual orientation.

I read online that some people had even put their favourite recipe on their gravestone, so one day I thought, why not combine all three of my new lockdown hobbies and try to bake all the gravestone recipes and [show the results on TikTok?](#)

There are only about 10 so far that I've found, mostly through searching online. The first one I tried was a spritz cookie that was on a gravestone in New York. The recipe was more like a list of ingredients – one cup of margarine, one egg, one teaspoon of vanilla. I had to guess the process without really knowing what a spritz cookie was. It tasted OK, but more surprising was how many people viewed my first post – there's the cemetery TikTok niche, and the baking TikTok niche, but I was the first to bring these two audiences together. What was nice was everyone weighing in, saying, "My grandmother used to make this too" or the different ways their family made the recipe.

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Since then I've made date and nut bread, "no bake" cookies, Christmas cookies, fudge and many others. As I made more of the recipes and got more feedback from everyone, I began to understand how important cooking is for people and for family histories.

My grandmother died from Covid, and making the gravestone recipes made me think about this special yellow cake she made for us grandkids on our birthdays. It was so good. It's nice to think about the recipes that hold a

similar significance for other families – perhaps at gatherings and holidays they know certain dishes will show up. Cooking my family recipes again is a way to bring back those strong memories: when I think of that cake, I remember my grandmother and all the birthdays we spent together.

Another more banal realisation I had when we were preparing my grandmother's epitaph was that it is very expensive to get words carved into a gravestone. You pay by the letter. Which must be why lots of the gravestone recipes are so sparse. The ones that have turned out best for me are the more detailed ones – the most recent is like a jam roll with pecans and cinnamon. You just roll it up and bake it, then slice it and add powdered sugar. The gravestone shared a detailed overview of the process, which was helpful. I will definitely be making that one again.

As well as learning to cook, I've loved researching the lives of the women behind the recipes – so far all the gravestones with recipes that I've found have been for women. There's been a Holocaust survivor; someone who worked at the post office her whole life; and one woman in Alaska who got the logo for the Cool Whip imitation cream brand engraved on her headstone.

The idea of selecting a stone is terrifying to me – I don't know how I want the world to remember me just yet. But for these women, their recipe seemed like the perfect way to connect with their families after they'd gone. And they wanted to share it with everybody, which is beautiful. My dream dinner party would be to bring all these women together and we would try all the recipes and get to know one another. It would be a rich dinner, though – they are all baking recipes, comfort foods and desserts.

As told to Felix Bazalgette

Do you have an experience to share? Email [experience@theguardian.com](mailto:experience@theguardian.com)

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## 2022.04.29 - Opinion

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- [I'm an out and proud lesbian – but after a recent attack, being visible feels scary](#)
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## Keir Starmer the grownup needs to rediscover the radical youth he once was

[Andy Beckett](#)

The Labour leader hopes his sober, moderate image will take him to No 10. But a nation in need of change demands more of him



‘From his strict suits and haircut to his no-frills speaking style, Starmer has sought to come across as a sober prime minister in waiting.’ Photograph: Ian Forsyth/Getty Images

Fri 29 Apr 2022 03.00 EDT Last modified on Fri 29 Apr 2022 05.41 EDT

Keir Starmer is a grownup. He is serious, capable, responsible, authoritative and realistic – or so he and Labour would like us to believe. Ever since [he became leader](#), two years ago this month, one of his main goals has been to present himself as a much-needed political adult: repairing the damage done to the party by the supposed perpetual adolescent Jeremy Corbyn; poised to rescue the country from the naughty schoolboy Boris Johnson.

From his strict suits and haircut to his no-frills speaking style and carefully researched Commons questions, Starmer has sought to come across as a sober prime minister in waiting, a reassuring figure in troubled times. He is 59, and if [Labour](#) wins the next election, he is likely to be the oldest successful candidate for prime minister since Harold Macmillan in 1959. It's almost possible to imagine Starmer as a politician back in those more stable times.

This old-fashioned, rather severe persona has sometimes been pretty effective. We are in one of those periods now, with Starmer easily dismissing Johnson's shoddy homework in the Commons, and Labour [ahead in the polls](#) and expected to do well at next week's local elections. With the Tories seemingly running out of talent and policy options, a Starmer government is starting to become imaginable.

Yet at other times during his leadership, his "grownup" act [has fallen flat](#) – and it could easily happen again. Next to Johnson's antics and the drama of the pandemic and Ukraine, any opposition leader would sometimes struggle to get attention. And Starmer, with his methodical, rather than intuitive, approach to strategy, his slightly yelping voice and stiff body language, is not a political natural. He is a workmanlike leader, partly because that's his character, as the modest but growing number of Starmer biographies make clear.

More importantly, his leadership style also reveals a lot about his party and our wider politics. Ever since Labour's crushing defeats and loss of confidence in the 1980s, to be a grownup Labour leader, in the eyes of most journalists, Labour MPs and strategists, has meant moving to the right. Neil Kinnock, Tony Blair, Gordon Brown and Ed Miliband led in very different circumstances, from the highly favourable to the near-impossible. But all reacted by shedding leftwing policies and acquiring more rightwing ones, by courting conservative interests and cutting adrift Labour's radicals.

Electorally, this approach only worked for Blair: a rare talent whose tenure also coincided with a particularly weak and divided Tory party. Otherwise, many voters, after initially being intrigued, have tended to conclude that Labour leaders who offer ideologically "moderate" maturity are a bit boring,

inauthentic, or not to be trusted. The same newspapers that help persuade Labour leaders to shift rightwards often then tell their readers that the party has not shifted enough. Kinnock, for example, got a good press for bashing the left in his early years as leader; but when he looked as if he might actually win an election, in 1992, [the tabloids destroyed him](#).

Yet Labour's urge to seem grown up persists. Partly it's sustained by the conviction that a less respectable, more leftwing party would do even worse at elections – which is why it's so important both to New Labour veterans and Starmerites that the [huge vote for Corbyn](#) in 2017 is forgotten.

Behind this conviction is another layer of pessimism: a belief that Britain, by which the Labour grownups usually mean England, is fundamentally a conservative country. In this environment, the argument goes, Labour can only exist as a significant force if it looks safe and sensible. The importance of retired voters in general elections, and the collapse since 2010 in the proportion of them choosing Labour, from about a third to about a sixth, add to the pressure on Starmer to be conventional. In today's Britain, growing up, political maturity and the renunciation of leftwing politics seem to go together more than ever.

As leader, Starmer has reinforced this connection. In his youth, he was part of a radical collective that produced [Socialist Alternatives](#), a short-lived 1980s magazine which argued presciently that the left should pay more attention to the environment and feminism. Yet on Desert Island Discs in 2020, he [mocked his days](#) at the magazine: “We were out to change the world ... I said some things that were daft.” He had become less dogmatic, he continued, “as I've grown up”.

But the idea that radicalism is always immature and naive is itself a form of dogma. During the 1990s and 2000s, when much of the west was relatively stable and prosperous under centrist governments, this cautious view of politics was fairly easy to justify. Yet today, with the climate emergency and capitalism [lurching from crisis to crisis](#), it is the anti-radical position that often seems unrealistic. When the climate activist group Just Stop Oil began blockading fuel depots this month, [Labour called for](#) “immediate nationwide injunctions” to halt the protests, because they “cause misery for motorists”. This stance may please some voters at the local elections, but it's unlikely to

seem wise in years to come. The same goes for Starmer's neglect of the young left that Corbyn mobilised, which could have been Labour's future.

In our era of flux, is there a chance that Starmer's leadership could change? In Oliver Eagleton's persuasive new biography, *The Starmer Project: A Journey to the Right*, his trajectory seems set: an idealistic lawyer protecting civil liberties gradually metamorphoses into a paternalistic party leader promising voters "security".

In theory, the latter offer still has radical potential, as one of the main causes of insecurity in Britain is our version of free-market capitalism. As leader, Starmer has repeatedly said that he wants an economy which is no longer "rooted in insecurity and inequality". Were he to become prime minister, however, the pressure to drop this goal would be considerable: many businesses have done very well out of Britain's harsh economic model. Taking advantage of the Tories' difficulties with some employers over Brexit, Starmer has already been trying to woo the private sector by calling Labour "the party of business".

To his admirers and lieutenants, such manoeuvres are simply grownup politics. If you want an end to Tory rule, they argue, this stern man in a suit is the person to deliver it. They may be right. But being a fully functional prime minister, like being a fully functional adult, isn't just about professionalism and authority. It's also about the ability to charm, communicate effectively, show empathy. We've yet to see those sides of him – if we ever will. Without them, a Starmer government, however welcome at first, will be hard work for him and for us.

- Andy Beckett is a Guardian columnist

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**OpinionLGBT rights**

## I'm an out and proud lesbian – but after a recent attack, being visible feels scary

**Lucy Knight**

It's great that we have Lesbian Visibility Week, but I know that being seen and perceived as 'different' carries risks too



'It's still undeniable that being visibly a lesbian can put me in danger. And at the moment I feel more scared than in the mood to celebrate.' Photograph: coldsnowstorm/Getty Images/iStockphoto

Fri 29 Apr 2022 02.00 EDT Last modified on Sat 30 Apr 2022 03.21 EDT

Over the years we've been together, my wife and I have become increasingly "visible" as lesbians. There's the somewhat obvious fact that we're a couple, which automatically makes us more identifiably gay than we were when we were single. But there's also been the evolution of our haircuts from straight-passing, to short and choppy, our recent adoption of a

cat (it's a thing, look it up), and the fact that sizeable proportions of our wardrobes consist of dungarees and blazers.

Moulding to stereotypes isn't, of course, the pinnacle of "lesbian visibility". But I do think that, having grown up believing that "looking gay" was an insult, the fact that both of us now generally view that description as a compliment demonstrates some degree of self-acceptance. And acceptance – whether it be of yourself or of others – is surely what Lesbian Visibility Week (which we're currently in, by the way) is all about.

Lesbian Visibility Day, or week, as it's now become, has been around since 2008, the entirety of my life as an out lesbian. I've always viewed it as a positive thing: an opportunity to be proud of who we are and how far we've come, and to keep fighting to be seen equally. But this time around I've found it trickier to stomach. I hadn't even realised it was this week, until I was informed via an email from Stonewall. And the next email in my inbox was from the British Transport Police, asking me to digitally sign the statement I provided after my wife and I were victims of a homophobic hate crime on a recent train journey.

The incident took place a few weeks ago. Men on the train were hurling abuse at us, and I didn't feel as if there was much I could do about it. Rather than turning around and shouting back, I instead avoided eye contact and stayed silent, knowing that we were outnumbered and unable to defend ourselves if they decided to physically attack us.

When things escalated and they started throwing things at us, I went and told on them to the train manager like a pathetic schoolchild, rather than standing up for myself as I felt I should have been able to as a fully grown adult. And I can't help thinking that even if CCTV can identify the men who did this to us, there will probably be other incidents like this in my life, and I will probably feel just as helpless.

It's still undeniable that being visibly a lesbian can put me in danger. And at the moment I feel more scared than in the mood for celebrating.

As much as I don't want to let those men and people like them "win", I probably will think twice before I get another train home late at night, or before I next hold my wife's hand in public. While you may be able to switch on the telly and see two men dancing together in the Strictly final, or drag queens advertising us everything from broadband to quarter pounders, it's still not safe to be visibly gay. LGBT+ hate crimes are [on the rise](#) in this country while homophobic laws [have been introduced](#) in others, and increasing criticism of gender non-conformity has made anyone who doesn't quite fit in with traditional gender norms a potential target.

This kind of fear is not exclusive to gay women, it's important to add. Being a woman alone is enough to attract abuse, as is being Black, or trans, or anything else that might make someone appear visibly "different".

I'm usually all for being "visible". I love the fact that queer teenagers in the UK now have grown up with a whole host of out-and-proud role models on their TV screens and social media feeds – perhaps in their parents' friendship groups, too. I love the camaraderie of a room full of proud dykes and bi women about to go out clubbing together, where a friend can yell, "Five minutes until we need to leave: start lacing your Doc Martens" and we can all laugh at ourselves. And I loved getting married – married in a church, even – surrounded by friends and family last year.

But it frustrates me how those of us in these marginalised groups are constantly having to think about how to stay safe in our day-to-day lives, just in case someone is waiting to harass us for simply being ourselves.

Soon, hopefully, I'll be pulling on my Doc Martens and joining those who have enough energy to fight back against all of this, and against all the other terrible things going on in the world right now. But forgive me if this Lesbian Visibility Week I'm too scared and tired to be much of an activist. Just let me get home safely to my cat.

- Lucy Knight is commissioning editor, books at the Guardian

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## OpinionScience

# Instead of obsessing over learning facts, let's teach children how to think

[Jim Al-Khalili](#)

Learning how to find things out is what the scientific method is all about. The UK's curriculum would benefit from more of it



‘Why spend so much of the school science curriculum loading up children’s brains with facts about the world that they can just look up anyway?’

Photograph: parkerphotography/Alamy

Fri 29 Apr 2022 05.00 EDT Last modified on Fri 29 Apr 2022 12.43 EDT

I've been giving considerable thought recently to the way we teach science at school – and whether we have the balance right between catering for those children who will become the scientists and engineers of the future (and how would we be able to tell this anyway?), and those who don't think they have a natural aptitude for science, or are simply more interested in other subjects.

The issue goes beyond which science topics we should be teaching, and in what depth. I'm more concerned by the obsession with making children memorise scientific "facts", and whether this is what we should be focusing on so much. Perhaps spending more time learning how we "do" science – what's called the scientific method – is more valuable than simply "knowing" stuff.

After all, science isn't a collection of facts about the world. That's just called "knowledge". Rather, science is a process – a way of thinking and making sense of the world, which will then lead to new knowledge. This is a very important distinction. We've often heard it said that we should be teaching children not *what* to think but *how* to think. This is an admirable sentiment, but what would it mean in practice? Why spend so much of the school science curriculum loading up children's brains with facts about the world that they can just look up anyway? Wouldn't it be more useful teaching them *how* to find reliable scientific knowledge – which these days inevitably means online rather than in books – and how to assess and critically analyse and absorb that knowledge when needed?

I have no doubt that those who develop the school science curriculum, and probably a few teachers too, would balk at this idea. After all, I am not a professional educationist. They might argue that we still have to teach the scientific nuts and bolts – chemical formulas, the bones of the human body, Newton's law of gravitation, electricity and magnetism, and so on – particularly to those who will end up studying their subject in greater depth at university and go on to take science up as a profession.

And what about the rest of society? Surely, everyone needs a basic scientific understanding. Just as everyone should have some understanding of, say, history or literature, we all need to know some science: facts about the world to help us make informed decisions in our everyday lives, from what precautions to take during a pandemic and the importance of vaccines, to the [risks of vaping](#), the [benefits of flossing](#) or why recycling our waste is good for the planet. A scientifically literate society is one that can see the world more clearly, and can make more informed decisions about important issues that face us all. Yet what seems to be missing today is an understanding of

the way we *gain* this scientific understanding of the world. And yes, you may be thinking: so what?

Adopting the scientific method could help us all become more tolerant and less polarised in our views – to disagree without being disagreeable – particularly online. No one can, hand on heart, deny that the internet is a wondrous invention, utterly transforming our lives over the past three decades. Even social media, that easiest of scapegoats for all of society’s ills, has played a vital role in disseminating and democratising information. That said, far too many people use it not as a useful tool, but as a medium for ill-informed, often toxic opinions, and for spreading disinformation. But the internet and social media have only really amplified societal problems that have always been with us. On top of this, our attention spans are inevitably getting shorter, and we don’t take the time to question our biases, or ask whether the information we are getting is reliable and trustworthy.

This is where thinking scientifically can help. I don’t mean being able to manipulate equations or interpret complex statistics, but rather adopting some of the ways that good science is practised, such as critically assessing what we believe and examining the trustworthiness of evidence; questioning our own biases before we attack views we don’t like; and being prepared to admit our mistakes and change our minds in the light of new evidence.

This is what we should be teaching more of in schools: better critical thinking skills, better information literacy (an understanding of data), how to cope with complexity, and how to assess uncertainty – to keep an open mind about information we only have partial knowledge about. All these skills are part of the scientific approach. This remarkable way of seeing, thinking and knowing, is one of humankind’s great riches and the birthright of everyone. And, most wonderfully, it only grows in quality and value the more widely it is shared.

To expect any kind of radical review or reassessment of what children are taught at school – given how disruptive and time-consuming even minor tinkering with the syllabus can be for many teachers – let alone asking wider society to adopt a more rational way of thinking, is probably too much to ask; but surely we have to do something. Humankind came up with the scientific method to make sense of a confusing physical universe. But even

in our exceedingly more complex and confusing universe of human affairs, adopting some of the lessons from the way we progress in science can be empowering and liberating. Thinking scientifically is much more than just knowing stuff. It gives us a way to see the world beyond our limited senses, beyond our prejudices and biases, beyond our fears, insecurities, ignorance and weaknesses.

- Jim Al-Khalili is a theoretical physicist, author and broadcaster. His new book, [The Joy of Science](#), is out now
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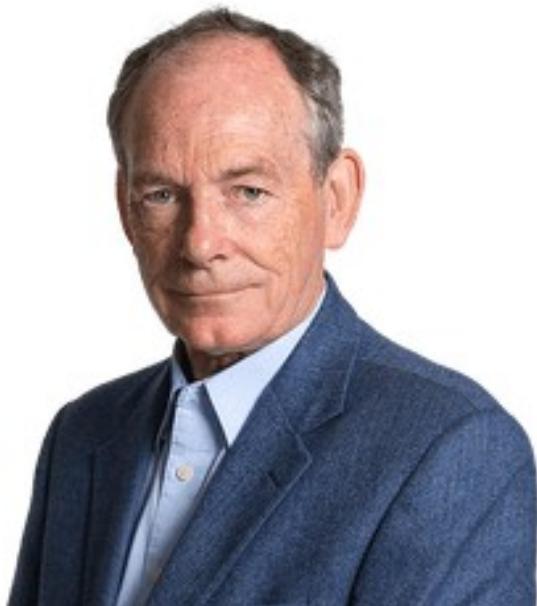
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**Opinion**[Liz Truss](#)

## Liz Truss risks recklessly inflaming Ukraine's war to serve her own ambition

[Simon Jenkins](#)



The foreign secretary's belligerent comments on Russia reduce Ukraine to a pawn in the Conservatives' power struggle



Liz Truss speaking at the Lord Mayor's Easter banquet at Mansion House, London, 27 April 2022. Photograph: Dan Kitwood/Getty Images

Thu 28 Apr 2022 11.06 EDT Last modified on Thu 28 Apr 2022 14.01 EDT

The foreign secretary, Liz Truss, is playing with fire. On Wednesday night she [described Russia's Vladimir Putin](#) as a “rogue operator” lacking rationality, and with “no interest in international norms”. As a result, [she said](#): “We will keep going further and faster to push Russia out of the whole of Ukraine.” She is clearly revelling in her imagined proxy war on the Russian bear and no one in Whitehall appears able to restrain her.

The use of the word “we” publicly identifies Britain’s interests with Kyiv’s. Truss calls for ever more economic and military aid to be sent to [Ukraine](#), and such aid now teeters on the brink of overt engagement with Russia. She appears to want Russia’s other dissident neighbours, Moldova and Georgia, to join the alliance. Though Putin is irrational and unreliable, Truss argues that he is susceptible to deterrence and will not react recklessly to her escalating belligerence. She nowhere mentions the risk involved in her desired escalation, let alone the possible compromises of peace. Hers is tabloid diplomacy.

Before his stunt visit to Kyiv this month, Boris Johnson also instructed [Volodymyr Zelenskiy](#) not to make any concessions to Putin, a line Truss is clearly seeking to rival. It is not unknown for democratic leaders to play war games to excite their electorates, but this must be the first Tory leadership contest fought on the frontiers of Russia.

It is hard to imagine a more delicate and dangerous time for such antics than now. Ukraine is seeing some of the most [appalling atrocities](#) since the second world war and the conflict in the former Yugoslavia. There is no conceivable excuse for what Putin is doing to his neighbour. But the burning issue is not the awfulness of war. It is what can be done to stop it.

It naturally suits a desperate Ukraine to claim the present conflict threatens to spill beyond its borders and into Europe more broadly. In reality, Ukraine has for [eight years](#) experienced a separatist conflict. That conflict did not necessitate the involvement of the rest of Europe or the US. But Truss declares that Putin wants to inflict “untold further misery across Europe”. She offers no evidence for what is a gross and alarmist assumption, with the implied need for western military retaliation.

Putin may be a monster and a liar and we are right to send aid to the people he oppresses, but a strategist should look beyond insults to assess risks and probabilities on the ground. This moment of maximum danger demands all the judgment and skill that narrowly resolved [Cuba in 1962](#). We should remember then that both sides had to climb down.

So far in this dispute, Nato has operated with impressive self-discipline. It has laid down the parameters of its aid to Ukraine and stuck to them. Two decades of highly provocative Nato encirclement of Russia halted at Georgia and Ukraine in the knowledge that going further would permanently inflame Moscow. Nato stayed aloof from Russia’s [Crimea](#) and Donbas occupations. Putin’s assault on Kyiv this spring was of a different order, but again Nato calibrated its response. It was able to present a united front to Russia while not inviting Moscow to retaliate beyond Ukraine’s borders.

Neither western sanctions nor military aid to Ukraine appear to have deterred Putin one iota. They have vastly increased the cost to Russia of his invasion, but as western democracies know well, the cost of military

adventures doesn't always impact policy. Putin will settle as and when he feels he has reached his military limit, which is why there is good reason for sending Kyiv weapons. It is also a reason for the common humanity of welcoming Ukrainian refugees, which [Johnson's immigration policy](#) has hypocritically denied. None of this is a reason for willing the conflict to continue, let alone risking Nato being drawn into the fight. Apart from anything else, a war with Nato would hugely reinforce Putin's domestic popularity.

As was indicated in the [Minsk negotiations of 2015](#) and [mooted in Istanbul](#) in March, there will have to be compromise if this is not to become an ongoing agony. An eventual deal will have to embrace Ukraine's security and a degree of autonomy for Donbas. This will be messy. It cannot award Putin victory but it would probably acknowledge the "Russian-ness" of Crimea and south-east Ukraine, if not of Odesa. There have been indications that Zelenskiy will accept something of this sort. Yet it is precisely such an outcome that Johnson and Truss now oppose, hoping to boost support from belligerents – and defence lobbyists – within the Tory party.

The cruelties inflicted by states on other states should always be condemned by the wider world. But condemnation is one thing, fighting another. When states interfere in the affairs of others it is usually, if not always, bloody and unsuccessful. Ukraine appears to be approaching what could be a final battle with [Russia](#) in the south, possibly followed by stalemate and some sort of settlement. The worst thing Zelenskiy could face is western allies in the US and Britain both led by politicians, Joe Biden and Johnson, who feel they are too weak domestically to support him in the compromises of peace.

Johnson and Truss have not declared that a Ukrainian deal is for Zelenskiy and his people to decide. They want him to keep fighting for as long as it takes for Russia to be utterly defeated. They need a triumph in their proxy war. Meanwhile anyone who disagrees with them can be dismissed as a weakling, a coward or pro-Putin. That this conflict should be hijacked by Britain for a squalid forthcoming leadership contest is sickening.

- Simon Jenkins is a Guardian columnist

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## [China](#)

# **China says Nato has ‘messed up Europe’ and warns over role in Asia-Pacific**

In response to British foreign secretary’s warning that Beijing must ‘play by the rules’, ministry of foreign affairs says Nato is stirring conflict

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



The flags of Nato member countries at its headquarters in Brussels, Belgium. China has refused to condemn Russia’s invasion of Ukraine and said on Thursday its position had been ‘consistent and clear’. Photograph: Olivier Matthys/AP

*Helen Davidson in Taipei and agencies  
@heldavidson*

Fri 29 Apr 2022 01.49 EDT Last modified on Fri 29 Apr 2022 04.58 EDT

China's ministry of foreign affairs has accused Nato of messing up Europe and stirring up conflicts in the Asia-Pacific region, after the UK's foreign secretary told [China](#) it should "play by the rules".

In a speech at Mansion House in London on Wednesday, Liz Truss [renewed calls to boost Nato](#) in the wake of the Ukraine war, and said the coordinated moves to isolate Russia from the world economy proved that market access to democratic countries was no longer a given. Truss also delivered a direct warning to China.

"Countries must play by the rules. And that includes China," she said.

On Thursday Wang Wenbin, a spokesman for China's ministry of foreign affairs, dismissed Truss's comments and accused [Nato](#) of demanding other countries abide by basic norms while it has "wantonly waged wars and dropped bombs in sovereign states, killing and displacing innocent civilians".

"Nato, a military organisation in the North Atlantic, has in recent years come to the Asia-Pacific region to throw its weight around and stir up conflicts," Wang said.

"Nato has messed up Europe. Is it now trying to mess up the Asia-Pacific and even the world?"

In her speech Truss said Nato had to pre-empt threats in the Indo-Pacific and extend its outlook to democracies outside its membership, like Taiwan, which Beijing claims is a breakaway Chinese province it must retake. She suggested China's economic rise – now the world's second largest economy to Britain's sixth – could be targeted.

"[China] will not continue to rise if they do not play by the rules. China needs trade with the G7. We [the Group of Seven] represent around half of the global economy. And we have choices," Truss said.

"We have shown with Russia the kind of choices that we're prepared to make when international rules are violated."

China has refused to condemn the invasion of Ukraine by Russia, one of its closest allies, drawing criticism and urgings from European and other governments [to use its influence on Moscow](#). A recent China-EU summit was reportedly strained as Chinese representatives rebuffed pressure by European counterparts to help end the war. Premier Li Keqiang said Beijing would pursue peace “in its own way”.

Beijing firmly opposes linking the Ukraine war to its relations with Moscow and has said it will defend the rights of Chinese individuals and companies. On Thursday Wang said China’s position on the conflict had been “consistent and clear”.

“We have always made independent judgments based on the merits of the case,” he said, adding no further detail.

Truss has previously accused China and Russia being “aggressors working in concert”, telling Australian media she couldn’t rule out China using Russia’s invasion as an opportunity to launch its own act of aggression.

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## The Pacific projectPacific islands

# Climate crisis – not China – is biggest threat to Pacific, say former leaders

Pacific Elders Voice group says military tension ‘created by China and the US and its allies’ are secondary to rising seas and catastrophic cyclones



Pacific elders say climate change is the primary threat to the region.  
Photograph: Mario Tama/Getty Images

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Thu 28 Apr 2022 22.29 EDT Last modified on Thu 28 Apr 2022 23.22 EDT

Growing military tensions in the Pacific between [China](#), the US and Australia do not address the most significant security threat to the region – climate change – former leaders of Pacific nations have warned.

In a statement on Friday, the Pacific Elders Voice group, which includes former leaders of the Marshall Islands, Palau, Kiribati and Tuvalu, as well as Dame Meg Taylor, the former secretary general of the Pacific Islands Forum secretariat, said that “the primary security threat to the Pacific is climate change”, rather than geo-strategic tensions.

“The growing military tension in the Pacific region created by both China and the United States and its allies, including Australia, does little to address the real threat to the region caused by climate change,” it said.

“We are suffering from many insecurities in our region. It is time that the international community focus on these insecurities, particularly in the context of climate change. We call on all nations to respect the sovereignty

of all Pacific Island countries and the right of Pacific peoples to develop and implement their own security strategies without undue coercion from outsiders.”

Pacific countries have often been seen as the canary in the coalmine for the climate crisis, with the region suffering from king tides, [catastrophic cyclones](#), increasing salinity, sustained droughts and the loss of low-lying islands to sea level rise among those most at threat from the climate crisis, with low-lying nations at risk from rising sea levels.

Climate-induced migration has already begun from the Pacific, with people across the region [forced to leave a number of island groups](#) that are disappearing or becoming uninhabitable due to rising sea levels.

Last year’s report by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change said global heating above 1.5C [would be “catastrophic”](#) for Pacific island nations and could lead to the loss of entire countries due to sea level rise within the century.

Pacific leaders, including authors of the statement such as Hilda Heine Hilda, former president of the Marshall Islands, Enele Sopoaga, former prime minister of Tuvalu, and Anote Tong, former president of Kiribati, are among the strongest global leaders for climate action, and have pushed for ambitious action at international summits.

The statement comes in the wake of news that [China and Solomon Islands signed a secretive security agreement](#) earlier this month.

The deal has not been made public, but a draft of the deal was leaked online in March and provided China with the option to “make ship visits to, carry out logistical replenishment in, and have stopover and transition in Solomon Islands”, raising fears that it could lead to China establishing a military base in the islands.

After news of the draft deal broke, Australia, New Zealand, Japan and the US have all sent top-level delegations to Solomon Islands in ultimately unsuccessful efforts to persuade Solomon Islands’ prime minister, Manasseh Sogavare, not to sign it.

After its signing, rhetoric has escalated, with the [Biden administration saying](#) the US would “respond accordingly” if China was allowed to establish a long-term presence on the islands, while noting assurances from Sogavare that he had no intention of allowing a military base.

Australia’s prime minister, Scott Morrison, said [Australia had “the same red line”](#) as the US when it came to China’s involvement in Solomon Islands, and the defence minister, [Peter Dutton, used his Anzac Day address](#) to declare: “Australia should prepare for war,” claiming that China was “on a very deliberate course at the moment”.

The former Pacific leaders voiced concerns that major powers including the US, Australia and Japan were developing policies for the region without consulting Pacific leaders, saying: “The security and future of the Pacific must be determined primarily by Pacific Island countries and not by external powers competing over strategic interests within our region.”

They also argued that major powers needed to address their own contribution to the climate crisis, which is an existential threat to many Pacific island states.

“These nations have done very little to address their own greenhouse gas emissions, despite statements of intent by the nations. Little has been done to address the impacts of climate change in the Pacific caused by their respective greenhouse gas emissions.”

Some members of the Australian government have ridiculed suggestions that Canberra’s unambitious climate policy may have contributed a loss of influence with Solomon Islands.

“That’s a nonsense,” Morrison said last week. “China has the biggest emissions and growing emissions in the world.”

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## James Corden

# Comedian James Corden to leave his CBS late-night show next year

The British host generated buzz with his viral Carpool Karaoke segments in which he sang along with stars such as Adele



James Corden at the 2019 Hollywood Foreign Press Association's Annual Grants Banquet, July 2019. Photograph: Jordan Strauss/Invision/AP

*Reuters*

Thu 28 Apr 2022 20.55 EDT Last modified on Fri 29 Apr 2022 15.20 EDT

British comedian and talkshow host [James Corden](#) will exit The Late Late Show on CBS television in 2023 after eight years in the job, a network spokesperson said on Thursday, a departure that may signal a larger shift in the direction of late-night television.

Corden began hosting the US weeknight show in 2015 and generated buzz with his viral Carpool Karaoke segments in which he sang along with stars

including Adele and Lady Gaga.

The comedian's contract was due to expire in August but he agreed to host the show for one more season that will run through spring of next year.

Corden announced the decision during a taping of his Thursday night episode in Los Angeles, the spokesperson said.

The comedian has previously signaled that he might be considering a move, including [telling Variety](#) last December that he "honestly" did not know if he would renew his contract, and that he "never really saw this job as a final destination. I saw it as a stop on a journey."

The viewership for shows like Corden's have dropped steeply in recent years, the [New York Times reported](#), and several other prominent late-night hosts, including Jimmy Kimmel and Stephen Colbert, also have contracts slated to end soon, a situation that raises larger questions about the direction of late-night shows built around the personalities of ageing male comedians.

CBS did not immediately respond to a request for comment about who might be tapped to replace Corden on The Late Late Show or if the show would definitely continue after his departure.

"Seven years ago, James Corden came to the US and took television by storm, with huge creative and comedic swings that resonated in a big way with viewers on-air and online," said George Cheeks, president and CEO of CBS.

"We wish he could stay longer, but we are very proud he made CBS his American home and that this partnership will extend one more season on The Late Late Show," Cheeks added.

In 2020, Corden said that he and his family missed England, telling the Sun that he was "homesick," and that the pandemic had heightened that feeling, the New York Times reported.

Several [American TV critics](#) suggested that Amber Ruffin, a comedian who has her own late night show on NBC's streaming service Peacock, would be a good pick to replace Corden. Nearly a decade ago, Ruffin became the [first Black woman to write](#) for a network late-night talkshow.

Corden, 43, also hosted the Tony and Grammy awards and appeared in films including the critically panned movie musical *Cats*.

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Rolling coverage of the latest economic and financial news, including growth figures from across the eurozone

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LIVE Updated 2d ago

[Graeme Wearden](#)

Fri 29 Apr 2022 13.24 EDTFirst published on Fri 29 Apr 2022 02.41 EDT



A European flag flutters in front of the European Central Bank building in Frankfurt. Photograph: Andre Pain/AFP/Getty Images

*Graeme Wearden*

Fri 29 Apr 2022 13.24 EDTFirst published on Fri 29 Apr 2022 02.41 EDT

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[2d ago](#)[13.24](#)

## Closing post

Time to wrap up... here's today's main stories:

*Goodnight, and best wishes for the bank holiday weekend if you're in the UK (and not working...). GW*

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[2d ago](#)[13.21](#)



Jasper Jolly

**In the push to cut carbon emissions, lorry vehicle makers are experimenting with a range of greener technologies to replace diesel engines.**

Both gas-powered, and battery electric, lorries are being developed. And my colleague **Jasper Jolly** has a couple for a spin to see how manufacturers are making progress:

Here's how it went....

"Just be careful where your back end is going," says the instructor as this reporter nervously steers a 44-tonne articulated Volvo lorry on a roundabout. It is good advice at roundabouts, as in life. The trailer rolls past the safety barrier with a barely visible gap, to the relief of everyone involved.

It is a manoeuvre played out across the world countless times each day as lorries lug the goods required for modern life from factory to consumer. However, this truck is slightly different: instead of a diesel engine, it is running on natural gas.

It is one of the products of a series of bets by lorry manufacturers on how to reduce the carbon footprint of road transport, a [key contributor to global carbon emissions](#). About 16% of the UK's carbon emissions in 2019 were from heavy goods vehicles, which carried 1.4bn tonnes across 17.8bn km in the year to June 2021, according to the Department for Transport.

### [Electric road system proposal would cover two-thirds of the UK's freight miles](#)

Electric road system proposal would cover two-thirds of the UK's freight miles

Manufacturers are backing a range of technologies from gas, to battery electric and various types of hydrogen to try to decarbonise those journeys – but none has yet succeeded at scale.

Everyone who drives an electric car for the first time after a lifetime of petrol or diesel [has had the moment of realisation](#): this really is the future. A similar dynamic is happening now with lorries. At the same test drive event, held this week at the Millbrook Proving Ground by the Society of Motor Manufacturers and Traders, there was also the chance

to try out the LF Electric, assembled by Dutch lorrymaker DAF Trucks at its Leyland subsidiary in Lancashire.

Compared to the noise and judder of a diesel engine it is a serene experience on a sunny spring day in the rolling Bedfordshire hills. So serene, in fact, that another good-natured instructor has to intervene to prevent another roundabout mishap....

Do check out the full piece:

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[2d ago](#)[12.55](#)

## European markets close

**European stock markets have ended the week higher, even as shares slide on Wall Street.**

In London, the **FTSE 100** gained 35 points, or 0.5%, to 7544, as stocks continued to recover from their plunge on Monday.

Germany's **DAX** gained 0.85%, while France's **CAC** rose 0.4%.

Quite a contrast with New York, where the Dow Jones is now down 1.7% or 575 points at 33,340.

**David Madden**, market analyst at **Equiti Capital**, says European shares pushed higher despite tensions around Russia have ticked up.

President Putin has threatened to hit back at countries that are assisting Ukraine. Gas supplies into the EU are being monitored as there are some worries the energy market could become weaponised.

Yesterday, Germany dropped its objection to an EU wide embargo on Russian oil. That has led to speculation about a potential ban on oil from Russia.

Even though those fears are in circulation, eurozone equities rose on the day, Germany's **DAX** hit a one-week, Italian stocks are posting strong gains too. In the US, the bulls are in retreat as stocks have handed back some of the stellar gains that were recorded last night. US tech stocks have experienced a spike in volatility lately ahead of next week's important Federal Reserve meeting, where it is widely believed that interest rates will be hiked by 0.5%.

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[2d ago](#)[12.23](#)

## **Pound on track for worst month against resurgent dollar since 2016**

**The pound is on track for its worst month against the US dollar in six years, amid worries that a recession could be looming.**

With only a few hours trading to go, sterling has lost 5.7 cents against the US dollar since the start of April to around \$1.256, the biggest monthly drop since October 2016.

The euro has had an equally grim month, down five cents to around \$1.05, its biggest fall since 2015.

The dollar has benefitted from expectations of sharp rises in US interest rates this year, as the Federal Reserve tries to rein in inflation, and hit a 20-year high agains a basket of currencies this week.

As **Kit Juckes** of **Société Générale** explains:

The war in Ukraine, Chinese efforts to offset the economic impact of the ‘Zero Covid’ policy and Japan’s attempts at defeating deflation are all helping the dollar, while the Fed’s attempt to catch up with the post-pandemic inflation spike continues.

The possibility of an end to Russian energy exports to Europe is also hitting confidence, he adds:

Meanwhile, the war created massive downside tail risk for the euro. This is obviously vastly less important than the human tragedy unfolding in Ukraine, but what happens if energy supplies cease? And with that recession risk present, who cares how hawkish the ECB is or what is priced into the rates curve?

So down went the euro and everything associated with it, including sterling, as deep cracks that were already present in the economic outlook started to become glaringly obvious.

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Updated at 12.27 EDT

[2d ago 11.53](#)

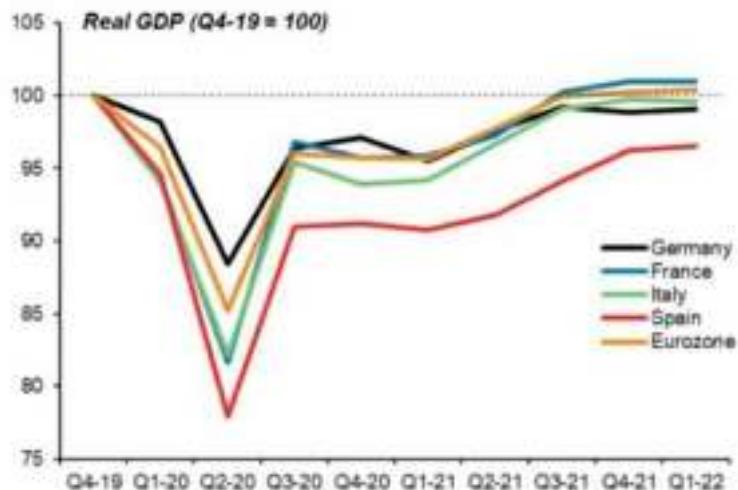
**The eurozone is heading towards a contraction as the cost of living squeeze and the Ukraine war hit the economy, warns BNP Paribas’s Markets 360 team.**

They say that this morning’s slightly weaker than expected Q1 GDP figures showed some early signs that household consumption was already losing steam at the start of the year.

This foreshadows a more significant slowdown further ahead in our view as the squeeze on real incomes intensifies and sentiment is hit from the war.

We think a contraction in the coming quarters is increasingly likely. Alongside today's inflation figures, today's data highlight the growth-inflation trade-off that the ECB faces – we think inflation concerns will keep the Governing Council on a normalisation path, but see lift-off happening in September rather than July.

Fig. 2: Real GDP levels (Q4-19 = 100)



Sources: National statistical offices, Macrobond, BNP Paribas

Photograph: BNP Paribas

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2d ago 11.38

**Russia's central bank chief has said the danger of an inflationary spiral have decreased, as she explained [today's rate cut](#).**

Central Bank Governor Elvira Nabiullina said inflationary pressure stabilised in the second half of March, and pointed to stabilizing inflation expectations and improving savings sentiment among households.

Nabiullina said (via Interfax):

“In April, households’ inflation expectations have returned to the levels of mid-2021. According to the surveys of households, expected inflation is below the observed price growth, meaning that people believe that prices will no longer rise as quickly.

Companies’ short-term price expectations have edged down as well, though they remain higher than last year.

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2d ago**11.00**

### **US consumer sentiment picked up in April.**

As anxiety over the economic outlook eased -- even as the economy went into reverse -- according to the University of Michigan’s consumer sentiment index. It rose to 65.2 for April, up from 59.4 in March. but still below 88.3 in April 2021.

Most of the surge was concentrated in expectations, with gains of 21.6% in the year-ahead outlook for the economy and an 18.3% jump in personal financial expectations.

The University of Michigan consumer sentiment index is at 65.2 in the final reading for April, a small downward revision from the preliminary report of 65.7. It is up from the final 59.4 in March.  
[pic.twitter.com/01bUpdj1u5](https://pic.twitter.com/01bUpdj1u5)

— Econoday, Inc. (@Econoday) [April 29, 2022](#)

**Richard Curtin**, surveys of consumers chief economist, says confidence is still weak, though:

The global economy has added even more uncertainties about prospects for the U.S. economy, including the growing involvement in the military support for Ukraine, and renewed supply line disruptions from

the covid crisis in China. Who would not be apprehensive about future conditions, even if on balance they anticipated a continued expansion?

Moreover, consumers have lost confidence in economic policies, with fiscal actions increasingly hampered by partisanship in the runup to the Congressional elections

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[2d ago](#)[10.28](#)



The New York Stock Exchange Photograph: John Minchillo/AP

**Wall Street has dipped in early trading, as Amazon's shares slide after it reported its first loss since 2015.**

Amazon have fallen almost 12% to \$2,547, their lowest since June 2020, after it reported a net loss of \$3.8bn in the quarter.

It was dragged into the red by a fall in the value of its stake in electric vehicle maker Rivian. But revenue growth slowed to just 7%, Amazon's slowest growth rate in nearly two decades.

**Craig Erlam** of **OANDA** says Amazon was the latest to catch Wall Street off guard, as it faced a multitude of challenges -- including the Ukraine war, the cost of living squeeze, and the end of lockdown restrictions.

There were the usual strong points to the report, like the cloud and advertising businesses - although the latter did fall a little short of expectations - but like many others, the company is struggling to adjust to post-pandemic life having scaled up massively over the last couple of years.

The tech-focused Nasdaq index is down 1.3%, as is the broader S&P 500, with Amazon leading the fallers.

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2d ago[09.56](#)

## Russia default fears ease as dollar payments made

**The risk of Russia defaulting on its sovereign debt may be easing today, after Moscow made a number of already-overdue international debt payments in dollars.**

Moscow has said that dollar payments on two foreign bonds are progressing after sanctions held them up for weeks.

It has previously used roubles to cover the payments after US restrictions prevented them being made in dollars. [Missing the dollar payments breached the terms on the debt](#), starting a 30-day grace period that ends next week.

Russia's finance ministry said it had managed to pay \$564.8m on a 2022 Eurobond and \$84.4m on a 2042 bond in dollars - the currency specified on the bonds.

**RUSSIA'S FINANCE MINISTRY SAYS IT PAYS MATURITY AND COUPON OF \$564.8 MLN ON 2022 EUROBOND AND COUPON**

## PAYMENT OF \$84.4 MLN ON 2042 EUROBOND IN U.S. DOLLARS

RUSSIAN FINANCE MINISTRY SAYS IT HAS CHANNELED THE REQUIRED FUNDS TO CITIBANK, N.A., LONDON BRANCH via  
[@Reuters](#) <https://t.co/g9UxkhUIr0>

— Jorgelina do Rosario (@jdosorario) [April 29, 2022](#)

The ministry said it had channeled the required funds to the London branch of Citibank, one of the so-called paying agents of the bonds whose job is to disburse them to the investors that originally lent the money to Moscow.

We now wait to see if the money reaches the bond holders before the 30-day grace period expires on 4th May.....

Russian default risk eases.

Concern Russia may default on USD denominated bonds eased after Russia's Finance Ministry confirms payments made today in US dollars on two separate bonds.

Russia Says It Made Sovereign Bond Payments in U.S. Dollars  
<https://t.co/wZxku7MSP2>

— James Wallace (@JamesWallace78) [April 29, 2022](#)

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[2d ago](#)[09.29](#)

**Britain's cost of living crisis, and the ongoing problems in the global supply chain, continue to hammer AO World, the online electricals retailer.**

AO, which sells kitchen appliances, computers, TVs and gaming consoles over the web, warned that its profits will dive this year as it faces falling sales.

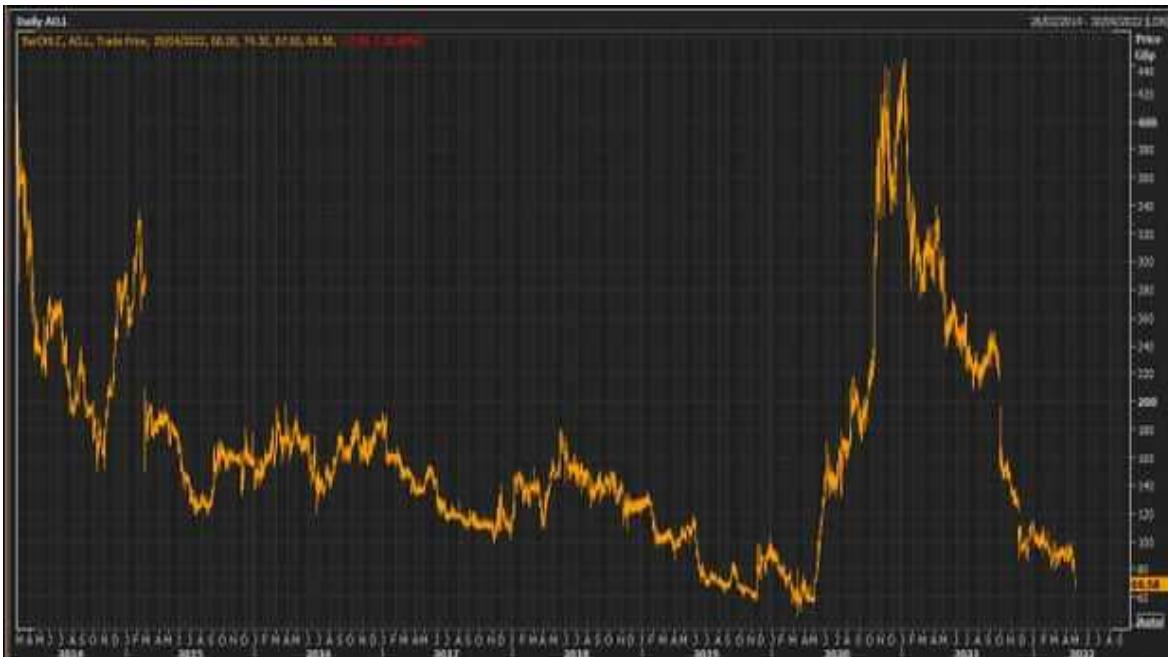
AO had previously been hit by global supply chain issues and a shortage of drivers. Now, customers are cancelling warranties on its products to save money amid the cost of living crisis, as my colleague Sarah Butler explains:

It said underlying profits would be only £8m for the year to 31 March 2022, down from £64m last year, reflecting higher costs from driver shortages, extra marketing spending in Germany as well as lower sales and warranty cancellations. Sales fell 6% to £1.6bn in the year but remain 52% ahead of pre-Covid levels.

The company said it had noticed “higher warranty cancellations than average historical trends” in March as customers “responded to the escalating cost of living”.

It said the latest trading figures indicated the trend was continuing, potentially forcing a writedown of the value of its insurance contract leading to a “material impact on full-year profits”.

Shares in AO have slumped 20% to 70p, a two-year low, having soared over \$4 in January 2021 as the pandemic drove a boom in web shopping.



Ao World's share price Photograph: Refinitiv

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[2d ago](#)[09.01](#)

## Eurozone facing stagflation as growth slows and prices soar

The eurozone faces stagflation after [growth slowed to 0.2%](#) in the last quarter and inflation hit [a record level of 7.5%](#).

Russia's war in [Ukraine](#) is driving up energy costs across the continent, just as economies emerged from Omicron disruption, while China's Covid-19 outbreaks threaten more disruption oo.

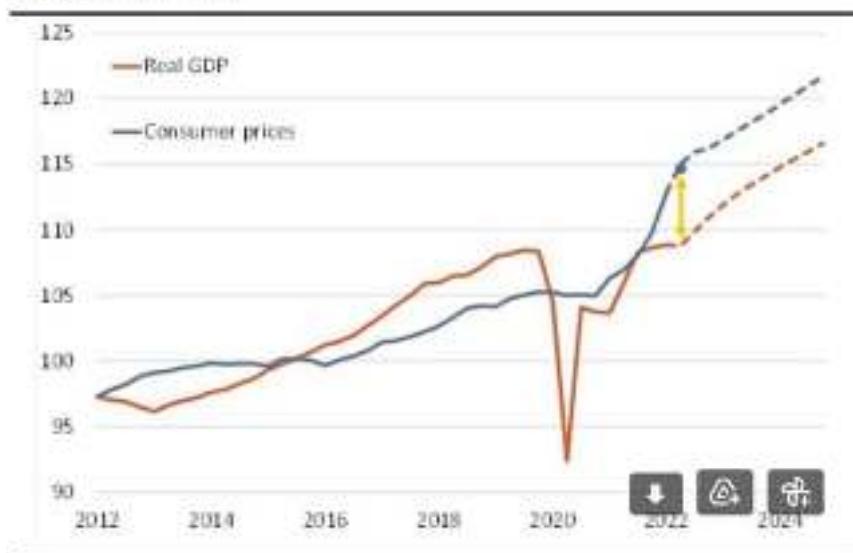
Berenberg Bank explains:

**Putin's war means Eurozone stagflation:** Russia's brutal war against Ukraine has driven up prices for energy and foodstuffs, disrupted

supply chains and dealt a serious blow to consumer confidence. As the most exposed major region globally, the Eurozone has fallen into stagflation as a result.

**Tough luck:** A series of unusual shocks is battering the Eurozone. In late 2021 and the beginning of 2022, the Delta and Omicron waves of the COVID-19 pandemic weighed on economic activity in the Eurozone much more than in the US and the UK. Moreover, just as the region was gearing up for a major rebound – as indicated by a February bounce in economic sentiment – Putin’s war derailed the nascent upturn. Due to its strong reliance on global trade, the Eurozone is now more at risk from Chinese lockdowns than the US.

**Big gap between growth and inflation: real GDP and consumer prices (2015=100)**



Photograph: Berenberg Bank

**My colleague Richard Partington says warning lights are flashing in the eurozone economy today, after France stalled and Italy shrunk in the last quarter.**

Raising the spectre of stagflation as living costs soar while growth in GDP falters, France’s economy unexpectedly ground to a halt in the first three months of the year, recording zero growth as supply chain disruption and higher energy costs held back activity.

Italy's economy shrank, Spain lost momentum, while [Germany](#) rebounded from a contraction in the fourth quarter when Omicron and supply chain problems had weighed heavily on the euro area's largest economy.

Suggesting a weaker period ahead as the conflict continues to push up the price of energy, hitting net importers of gas across the continent, separate figures for April showed eurozone inflation hit a record high of 7.5%.

Here's the full story:

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[2d ago](#)[08.52](#)

**Over in the US, the Federal Reserve's preferred measure of consumer inflation has just hit a 40-year high.**

The PCE prices index rose by 6.6% in the year to March, the highest reading since 1982, with energy prices up 33.9% and food up 9.2%

In March alone, the PCE rose by 0.9% in March, up from 0.5% in February.

PCE m/m 0.9% (est 0.9%, last 0.5%)  
PCE y/y 6.6% (est 6.7%, last 6.3%)  
PCE core m/m 0.3% (est 0.3%, last 0.3%)  
PCE core y/y 5.2% (est 5.3%, last 5.3%)

— Mario Cavaggioni (@CavaggioniMario) [April 29, 2022](#)

PCE Price Index YoY%: {ECAN} [pic.twitter.com/iphBNpqjrh](#)

— Michael McDonough (@M\_McDonough) [April 29, 2022](#)

Despite rising prices, Americans kept spending last month. Consumer spending grew 1.1%, faster than expected, meaning real spending was up 0.1% after inflation

Personal income rose 0.5% in March, as wages increased (but still lagged inflation), while the savings rate dipped to 6.2% from 6.8%.

Confirmation that savings boom is over: personal savings rate fell to 6.2% in March, lowest since 2013 [pic.twitter.com/RQKMdzkBjg](https://pic.twitter.com/RQKMdzkBjg)

— Liz Ann Sonders (@LizAnnSonders) [April 29, 2022](#)

US March Personal income climbs 0.5%, spending increases 1.1%, while real spending rises 0.2%. Core PCE Y/Y increases at a moderate 0.2% & is 5.25 Y/Y. M/M PCE up 0.9%. Q1'22 Employment Cost Index comes in hot at 1.4%. This underscores the urgency at the Fed to act decisively.

— Joseph Brusuelas (@joebrusuelas) [April 29, 2022](#)

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[2d ago](#)[08.22](#)

**Deutsche Bank has been under pressure from authorities in recent years to improve its areas such as money-laundering controls, ahead of today's searches.**

Back in 2018, Germany's financial watchdog, Bafin, ordered [Deutsche](#) to do more to prevent money-laundering and "terrorist financing," and appointed KPMG as an independent auditor to assess progress.

Three years later, [Bafin ordered Deutsche to bring in tighter controls,](#) and expanded KPMG's mandate.

In 2020, Frankfurt Prosecutor's Office fined Deutsche Bank €13.5m for being slow to report suspected money laundering in more than 600 cases related to its work with Danske Bank, but [dropped a money-laundering probe against Deutsche Bank managers](#).

Oh my god Deutsche Bank is being raided again - by three separate parties no less: police, prosecutors and regulators ... [@OlafStorbeck](#)  
<https://t.co/1VfPXvgI2M> [pic.twitter.com/vwWuSqLxaF](https://pic.twitter.com/vwWuSqLxaF)

— Stephen Morris (@sjhmorris) [April 29, 2022](#)

Separately, in January 2021, [Deutsche agreed to pay US authorities around \\$130m](#) and entered into a deferred prosecution agreement to resolve allegations that it breached bribery and fraud laws.

Last month, Deutsche admitted it had breached this DPA by failing to flag a whistleblower complaint over its environment, social and governance work - meaning the DoJ has extended its monitorship.

Today's may add to a list of legal and regulatory issues looming over Deutsche Bank's CEO Christian Sewing, [says Bloomberg](#):

Recent challenges include an internal probe into staff's widespread use of private communication channels, a lawsuit alleging mis-selling of foreign-exchange derivatives, and criticism from U.S. and German regulators of the bank's deficient controls.

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[2d ago](#)[07.09](#)

## **German authorities search Deutsche Bank over potential money laundering**

**Prosecutors, federal police and other officials are conducting a search at Deutsche Bank in Frankfurt, the city's prosecutors have said.**

Germany's largest lender said the search involved suspicious transactions it had itself reported in relation to money laundering, and that it was cooperating fully.

[Reuters has the details:](#)

Prosecutors said they had a search warrant but declined to elaborate. They said representatives of financial regulator BaFin were also taking part.

BaFin and federal police declined to comment.

Deutsche Bank, under CEO Christian Sewing, has been trying to repair its reputation after a series of embarrassing and costly regulatory failings.

This week, the bank posted a better-than-expected 17% rise in first-quarter profit as investment banking revenue climbed, but it warned that the Russia-Ukraine conflict could hurt annual earnings.

A Reuters witness said that there was no sign of authorities outside the bank's headquarters.

Deutsche Bank's shares are down around 2%.

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Updated at 07.19 EDT

[2d ago](#)07.04

**Russia's economy could shrink 10% this year - central bank**

**Russia's economy is expected to contract by between 8% and 10% this year, the Bank of Russia warns.**

The decrease will be mainly driven by “supply-side factors”, it says -- namely the sanction imposed on Russia since the war began.

That would be the worst drop since Russia's economy shrank for several years in the early 1990s, exceeding the [7.8% decline after the 2008 financial crisis.](#)

[Anouncing today's rate cut](#), the Bank says the economy has already begun to decline

Based on Bank of Russia estimates, **economic activity** began to decline in March 2022.

High-frequency indicators point to a contraction in consumer and business activity. After a temporary surge, consumer demand is decreasing in real terms, accompanied by a rise in households' propensity to save. The decline in imports due to the introduction of external trade and financial restrictions is outstripping the decline in exports.

Despite the gradual change in the country and commodity structure of exports and imports as new suppliers and sales markets emerge, businesses are experiencing considerable difficulties in production and logistics.

It predicts that the Russian economy will begin growing gradually in 2023, amid a structural transformation:

In 2023 Q4, output will be up by 4.0–5.5% on the same period in 2022.

However, the overall GDP change in 2023 will be within the range of (-3.0)—0.0% due to the base effect of 2022 Q1. In 2024, GDP will increase by 2.5–3.5%.

[@bank\\_of\\_russia](#) cuts key rate to 14% from 15%, sees 2022 GDP contracting 8%-10%. Inflation running 17.6% in April, yet sees more rate cuts ahead.

Initial rate rise wasn't about cooling demand to forestall inflation, but to keep money in the country.

Key headline:

1/2

— Michael McKee (@mckconomy) [April 29, 2022](#)

\*BANK OF RUSSIA SEES 2022 CURRENT ACCOUNT SURP.  
\$145B; SAW \$133B

European energy payments fill the hole from frozen forex reserves,  
keep Russia afloat 2/2

— Michael McKee (@mckconomy) [April 29, 2022](#)

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[2d ago](#)[06.55](#)

**Russia's central bank says that inflation in Russia could be as high as 23% this year, a sign of the economic damage caused by sanctions imposed since the Ukraine war:**

[Announcing today's interest rate cut](#), it says:

As of 22 April, annual inflation was 17.6% (vs 16.7% in March).

In the baseline scenario, the Bank of Russia expects annual inflation to continue to increase in the coming months, due to the base effect, to total 18.0–23.0% in 2022.

Inflation is then seen at 5.0–7.0% in 2023, before returning to the Bank of Russia's 4% target in 2024.

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[2d ago](#)[06.50](#)

## Russia cuts interest rates to 14%

**Russia's central bank has lowered interest rates to 14%, a bigger cut than expected.**

At its regular meeting, the Bank of Russia lowered its key rate by 300 basis points to 14% from 17%.

Economists had expected a smaller cut to 15%, but this still leaves borrowing costs much higher than before the Ukraine war.

Announcing the move, the Bank of Russia says that inflationary pressures have eased after the rouble recovered from its plunge when the Ukraine invasion began in February:

The external environment for the Russian economy remains challenging and significantly constrains economic activity. With price and financial stability risks no longer on the rise, conditions have allowed for the key rate reduction.

Recent weekly data indicate a slowdown in current price growth rates on the back of a strengthening of the ruble and a cooling of consumer activity. Further inflation movements will be shaped by such impactful factors as the efficiency of import substitution processes and the scale and speed at which imports of finished goods, raw materials and components will be recovering.

The Bank of Russia's monetary policy will take into the account the need for a structural transformation of the economy and will ensure a return of inflation to target in 2024.

In February, [Russia's central bank more than doubled interest rates from 9.5% to 20%](#) shortly after the war began, in an attempt to support the sliding rouble.

Russia's currency has since recovered to levels before the invasion, at around 70 to the US dollar, having hit a record high of 135 to the rouble in March.

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[2d ago](#)[06.47](#)

In the City, shares in UK specialist chemicals group **Johnson Matthey** are up 18% after the investment arm of New York-based industrial firm Standard Industries took a 5.23% stake

Matthey's stock jumped as much as 30% on the [FTSE](#) 250 index of mid-size firms, and are trading at their highest since November.

That was the month when the company announced it was pulling out of the fast-growing market for electric vehicle batteries, sending shares sliding and leading to Johnson Matthey exiting the FTSE 100 index.

Johnson Matthey shares have jumped nearly 30% this morning. Standard Latitude Master Fund has taken a 5.2% stake in the company

— Dan Coatsworth (@Dan\_Coatsworth) [April 29, 2022](#)

Reuters says:

A London trader, on condition of anonymity, said the stake deal could be a prelude to “some kind of move”, referring to possible transactions.

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[2d ago](#)[06.00](#)

## **ING: A turbulent quarter, and more high inflation to come**

**The eurozone slowed rapidly due to a “hodgepodge of reasons”, from Omicron to the Ukraine war, says ING senior economist Bert Colijn.**

Zooming out, we see a eurozone economy undergoing a turbulent quarter though managing to eke out a small positive growth number, with the Omicron impact milder than expected and the war in Ukraine having an increasing impact from early March onwards.

Supply chain problems flared up again in March, causing production shutdowns across the eurozone, which has added to the slowing growth figure in 1Q.

Colijn also fears that [core inflation across the eurozone](#) could continue to climb this year, hurting households.

The spike in fuel, electricity and gas prices from early March at the start of the war in Ukraine was followed by cautious retreats and governments reducing taxes on energy. This has resulted in a slight moderation of energy inflation, but concerns remain for the months ahead. The recent jump in market gas prices on the back of Russia cutting off Poland and Bulgaria from gas supply illustrates that it is very possible energy prices spike once again as the war continues.

The impact on core inflation remains key and poses a concern for the ECB. Second-round effects and supply chain problems add to faster price increases in goods and services as well, which has caused core prices to jump from 2.9% in March to 3.5% in April.

Eurozone core inflation jumps to 3.5% in April. Second round effects of high energy prices are coming in faster than expected. Key figure for

the ECB out of all data just released. [pic.twitter.com/JCRqKoyPWT](https://pic.twitter.com/JCRqKoyPWT)

— Bert Colijn (@BertColijn) [April 29, 2022](#)

With supply chain problems set to last longer and become more severe again due to Chinese lockdowns and the war, expect core inflation to trend higher for most of 2022 at least. This broadening of high inflation is a key concern for the ECB and adds to pressure to act quickly, despite the fact that this inflation continues to be rooted in supply-side issues beyond the control of the central bank.

[More here:](#)

Some more thoughts on today's GDP and inflation data for the Eurozone: <https://t.co/BElA1NXePH>

— Bert Colijn (@BertColijn) [April 29, 2022](#)

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Updated at 06.02 EDT

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## Global development

# Inflation bites hardest in developing world as Ukraine war raises prices

Poorer countries – hampered by Covid debt and aid cuts – are facing hunger and unrest as conflict pushes up the cost of staples



A demonstration against rising fuel prices in Kolkata, India. There have been protests around the world against the increasing costs of basic commodities. Photograph: Piyal Adhikary/EPA

Global development is supported by



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[Kaamil Ahmed](#)

Fri 29 Apr 2022 01.00 EDT Last modified on Fri 29 Apr 2022 01.02 EDT

Prices were rising before Russia's invasion of [Ukraine](#), which has further disrupted energy markets and food exports, forcing developing countries to pay more to import staples at a time when they are already struggling with increased debts taken on to pay for pandemic responses.

While panic over inflation has led news agendas all over the world, the [IMF's World Economic Outlook](#) released this week estimated it would reach 8.7% in developing economies compared with 5.7% in rich countries. Experts fear millions more will be driven into poverty and that transport and food networks will be affected.

Humanitarian efforts for refugees and populations already facing hunger crises could also struggle to cope with increased prices, at a time when many are already [coping with reduced aid funding](#).

“The rising cost of getting aid into areas like north-west Syria, which is hugely dependent on humanitarian aid, means that it’s the people who need

help most who are suffering,” said Jessica Adams, head of communications at Syria Relief.

“Our costs in meeting the needs have gone up – petrol for trucking water into camps costs more, building homes for displaced Syrians in tents costs more as building materials have gone up. This is against a backdrop where donations to Syria are reducing – so in a conflict like Syria … living has become unaffordable.”



Lumley Market in Freetown, April 2022. Petrol costs in Sierra Leone are up by 50%, and prices for basics such as cooking oil and rice have also surged. Photograph: Saidu Bah/AFP/Getty Images

The effects of the Ukraine war on oil, and the energy sector as a whole, are being monitored by experts but prices have fluctuated wildly since Russia’s invasion and there is concern about how much oil is being refined and exported as the products ordinary people need.

Rising oil prices are being felt on the forecourts, with petrol up 63% in Sudan, [50% in Sierra Leone](#) and [42% in Ghana](#) compared with [9% in Britain](#).

“You cannot isolate oil from the other markets – gas prices are higher, coal prices are higher, food prices are higher and you have supply-chain

bottlenecks. There are a lot of headwinds that are affecting economics all over the world," said Bassam Fattouh, director of the Oxford Institute for Energy Studies.

"If you look at it from a consumer's point of view, they are being hit left and right all over the world."

[A graphic showing the difference in price rises between the worst affected countries worldwide and wealthy European countries.](#)

Oxfam has estimated that a [quarter of a billion people face poverty](#) this year because of rising food and fuel prices, calling it "the most profound collapse of humanity into extreme poverty and suffering in memory".

The UN's agencies raised concerns about how rising food and fuel costs will affect their operations, [predicting a \\$136m rise](#) in operational costs in West Africa. [In east Africa](#) it has warned of refugee families getting into debt and selling off their belongings because they [fear ration cuts](#).

The UN warned last week of developing countries becoming "[collateral damage](#)" of the Ukraine war.

"The developing countries are facing a perfect storm of soaring food and fuel prices with already limited fiscal space and high debt ratios. We need urgent measures to prevent great human suffering and the world tipping into an era of social and political unrest," said Rebeca Grynspan, secretary general of the UN conference on trade and development (Unctad).

The IMF said the war was derailing post-pandemic economic recovery and estimated global growth would slow from 6.1% last year to 3.6% in 2022. It also said the pandemic had increased debt because of response spending, making vulnerable countries reliant on oil and food imports.

[In Sri Lanka](#), the lack of foreign currency reserves has sparked a movement to bring down the government, which has struggled to import food, medicine and fuel, leading to blackouts and [farmers struggling to transport crops](#).



Demonstrators in Peru block a road in Cuzco, April 2022, to protest against a rise in the cost of living triggered by the war in Ukraine. Photograph: Alessandro Cinque/Reuters

[In Peru](#) there have been anti-government protests over fuel and fertiliser prices, while [Egypt has tried to avert similar anger](#) with price controls, punishing non-compliant bakeries and retailers with closure.

Living costs helped fuel the anti-government demonstrations that brought down Sudanese dictator Omar al-Bashir in 2019 and similar protests have emerged against the military rulers who took control in a coup last October.

Kholood Khair, of Sudanese thinktank Insight Strategy Partners, said the rise in food and fuel prices is adding to the grievances being voiced by protesters.

“Gas prices have been rising steadily in the past few months at the same time as the government has been struggling to retain hard currency in the central bank to buy more ... the government has very acute supply problems,” said Khair, who added that many of the fuel subsidies have been removed since Bashir’s exit.

“If the Gulf doesn’t come with financial support and in-kind support with fuel, then the generals in Khartoum will find themselves in an ever more

precarious position.”

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# Headlines

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- [Live Parish says ‘weight lifted off me’ after being named as MP at centre of scandal](#)
- [Neil Parish Tory MP at centre of Commons pornography scandal](#)
- [‘It’s just rife’ Female MPs tell of climate of misogyny in Westminster](#)

## Conservatives

# Tory MP Neil Parish says he may have opened porn by mistake in Commons

Parish rejects calls to immediately quit as MP and says he will cooperate with investigation



Neil Parish revealed he had referred himself to the standards commissioner on Friday afternoon. Photograph: Richard Townshend/UK Parliament/AFP/Getty Images

*[Ben Quinn](#) and agency  
@BenQuinn75*

Sat 30 Apr 2022 04.55 EDTFirst published on Sat 30 Apr 2022 03.40 EDT

The senior Conservative MP under investigation for [allegedly watching pornography](#) on his phone in the House of Commons chamber has suggested he may have opened it accidentally but has rejected calls to stand down as an MP immediately.

[Neil Parish](#), the MP for Tiverton and Honiton in Devon, had the whip suspended after becoming the fourth MP from his party since the last election to face claims of impropriety.

Parish revealed he had referred himself to the standards commissioner on Friday afternoon after senior Tory women expressed outrage at the party for failing to act on complaints made earlier this week, despite being aware of his identity.

In a statement, the 65-year-old wrote on his website: “I will be cooperating fully with any investigation, and whilst it is ongoing I will continue to perform my duties as MP for Tiverton and Honiton.”

Asked later by broadcasters if he had opened something in error in the Commons, he said: “I did, but let the inquiry look at that.”

However, there were suggestions that a Tory minister also saw him watching porn on a second occasion, in a committee meeting.

Parish said he would consider his position as an MP after the result of the investigation, telling reporters: “I will not remain if I am found guilty.”

His wife, Sue Parish, told the [Times](#) the accusations were “all very embarrassing”, adding: “My breath was taken away, frankly.

“People shouldn’t be looking at pornography. He would never just sit there with people looking. He would never just do that knowing [people were looking]. These ladies were quite right to be as [upset] as they were.”

Describing her husband as a “normal … lovely person”, she added: “If you were mad with every man who looked at pornography, you would not have many wives in the world.

“It’s degrading. It’s demeaning. But on the other hand it takes two to tango. There must be women posing for all this.”

Tory MP Neil Parish faces inquiry over claims of watching pornography in Commons – video

When asked what the accusations could mean for her husband's career, she replied: "I've got no idea. It depends on what Chris Heaton-Harris [the Tory chief whip] says, I suppose. I don't think it's going to carry on, is it? It's so stupid. He's such a good MP. He's such a good person."

Labour accused the Tory whips of trying to "cover up" for Parish before finally deciding to withdraw the whip on Friday.

If found to have brought the Commons into disrepute, Parish could be sanctioned and face the possibility of a recall petition, potentially triggering a by-election, if suspended from parliament for more than 10 days.

Allegations of a porn-watching parliamentarian were first aired by Tory MPs in a meeting with Heaton-Harris, the party's chief whip, on Tuesday.

Heaton-Harris suspended Parish, who has represented his constituency since 2010, from the parliamentary Conservative party pending the outcome of an investigation after they spoke on Friday afternoon.

Harriet Harman told the BBC Radio 4 PM programme that Parish should stand down as an MP. "This marks a new low for the [House of Commons](#)," the senior Labour MP said. "It is not right for him to go through the investigation processes if that is what he has done. Clearly he is not fit to be in parliament. He should accept that and not drag the processes out."

It was understood that the [Independent Complaints and Grievance Scheme \(ICGS\)](#), which looks into claims of bullying and sexual harassment, had begun examining events after at least one witness made a referral.

A second investigation could be launched after Parish's commitment to refer himself to Kathryn Stone, the independent parliamentary commissioner for standards, who may consider whether Parish broke the MPs' code of conduct by causing "significant damage to the reputation and integrity" of the Commons.

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Parish gave an interview to GB News this week in which he was asked about allegations of a then unidentified Tory MP watching pornography in the Commons.

“I think the whips’ office will do a thorough investigation and we will wait and see that result and from that, then the decision will have to be made what action will be taken,” he said.

Pressed on whether there was a problem with the culture at Westminster, Parish said: “We’ve got some 650 members of parliament in what is a very intense area. You are going to get people who step over the line. It does have to be dealt with and dealt with seriously.”

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[Skip to key events](#)

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

## Neil Parish says watching porn in Commons was ‘moment of madness’ as he resigns as MP – as it happened

The MP for Tiverton and Honiton says he initially found the pornographic website while looking at tractors

- [Tory Neil Parish to resign as MP over Commons porn allegations](#)
- [Wife of Neil Parish says she first heard of porn claims from reporter](#)
- [Profile: Tory MP at centre of Commons pornography scandal](#)
- [Rebel MPs fear Johnson could trigger autumn general election](#)

Updated 14h ago

[Tom Ambrose \(now\)](#) and [Tobi Thomas \(earlier\)](#)

Sat 30 Apr 2022 12.56 EDTFirst published on Sat 30 Apr 2022 05.07 EDT

'Moment of madness': Neil Parish resigns over watching porn in Commons – video

[Tom Ambrose \(now\)](#) and [Tobi Thomas \(earlier\)](#)

Sat 30 Apr 2022 12.56 EDTFirst published on Sat 30 Apr 2022 05.07 EDT

## Key events

- [17h agoParish says he was trying to look at tractors instead of porn](#)
- [17h agoNeil Parish to resign as an MP](#)
- [18h agoWho is Neil Parish?](#)
- [19h agoParish's wife first learned of allegations when approached by a reporter](#)

- [21h ago Parish says 'weight is lifted' after being named as MP who watched porn in Commons](#)
- [22h ago Tory MP facing calls to resign over porn allegations](#)

Show key events only

## Live feed

Show key events only

From 17h ago

[10.03](#)

## Parish says he was trying to look at tractors instead of porn

Speaking to the BBC, **Neil Parish** said that viewing porn in the [House of Commons](#) was a “moment of madness” and “I was not proud of what I was doing”.

He continued: “The situation was that - funny enough it was tractors I was looking at. I did get into another website that had a very similar name and I watched it for a bit which I shouldn’t have done. But my crime – biggest crime – is that on another occasion I went in a second time.”

When asked whether viewing the porn for a second time had been deliberate, Parish said: “That was deliberate... that was sitting waiting to vote on the side of the chamber.”

He added: “What I did was absolutely totally wrong.”

You can view his full interview with BBC South West [here](#)

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Updated at 11.42 EDT

14h ago 12.56

The UK politics blog is now closed. Thanks for following along throughout the day.

You can keep across all the latest news [here](#). Bye for now.

•  
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14h ago 12.42

**Labour's deputy leader Angela Rayner has criticised the Tory MP Neil Parish over his excuse for viewing porn "in error" in the [House of Commons](#).**

She tweeted:

He was looking for tractors but ended up with porn actors?

Neil Parish must think you were all born yesterday.

Boris Johnson's Conservatives are a national embarrassment.

He was looking for tractors but ended up with porn actors? □

Neil Parish must think you were all born yesterday.

Boris Johnson's Conservatives are a national embarrassment.[pic.twitter.com/wm3ijan21s](https://pic.twitter.com/wm3ijan21s)

— Angela Rayner □ (@AngelaRayner) [April 30, 2022](#)

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[15h ago](#)[12.02](#)



Gwyn Topham

**He's the unflappable frontman and loyal defender of the errant "big dog" in Downing Street. Through the lens of Conservative politics, the transport secretary [Grant Shapps](#) is on a winning streak.**

But as [crisis looms](#) in a key part of his day job – running the railways – a series of bizarre interventions have raised eyebrows and hackles. Just what, the industry is wondering, is going on with Shapps and the Department for Transport?

Rumbling disquiet has erupted into outright condemnation in some quarters, at a time when the biggest rail union, the RMT, has [launched a national strike ballot](#), against a backdrop of lost revenue, deep cuts and an uncertain future.

While the pace of promised reform and investment has been slow, Shapps has promoted personal wheezes that parts of the railway industry believe are, at best, misguided, and smack of YouTubing while Rome burns.

•

[15h ago11.40](#)

**Neil Parish initially resisted calls to resign after saying he may have opened pornography on his phone “by mistake”.**

In an interview with BBC South West, he revealed that he had initially mistakenly opened a pornography website after looking for a site related to tractors, but admitted revisiting the site intentionally on a different occasion while in the Commons.

'Moment of madness': Neil Parish resigns over watching porn in Commons – video

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[15h ago11.20](#)

**Labour’s shadow Commons leader, Thangam Debbonaire, said Parish was right to resign over his “disgusting behaviour”.**

“But it’s shocking that the [Conservatives](#) have allowed this debacle to drag out over many days,” she added.

“Time and again the Tories refuse to act, resorting to cover ups and dragging the reputation of other MPs and the house down with them.”

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Updated at 11.22 EDT

[16h ago11.08](#)

**Nicola Sturgeon has said the resignation of Neil Parish should be a moment for society to say “enough is enough” when it comes to**

**misogyny.**

The first minister reacted to news of the MP's resignation as she campaigned in Burntisland, Fife, on Saturday.

She told the PA news agency:

I don't think there could really be any other outcome to what has come to light about this particular MP over the last few days.

Watching porn on a mobile phone in the House of Commons when you're there representing constituents is just unacceptable.

She said sexism and misogyny were a "societal problem" which now needed to change.



First Minister Nicola Sturgeon visits Tom Courts Butchers as she met with members of the public during local election campaigning on April 30, Burntisland, Scotland. Photograph: Jeff J Mitchell/Getty Images

She added:

So this is a moment I think to really say 'enough is enough'. Not all men are misogynists, but all women do experience misogyny.

And misogyny is by and large about male behaviour. So men have to change, and I hope this is a moment where they really think about that carefully and seriously.

- *I'm Tom Ambrose and will be running this blog for the next couple of hours. Feel free to tweet me [@tomambrose89](#) with tips and comments.*

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Updated at 11.13 EDT

[16h ago](#) **10.19**

**Parish** has also said that he wanted to put on record “for all my rights and wrongs, I was not proud of what I was doing and the one thing I wasn’t doing, which I will take to my grave as being true, is I was not actually making sure people could see it.

“In fact I was trying to do quite the opposite.”

Asked again why he had viewed the material, he said: “I must have taken complete leave of my senses and my sensibilities and sense of decency, everything.”

Parish said he was “not defending what I did for one moment” adding he thought the best thing he could do was to “tell the truth”.

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[17h ago](#) **10.03**

**Parish says he was trying to look at tractors instead of porn**

Speaking to the BBC, **Neil Parish** said that viewing porn in the [House of Commons](#) was a “moment of madness” and “I was not proud of what I was doing”.

He continued: “The situation was that - funny enough it was tractors I was looking at. I did get into another website that had a very similar name and I watched it for a bit which I shouldn’t have done. But my crime – biggest crime – is that on another occasion I went in a second time.”

When asked whether viewing the porn for a second time had been deliberate, Parish said: “That was deliberate... that was sitting waiting to vote on the side of the chamber.”

He added: “What I did was absolutely totally wrong.”

You can view his full interview with BBC South West [here](#)

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Updated at 11.42 EDT

[17h ago](#)[09.59](#)

Following **Neil Parish’s** announcement that he will resign as an MP, a spokesperson for Tiverton and Honiton [Conservatives](#) said:

*“We would like to take this opportunity to thank Neil Parish for his service to our communities over the past 12 years.*

*“We support his decision to step down as our Member of Parliament.”*

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Updated at 09.59 EDT

[17h ago](#)[09.53](#)

# **Neil Parish to resign as an MP**

The Conservative politician accused of watching porn on his phone in the [House of Commons](#) has announced he will step down as an MP after facing calls to resign.

Neil Parish, the MP for Tiverton and Honiton in Devon, had already had the Tory whip removed and suggested he had opened the porn “in error”. He previously said he would only resign if found guilty by an inquiry into his actions.

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Updated at 09.53 EDT

[17h ago](#) [09.17](#)

**Steven Morris** has spoken to some of Neil Parish’s constituents, and many are calling for him to resign as an MP.

“He should just admit what he’s done and get out,” said Hannah Tucker, 32, a supermarket worker who was shopping with her husband, Liam. “The Tories are a joke. They get up to all sorts – and most of the time get away with it. They’ve got to be stopped.”

Liam, a highways technician, said it was never acceptable to look at the sort of material Parish is alleged to have viewed in the workplace. “The scandals keep on coming. I’ll never vote Tory.”

Katy Oakley, 40, an ecologist, was walking through the town with her four-year-old daughter, Olive. “This sums up what everybody thinks about the government, another shocking incident in a long line.

“I think it shows just how out of touch members of the elite are with normal society. They think they can get away with things that ordinary people

couldn't.

"This isn't brilliant publicity for our town – it puts Tiverton in a bad light. It's not good for the country's image abroad. And it's not good for society."

You can read the full article here:

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Updated at 09.17 EDT

[18h ago](#)[08.30](#)

## Who is Neil Parish?



Ben Quinn

After a 12-year parliamentary career in which the MP for Tiverton and Honiton had rarely – if ever – been elevated to national importance, Neil Parish now finds himself at the centre of a political storm after it emerged on Friday that the Tory whip had been removed from him over the allegations.

A farmer and former member of the European parliament for south-west England, and a councillor before that, Parish was part of the 2010 parliamentary intake when he won what has increasingly become a safe Tory seat.

Since then, he has avoided controversy and has tended to measure his words relatively carefully in media appearances, and has served since 2015 as chair of the environment, food and rural affairs select committee (Efra).

One of the few areas where he has gone against the grain of his own party has been in his opposition to rewilding, which he opposes despite it being a position endorsed by Boris Johnson himself and most of the party.

One Tory source with previous experience working with him on the Efra committee – to which Parish was returned as chair in successive terms – described him as quiet and hard-working. “He would not have been on the top of my list of suspects,” they said, adding that Parish, 65, is “rather boring, actually”.

You can [read more in our profile of Parish here](#).

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Updated at 08.45 EDT

[19h ago](#)[07.50](#)

Sky News understands that Neil Parish is now likely to quit within hours after massive pressure from friends on him to step down, according to deputy political editor Sam Coates.

Sky News understands Neil Parish is now likely to quit within hours after massive pressure from friends on him to step down

The Tory “porn MP” has been told by allies his position untenable because of the way he kept quiet and allowed speculation form about Tory colleagues.

— Sam Coates Sky (@SamCoatesSky) [April 30, 2022](#)

There were fears last night that the ongoing speculation could have led to the complainant being named in the frenzy to uncover the name.

Allies were deeply unimpressed by his TV news appearance last week where he discussed the need for an investigation to find the culprit.

— Sam Coates Sky (@SamCoatesSky) [April 30, 2022](#)

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Updated at 08.09 EDT

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## Conservatives

# Neil Parish: Tory MP at centre of Commons pornography scandal

After a quiet 12-year parliamentary career, the MP for Tiverton and Honiton is under pressure to quit over allegations



Neil Parish was suspended by the Conservative party on Friday pending an investigation. Photograph: Richard Townshend/UK Parliament/AFP/Getty Images

*[Ben Quinn](#) and [Helena Horton](#)*

Fri 29 Apr 2022 13.50 EDT Last modified on Fri 29 Apr 2022 17.38 EDT

At the end of a live GB News interview just three days ago about a report on rural poverty, Neil Parish was asked in passing for his views on claims that a Tory MP had been caught watching pornography.

“If you have got 650 members of parliament in what is a very intense area you are going to get people that step over the line,” the Conservative MP

told [GB News](#), pokerfaced.

“I don’t think there is necessarily a huge culture [of that behaviour] here but it does have to be dealt with and dealt with seriously and I think that is what the whips will do in our whips’ office.”

After a 12-year parliamentary career in which the MP for Tiverton and Honiton had rarely – if ever – been elevated to national importance, he now finds himself at the centre of a political storm after it emerged on Friday that the Tory whip had been removed from him over the allegations.

A farmer and former member of the European parliament for South West England, and a councillor before that, Parish was part of the 2010 parliamentary intake when he won what has increasingly become a safe Tory seat.

Since then, he has avoided controversy and has tended to measure his words relatively carefully in media appearances and has served since 2015 as chair of the environment, food and rural affairs select committee (Efra).

'You are going to get people that step over the line.'

Neil Parish, who has had the whip removed following accusations he watched pornography in the Commons, spoke to Darren McCaffrey earlier this week and denied there was a cultural problem in Parliament.  
[pic.twitter.com/bHHQedHpdo](https://pic.twitter.com/bHHQedHpdo)

— GB News (@GBNEWS) [April 29, 2022](#)

One of the few areas where he has gone against the grain of his own party has been in his opposition to rewilding, which he opposes despite it being a position endorsed by Boris Johnson himself and most of the party.

One Tory source with previous experience working with him on the Efra committee – to which Parish was returned as chair in successive terms – described him as quiet and hard working. “He would not have been on the

top of my list of suspects,” they said, adding that Parish, 65, is “rather boring, actually”.

Parish had been a farmer in his native Somerset and still lives on the family farm, according to a profile on his website, which says he is married and has two children and two grandchildren. The MP employs his wife as a junior secretary, according to his register of interests, which also declares interests from the family farm in Somerset.

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The MP’s website also lists “the politics of Africa” as being among his other interests, adding that a ban on him re-entering Zimbabwe after he criticised Robert Mugabe’s regime in his capacity as an election monitor remained in place to this day. The MP had said this week that he also wore “as a badge of honour” the fact that he was among more than 280 MPs who had been “sanctioned” by Russia.

Records of [Parish’s parliamentary voting record](#), meanwhile, show that he has tended to go – in the vast majority of cases – in the same direction as Tory colleagues, though he was among those who had advocated during the 2016 referendum for the UK to remain in the EU.

In the past, Parish had gained some fans among animal welfare campaigners when he tried to stop the government signing post-Brexit trade deals that would have devalued animal welfare.

Nevertheless, nature campaigners have reacted to the latest news by saying they hoped that he would be replaced on the committee by someone who was more in favour of nature restoration than Parish, who usually takes the side of landowners and farmers in rewilding debates.

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## **‘It’s rife’: female MPs tell of climate of misogyny in Westminster**



Derogatory comments about Angela Rayner have led female politicians to raise the alarm over ongoing alleged misogyny in the Commons.  
Photograph: Jessica Taylor/UK Parliament/AFP/Getty Images

After two cases of misogynistic behaviour in a week, Harriet Harman says there will be ‘no hiding place’ for sexism in Commons

*[Emily Dugan](#)*

*@emilydugan*

Fri 29 Apr 2022 13.34 EDT Last modified on Fri 29 Apr 2022 14.07 EDT

Even as Conservative whips [claimed they were hunting down](#) the MP who made anonymous derogatory comments about Angela Rayner this week, one senior Tory minister was already making light of it.

Following the claim that Labour’s deputy leader [had been using a “Basic Instinct” ploy](#) to distract Boris Johnson, a male minister was seen making a series of jokes about women crossing and uncrossing their legs suggestively while in one of parliament’s bars. The remarks, witnessed by someone working in Westminster, are the latest sign of a macho culture that it is struggling to shake off.

Five years on from another scandal at the heart of government, which resulted in the [sacking of the effective deputy prime minister, Damian Green](#), the slur against Rayner led to female politicians raising the alarm over ongoing alleged misogyny and sexual misconduct, including a Conservative MP allegedly caught [watching pornography](#) on his phone in the Commons.

I’ve watched older Tory men having young women sitting on their laps on the terrace on a late night

*Jess Phillips*

Female politicians say sexist and demeaning treatment on the parliamentary estate continues unchecked. “Everybody has experience of sexism, it’s just rife,” said Alex Davies-Jones, [Labour](#) MP and shadow minister. “You know, comments about appearance, and comments on what we’re wearing rather than what we’re saying.”

Three cabinet ministers are said to be among [more than 50 MPs facing complaints of sexual misconduct](#) made to the parliamentary watchdog.

Many of the most blatant examples relate to after-hours drinking in Westminster's bars. [Lynne Featherstone](#), who served as equalities minister in the coalition government and now sits in the Lords, recalled an incident on the Commons terrace when she was still an MP.

A Labour MP in his sixties “kept saying to his researchers, ‘come and sit on my knee’ and different ones were taking a turn sitting on his knee and giggling and stuff”, she said. “It was just horrible to watch. He was pulling them onto his knee and they were giggling because they were young and impressionable.”

The Labour MP [Jess Phillips](#) recalled seeing similar behaviour from Conservative MPs. “I’ve watched older Tory men having young women sitting on their laps on the terrace on a late night,” she said.

In the chamber itself, sexism comes most often in the form of patronising or derogatory comments. It is more than a decade since [David Cameron told Labour’s Angela Eagle to “calm down dear”](#) during a Commons exchange, but women in parliament say belittling treatment is still routine.



Jess Phillips: ‘You get men, and it is always men, on the opposite benches who treat you like a harridan for behaving just exactly as they behave.’  
Photograph: UK parliament/Jessica Taylor/PA

Phillips, who describes herself as “quite rowdy in the chamber”, says she is frequently shushed by Tories on the opposite benches. “You get men, and it is always men, on the opposite benches who treat you like a harridan for behaving just exactly as they behave. I’ve had people putting their fingers to their lips and doing the calm down sign with their hands.

“They wouldn’t necessarily perceive that they were being sexist, but they wouldn’t do it to a man. They wouldn’t shush like you’re a child in a classroom.”

Anna Soubry, a former minister and Conservative MP until she moved to Change UK in 2019, said one Tory colleague used to tease her from the benches during every prime minister’s questions.

“In parliament, it gets very hot and stuffy, and I’d sit there and fan myself with the order paper and I’d get this: ‘Ooh, are you having a hot flush dear?’ It really pissed me off because I wasn’t but I didn’t know what to say.”

When she pulled the colleague up on it, she said he got defensive and said it was “just a joke”. Soubry believes he was doing it “to try to humiliate”. She added: “Obviously I never complained about it because there was no point.”



Harriet Harman says there has always been a male impunity for misogyny in the House of Commons. Photograph: Ken McKay/ITV/Rex/Shutterstock

Soubry also said a fellow Tory MP once made an “incredibly shocking” and “excruciatingly embarrassing” comment about her body that she reported to the whips at the time, who spoke to the man about it.

Phillips believes the worst behaviour comes back to a culture of politicians, particularly men, protecting each other. “I think there are some people who do not know how to behave and are covered by power and friendship to behave that way,” she said.

“That’s the problem. The culture in Westminster is not an overtly sexist one. The culture in Westminster is one where people protect their own, but their own being men. Men are much more likely to be protected by other men than women are to be protected.”

Female clerks, researchers and others working on the parliamentary estate without the status of being an MP can face worse problems. Phillips said: “A lot of clerks in the past have told me that they’ve been treated very sexistly and treated like little girls and like they’re stupid.”

Louisa Casson, 30, worked as a political adviser in an MP’s office in her mid 20s before moving to charity work. She said that “laddish banter” was

commonplace, with MPs commenting on colleagues' wives and giggling at puerile jokes.

"You'd get quite macho banter in policy meetings which I'd find extraordinary or just quite uncomfortable," she said. "There was a conversation about blue tits at one point, in the context of the bird, and a couple of MPs were sniggering and making jokes about that."

The age of male misogyny in the House of Commons is going to end ... there's going to be no hiding place.

*Harriet Harman*

For women in a tiny minority when they first became MPs, the latest uproar and debate offer hope, despite the behaviour they've exposed.

Harriet Harman, who by October will have spent 40 years sitting on parliament's green benches, said: "There's always been a male impunity for misogyny in the [House of Commons](#). And when there was just a handful of us women MPs, and we were very marginalised, it felt impossible to do anything about it.

"It was my everyday experience having a climate of misogyny from MPs that was amplified by a collusive press. But for me and the other women at the time, we just didn't feel there was anything we could do about it. We just had to grin and bear it and try to get on with our work."

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Harman believes the latest backlash against sexism in Westminster could mark its death knell. "It's not all men [who] are doing it," she said. "But all women have experienced it in the House of Commons. And they're just calling time on it.

"Now, because there are many more woman MPs, and because they are much more confident and assertive, and because there are woman MPs on all sides, they are not prepared to put up with it anymore. And therefore, the

age of male misogyny in the House of Commons is going to end ... there's going to be no hiding place."

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## **Depp v Heard: second week of trial takes sheen off celebrity glamor**



Amber Heard is seen in court in Fairfax, Virginia, on 28 April. Photograph: Michael Reynolds/EPA

Court – and public – hears a painful story of substance abuse, a deeply dysfunctional marriage, professional woes and plotting

[Edward Helmore](#)

Sat 30 Apr 2022 02.00 EDT Last modified on Sat 30 Apr 2022 12.58 EDT

Amber Heard has sat impassively through 10 days of Johnny Depp's \$50m defamation against her stemming from their volatile 15 month marriage. Next week, the 36-year-old actor will get to present her version of events in support of a \$100m counter claim for nuisance.

Whoever prevails in the end, and perhaps neither, the trial between the pair has been an unedifying spectacle of a horrifying relationship that so far only Depp has had the opportunity to present to the court.

The damage to each of them from their marriage, divorce and subsequent highly public and epic legal battles is conspicuous. Heard walked away with a \$14m settlement under California's communal property no-fault divorce laws, using the threat of a restraining order to negotiate for more, but little in the way of a movie career. Depp, too, lost work, having being dropped by Disney's Pirates franchise when allegations of domestic abuse against were made by Heard in 2016.

And for both, the long days of recent testimony have taken the sheen off any sense the public may have that either of the actors' lives of apparent wealth and glamor were in any way enviable. Instead, it has been a painful story of substance abuse, a deeply dysfunctional marriage and professional woes and plotting.

While Depp consoled himself touring with his band, Hollywood Vampires – a group that Christian Carino, the couple's former talent agent, testified last week was not a commercial proposition – Heard became an ambassador for the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) specializing in gender-based violence.

The court was told that the venerable civil rights group had written the draft of the now infamous Washington Post article upon which this legal action is based, and placed it in the outlet to coincide with the release of Heard's Aquaman superhero movie. Heard, the ACLU's general counsel testified, had pressed to go further, identifying herself as an abuse survivor, but her

lawyers had excised the passages lest it violated her divorce non-disclosure agreement.

Depp's generalized argument – that he was docile as a prescription opioid addict, but wrestled with a “monster” when drinking – was coupled with observations made on Friday that household alcohol spending dropped from \$160,000 a year during their marriage to “virtually nil” today. Some of that spending, Depp’s accountant testified, went toward Heard’s taste for \$500-a-bottle Vega Sicilia wine.



Depp testifies in Fairfax, Virginia, on 25 April. Photograph: Steve Helber/AFP/Getty Images

The grim tableau presented to the court peaked this week with images of Depp’s exploded finger after a fight in a rented house in Australia that was re-decorated with blood and broken glass, causing \$50,000 in damages.

The unedifying testimony, provided by a succession of aides, agents, concierge doctors, psychoanalysts, housekeepers, doormen and bodyguards, has left the impression of an appalling lifestyle environment that might have been brought to account sooner if there were fewer resources and enablers to support it.

“I would have required that each of them be in an abstinence-only program with random drug tests that confirm their level of sobriety, and I would have required both to do 12-step work,” said New York therapist [Dr Darcy Sterling](#), host of E! Network’s Famously Single.

“The step work is the work that deflates the ego – the arrogance, the propensity to view oneself as a victim with no role in the consequences of their life – so that they could come together without pointing fingers at the other.”

But the trial has provided insight into how celebrity justice might be warped. Expert witness Dr Shannon Curry refuted an implication that her psychological diagnosis of Heard was tainted by being taken out to dinner by Depp and his attorneys, an inference she rejected.

At times what the court has delved into has been bizarre as lawyers sought to prove undue influence. For example, Heard attorney Elaine Bredehoft pressed Curry on exactly who had brought muffins to her practice on the day Heard came for examination. Curry testified that it had been her husband, but that her husband had not known a celebrity client was coming.

“May I clarify what occurred so that we can stop talking about the muffins?” Curry said on the stand. “What happened was that I was getting ready that morning, I frequently bring muffins to the office.”

In the absence of Heard’s testimony, public opinion appears to be so far siding with Depp. According to a [Rasmussen Reports national telephone and online survey](#), 40% of those polled said Depp is probably telling the truth. Ten per cent think Heard is probably telling the truth. Fifty-one per cent are undecided.

Some top celebrities sided with him too. Joe Rogan, host of Spotify’s controversial The Joe Rogan Experience, said that watching the trial was a “cautionary tale” about “believing in bullshit” and offered that the case was good for Depp, but not for Disney. “You got rid of the best fuckin’ pirate you ever had! For a crazy lady!”

Others have fretted that the trial, coming soon after the Will Smith-Chris Rock Oscar slap, has bought the entire construct of Hollywood celebrity into disrepute – as a dissertation on fame as a personal curse – reenacted in a suburban courtroom.

Derek Long, assistant professor of media and cinema studies at the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign, said that “movie stardom culturally is less important than it used to be by virtue of the fact the media landscape is fractured and everyone constructs their own personal garden of interest”.

Celebrity bad behavior, or scandal of any stripe, is a lot more in the open now and scandal has become a public part of popular discourse

*Derek Long*

Under Hollywood’s old studio system, somewhat reconstructed in the streaming era of Netflix, stars and their images were closely managed and protected by studio chiefs and publicity departments. There were scandals, from Fatty Arbuckle to Charlie Chaplin, or any number of others detailed in Kenneth Anger’s *Hollywood Babylon* book, but morality clauses and studio infrastructure had ways of managing it in the first place or at least the narrative of it in the press once it had occurred.

“In a pre-#MeToo era there was more of an understanding that terrible things were going to happen and most of their efforts went into damage control, not prevention,” said Long. “Celebrity bad behavior, or scandal of any stripe, is a lot more in the open now and scandal has become a public part of popular discourse.

“Stardom has always been about selling the sense that stars are just like us. Implicit in that commodification was good behavior – that stars are just like you at home, they bake cakes and use this or that brand of household cleaner. When all the bad behavior that goes along with stars being human beings, it disturbs people.”

Frustrated witness in Depp v Heard trial starts driving during deposition – video

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# What I've learned from 10 years of therapy - and why it's time to stop

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## Blind date: ‘I wish I hadn’t gone into so much detail about my star sign chart’



Photograph: Alicia Canter/the Guardian

**Josie, 28, civil servant, meets Ruth, 26, community development lead**

Sat 30 Apr 2022 01.00 EDT

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## **Josie on Ruth**



### **What were you hoping for?**

Anything even marginally better than the dating apps. Good food and company would be a great bonus.

### **First impressions?**

I was quite nervous but we broke the ice quickly because we laughed about the fact she had dirty hands. Turned out her bike chain had broken en route.

### **What did you talk about?**

How we're both terrible vegetarians (and ordered meat and fish). Music (I probably rambled for too long about Taylor Swift). The sports she plays, including for the Ex-Girlfriends football club, which I thought was hilarious. We also had a classic lesbian moment of talking about star signs.

### **Any awkward moments?**

Not apart from the dirty hands.

### **Good table manners?**

Absolutely. She offered to share all her food, which is a big green flag for me.

**Best thing about Ruth?**

Her positive energy and nice smile.

**Would you introduce her to your friends?**

Yes, she can come to Hackney Wick any time.

**Describe Ruth in three words**

Genuine, sweet, outdoorsy.

**What do you think she made of you?**

We got along very well, but I was doing a bit of nervous, excited babbling.

**Did you go on somewhere?**

It was a Tuesday, so no.

**And ... did you kiss?**

A gentlewoman never tells.

**If you could change one thing about the evening, what would it be?**

I wouldn't have gone into so much detail about my star sign chart. I actually said: "Yeah, but I think my Taurus moon really grounds me." Cringe!

**Marks out of 10?**

A solid 7. I had an amazing time but there wasn't a romantic spark for me.

**Would you meet again?**

Only if she invites me to watch an Ex-Girlfriends FC game.



Ruth, left, and Josie on their date  
Q&A

### **Want to be in Blind date?**

Show

Blind date is Saturday's dating column: every week, two strangers are paired up for dinner and drinks, and then spill the beans to us, answering a set of questions. This runs, with a photograph we take of each dater before the date, in Saturday magazine (in the UK) and online at [theguardian.com](http://theguardian.com) every Saturday. It's been running since 2009 – you can [read all about how we put it together here](#).

### **What questions will I be asked?**

We ask about age, location, occupation, hobbies, interests and the type of person you are looking to meet. If you do not think these questions cover everything you would like to know, tell us what's on your mind.

### **Can I choose who I match with?**

No, it's a blind date! But we do ask you a bit about your interests, preferences, etc – the more you tell us, the better the match is likely to be.

**Can I pick the photograph?**

No, but don't worry: we'll choose the nicest ones.

**What personal details will appear?**

Your first name, job and age.

**How should I answer?**

Honestly but respectfully. Be mindful of how it will read to your date, and that Blind date reaches a large audience, in print and online.

**Will I see the other person's answers?**

No. We may edit yours and theirs for a range of reasons, including length, and we may ask you for more details.

**Will you find me The One?**

We'll try! Marriage! Babies!

**Can I do it in my home town?**

Only if it's in the UK. Many of our applicants live in London, but we would love to hear from people living elsewhere.

**How to apply**

Email [blind.date@theguardian.com](mailto:blind.date@theguardian.com)

Was this helpful?

Thank you for your feedback.

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**Ruth on Josie**



**What were you hoping for?**

A fun, boozy evening with someone silly that ended in a snog.

**First impressions?**

Pink coat! She looked lovely and super friendly.

**What did you talk about?**

The joys of being flexitarian. Our jobs (and the frustrations of working in big systems). Taylor Swift. And whether the waitress secretly hated us.

**Any awkward moments?**

Turning up late and covered in bike chain oil.

**Good table manners?**

Excellent food sharer.

**Best things about Josie?**

Honesty and integrity when she asked for the bill at the end, followed by her total joy when it was confirmed that all our food and drinks were free after a tense two-minute wait.

**Would you introduce her to your friends?**

Sure, especially the tarot-reading one.

**Describe Josie in three words**

Big-time hun.

**What do you think she made of you?**

A bit flustered/scattered – and oily.

**Did you go on somewhere?**

Only to my disgraced bicycle.

**And... did you kiss?**

No.

**If you could change one thing about the evening, what would it be?**

I wouldn't have stayed out late the night before.

**Marks out of 10?**

8, as a potential mate.

**Would you meet again?**

Perhaps, a Spotify blend might be on the cards.

*Ruth and Josie ate at [Quo Vadis](#), London W1. Fancy a blind date? Email [blind.date@theguardian.com](mailto:blind.date@theguardian.com)*

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Interview

**Olivia Williams: ‘I have unattractive knees. They have taken offence at my scathing remarks and decided to stop functioning’**

[Rosanna Greenstreet](#)



Olivia Williams: ‘My guiltiest pleasure? Winceyette.’ Photograph: Chris McAndrew/Camera Press

The actor on early ambitions in tractor driving, wardrobe mishaps and the body parts taking revenge

Sat 30 Apr 2022 04.30 EDT

Born in London, Olivia Williams, 53, studied at Cambridge University and Bristol Old Vic Theatre school before joining the RSC. Her movies include The Postman, The Sixth Sense, Rushmore and The Father, and her TV work includes Friends, the British remake of [Call My Agent!](#) and [The Crown](#). She is in [Marys Seacole at the Donmar Warehouse in London](#) until 4 June. She has two daughters with her husband, the actor Rhashan Stone, and lives in London.

**When were you happiest?**

People are often traumatised by the sleeplessness in the first years of their children’s lives, but I was insanely happy to be married and have two children. The only dark cloud was how much we were loathed for having babies who slept through the night.

**What is your greatest fear?**

Complacency.

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

Complacency.

**What was your most embarrassing moment?**

For complicated reasons involving a door that was supposed to be locked being unlocked, my emerging unexpectedly on to the stage, bare-arse first, in the closing scene of The Changeling.

**Aside from a property, what's the most expensive thing you've bought?**

An electric car.

**What makes you unhappy?**

Rubbish left out on the street on the wrong day.

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

I have very unattractive knees. They have clearly taken offence at my scathing remarks and have decided to stop functioning, as well as being ugly. I should have been nicer about them while they still worked.

**What is your most treasured possession?**

My husband gave me a ring that is the only thing he owns that belonged to his mother. She died when he was 11.

**What would your superpower be?**

Making people laugh.

**If you could bring something extinct back to life, what would you choose?**

The *Ecnomiohyla rabborum* or Rabbs' fringe-limbed tree frog – relatively recently lost – has a couple of pleasing eccentricities. It fed its young on its own skin, and had a slight ability to hang-glide from tree to tree, thanks to its disproportionately large, webbed feet.

**Who is your celebrity crush?**

I've always had a thing for dancers: Nureyev as a child. Baryshnikov as a teenager. [Akram Khan](#).

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

My mother says I had a plan to be a farmer's wife and a violinist, going to concerts at the Royal Albert Hall in my tractor.

**What is your guiltiest pleasure?**

Winceyette.

**When did you last cry, and why?**

In rehearsals. The play is very funny about mothers and daughters, but one of the gags hit a raw nerve.

**What would you like to leave your children?**

No clutter.

**What is the closest you've come to death?**

Undiagnosed VIPoma in 2018.

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

Emerging from the womb of a barrister.

**What keeps you awake at night?**

All the things I ought to have done.

**Tell us a joke**

A man walks into a gym and says: “I want to learn to do the splits.” The instructor asks: “How flexible are you?” He says: “I can’t do Tuesdays.”

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## 2022.04.30 - Opinion

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**OpinionPolitics**

# **Jacob Rees-Mogg has given the game away – even this government knows Brexit is a disaster**

[Jonathan Freedland](#)



Leaving the EU was the point of Johnson's administration. Without that goal, its founding purpose has gone



‘In the long story of Britain’s needless, pointless departure from the EU, the Rees-Mogg admission should count as a milestone.’ Photograph: Martin Godwin/The Guardian

Fri 29 Apr 2022 12.39 EDT Last modified on Fri 29 Apr 2022 16.38 EDT

The definition of [a gaffe](#) is when a politician accidentally tells the truth. So ruled the veteran Washington journalist Michael Kinsley, who would surely take delight in the textbook example of the form served up on Thursday by Jacob Rees-Mogg, the satirically titled minister for Brexit opportunities.

On a visit to the Eurotunnel terminal at Folkestone, hi-vis gilet over his double-breasted suit, Rees-Mogg announced that the government was [delaying yet again](#) the imposition of post-Brexit border checks on imports from the EU. He asked the public to celebrate this decision, on the grounds that it would save £1bn a year and help hard-pressed consumers by avoiding an increase in the cost of imported food. Enforcing post-Brexit checks, [said the minister](#), “would have been an act of self-harm”.

You read that right. [Jacob Rees-Mogg](#), arch-leaver and longtime loather of the EU, is now parroting lines from the remain campaign. He is admitting that implementing Brexit in full, honouring the 2016 promise to take back control of Britain’s borders, would be “an act of self-harm”.

There's plenty to attack here, starting with the nerve of hailing this move as "saving" Britons £1bn, when this was £1bn that Britons would never have had to spend at all if it hadn't been for Brexit. Or you could share the [outrage of British farmers](#), appalled that, thanks to Brexit, they have been left at a serious competitive disadvantage: they now face onerous and costly checks when they ship their goods across the Channel, while French, Italian or Spanish farmers face no such hassle moving their products in the other direction. Or you could worry along with the British Veterinary Association, which warns that not checking food imports [leaves Britain exposed](#) to "catastrophic" animal diseases such as African swine fever – a risk that was reduced when Britain was part of "the EU's integrated and highly responsive surveillance systems". Or you could join the lament of the UK Major Ports Group, whose members have spent hundreds of millions of pounds building checking facilities, which now stand unused as "[bespoke white elephants](#)".

But put all that aside for a moment and grasp the full meaning of Rees-Mogg's admission. He and his fellow Brexiteers once looked forward to these border checks, seeing them not merely as a price worth paying for leaving the EU but as a genuine benefit. Britain would at last be free to set its own food standards, superior to the EU's. And yet now the minister admits that putting up barriers just [makes food more expensive](#) for British consumers and risks bankrupting British farmers: precisely the act of self-harm remainers always said it would be. The irony of hearing Rees-Mogg declare that "free trade is hugely advantageous to consumers" after he and his comrades pulled us out of the largest, most successful free trade bloc in the world – the European single market – would be funny if it weren't so bitter.

At a stroke, the minister for [Brexit](#) opportunities has implicitly admitted that there are none – or, at the very least, any opportunities are outweighed by costs so great they represent economic self-mutilation. In the long story of Britain's needless, pointless departure from the EU, the Rees-Mogg admission should count as a milestone.

Which is not to say the Conservatives won't keep banging the Brexit drum, hoping it will [rally the electoral coalition](#) it summoned back in 2019. But the sound, always hollow, will now be hollower still: thanks to Rees-Mogg, the Brexiteers themselves have admitted as much.

This matters not just as a twist in the Brexit saga but for the life expectancy of this government. For Brexit was this government's founding purpose. When the best that even the loudest advocates for that project can promise is a delay in its realisation, it's clear: the drive has gone. And without such a goal, a destination to aim for, governing parties drift and become vulnerable.

If the two usual determinants of an incumbent administration's popularity are the economy and the personal standing of the leader, those now combine dangerously for the Tories. The cost of living crisis is both deep and wide, reaching into families that had previously been getting by, albeit with a struggle. It's the mother living off a [tin of soup](#) for herself so her children can eat; it's the parent getting the kids to change into pyjamas when they get home from school, to avoid wearing out their uniforms.

But this crisis runs in parallel with Partygate, each revelation of indulgence in Downing Street affronting not only those who followed the rules and denied themselves contact with loved ones during lockdown, but all those who do not have the money to put bread on the table, let alone pay for a suitcase full of booze. This is a Marie Antoinette government, pampering itself while too many of its people go hungry.

The usual alibis are no longer working. The much trumpeted vaccine rollout is increasingly offset in the public mind both by Partygate and the handling of the first phase of the pandemic: witness this week's high court ruling that discharging people from hospitals into care homes was "[irrational](#)" and [unlawful](#). A new poll shows a sharp decline in the number of [voters ready to forgive](#) those early decisions just because they're glad they got the jab.

Nor does law and order any longer offer its traditional comfort to Conservatives, not when new figures show overall crime has increased by 18% in the past two years, with the proportion of those [charged down to just 5.8%](#). On almost every issue, from inflation to immigration, tax to housing and the NHS, big majorities think the government is [handling things badly](#). Only on defence and terrorism do the Tories get positive marks. No wonder they like to hail Boris Johnson as a leader on Ukraine, though that is of limited political value: most voters surely sense that today's Labour party would not be doing anything different.

In normal circumstances, you would say this spells doom for Johnson. He lags behind Labour and Keir Starmer on the two big ones: the [economy](#) and [leadership](#). People are far worse off than they were, and they have lost all trust in him. His government is stripped of its defining purpose, leaving it exposed to daily squalls and scandal.

And yet, while the evidence is strong that voters are making the break from this government, they are not yet fully sold on the alternative. The old line says it's governments that lose elections, rather than oppositions that win them. But changing governments is a two-stage process: first, the electorate moves away from the incumbent party; then it moves towards the challenger. [Labour](#) and Starmer have work to do on that second stage. But the first phase is well under way – and Rees-Mogg's accidental truth revealed one reason why.

- Jonathan Freedland is a Guardian columnist
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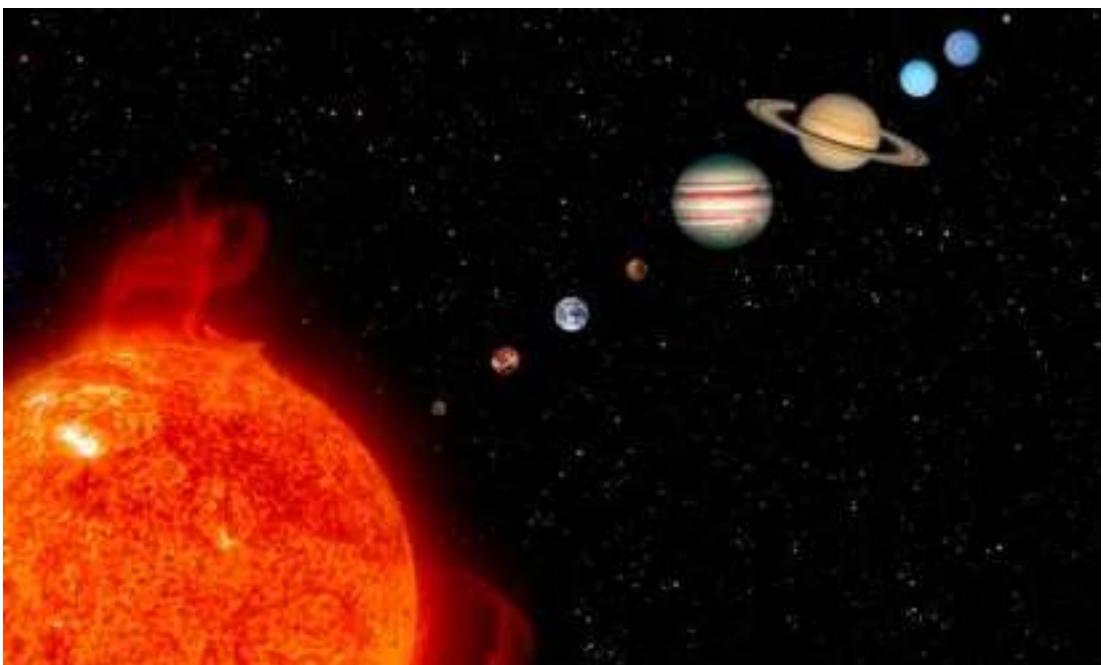
## OpinionSpace

# Could space-going billionaires be the vanguard of a cosmic revolution?

[Martin Rees](#)

For humanity truly to slip the surly bonds of Earth, private funds and intrepid thrill-seekers will be required

- Martin Rees is the astronomer royal



‘I want to cheer on those pioneer ‘Martians’ because they will have a pivotal role in shaping what happens in the 22nd century and beyond.’ Photograph: Steve Allen/Getty Images

Sat 30 Apr 2022 03.00 EDT Last modified on Sat 30 Apr 2022 13.11 EDT

I’m old enough to have watched the grainy TV images of the first moon landings by [Apollo 11 in 1969](#). I can never look at the moon without recalling this heroic exploit. It was achieved only 12 years after the first

object, Sputnik-1, [was launched into orbit](#). Had that momentum been maintained, there would surely have been footprints on Mars a decade or two later. That's what many of our generation expected. However, this was the era of the space race between the United States and the USSR, when Nasa absorbed up to 4% of the US federal budget. Once that race was won, there was no motivation for continuing this huge expenditure.

To young people today, these exploits are ancient history. Yet space technology has burgeoned. We depend on satellites every day, for communication, weather forecasting, surveillance and satnav. Robotic probes to other planets have beamed back pictures of varied and distinctive worlds; several have [landed on Mars](#). And telescopes in space have revolutionised our knowledge of the cosmos. What's more, humanity, or rather a narrow sliver of us, may be on the verge of an era of space exploration that makes the moon landings seem parochial by comparison.

The last visitors to the moon – Harrison Schmitt and Eugene Cernan, [on Apollo 17](#) – returned in 1972. During the subsequent 50 years, human spaceflight has seemingly regressed: hundreds have ventured into space but, anticlimactically, none has done more than circle the Earth in low orbit, mainly in the International Space Station (ISS). The scientific and technical payoff from the ISS isn't trivial, but it has been less cost-effective than robotic missions. Nor are these voyages inspiring in the way that the pioneering Soviet and US adventures were.

The space shuttle was, until its decommissioning, the main vehicle for transporting people to and from the ISS. It failed twice in 135 launches. Astronauts or test pilots would willingly accept this level of risk – less than 2%. But the shuttle had, unwisely, been promoted as a safe vehicle for civilians (a female schoolteacher, Christa McAuliffe was one of the casualties of the Challenger disaster in 1986). Each failure caused a national trauma in the US and was followed by a hiatus while costly efforts were made, with very limited effect, to reduce risks still further.

During this century, our whole solar system will be explored by flotillas of miniaturised probes. These technologies are far more advanced than Nasa's wonderful [Cassini probe](#), which was launched nearly 25 years ago on a

seven-year journey, and spent 13 years exploring Saturn and its moons. In coming years, robotic fabricators may assemble vast lightweight structures in space: huge, gossamer-thin mirrors, for telescopes or solar energy collectors, perhaps using raw materials mined from the moon or asteroids. Such robots could repair spacecraft even in high orbits.

Advances in robotics and artificial intelligence (AI) are eroding the need for humans in space. The fact that the Apollo 17 astronaut Schmitt was a geologist enabled him to gather especially interesting samples of lunar rocks and soil. But future probes to Mars will be able to make such choices themselves. If you can get a robot to do it, why send a human at all? Nonetheless, I hope people do follow the robots – as adventurers, rather than for practical goals.

Private-enterprise ventures such as [SpaceX](#) and [Blue Origin](#) have brought a Silicon Valley culture into a domain long dominated by Nasa and a few aerospace conglomerates. They have managed to improve rocketry and cut costs. Moreover, they can be less risk-averse than Nasa, and still find volunteers willing to tolerate higher risks than a western government could impose on publicly funded civilian astronauts. So it's these cut-price ventures – with private sponsorship, rather than public money – that should be at the forefront of human space travel.

The phrase “space tourism” should be avoided. It lulls people into believing that such ventures are routine and low-risk. And if that's the perception, the inevitable accidents will be as traumatic as those of the space shuttle were. These exploits must be “promoted” as dangerous sports or intrepid exploration. Later this century, courageous thrill-seekers – in the mould of, say, Ranulph Fiennes or the early polar explorers – may well establish “bases” independent of the Earth. [Elon Musk](#), the richest man on the planet, himself says he wants to die on Mars – but not on impact.

But what is the longer-range goal? Musk and my late colleague Stephen Hawking envisaged that the first “settlers” on Mars would be followed by literally millions of others. But this is a dangerous delusion. Coping with the climate crisis is a doddle compared to terraforming Mars. Nowhere in our solar system offers an environment even as clement as the top of Everest. There will be no “planet B” for most of us. But I still want to cheer on those

pioneer “Martians” because they will have a pivotal role in shaping what happens in the 22nd century and beyond.

This is because the pioneer settlers – ill-adapted to their new habitats – will have a more compelling incentive than those of us on Earth to literally redesign themselves. They’ll harness the super-powerful genetic and cyborg technologies that will be developed in coming decades. These techniques will be, one hopes, heavily regulated on Earth – but those on Mars will be far beyond the clutches of the regulators. We should wish them luck in modifying their progeny to adapt to alien environments. This might be the first step towards divergence into a new species.

It’s these space-faring adventurers, not those of us contentedly adapted to life on Earth, who will spearhead the post-human era. It’s perhaps in deep space – not on Earth, or even on Mars – that non-biological “brains” may develop powers that humans can’t even imagine.

The sun will survive six billion more years before its fuel runs out. And the expanding universe will continue far longer – perhaps for ever. So even if intelligent life had originated only on the Earth, it need not remain a trivial feature of the cosmos: it could jump-start a diaspora whereby ever more complex intelligence spreads through the whole galaxy. Interstellar – or even intergalactic – voyages would hold no terrors for near-immortals.

Even though we are not the terminal branch of an evolutionary tree, we humans could claim truly cosmic significance for jump-starting the transition to electronic entities, spreading our influence far beyond the Earth. But this raises a further question: will our remote progeny be the first intelligences to spread through the galaxy? Or will they encounter something already out there, whose origins lie on a planet around an older star where evolution had a head start over us?

- Martin Rees is the astronomer royal and a former president of the Royal Society. His new book, co-authored with Donald Goldsmith, is *The End of Astronauts: Why Robots Are the Future of Exploration*
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**Opinion**[Jez Butterworth](#)

# **Jerusalem is back, and channelling England's rough magic once again**

[Charlotte Higgins](#)



Jez Butterworth's revived play taps directly into an ancient seam of anarchic, Puckish energy



Left to right, front: Kemi Awoderu (Pea), Mark Rylance (Johnny “Rooster” Byron) and Charlotte O’Leary (Tanya). Back: Ed Kear (Davey) and Mackenzie Crook (Ginger). Photograph: Simon Annand

Sat 30 Apr 2022 05.00 EDT Last modified on Sat 30 Apr 2022 16.19 EDT

Jez Butterworth’s *Jerusalem* is back, 13 years and, as one fellow theatregoer put it on Wednesday, several culture wars since its premiere. Set on a riotous St George’s Day in a Wiltshire village, the day the functionaries of Kennet and Avon council have chosen to evict the defiant “Rooster” Byron from his illegal encampment, the play still pulsates with a punkish, Puckish energy. The company, less white as a group than in 2009, is still seamless; Mark Rylance still mesmerising. It remains one of the most brilliant things I’ve seen at the theatre.

Butterworth has [recently disavowed](#) the notion of having created a “state of the nation” play – which would anyway be a remarkably pompous thing to set out to do. That doesn’t mean he didn’t actually write one. What are artists for if not to sense vibrations undetectable by others? Great artists are the nation’s diviners and soothsayers. Currents rise through them, poetically, obliquely, while they are telling themselves they are dealing with the practical craft of making a workable script. Butterworth has boiled *Jerusalem* down to being a play “about wanting to stay but having to go” – and no, that’s not a veiled reference to Brexit. It is, at its most basic, about

characters moving on or offstage, the most fundamental engine-work of drama since Clytemnestra persuaded Agamemnon to step on the purple tapestries at the premiere of The Oresteia [in 458BCE](#).

I remember the shock of seeing Jerusalem in 2010: the absolute jolt of a new play about rural [England](#) – and you didn’t hear much about “England” as a cultural or political unit then. It wasn’t some pleasant pastoral; it was a difficult, messed-up countryside, albeit steeped in beauty and myth. Ultz, the designer, had conjured trees, thickets, grass; a clutter of old drinks cans and rubbish. Nothing about this was “cool”, nor was it “experimental”: it was a three-act play set over a single day, as a Greek might have done it, full of Falstaffian energies – which admittedly are themselves the energies of the counterculture, of punk, of an anarchic Englishness, both attractive and rebarbative. My mind couldn’t help flying to other darkly enchanted forests: Arden, of course, and the “wood near Athens” of A Midsummer Night’s Dream. The man was riffing with Shakespeare, with Blake. The confidence of it was jaw-dropping.

What’s difficult to remember is that for the preceding decade, while Butterworth had been holed up at home in Pewsey, Wiltshire, trying to get the play to work, the prevailing cultural tides had seemed so different. The focus had been on London and its resurgent inner city, fuelled by a rising economy. The capital – and this really does seem like something from another life – was full of cheap abandoned warehouses where the YBAs, still actually young, were [setting up studios](#).

I was 24 and working at Condé Nast when the March 1997 edition of [Vanity Fair](#) was dumped on my desk – the famous “London swings” issue, with Patsy Kensit and Liam Gallagher reclining on union jack pillows. Inside, Tony Blair, two months off becoming PM, was photographed like a grinning young saint. Even at the time, though, there was a “this can’t last” feel: the cover article made much of echoes between its own moment and “Swinging London 1.0”, the dead-and-buried 1960s. I was working at The World of Interiors magazine at the time. In that venerable home of French ticking and *toile de jouy*, our January issue had been – shockingly in its own way – devoted to concrete. That’s where the buzz was: concrete and steel, Hoxton and Shoreditch. It was Damien Hirst, Alexander McQueen, Sarah Kane, the

River Café. The buzz was not in Wootton Bassett, in Devizes, in Wilcot or Potterne, the English placenames Butterworth would conjure like charms. (All Britain came to hear of [Wootton Bassett](#), mind, it being the place to which the bodies of British soldiers killed in Afghanistan were flown.)

When did things begin to shift? It's tempting to declare that Jerusalem marked the end of the New Labour aesthetic, but that's way too pompous. Anyway, things had gone sour long before: Iraq, the financial crisis. Lucy Prebble's play [Enron](#) also premiered in 2009, though Jerusalem too contains a hilarious exegesis of What Went Wrong With the Economy, via a botched attempt to buy a gram of whizz. There were other artists working against the current: Jeremy Deller and Alan Kane were collecting their [Folk Archive](#), including images of Cumberland wrestlers and Devonian tar-barrel rollers – exactly the sorts who might have done a turn at the Flintock fair, the village festival in Jerusalem. “The new nature writing” was getting going thanks to people like Kathleen Jamie and Robert Macfarlane. Foundations were being laid that would later, indirectly, give rise to artworks from Max Porter’s novel [Lanny](#) to Charlotte Prodger’s film [BRIDGIT](#) and PJ Harvey’s Dorset-dialect poetry collection, [Orlam](#).

It would be facile to declare Jerusalem the prophet of Brexit. That would reduce the play. Jerusalem comes out of something more fundamental: a seam of rough, sometimes unpleasant English magic that churns away beneath the surface. It’s in Geoffrey of Monmouth. It’s in Shakespeare and Blake. It’s in [Jacquetta Hawkes’s A Land](#). It’s in Alan Garner and Susan Cooper; it’s in Sylvia Townsend Warner’s novel Lolly Willowes; Deller would say it was there in 90s rave culture. Perhaps, though, Jerusalem goes deeper than that, to a place well beyond “nation” or “myth”, to the secret places of the imagination – where even the most rational raise spirits and commune with ghosts. “Come, you battalions … Come, you giants!”

- Charlotte Higgins is the Guardian’s chief culture writer

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## OpinionScotland

# **Who rules the waves? In my part of Scotland that's far from clear**

[Ian Jack](#)



The sale of a Clyde estate might once have been seen as making a positive case for globalisation. But it's no longer so simple

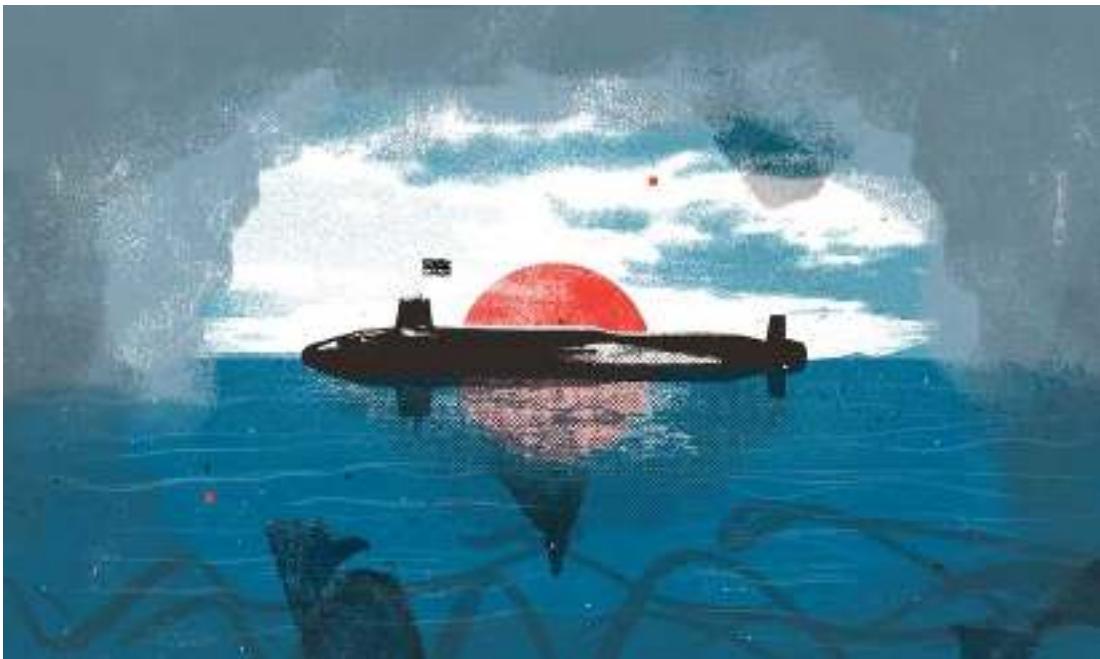


Illustration by Nate Kitch

Sat 30 Apr 2022 02.00 EDT Last modified on Sat 30 Apr 2022 15.22 EDT

The war in Ukraine has made the Firth of Clyde busy again. We used to have neighbours – he died, she moved away – who could remember the view from their house when it was filled with shipping during the second world war: when big liners such as the Queen Mary and the Queen Elizabeth arrived, as my neighbours used to say, “as regular as clockwork”, packed with troops and supplies on their way to the D-day beaches from the ports of North America.

There is nothing quite as momentous as that now. What happens more frequently is the humdrum arrival or departure of an oil tanker. Two or three tugs from Greenock will sail round the headland and take up their position in the channel; a large tanker will move slowly into view from the lower firth; the tugs will settle ahead, astern and abreast of the tanker; together the small convoy will head across Rothesay Bay towards the Nato jetty in Loch Striven. There, tanks submerged in the green hillside store oil. Merchant ships flying flags of convenience bring the oil in; navy tankers in various shades of warship grey take it away, presumably to Nato fleets exercising in the North Atlantic.

Late last month a particularly imposing ship came and went from the jetty. I identified it from an online shipping movements site. It was the USNS Patuxent, 31,200 deadweight tonnes, an American “replenishment oiler” that could, like a giant sow, refuel two warships, one lying either side of it, at the rate of 3.6m litres of diesel an hour. I sent a photograph to a friend, and my friend wondered what would happen if she posted it on Instagram: what view would the authorities take, given the war in Ukraine? And I replied that the authorities – the Ministry of Defence, MI5 or whoever – would be entirely relaxed. A week or two before, the Royal Navy itself had published a [video](#) of one of its vast new aircraft carriers in the narrow waters of Loch Long, where it had gone to restock its armoury from the munitions dump in Glen Douglas. The idea, presumably, was to publicise British armed power.

Other wars, not least the cold war, produced different behaviour. In the 1940s, when midget submarines and bouncing bombs were tested in Loch Striven, security men visited the few people who lived on its shores to make sure their curtains were closed. From the 1950s to the 1980s, aerial photographs that included the Clyde’s military infrastructure were marked “secret” or “restricted” and kept from public view. Even 10 years ago a car thought to be loitering suspiciously on the roads near the nuclear submarine base in the Gare Loch (or its nuclear warhead-fitting facility in Loch Long) might be followed for a while, if only to give the watchers some practice in watching. It probably still happens. Even now, ship-tracking sites will record the movement of everything from a prawn dredger to a supertanker, though not a Trident submarine.

In general, far more powerful and less obvious forms of surveillance have replaced the old restrictions and gumshoe techniques. Meanwhile the enemy, the potential target of the weaponry that the secrecy exists to protect, has become harder to define and describe. Is it just Vladimir Putin and the clique around him? Is it the Russian state? Is it a majority of the people who live in it? Does it include the music of Tchaikovsky or the Russian tennis players [shunned by Wimbledon](#)? Should the government’s newfound distaste for oligarchs extend to all of them, as ruthless looters of the Soviet people’s assets, or are some oligarchs better than others?

I am shocked by my own ignorance. In the week that the Patuxent arrived in Loch Striven, the local Argyll paper carried a story about an oligarch's superyacht that had been stranded in the Norwegian port of Narvik because dockworkers had [refused to refuel it](#). The yacht, the Ragnar, was said by the paper to be owned by the Russian businessman Vladimir Strzhalkovsky, "a former KGB comrade of Russian dictator Vladimir Putin", though as yet absent from the EU and UK lists of sanctioned oligarchs and also from the US's much longer list of the possibly sanctionable.

His house in Monaco is some way outside the Dunoon Observer and Argyllshire Standard's core circulation area. What explains the paper's interest in him is his son Evgeny's purchase in 2017 of a country estate 10 miles from Dunoon. The estate, Knockdow, covers 250 acres of the Cowal peninsula and includes two lakes, two 2,000ft hills, a millpond, pastureland, a forest and an 18th-century mansion, Knockdow House, which has 12 bedrooms, six principal reception rooms and as its centrepiece a "glorious domed cupola" (Country Life) supported by Ionic columns. For two centuries it was one of the homes of the local gentry, the Lamonts, who like many prosperous families in the west of [Scotland](#) made at least some of their fortune from slave-worked sugar plantations in the Caribbean. Evgeny, whose employment is hard to discover but whose interests are yachting and re-enacting historic battles, is said to have paid £4m for it. His father is thought to be worth at least a hundred times that amount, after a short post-KGB career as the chief executive officer of Norilsk Nickel. You might say that the riches of the earth, cheaply and sometimes brutally harvested abroad, have kept the place going since the beginning.

I can see the estate from our window, though the house itself is hidden behind a slope. It lies just three miles away across the water at the beginning of Loch Striven, but to reach there by any transport other than a small boat means a ferry crossing and a 40-mile drive: the Clyde estuary has a complicated geography. For that reason I've been there only once and never bothered to know it. It might have been the moon – this is what I mean by ignorance. Last month, looking at a plan of the estate, I saw that it surrounded the Nato jetty and its oil tanks on all three landward sides. In other words, the big grey ships come and go from a small square of MoD land that sits inside 250 acres bought by Evgeny Strzhalkovsky from funds that may well have been supplied by his father.

Until recently, that might have served as an advertisement for globalisation – old enemies living together, outbreaks of peace. Today it looks like the outcome of a perplexing historical episode. Welcome, oligarchs! No questions will be asked.

- Ian Jack is a journalist and commentator. He edited the Independent on Sunday from 1991 to 1995 and Granta magazine between 1995 and 2007
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## 2022.04.30 - Around the world

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- [Islamic State British-born member receives life sentence in US trial](#)
- [US Judge denies Trump's request to end contempt order and \\$10,000-a-day fine](#)
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## Ghislaine Maxwell

# Judge denies Ghislaine Maxwell's bid to overturn sex trafficking conviction

Socialite was convicted in December of five counts for bringing teenage girls to the disgraced financier Jeffrey Epstein



A judge denied Ghislaine Maxwell's motion to overturn her sex trafficking conviction. Photograph: John Minchillo/AP

*Victoria Bekiempis in New York*

Fri 29 Apr 2022 19.34 EDTFirst published on Fri 29 Apr 2022 17.39 EDT

The judge in [Ghislaine Maxwell](#)'s sex-trafficking case has upheld her conviction, according to a ruling issued Friday. In rejecting Maxwell's request for acquittal, Judge Alison Nathan said the guilty verdict was "readily supported by the extensive witness testimony and documentary evidence admitted at trial".

“Further, those counts of conviction matched the core of criminality charged in the Indictment, presented by the Government at trial, and on which the jury was accurately instructed,” Nathan said.

The British socialite was [convicted](#) on 29 December of five counts for bringing girls, some as young as 14, to financier [Jeffrey Epstein](#), for him to sexually abuse. Maxwell was found guilty on one count of sex-trafficking, one count of transportation of an individual under the age of 17 with intent to engage in illegal sexual activity, and three conspiracy counts.

When Maxwell is sentenced on 28 June, Nathan will impose punishment for three of those five counts, according to her ruling. They include sex-trafficking, transportation, and one of the three conspiracy counts.

Nathan agreed that the three conspiracy counts were “multiplicitous”, meaning that “they all charge the same offense”. Under the US constitution’s “double jeopardy” clause, Nathan is prohibited “from imposing multiple punishments for the same offense”.

“The overarching conspiracy – which, as the Government argued and proved at trial, employed a single ‘playbook’ to groom and sexually abuse underage girls – constitutes a single conspiracy offense with multiple victims,” Nathan said.

“This legal conclusion in no way calls into question the factual findings made by the jury,” Nathan said, in explaining her decision. “Rather, it underscores that the jury unanimously found – three times over – that the Defendant is guilty of conspiring with Epstein to entice, transport, and traffic underage girls for sexual abuse.”

Because Nathan will sentence Maxwell on fewer counts, she now faces up to 50 years in federal prison. She had previously faced a maximum 65-year sentence.

Epstein, a convicted sex offender who once counted Prince Andrew among his rich and famous associates, was arrested in July 2019 on sex trafficking

charges. Epstein killed himself about one month later in a New York City federal jail.

Maxwell has maintained her innocence. Her lawyers did not immediately respond to a request for comment.

Nathan's decision on Friday comes about one month after she denied Maxwell's request for a new trial. Maxwell's team had repeatedly requested a new trial after reports revealed that a juror in her case failed to disclose childhood sexual abuse during jury selection.

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## [Islamic State](#)

# **British-born Islamic State member receives life sentence in US trial**

Alexander Kotey of the so-called ‘Beatles’ terror cell given a life sentence for each of the eight counts he pleaded guilty to



Alexander Kotey, left, and El Shafee Elsheikh during an interview with the Associated Press. Photograph: Hussein Malla/AP

*[David Smith](#)in Alexandria, Virginia*

*[@smithinamerica](#)*

Fri 29 Apr 2022 12.57 EDT Last modified on Fri 29 Apr 2022 20.09 EDT

A member of an [Islamic State](#) group that beheaded western hostages in Iraq and Syria, nicknamed “the Beatles” for their British accents, has been sentenced to life in prison in the US.

Alexander Kotey, 38, originally from Paddington, London, stood motionless as Judge Thomas Selby Ellis delivered his verdict at a district court in

Alexandria, [Virginia](#), while members of his victims' families watched.

Kotey was given a life sentence for each of the eight counts to which he pleaded guilty last year when admitting responsibility for the deaths of four American hostages in Syria as well as the kidnapping and torture of numerous journalists and relief workers.

The sentences are to run concurrently for "the period of your natural life", the judge said, describing Kotey's conduct as "egregious, violent and inhumane".

Speaking of Kotey's victims, Ellis added: "These were not prisoners of war, these weren't soldiers in the field. They were soldiers but they were soldiers for good."

Kotey was captured by a Kurdish militia in Syria in January 2018 and handed over to US forces in Iraq before being flown to the US in 2020 to face trial. He was stripped of UK citizenship by the British government.

The judge noted that, under a plea bargain, the US government has committed to seek Kotey's transfer to the UK after 15 years. "That's a pretty major plus for you," Ellis commented.

As the hearing concluded, Bethany Haines, 24, the daughter of British aid worker David Haines, who was abducted and beheaded by Islamic State in Syria in September 2014, walked towards Kotey and said: "I hope you go rot in hell."

Earlier, wearing green prison uniform and long white sleeves, the bearded Kotey sat near El Shafee Elsheik, a fellow convicted "Beatle" who gazed downwards while wearing a mask over his beard, as members of the victims' families read prepared statements into a microphone.

Family member after family member spoke movingly about psychological trauma, lives changed irrevocably, being haunted by trying to imagine their loved ones' final moments and the ripple effect on relatives, friends and communities. Some broke down in tears during the devastating testimony, which was punctuated by and sighs and sniffs in the public gallery.

Bethany Haines told the court that her grandparents “died of grief” and she was diagnosed with post traumatic stress disorder, depression and anxiety. “My whole life has been turned upside down.”

Wearing black, Haines said she had not had a good night’s sleep since before her father was taken. “I wake up during the night hearing my dad’s screams as he is being tortured by these men. I hear him begging for his life and I can’t do anything to save him.”

Haines added that celebrating birthdays or Christmas is no longer enjoyable. “My dad should be celebrating with me, but instead he is in a mass grave in the hills of Raqqa. He hasn’t been laid to rest he was dumped like a bag of rubbish.”

She said the grief had forced her to drop out of school, college and university and she has been unable to hold down a job. “I’m at a loss as what to do with my life. I originally planned to complete my degree at university and work my way up through the police force to become a detective but now I think, what’s the point?”

Haines has a six-year-old son, born in the year following her father’s death. “I struggle to explain to my son why Mummy is so sad all the time, why Mummy has scars on her arms, why Mummy sometimes can’t get out of bed and why Mummy can’t be like the other mummies.”

Haines’s widow, Dragana Prodanovic Haines, broke down at the start of her testimony. She concluded: “I really hope both of you will live at least 200 years to hear about the death of everyone you care about. For all I care you can live long and suffer.”

Her daughter Athea, 11, who lost her father when she was four, added: “I miss him so much. Sometimes I get sad when I see my friends from school and club laughing and playing with their dads. That is something I will never have a chance to do again. It is not easy to be that kid in school whose dad was killed by terrorists.”

There was a dramatic moment in court when Shirley Sotloff, mother of the late journalist Steven Sotloff, challenged the “Beatles” to look her in the eye.

“Elsheikh do not close your eyes, leave them open and look at me,” she demanded. “Yes, you have to do that.”

Elsheikh complied only fleetingly before looking down again and refusing to make eye contact. Sotloff pressed on: “It’s something you see in movies – not in real life. Steven’s death was like a global worldwide horror movie that was witnessed live and continues to be replayed with the click of a button for millions to see.”

She added: “Sleep is never undisturbed even eight years later. The sickness in our stomachs the minute we wake up and the psychological trauma that we relive over and over and over. We are forever broken by the loss of our beloved son and defined as the people from the horror movie.”

At the end of her statement, Sotloff again entreated Elsheikh: “Open your eyes please and look at me. You destroyed our lives and we hope for the rest of your lives you will think about what you have done, and to your families as well.”

Paula Kassig, mother of murdered American aid worker Peter Kassig, said her health had been negatively affected by the loss as she often has insomnia, forgetfulness and palpitations. Both she and her husband took early retirement.

She told the court: “Knowing that the man I rocked to sleep as an infant and whose hand I held when he was fearful as a child was being starved, beaten, tortured, and threatened with death every day for over a year while I was not able to help him at all was beyond my ability to cope.”

Her husband, Ed Kassig, said: “They say, time heals. They lie. And ‘closure’? I’m sorry, that’s just a word to make bystanders of tragedy feel better. We, and our fellow victimized families, bear scarred hearts and souls. For us, the operating word is ‘forever’. I awaken every morning and look into the eyes of my beautiful wife, his mother, knowing they can’t unsee unspeakable horror.

“At totally unpredictable times, the enormity of it all, like a rogue wave will catch me off guard and dash me to the ground. How does one ‘price out’ the

cost of losing a lifetime's worth of watching one's child grow and have children of their own? He was the last Kassig of his generation. The last male. The name dies."

Ed Kassig also noted: "It was we, the victims, who lobbied long and hard to keep them out of Gitmo and avoid the death penalty."

Carl Mueller, father of the killed humanitarian worker Kayla Mueller, addressed the defendants directly. "Who takes a young woman, an aid worker, whose life work is to help people, to heal people, who takes a woman like that? Cowards. That's who does that.

"Bravery is what you are witnessing here today. She would have helped hundred, maybe thousands of people, during her lifetime, and you took her from the world."

At times even Ellis, a deeply experienced judge, appeared to be struggling to compose himself. After the statements, he said: "Countries celebrate heroes and we should celebrate these individuals who demonstrated courage, purpose and compassion under the most difficult of circumstances."

He added: "The victims of the hostage-taking by Isis are undeniably heroes."

Elsheikh, who was also stripped of British citizenship, is due to be sentenced on 19 August after being convicted of his role in the plot.

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## New York

# Judge denies Trump's request to end contempt order and \$10,000-a-day fine

New York judge said there was no evidence Trump had conducted a thorough search for the records sought by attorney general



Donald Trump, a Republican, has denied wrongdoing and calls the investigation politically motivated. Photograph: Saul Loeb/AFP/Getty Images

*Reuters*

Fri 29 Apr 2022 13.55 EDT Last modified on Fri 29 Apr 2022 14.37 EDT

A New York judge on Friday denied a request from Donald Trump's lawyer to end a contempt-of-court finding against the former US president and kept in place \$10,000-a-day fine over his failure to comply with a subpoena issued by the state attorney general investigating the business practices of Trump's family company, the Trump Organization.

Justice Arthur Engoron in [New York](#) state court in Manhattan said he was not satisfied with an affidavit provided by Trump and said there was no evidence Trump had conducted a thorough search for the records sought by New York's attorney general, Letitia James.

"I am surprised he doesn't seem to have any documents, they're all with the organization," the judge said.

"I will consider your request to terminate the fine," he told Trump lawyer Alina Habba. "But if you don't hear from me, the clock is still ticking."

James says her investigation has turned up evidence the Trump Organization, which manages hotels, golf courses and other real estate around the world, has given banks and tax authorities misleading financing information in order to obtain financial benefits such as favorable loans and tax breaks.

Trump, a Republican, has denied wrongdoing and calls the investigation politically motivated. James is a Democrat.

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## [Donald Trump](#)

# Trump mocked for fearing protesters would throw ‘dangerous’ fruit at him

Late-night talkshow hosts juice former president’s testimony to attorneys representing a group of protesters suing over 2015 rally



Donald Trump throws hats at a rally in Wellington, Ohio, in June 2021.  
Photograph: Tony Dejak/AP

[Adrian Horton](#) and [Richard Luscombe](#)

Fri 29 Apr 2022 14.11 EDT Last modified on Fri 29 Apr 2022 14.14 EDT

Donald Trump has been mocked for fearing protesters would throw “dangerous” fruit at him, with [late-night talkshow host Trevor Noah](#) calling it “one of the most crazy defenses I’ve ever heard”.

The revelation came during the former president’s testimony to attorneys representing a group of protesters suing over their violent removal from a Trump campaign rally in 2015.

According to the transcript of the deposition, when asked about his statement to the crowd that “If you see someone getting ready to throw a tomato, just knock the crap out of them, would you,” Trump replied: “It’s very dangerous stuff. You can get killed with those things.

“We were threatened,” the president added. “They were going to throw fruit. We were threatened. We had a threat.

Trump also said: “I wanted to have people be ready because we were put on alert that they were going to do fruit.”

“What do you mean ‘do fruit’?” said Late Night host [Seth Meyers](#) on Thursday’s episode. “What do you mean you were put on alert? There’s an alert system for fruit? It’s like the homeland security threat level? Red’s tomato, yellow is for banana and green is for avocado.

“You know what they say,” Meyers added, “if you get hit with an avocado, you’re toast.”

Trump claimed in the deposition that he became aware of the threat of being beaned by a tomato because the Secret Service warned him:

“We were told. I thought Secret Service was involved in that, actually. And you get hit with fruit, it’s very violent stuff. Tomato, when they start doing that stuff, it’s very dangerous. There was an alert out that day.”

Perhaps aware of the potentially serious consequences of admitting he had intended security staff or other rally attendees to commit violence, Trump insisted his “knock the crap out them, would you” comment was a joke.

“It was said sort of in jest. But maybe, you know, a little truth to it. I wanted to have people be ready because we were put on alert that they were going to do fruit. And some fruit is a lot worse than … tomatoes are bad by the way. But it’s very dangerous … they were going to hit very hard.”

The videotaped deposition took place in New York’s Bronx county in October 2021. Noah, on his show, simply read the transcript aloud, because “no comedy writer is going to come up with something funnier than [Trump’s deposition](#)”.

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## [Angela Rayner](#)

# Tory whips ‘asking questions’ to find MP behind Angela Rayner claims

Speaker seeks meeting with Mail on Sunday editor as PM threatens to unleash ‘terrors of the earth’

- [Today’s politics news – live updates](#)

MP behind 'misogynist' Rayner story will be punished, warns Johnson – video

*[Rowena Mason](#), [Archie Bland](#) and [Rachel Hall](#)*

Mon 25 Apr 2022 15.23 EDTFirst published on Mon 25 Apr 2022 04.23 EDT

Conservative whips have said they are trying to find out the identity of the Tory MP responsible for [misogynistic attacks on Angela Rayner](#), with a view to taking disciplinary action after Boris Johnson threatened to unleash “the terrors of the earth” against the culprit.

The prime minister hit out at the “sexist, misogynistic tripe” in the [Mail on Sunday](#), which ran allegations from an anonymous MP that Rayner, Labour’s deputy leader, deliberately tried to distract Johnson by crossing and uncrossing her legs in the House of Commons.

Following outrage across Westminster, the Speaker, Sir Lindsay Hoyle, told MPs on Monday that he had asked for a meeting with the [Mail on Sunday](#) editor, David Dillon, as well as the chair of the press gallery in the Commons.

It comes after Caroline Nokes, the Conservative chair of the women and equalities committee, wrote to Hoyle asking him to look into revoking the

parliamentary pass of the article's author, Glen Owen.

Amid pressure to unmask the MP behind the claims, a source close to the whips said: “Questions are being asked around the palace and if the anonymous source is identified, action will be taken.” However, their action appears to stop short of a formal investigation.

The Independent Press Standards Organisation (Ipso) received more than 5,000 complaints about the story, which Rayner described as “gutter journalism” while accusing the sources of “spreading desperate, perverted smears in their doomed attempts to save [the prime minister’s] skin”.

The newspaper had reported that a Tory MP claimed Rayner was adopting a “Basic Instinct” style ploy towards Johnson, in a reference to the Sharon Stone 1992 film in which she flashes a policeman during an interview.

Following the outcry, a number of female MPs spoke of their own experiences of sexism in Westminster. Nokes told the [Guardian's First Edition newsletter](#) that she had once been the subject of an article along with former Tory MP Claire Perry “that actually compared our boobs”. Labour MP Kim Leadbeater recounted how she had been in a meeting with a male MP who “definitely spoke more comfortably … to my male staff member than he did to me”.

The shadow chancellor, Rachel Reeves, told BBC Radio 4 that a Tory MP had questioned how, with a newborn baby, she would have been able to be a cabinet minister if [Labour](#) had won the election. She said the slur against Rayner was “the sort of thing that happens day in, day out in parliament”.

The incident “shines a spotlight” on other female MPs’ experiences of sexism and misogyny, she said. “I am sick and tired of the way that female MPs and women are treated in parliament, and if this story, this outrageous slur on Angela, gets change, that would be a good thing,” she said.

Johnson suggested his party would investigate to find out who was responsible for the claims. Asked whether there was a cultural problem in parliament, Johnson said: “It’s hard to say on the basis of that particular story. But I have to say I thought it was the most appalling load of sexist,

misogynist tripe. I immediately got in touch with Angela and we had a very friendly exchange.”

In a reference to King Lear, he threatened to unleash “the terrors of the earth” on the source behind the comments if they were identified. “If we ever find who is responsible for it, I don’t know what we will do, but they will be the terrors of the earth,” he said. “It’s totally intolerable, that kind of thing.”

The Speaker has not commented on the calls for Owen to lose his Commons pass but is expected to give Dillon a dressing down when he meets the newspaper’s editor. There is also a precedent for a non-MP being hauled before the House of Commons itself to apologise for an article – in 1957. On that occasion, the editor of the Sunday Express, John Junor, was brought by the serjeant at arms to the bar and admonished by the Speaker for publishing an article that cast doubt on the integrity of MPs over their constituency petrol allowances.

In the Commons on Monday, Hoyle said: “I share the views expressed by a wide range of members ... that yesterday’s article was reporting unsubstantial claims [that were] misogynistic and offensive. Those are what we believe. In being demeaning, offensive to women in parliament, it can only deter women who might considering standing for election, to the detriment of us all.”

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Earlier on Monday, Chris Philp, a junior minister, said he expected government whips would investigate and that if the source’s identity emerged then he would “imagine they would be subject to discipline”.

Asked why Johnson and the culture secretary, Nadine Dorries, had posted identical tweets denouncing the claims, Philp said this was “nothing surprising” because they had “reached the same view and they have used the same words”.

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

## Speaker summons Mail on Sunday editor to meeting to discuss sexist article about Angela Rayner – as it happened

Prime minister threatens to unleash ‘[the terrors of the earth](#)’ on the source behind the comments if they are identified. This live blog is now closed – for updates on the war in Ukraine, [please follow this live blog](#)

- [Speaker summons Mail on Sunday editor to discuss Rayner article](#)
- [PM threatens ‘terrors of the earth’ over Tory’s Rayner claims](#)
- [Summary of Johnson’s pooled TV interview](#)
- [Priti Patel’s refugee pushback policy withdrawn](#)
- [PM backs Rees-Mogg’s ‘Dickensian’ approach to wfh](#)
- [Summary of Downing Street lobby briefing](#)
- [Tories could lose 1.3m voters if net zero target ditched, says poll](#)

Updated 6d ago

[Andrew Sparrow](#)

Mon 25 Apr 2022 12.57 EDTFirst published on Mon 25 Apr 2022 04.27 EDT

MP behind 'misogynist' Rayner story will be punished, warns Johnson – video

[Andrew Sparrow](#)

Mon 25 Apr 2022 12.57 EDTFirst published on Mon 25 Apr 2022 04.27 EDT

## Key events

- [6d ago Afternoon summary](#)
- [6d ago Speaker summons Mail on Sunday editor to meeting to discuss sexist article about Angela Rayner](#)
- [6d ago Johnson rejects claims he is liability to Tories in local elections](#)
- [6d ago Johnson says source behind sexist story against Angela Rayner will be punished if caught](#)
- [6d ago No 10 backs Rees-Mogg over Dorries on getting civil servants back into office](#)
- [6d ago Johnson has not yet received a fine over No 10 garden party, Downing Street says](#)
- [6d ago Minister rejects claims elections bill will undermine independence of Electoral Commission](#)

Show key events only

## Live feed

Show key events only

From 6d ago

[09.40](#)

## **Speaker summons Mail on Sunday editor to meeting to discuss sexist article about Angela Rayner**

In the Commons **Sir Lindsay Hoyle**, the Speaker, has joined those criticising the [Mail on Sunday](#) for its sexist report about Angela Rayner. He said coverage like this was demeaning and offensive to MPs.

He said that he would be inviting the editor of the Mail on Sunday, David Dillon, as well as the chair of parliamentary lobby (the group representing lobby journalists), Bloomberg's Kitty Donaldson, to discuss the matter further.

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Updated at 09.48 EDT

[6d ago](#)[12.49](#)

## Afternoon summary

- Sir Lindsay Hoyle, the Commons Speaker, has summoned the editor of the Mail on Sunday, David Dillon, to a meeting to discuss a story published by the paper yesterday that was widely condemned as sexist. Hoyle said reporting like this discouraged women from standing for parliament. (See [2.54pm.](#)) Earlier [Boris Johnson described the article as “sexist, misogynist tripe”](#) and said if the Tory source for the story were identified, they would be punished.
- [No 10 has backed Jacob Rees-Mogg over Nadine Dorries amid a cabinet split over his drive to get civil servants to stop working from home, which Dorries had labelled “Dickensian”.](#)
- [British universities are facing a brain drain as the row over Brexit in Northern Ireland threatens £250m in research funding from the EU, it has emerged.](#) As my colleague Lisa O’Carroll reports, the European [Research](#) Council (ERC) has written to 98 scientists and academics who were recently approved for €172m (£145m) in grants telling them that if the UK’s associate membership of the €80bn Horizon Europe programme is not ratified they will not be eligible to draw down the money.

- The Labour party has vowed to abolish the “non-dom” tax loophole used by Rishi Sunak’s wife to save paying up to £20m in UK tax. Labour says the move could raise up to £1bn for the exchequer, but tax experts have questioned this, on the grounds that the 76,000 non-doms in the UK contributed £7.9bn in tax in 2019-20 (the most recent year for which data is available), including £5.6bn in income tax. “If non-dom status is scrapped, there is a real risk that the net effect on the UK tax base will be negative, not positive,” said Josie Hills, a tax manager at the law firm **Pinsent Masons**.  
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6d ago12.18

ITV's political editor **Robert Peston** says in a blog that Boris Johnson has not even received a questionnaire from the Metropolitan police about his attendance at the party in the No 10 garden on 20 May 2020, even though some fines have already been issued in connection with the event. He says his brain is aching trying to comprehend the logic behind the Met's approach. He says:

I want to stress, for the avoidance of doubt, that I am not saying it is a scandal or miscarriage of justice or wrong that the PM hasn't been fined for the event on May 20, 2020. The point is I don't know.

It is also theoretically possible that Boris Johnson will end up receiving a questionnaire and being fined, and that he is simply at the back of some weird bureaucratic queue. But this anomaly is not trivial. It matters, to the public reputation of the prime minister, how many times he is fined for breaching the Covid rules he wrote ...

Even when there are bigger problems directly affecting our lives to solve - Vladimir Putin, the cost of living - a police investigation of a serving prime minister is a massive deal. The lack of clarity and transparency on it undermines confidence in our version of democracy.

Public understanding of how the police conduct the probe and reach their decisions will be hugely important if the police themselves are to avoid the taint of incompetence or political partiality.

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Updated at 12.57 EDT

[6d ago](#)[11.56](#)

**Sir Stephen Lovegrove**, the national security adviser, has been giving evidence to the Commons foreign affairs committee about the decision to approve the decision to evacuate staff and animals from the Nowzad charity from Kabul last summer, as part of the airlift of Britons and Afghans at risk from the Taliban. (See [11.57am](#).) He says Boris Johnson was not directly involved in the decision. Asked about evidence given to the committee at an earlier hearing by an official who said Lovegrove was asked to get guidance from No 10 about the Nowzad staff, Lovegrove said he had “no memory” of speaking to No 10 about that matter. He said that he could not remember much from what happened that morning. His call logs and his emails showed nothing to suggest he had been in contact with No 10 about this, he added.



Stephen Lovegrove. Photograph: HoC

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Updated at 12.03 EDT

6d ago**11.03**

**Ben Wallace**, the defence secretary, has confirmed in a statement to MPs that the UK will be sending a small number of Stormer missile launching vehicles to Ukraine. These are from my colleague **Dan Sabbagh**.

Ben Wallace tells MPs UK will provide "a small number" of Stormer missile launcher vehicles to Ukraine...

— Dan Sabbagh (@dansabbagh) [April 25, 2022](#)

...also promises to "offer a deployment" of an unspecified number of Challenger 2 tanks to Poland to "bridge the gap" between Warsaw donating T-72s and the arrival of new US made tanks

— Dan Sabbagh (@dansabbagh) [April 25, 2022](#)

Stormer vehicle deployment to Ukraine is no surprise - although offer of tanks to Poland seems to have firmed up somewhat since Boris Johnson referred to it in India on Friday

— Dan Sabbagh (@dansabbagh) [April 25, 2022](#)

UK has sent 5,361 NLAWs, 200 Javelins and will provide 250 Starstreak anti-air missiles Wallace tells MPs.

Adds Treasury has agreed to fund "new for old replacement" + efforts being made with industry "to replenish as soon as we can".

— Dan Sabbagh (@dansabbagh) [April 25, 2022](#)

NLAWs are next-generation light anti-tank weapons, and Javelins are anti-tank missiles.

In his opening statement Wallace also said Ukraine had been an inspiration. He said:

At the start of this conflict Russia had committed over 120 battalion tactical groups, approximately 65% of its entire ground combat strength. As of now we assess around over 25% of these have been rendered not combat effective.

Ukraine is an inspiration to us all. Their brave people have never stopped fighting for their lands. They have endured indiscriminate bombardment, war crimes and overwhelming military aggression but they have stood firm, galvanised the international community and beaten back the army of Russia in the north and the north east.

We anticipate this next phase of the invasion will be an attempt by Russia to occupy further the Donbas and connect via Mariupol the Crimea so it's urgent that we in the international community ensure Ukraine gets the aid and weapons it so much needs.

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Updated at 11.41 EDT

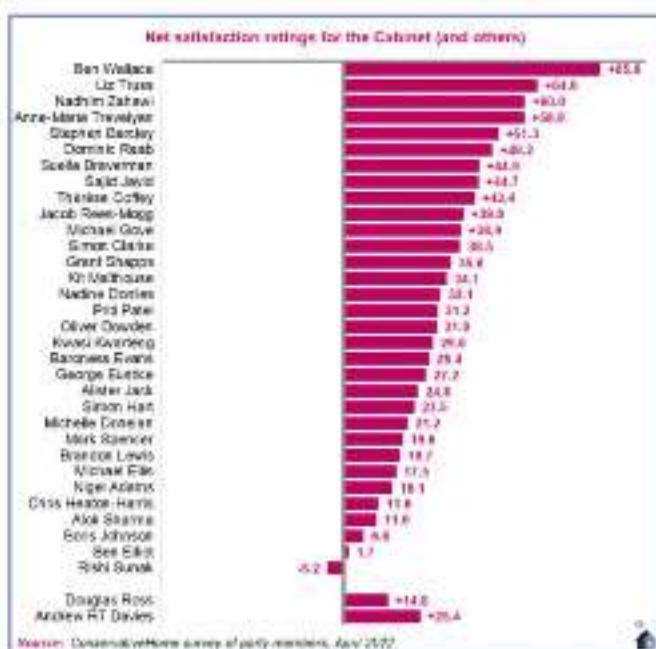
6d ago **10.47**

Rishi Sunak, the chancellor, was once seen as Boris Johnson's most likely successor as Tory leader and prime minister. But his reputation in the party has collapsed in the light of the spring statement and the controversy about his wife's non-dom status, and he is now the cabinet minister least rated by Conservative members, according to [ConservativeHome's regular survey of Tory members.](#)

Boris Johnson is third from bottom in the league table. In their write-up, **Paul Goodman** and **Henry Hill** says:

Ukraine will have pushed him up last month; Partygate will have pulled him down this. But the driver of his low scores is that the government is too left-wing, at least in the view of many activists.

Priti Patel, the home secretary, was in bottom place last month, but her approval rating has soared following the announcement of her plan to effectively deport some asylum seekers to Rwanda.



Approval ratings for cabinet ministers among Tory members. Photograph: ConservativeHome

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Updated at 10.56 EDT

[6d ago](#)[10.37](#)

This is from the **Independent Press Standards Organisation**, a media regulator, on the [Mail on Sunday](#) article about Angela Rayner.

We are currently receiving a high volume of complaints about a Mail on Sunday concerning Deputy Leader of the Labour Party Angela Rayner. We are dealing with these under our normal procedures.

— Independent Press Standards Organisation (IPSO) (@IpsoNews)  
[April 25, 2022](#)

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[6d ago](#)[10.12](#)



Lisa O'Carroll

A row over the legality of the Brexit deal is set to go to the supreme court.

Senior judges in Belfast agreed to allow a group of unionists challenge an appeal court ruling over the Northern Ireland protocol, which mandates customs and physical checks on goods crossing the Irish Sea from Great Britain.

It will be asked to decide whether the protocol had illegally trumped the Acts of Union 1800 or elements of the Northern Ireland Act 1998 which followed the Good Friday peace accord in the same year.

Three legal points of public importance were identified for consideration in the ongoing campaign being mounted by the Traditional Unionist Voice leader, Jim Allister, and other representatives.

Lady chief justice **Dame Siobhan Keegan** confirmed: “We have considered the papers, and in the circumstances of this case we are going to grant leave to appeal to the supreme court.”

A judicial review challenge was originally brought last year by a group of unionist politicians and supporters including Allister, former Brexit party MEP Ben Habib, former Labour MP Kate Hoey, former DUP leader Arlene

Foster, former UUP leader Steve Aiken and one of the architects of the Belfast Good Friday agreement, Lord Trimble.

An adjoined case was taken by Belfast loyalist pastor Clifford Peebles.

You can read why the court of appeal dismissed the earlier appeals [here](#).

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Updated at 10.31 EDT

[6d ago](#)09.54

This is what **Sir Lindsay Hoyle**, the Commons Speaker, said told the Commons a few minutes ago about the [Mail on Sunday](#) article.

At the start of today's business I want to say something about the article in yesterday's Mail on Sunday about [Angela Rayner].

I said to the house last week, in response to a point of order about a different article, that I took the issue of media freedom very seriously. It is one of the building blocks of our democracy.

However, I share the views expressed by a wide range of members, including I believe the prime minister, that yesterday's article was reporting unsubstantial claims [that were] misogynistic and offensive. Those are what we believe.

I express my sympathy to [Rayner], subject to this type of comment. In being demeaning, offensive to women in parliament, it can only deter women who might consider standing for election to the detriment of us all.

That is why I have arranged a meeting with the chair of the press lobby [and] the editor of the Mail on Sunday to discuss the issue affecting our parliamentary community.

As my colleague **Jessica Elgot** points out, Hoyle's final comment will cause some confusion because at Westminster there is a press gallery chair as well as a lobby chair. Presumably they can both go to the meeting.

This will cause some niche confusion given we have both a chair of the lobby and chair of the press gallery <https://t.co/rfPUXQo0yZ>

— Jessica Elgot (@jessicaelgot) [April 25, 2022](#)



Lindsay Hoyle. Photograph: HoC

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Updated at 10.00 EDT

[6d ago](#)[09.40](#)

**Speaker summons Mail on Sunday editor to meeting to discuss sexist article about Angela Rayner**

In the Commons **Sir Lindsay Hoyle**, the Speaker, has joined those criticising the [Mail on Sunday](#) for its sexist report about Angela Rayner. He said coverage like this was demeaning and offensive to MPs.

He said that he would be inviting the editor of the Mail on Sunday, David Dillon, as well as the chair of parliamentary lobby (the group representing lobby journalists), Bloomberg's Kitty Donaldson, to discuss the matter further.

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Updated at 09.48 EDT

[6d ago](#)[09.16](#)

## **Johnson rejects claims he is liability to Tories in local elections**

And here is a full summary of what **Boris Johnson** said in his pooled TV interview. He was speaking to the BBC's Nick Eardley.

- **Johnson said that the Tory source behind the sexist briefing to the Mail on Sunday about Angela Rayner will be punished if they are caught.** (See [1.16pm.](#))
- **He sidestepped a question about whether he would resign if the Sue Gray report is as damning about him as some reports claim it might be.** (See [10.50am.](#)) Asked if there were any circumstances in which he might read the report and resign, he said there were no circumstances in which he would comment on the report before it was out.

- **He said people should vote Conservative in the local elections because Conservative councils provided value for money.** He said:

I think the case is very, very clear. It is Conservative councils that charge you less, it is Labour councils that have record council taxes. We're the party that does more to empty your bins, does more to fix potholes - I think I'm right in saying that Conservative councils fill in four times as many potholes as Labour councils. What we believe in fundamentally is delivering value for money and getting over the job. That is what Conservative councils do.

- **He did not comment on a suggestion that the [Conservatives](#) might lose 800 council seats in the elections.** Eardley mentioned this figure when he asked how bad the results might be for the party. In response, Johnson just stressed reasons why people should vote for the Tories.
- **He rejected suggestions he was a liability to the Conservatives in the local elections.** Asked if he was an asset to the party, he said that the asset that party had was “the dynamism, energy and effort that Conservative councillors put in up and down the land to delivering better services, based on the sound Conservative principle of taxpayer value”. Pressed a second time on whether he was an asset to the party, he said “I’m not denying that”, before repeating the point about councillors.
- **He welcomed Emmanuel Macron’s re-election as French president.** He said:

I think it's very important that we have in Paris, a president of the French Republic who can be relied upon when it comes to some of the most important international issues, and particularly when you look at what's been going on in Ukraine.

It's not right for friendly governments to comment on elections in neighbouring countries but what I can certainly say is that it is very, very important that Emmanuel and I have been able to work closely together on Ukraine over the last few weeks and months.

We share a very common, very similar perspective and the unity of the west, the unity of Nato, has been absolutely vital for the stance we've taken against Putin, and that will now continue and I'm very, very reassured by that.

- He highlighted government plans to create an independent regulator for football, saying the new figure would “help fans to stick up for their interests, and stick up for the interests of historic clubs”. But he sidestepped a question about when a new regulator might be appointed. Asked if the new system could be in place within months, he just said that the government wanted to make “rapid legislative progress” and that it was going “as fast as we possibly can”. Here is my colleague **Paul MacInnes**'s story about the new regulator.



Boris Johnson holding a shirt with his name on next to the fans in the stands during a visit to Bury FC Photograph: WPA/Getty Images

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Updated at 09.24 EDT

[6d ago09.07](#)

The Conservative party could lose more than 1.3 million voters if the government scraps its net zero target, research suggests. My colleague **Helena Horton** has the story here.

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[6d ago08.43](#)



Boris Johnson visiting the football club Bury FC at their ground in Gigg Lane, Bury, today. Photograph: Danny Lawson/AFP/Getty Images

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[6d ago08.32](#)

In his TV clip talking about what he might do to the Tory source behind the Mail on Sunday story about Angela Rayner, **Boris Johnson** referenced [a quote from King Lear:](#)

I will do such things,—

What they are, yet I know not: but they shall be

The terrors of the earth.

At this point Lear is ranting about the disloyalty of his daughters. He is also starting to go mad. It is not a comparison that Johnson ought to welcome.

Perhaps he has been re-reading his Shakespeare with a mind to getting on with the biography of the bard that he has been commissioned to write. It has been claimed that [he was working on it in early 2020](#) when he should have been focusing on Covid.

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[6d ago](#)[08.16](#)

## **Johnson says source behind sexist story against Angela Rayner will be punished if caught**

**Boris Johnson** has recorded a TV interview on a campaign trip, and he has used it to claim that if he identifies the Tory source who gave a sexist briefing to the [Mail on Sunday](#) about Angela Rayner, they face punishment. Johnson said:

I have to say I thought it was the most appalling load of sexist, misogynist tripe. I immediately got in touch with Angela and we had a very friendly exchange.

As PA Media reports, in a King Lear reference, he threatened to unleash “the terrors of the earth” on the source behind the comments if they were ever identified.

If we ever find who is responsible for it, I don’t know what we will do, but they will be the terrors of the earth. It’s totally intolerable, that kind of thing.

Sky News has just broadcast the clip now. As he talks about the “terrors of the earth”, Johnson frowns, and looks serious, but hyperbole like this normally implies Johnson is exaggerating for comic effect. There is a risk that a quote intended to show he is taking this seriously could have the opposite effect.

As the Lib Dems have argued in the past, if Johnson is keen to root out people in the Conservative party who have expressed sexist views, [other culprits are available.](#)



Boris Johnson being interviewed today Photograph: Sky News

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Updated at 09.14 EDT

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## [UK news](#)

# First victim named as man arrested over four killed in south London

Grandmother believed to be one of victims as three women and a man pronounced dead after police called to home in Southwark



Dolet Hill, a former employee at Guy's and St Thomas' hospitals, was one of the victims, her niece said. Photograph: Facebook

*[Rachel Hall](#) and [Jamie Grierson](#)*

Mon 25 Apr 2022 13.02 EDTFirst published on Mon 25 Apr 2022 03.58 EDT

A grandmother was among four people stabbed to death in a house in south London, a family member has said, after a man was arrested on suspicion of their murder.

The Metropolitan police are investigating the deaths after police were called to a residential address on Delaford Road in Bermondsey at about 1.40am on

Monday after reports of a disturbance.

After forcing entry, they found four people inside – three women and a man – with stab injuries.

A man aged in his late 20s, who was known to them, has been arrested on suspicion of murder and remains in custody.

Venecia Reid, the niece of one of the women, told the Evening Standard that grandmother Dolet Hill, a former employee at Guy's and St Thomas' hospitals, was among the victims.

Speaking of her aunt, Reid said: “She was very loving, very kind, very generous. She worked very hard in this country to support her two girls and her two grandkids. She does not deserve this.”

It has been reported that one of the victims was Hill’s partner.

Speaking to reporters, local police commander Colin Wingrove confirmed that the four deceased individuals were three women, thought to be in their mid-60s, 40s and 30s, and one man in his mid-60s.

The arrested suspect is a man in his late 20s, he said. “At this early stage, officers are not looking for any other person.”

### Locator

The four people were attended to by emergency services but all died from their wounds at the scene. Officers are contacting next of kin and postmortem examinations will be arranged shortly.

It is thought all five people were known to each other. However, Wingrove was unable to say whether they were family members. He appealed to anyone with information on the “deeply shocking incident” to contact the police, and added that support would be available for the local community.

Pictures from the scene showed that part of the road was closed off with metal hoarding and a number of forensic tents had been put up.

The arrested man was taken to a south London police station where he remains in custody while detectives investigate.

Anne Birkett, 60, who lives near the property where the victims were found, said she was woken up by police sirens and a circling helicopter just before 2am.

Birkett said: “It’s devastating – you hear all of this but you never assume it’s going to be right on your own doorstep. I’m a foster carer and I’ve got children in my care, and now I’ve got to protect them now because of what’s happened.”

A resident of the adjacent road, Bramcote Grove, who did not want to be named, said: “When I saw four ambulances – not one, not two, but four – I knew it was serious.”

Neighbours who spoke to the Guardian shared their shock and said they believed it was an isolated incident.

One resident of Bramcote Grove, Danny Smith, 39, said he heard screaming on and off for five minutes at about 1am. He has lived in the area for 20 years and is an acquaintance of the household in which the stabbings took place. He said he believed four people were living in the house, whom he described as “such a nice family”.

Smith said that although he had heard occasional police raids, he had never heard of an incident on this scale in the area. “It’s the worst thing that’s ever happened here. It’s not the nicest neighbourhood, but everybody knows each other,” he said.

He added that he saw armed police officers arrive in the early hours of the morning.

Another neighbour, who asked not to be named, said the screams on Monday morning sounded like “someone getting battered”. He added: “It’s a very barbaric act, it’s tragic what happened there.”

The London mayor, Sadiq Khan, said: “I am heartbroken that three women and a man were killed last night in a devastating incident at an address in

Southwark. My thoughts are with the family and friends of those who have lost loved ones in this awful crime. I am in contact with the leadership of the Metropolitan police.

“An investigation is under way and one man has been arrested. I urge anyone who has information that could be relevant to contact the police immediately.”

A spokesperson for London ambulance service said: “We were called at 2.07am today to reports of an incident on Delaford Road, Bermondsey.

“We sent three ambulance crews, two fast response units, two incident response officers, two advanced paramedics and a team leader to the scene. Our team worked closely with colleagues from other emergency services. Sadly, despite the best efforts of our medics, four patients died at the scene.”

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This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2022/apr/25/southwark-london-four-people-stabbed-to-death-man-held>

## The super-rich

# Rachel Reeves promises Labour will close ‘non-dom’ tax loophole

Shadow chancellor says it ‘isn’t right that those at the top benefit from outdated tax perks’



Rachel Reeves, the shadow chancellor, says Labour is sending a clear message to the world’s super-rich. Photograph: UK Parliament/Jessica Taylor/PA

*[Rupert Neate](#) Wealth correspondent*

*[@RupertNeate](#)*

Mon 25 Apr 2022 01.00 EDT Last modified on Tue 26 Apr 2022 08.58 EDT

The Labour party has vowed to abolish the “non-dom” tax loophole used by [Rishi Sunak’s wife](#) to save paying up to £20m in UK tax.

Rachel Reeves, the shadow chancellor, said it “simply isn’t right that those at the top can benefit from outdated non-dom tax perks” while ordinary

people struggle with tax rises and the cost of living crisis.

Reeves on Monday said [Labour](#) was sending “a clear message” to the global super-rich: “If you make your home in Britain you should pay tax here – on all of your income.”

Labour’s pledge follows the revelation that Sunak’s billionaire heiress wife, [Akshata Murty](#), had been registered as a non-domiciled person for nine years and was paying an annual levy in order to shelter her foreign income from HMRC.

The status meant she could legally avoid UK tax on annual dividends worth millions, which she collected from her family’s IT business empire.

Following days of mounting public and political outrage, Murty announced this month she would begin paying tax on her worldwide income. However, she will not do so on backdated income. She also refused to give up her non-dom status, which could in future allow her family a legal means of avoiding an inheritance tax bill of more than £275m.

It also emerged that Sajid Javid, the health secretary, [held non-dom status](#) for six years while a banker, also allowing him to avoid tax on overseas earnings without breaking the law.

“With Labour, people who make the UK their home will contribute to this country by paying tax on their global income,” Reeves said.

“The prime minister and chancellor have spent the last few weeks preoccupied with saving their own skins, and have done nothing to tackle the spiralling cost of living. Even worse, they’ve made it harder for working people to make ends meet by hiking national insurance.”

Reeves promised that a Labour government would “tax fairly, spend wisely, and grow the economy”.

Proponents of non-dom status have warned that scrapping it could deter business owners from investing in the UK and creating jobs.

Reeves said Labour would replace the non-dom status – which was introduced under King George III in 1799 when Britain was fighting France – with a modern scheme for people who are “genuinely living in the UK for short periods to allow us to continue to attract top international talent”.

Labour said it would consult widely on how its new “temporary resident tax regime” would work but that any tax advantages would be likely to expire after five years, compared with up to 15 years under the current system.

The party said its plan would finally “put an end to the broken 200-year-old system that lets people dodge millions in tax, and bring our rules into line with those of systems similar to other major economies such as France, Germany and Canada”.

Scrapping the non-dom scheme could lead to a £1bn boost to the exchequer, Labour claimed [citing research](#) by the EU Tax Observatory.

The number of people who have ever claimed non-dom status in the UK rose from 162,000 in 2001 to 238,000 in 2018, according to a [study by the London School of Economics](#) and the University of Warwick.

This is not the first time Labour has promised tackle the controversial tax loophole, including while in government.

When Gordon Brown was chancellor, he used his 2002 budget to announce a review of non-dom rules following public outrage at the revelation that Hans Rausing, then the UK’s richest person, [claimed non-dom status](#).

Brown declared that the country “must act swiftly to close tax loopholes and be vigilant against tax avoidance”.

However, it took a year to produce a “discussion document” that ruminated on possible changes but no action was taken.

Critics suggest that the very rich non-doms and their well-paid advisers lobbied hard for the tax scheme to be left in place, claiming that if scrapped the global super-rich would leave the UK and take their money with them.

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During the period that potential changes were under discussion, steel billionaire Lakshmi Mittal – a non-dom – [became the Labour party's biggest donor](#). Mittal, who owns a £90m mansion on Kensington Palace Gardens next door to fellow non-dom Roman Abramovich, donated £125,000 in 2001 (before the review) but increased his donation to £2m in 2005 and gave a further [£2m in 2007](#).

In 2015, then Labour leader Ed Miliband also [promised to axe](#) the “indefensible” non-dom tax scheme.

A spokesperson for Gordon Brown said: “Throughout the 13 years of the Labour government we were extremely concerned about the avoidance of tax by companies and individuals claiming domicile elsewhere or finding other ways to escape paying their full share of tax due and in every single budget there was a series of new measures to address abuse and avoidance ... It was after 2010 that the coalition government eased up on tackling tax avoidance.”

This article was updated on 25 April 2022 to include a quote from Gordon Brown’s spokesperson. As an earlier version of the article said, opportunity to comment had been declined prior to publication.

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## 2022.04.25 - Spotlight

- 'An apparition came towards me' Tracey Emin on seeing a ghost and building a new life in Margate
- Surviving a setback Books, music, films and more about dealing with disappointment
- A new start after 60 'I trained to be a flight attendant – it's the only way I could explore the world'
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[Tracey Emin](#)

Interview

## **‘An apparition came towards me’: Tracey Emin on seeing a ghost and building a new life in Margate**

[Jonathan Jones](#)



Fresh from snipping a ribbon at the opening of a new sweet shop ... the artist outside her new house in Margate. Photograph: Martin Godwin/The Guardian

Still in recovery from cancer, the artist has moved home with plans to open an art school, launch a catering college, and even spruce up the streets. She talks about her new sense of freedom – and the pain that infused her latest devastating nudes



Mon 25 Apr 2022 01.00 EDT Last modified on Tue 26 Apr 2022 06.47 EDT

Tracey Emin is curled up on the red sofa of her new home in Margate, with her kittens Teacup and Pancake lolling beside her. “Some critic,” she tells me, “said I was influenced by Matisse. I said, ‘Oh, you mean because of this?’” She raises her right hand and places it behind her neck, adopting the posture of Matisse’s famous [Blue Nude](#). “And I asked, ‘Are you saying that Matisse owns the way that women sit?’”

It can certainly feel that way, given the propensity of female nudes in Matisse’s oeuvre. The same could be said of Picasso, Botticelli and [Titian](#), too. But Emin is now seeking to take back this territory – in spectacular fashion. “The nude, the naked female body, is the big picture,” she says. “It’s archetypal, everybody understands it. It’s like a cave drawing.”

I had half my vagina cut away. If a guy had half his dick cut off, he'd soon start complaining

As she speaks, I am reminded of the images I have just watched being hung in the Carl Freedman Gallery, which adjoins her studio and living space in Margate. Inked in black and white, with flows and smears of grey, these startling new nudes are bigger than life-sized, adorning sheets of paper two and a half metres wide. Made with a little help from the biggest silkscreen frame in Europe, they are, I think, her best figurative works yet, their physical features drawn with an anatomical insight and frankness that renders them as shocking as they are beautiful. Unlike Matisse, Emin doesn't need a model in a Nice hotel room to know a woman's buttocks, legs, back, tummy and face. "Because it's me," she says.

The artist has been painting, drawing and photographing herself for a long time but these latest nudes are her grandest and most honest yet, appearing in a show called A Journey to Death. Depicting pain, fear and a lust for life, they are her response to the bladder cancer she was diagnosed with in 2020, and to [the surgery that saved her life but changed her body](#).



'I went through something quite horrific' ... Emin's self-portrait Like The Moon You Rolled Across My Back. Photograph: Tracey Emin/Courtesy of

## Carl Freedman Gallery, Margate

Carl Freedman was one of the names in Everyone I Have Ever Slept With 1963-1995, Emin's tent artwork that caused a storm at the fabulously controversial 1997 YBA show Sensation, before it was destroyed in a warehouse fire. We go off to lunch at Angela's, a seafood restaurant on Margate's Parade; as I scoff clams, they remember how they met at a party in 1991.

Emin was struck by the young writer and curator's "aura" and they went on to tour the US, with Emin giving readings about her life from a cute little armchair. They decided to reassess their relationship every six months: one night she came home to find him crying in the dark and realised it was renewal day. Or rather, non-renewal. But they are still friends: two years before she recently decided to move back to Margate, he had settled his family and business there.

That's why Emin's first exhibition of new art since her illness is happening here – but also because Freedman has some pretty impressive printing equipment on site. Upstairs at his gallery, I see the huge silkscreen she did her nudes with. "If I'm not making art," she says, "I don't feel alive. A big part of me will feel dead: I'm not Tracey, I don't exist. I felt so much better after this work. It's like, 'Ah – ah – ah – I'm alive!'"

There is certainly a savage life force coursing through these new works. In one, called Like the Moon You Rolled Across My Back, she crawls naked through a lunar scene, limbs gnawed by pain, her face turned towards us in a melted mask of suffering. Emin has never before drawn or painted her face as much. "It's not about how I look," she says. "It's about how I'm feeling. Some of them are pretty. Some are ugly. Some are really fucked up."

In The Mistress from Death, she is recognisable, wearing a ruched-up dress that flows outwards across the space. It is her interpretation of a painting by Manet of Jeanne Duval, lover of the poet Baudelaire. But even in this beautiful work, illness pervades, Duval having had polio. Elsewhere, we see a naked figure curled up on a bed. It is called Don't Tell Me About This Kind of Pain.

"It's contorted and twisted," she says, "but I've just gone through something quite horrific. You know, if a robot hadn't done the cutting and sewing, my body would have had scars all over it. I haven't got scars, I've just got holes. My body's weird now. Down here, it looks odd – but I'm not pulled together by scars, on the outside at least. On the inside I am. The recovery is still going on. It will be two years in July. Recovery takes a really long time."



Illness pervades ... The Mistress from Death. Photograph: Tracey Emin/Courtesy of Carl Freedman Gallery, Margate

Emin has always made art about her physical existence. Once, it may have seemed "narcissistic" – a word still guaranteed to provoke her. "Do people call Vincent van Gogh narcissistic?" But, as she's got older, her unique approach to self-portraiture has come to seem enduring and brave, especially as she is now directing her unflinching gaze at the aftermath of her cancer.

"That's all come out in these works: the pain I'm in. Because I get a lot of pain. That's all just to do with mobility, muscles, everything – no lymph nodes, all of those kind of things. And also the sexual pain as well. I had half my vagina cut away. It's a big deal. If a guy had half his dick cut off, he'd soon start complaining about it. I also had to have my womb removed and my ovaries, a full hysterectomy. Is this sexy? No, of course it isn't. Everything's changed for me. My whole life has changed."

Yet these artworks are sexy, I say. There is ecstasy as well as agony. One nude is curled up masturbating – never a subject Emin has shied away from but one she depicts here more furiously than ever. “You can be a nun the whole of your life and not have sex and still be really fucking sexy. It’s not about what you do with your body. It’s what you do with your mind, isn’t it? What you do with your hands, your sense of self, self-worth. It all comes out – and I think with this work, it’s come out really strong.”

I needed to go into the cave, just sit there for a while in the darkness, and then come out

These are, she says, her Black Paintings, echoing the name given to the [scenes of nightmare and madness created by the great Spanish artist Goya after he went deaf](#). “I had to do something like that. I needed to go into the cave and just sit there for a while in the darkness, and then come out. So I kept thinking I wanted to do black paintings, black on black on black on black.”

This urge began before she was even diagnosed, though. She believes she had a premonition one sunny spring evening, when her entire world suddenly went dark. “It was during the first lockdown, just before the [banging of the saucepans for the NHS](#). It was light, I was sitting in my living room waiting to look out the window and the TV was on – and suddenly it went off, the room went completely dark, and this apparition came towards me. I went, ‘Oh, fucking hell!’”

She still can’t explain the experience. And when she says darkness, I realise, she is being both literal and metaphorical. “There *is* darkness. For every ounce of light, there is darkness. There’s black holes in space. In every nook and cranny, in the recesses of our mind, there’s darkness. Maybe it’s inside us like the cancer, gnawing away.”



‘Coming from my background, speaking the way I do, I really have achieved something’ ... at the Carl Freedman Gallery in Margate. Photograph: Martin Godwin/The Guardian

Conversely, though, for every ounce of darkness, there is light. Emin was able to make these powerful new works that defy her illness because of what she is creating in Margate: not just her studios, her home and Freedman’s gallery, which are all joined together, but also a community. An entire side of a street is currently busy with builders. Emin is opening her own art school here in September, with an admissions policy that invites anyone, regardless of age or qualification, to submit a portfolio. As I chew ray wing, I discover I am not just enjoying lunch but also getting a taste of Emin’s social vision – for this restaurant will provide teaching at the catering college she is also creating.

“When I talk about how much poverty there is now,” she says, “I’m talking about people who can’t eat. When I was little, I went through that: no food, no electricity, no hot water. We squatted in a house. Squatted. We didn’t have anywhere to live. And with a single-parent mum. When you’ve achieved what I have achieved coming from that background, speaking the way I do as well, it is like, ‘Fucking hell, I really have done something.’ If I’ve done it, other people can do it, and I’m going to show people they can.”

As she remembers her childhood in Margate, I can't help wondering what has drawn her back. Through her art, she has told in terrible detail how she was raped at 13 and quit school. You might not think she owed the place anything. She admits that when she first spent a fortnight back here a few years ago, she felt the memories menacing her sanity: "It was almost like I was back in my childhood. And it was so terrible for me."

But it's different now that she has come home properly, buying a place in the town. "I feel a sense of freedom. I feel a sense of being Tracey. I like walking down the street. I like the smallness of everything. And the more I go round town, the more I realise there's lots of it I'd blurred out, lots of things I don't really remember."



Catering college tie-in ... Angela's restaurant in Margate. Photograph: Martin Godwin/The Guardian

Emin is not just recreating Margate in her head. There's a part of town with paving stones, for instance, that would look great if they were not so filthy. When she suggested the community do something about it, people said the council was not interested. "Why wait for the council?" she asked. Margate may not know what's about to hit it. When I suggest she run for mayor, she says she's too forthright for politics. "I'd soon be calling someone a tosser."

Outraged by Partygate, Emin [recently demanded](#) the government remove her neon work More Passion from 10 Downing Street because the last thing they need is more encouragement to party. Yet she has no political affiliation. Her utopian mission in Margate is simply local and ethical. As we walk along the street, people come up and greet her, among them the foreman of her building site, who tells me she is doing great things. We pass a sweet shop that she snipped the ribbon to open.

The other night I was painting and I was so happy I started dancing for the first time in two years

When she helps people, she says, her darkness goes. “The busier I am with responsibility for others, the more chance I have of lifting myself out of this mire of shit that I could be just floating around in – a woman who’s nearly 60, living on her own.” She pauses. “In terms of going out in cities now, everything is so much more difficult for me because of having a bag and everything. It’s not very rewarding or nice. It just feels so much more cosy being at home. Like we’ve just had lunch at Angela’s – that’s good anywhere in the world.”

Emin seems happier than I have ever seen her, creating a new life for herself and others in a beaten-up part of a faded town. But, for all the fine food and the colleges going up brick by brick, it is the art that completes her. “The other night I was painting,” she says, “and I was so happy. I was listening to Stupid Girl by [Garbage](#) and started dancing for the first time in two years. Really dancing. On my own. Really dancing. And I’ve had a lot of mobility issues since surgery, like my hips can’t move properly and I’m just kind of stuck. And I started dancing and I was so happy. I felt so fucking good, I felt brilliant. It was the first time in ages I felt, ‘Yeah. Got it back. This is it.’”

- [Tracey Emin: A Journey to Death is at Carl Freedman Gallery](#), Margate, until 19 June.

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## [Cultural prescription](#)[Culture](#)

# Surviving a setback: books, music, films and more about dealing with disappointment

From James Acaster's lowest ebb to encouraging words from Radiohead, our critics suggest popular culture about picking yourself up and carrying on



Cheesed off ... James Acaster. Photograph: RMV/Shutterstock

[Jessica Kiang](#), [Brian Logan](#), [Jason Okundaye](#), [Jenessa Williams](#) and [Imogen Russell Williams](#)

Mon 25 Apr 2022 05.00 EDT Last modified on Mon 25 Apr 2022 05.02 EDT

## Comedy

There is no shortage of standup that takes the raw material of hapless, disappointing life and turns it into laughter. That's a sizable part of what

comedy does. But for big, big laughter fashioned from pretty severe instances of disappointment, look no further than [James Acaster](#)'s career-best 2018 show, [Cold Lasagne Hate Myself 1999](#). It takes two low moments in the Kettering man's life (being dumped by his girlfriend in favour of, er, Mr Bean; and being dumped by his agent after an on-air PR gaffe) and – in two hours of gasp-inducing, gut-bustingly funny standup – recasts those disappointments as mere staging posts on the route to comedy glory. *Brian Logan*

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## TV



Brace yourself ... Ugly Betty. Photograph: Andrew Eccles/Disney/Getty

Disappointment hangs over Betty Suarez, the Latina titular character of *Ugly Betty*, like a sword of Damocles, waiting for the moment to finally tear her apart. The series begins with her disenchanted: her job as an assistant at Mode magazine is unglamorous, and her colleagues are visibly displeased at being forced to accommodate her poncho, braces and sanguine confidence – attributes that are “unchic” in the world of mid-2000s high fashion. It makes for ironic viewing now: transplant Betty into the 2020s and you can imagine her with a viral Instagram account focused on thrifting and sustainability;

Mode's cruel receptionist Amanda, the apparent embodiment of the 00s "it girl", would be left behind in her wake. *Jason Okundaye*

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## Music

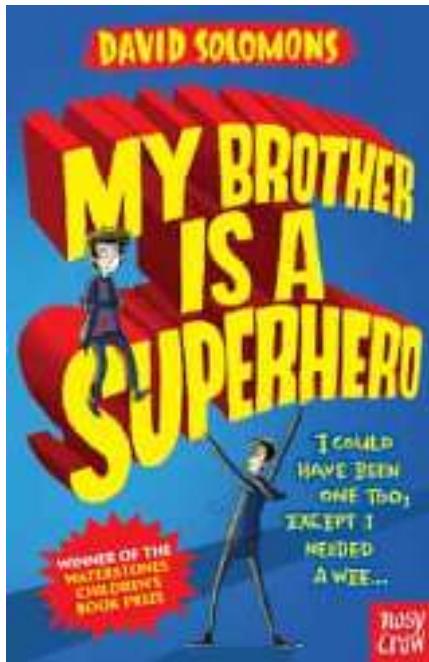


No surprises ... it's Radiohead. Photograph: Roger Sargent/Shutterstock

Very few bands convert sadness into elegance quite like [Radiohead](#). Although Thom Yorke's writing often revolves round menacing, downtrodden critiques of consumerist culture, the chorus of [Kid A's Optimistic](#) makes use of one uplifting mantra: "You try the best you can / You try the best you can / The best you can is good enough". At times of self-doubt, my partner often recites this chorus to me, temporarily accepting its meaning independently from the song. It's a simple phrasing, but a welcome reminder nonetheless that in life and lyricism, we have to learn from our failures. *Jenessa Williams*

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## Books



Eleven-year-old Luke Parker's knowledge of comics is encyclopedic. Costumes, symbols, abilities, origins – he's a superhero savant. This makes it still more galling that while he nips off for a wee, his maths-obsessed older brother Zack is given superpowers by a visiting alien. Luke's jealous disappointment, coupled with his determination to mentor Zack (or at least get him wearing a cape), shapes David Solomons's hilarious novel [My Brother Is a Superhero](#), full of fraying fraternal bonds and a mission to save not one, but two worlds that will need all Luke's knowhow – as well as Zack's powers – to succeed. *Imogen Russell Williams*

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## Film



Lady vengeance ... Olivia De Havilland and Montgomery Clift in *The Heiress*. Photograph: Paramount Pictures/Allstar

In the 1949 film *The Heiress*, Catherine (Olivia de Havilland), a wealthy but dowdy disappointment to her autocratic father, falls hard for Morris (Montgomery Clift), who in turn disappoints her. William Wyler's gripping melodrama is a dazzling depiction of disillusion, providing De Havilland with an extraordinary, Oscar-winning role, in which she adjusts the wick on her natural luminosity like it's a gas lamp that can bathe the room in brightness or make shadows leap large across the wall. The sorrow of the underestimated, unloved soul pervades the film but Catherine's final act of vengeful disdain makes it also the cruellest success story, as a wilting wallflower comes to know her intrinsic self-worth as never before. *Jessica Kiang*

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[A new start after 60](#)[Life and style](#)

## A new start after 60: ‘I trained to be a flight attendant – it’s the only way I could explore the world’



Suzanne Watkins: ‘It’s important as an older adult to keep pushing the limits.’ Photograph: Laura Buckman/The Guardian

After too many years of commuting and poorly paid office work, Suzanne Watkins nearly died of sepsis. It was the push she needed to spread her wings

[Paula Cocozza](#)

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Mon 25 Apr 2022 02.00 EDT

Sometimes, when she reaches the sanctuary of her hotel room after 24 hours on duty, Suzanne Watkins finds herself laughing uncontrollably. This has happened in South Korea, Guam, Japan and Ireland – all since last November when, on her 60th birthday, she passed her flight attendant training.

“I knew the only way I could explore the world economically was to get paid to fly,” she says. “And I knew I had to do it at 60, because I didn’t want to do it at 70.”

Watkins works long-haul at short notice, with an ad hoc schedule. The lifestyle would horrify some, but she says she feels “most at peace with myself when I am a stranger in a strange land and I am wandering”.

So she has given up her rented apartment, downsized and squeezed everything she owns into a 5ft by 10ft storage unit. “And that’s all I have,” she says. “It’s exciting, not knowing where I’m going, what I’m going to do.” She stays with friends and family when she is not travelling.

After Watkins and her husband divorced in 2008, she always knew where she was going. She raised their daughter, then 14, and son, eight, as a single parent in Sebastopol, California. “Economically, I scrambled. I had three minimum-wage jobs.” These included working in a toy shop and planning travel for non-profit school organisations.

Life settled into a necessary pattern. “You drive to the office, you sit at a computer all day, you go home, sleep, and do it all over again.”

They had to remove half my intestines. It made me realise that I'm mortal

*Suzanne Watkins*

Watkins was still in this mode in 2018, when she was taken to ER with a life-threatening sepsis infection. “They had to remove half my intestines. It made me realise that I’m mortal,” she says. “Sometimes that’s what it takes.”

After the surgery, Watkins recovered at home, and for the first time in a decade her relentless working rhythm was put on pause. “I saw things I had never even seen in my own home before – noticing the lamp on the ceiling, or the birds outside. I had never taken the time.”

One day, in this frame of mind, she was listening to the radio. Entrepreneur Chip Conley was talking about his new project: [Modern Elder Academy](#), which is billed as a “midlife wisdom school”, in Baja California, Mexico. Watkins applied for a scholarship. “As a single mom, it was the only way I could do it.”

She was still wearing her post-surgery colostomy bag when she went to the MEA campus in February 2018 for a week of “transformational workshops and active listening … I felt like I was taking a big deep breath in for the first time, and then just letting it out,” Watkins says.

She had had an unsettled, anxious childhood. She loved looking through National Geographic magazine, which was always on the coffee table, but her parents “were not travellers in any way, shape or form”, though the family moved a dozen times. Watkins sent off for brochures about places but never went, and drew pictures of aeroplanes. At university, she studied geography. Once she got to Modern Elder Academy, she realised she needed to find a job that involved travel.

When the pandemic shut the skies in 2020, Watkins read of flight attendants being laid off. Counterintuitively, her own plans grew wings. She applied to be a flight attendant, and graduated after five weeks of training.

“I don’t want to have any regrets on my deathbed. So I wake up every morning and I say, ‘If today was my last day, would I be OK?’, and I say ‘Yes’.”

Before her illness, she says, “I was complacent. And complacency and old age – it doesn’t work. It’s not uplifting. I think it’s important as an older adult to keep pushing the limits. Don’t think of your life linearly.” She opens out her hands. “Think of it as continuing to unfold. And you can have surprises and joy.”

Her children, too, appreciate her differently. “I think they saw me as afraid, not a risk-taker, when they were younger. Now they’ve seen me go through a lot of transformation. I can finally be a role model for them to show that it’s OK to follow your heart.”

- [Tell us: has your life taken a new direction after the age of 60?](#)
- 

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## The ObserverMotoring

# Not so fast: why going slower can save you a packet on petrol

With fuel prices soaring, drivers can reduce their costs with a few useful tips – most important, aim for a lower average speed



In slow-moving traffic, avoid using the brakes unnecessarily. Photograph: Martin Bond/Alamy

[Shane Hickey](#)

Mon 25 Apr 2022 04.00 EDT

When Turlough Downes left the roof box on his car after a holiday, he knew it would push up the cost of fuel. However, after he did the maths, he was stunned to find out by just how much ... a lengthy journey across Ireland had cost 50% more in fuel.

“It really caught me off guard. It wasn’t what I expected. I expected it to make a small difference, but I was really shocked,” he says.

Downes, professor of mathematics and astrophysics at Dublin City University, has applied his knowledge of aerodynamics to fuel efficiency, to understand how drivers can save money.

There are many reasons for cars to use more fuel and drive up the cost of motoring – speed, weight, how the gears are used among them – but many drivers will be surprised just how much money can be saved from slowing down and making small changes when behind the wheel.

The reason for the jump in cost when you use a roof box is that the added weight and air resistance means more fuel is used to move. Curious to see how much more drivers who sped past him were spending on fuel, Downes has also examined the effects of slowing down.

Motoring groups such as [the RAC](#) have told drivers they can save money if they drive at lower levels than the speed limit. This typically applies when travelling a considerable distance where they can reach high speeds, such as on motorways.

The differences are significant, according to Downes.

A driver on a 45-mile journey from Manchester to Leeds, using an average car, can save around £4.30 if they go at 50mph, rather than the national speed limit on a motorway of 70mph, using the current average price of a litre of petrol at £1.62.

The savings are similar whether using petrol or diesel.

## Finding the sweet spot

On long journeys, the most important issue for drivers is air resistance, or drag. Once the driver goes above a particular speed – usually 50mph – extra fuel is being used to deal with the increased air resistance.

“Most of the extra energy you need to go faster than 80kph (50mph) is involved in getting the air out of the way of your car as you drive. It is not the only thing that is affecting you, but it is the dominant one,” says Downes.

And as you drive faster, the amount of air resistance increases. “If you go twice as fast, your air resistance goes up by a factor of four. If you go four times as fast, it goes up by a factor of 16, so it is really bad,” he says.

“That is why it makes such a significance difference what speed you go at, once above 80kph.” In the case of a 2014 Golf GTI – which has a fuel efficiency of 37.2 miles a gallon – a five-mile journey at 50mph on a motorway can cost £1, based on the current average price of petrol.

If you increase your speed to 60mph, that goes up to 1.22p; at 70mph, £1.48. This amounts to an extra 50%. Break the law, and drive at 80mph, and it will cost £1.78 for the same journey.

The savings become more meaningful if you are covering longer distances, and are consistent for petrol or diesel in terms of the volumes of fuel saved.

For the Manchester to Leeds journey, at 50mph, it costs £8.98, rising to £13.28 at 70mph.

More fuel-efficient vehicles will achieve similar savings. A Honda Jazz with a fuel efficiency of 62 mpg will cost £5.39 at 50 over 45 miles and £7.97 at 70.

For many cars, the “sweet spot”, where the vehicle is getting the best miles per gallon is between 50 and 55mph, when the engine is not labouring, says Downes.

## Avoid the brakes

Slowing down is not the only way to reduce bills. It’s about how you slow down – specifically by not using the brakes too often. This is especially true in slow-moving traffic when you should avoid using your brakes unnecessarily.

“With the more energy you put into moving faster … that energy, in the end, is turned into heat as you put on your brakes. So you’ll have burned all this fuel to give your car the energy and then you’ll be wasting it in your brakes. And you won’t have got there any faster. So there’s absolutely no benefit,” says Downes.

“You should always go as slowly as you can in start-stop traffic. That is a huge benefit. If everybody did that, then the traffic jams would last much less time.”

## Take off the roof box

When he didn’t take off the roof box after his holiday in France, Downes got a swift lesson in how costs can spiral quickly. The box, which was the full width of the car, forced the engine to work harder to deal with more air resistance.

While this will not matter when you are driving in the city, as the car does not have to deal with the issue of drag that it does on motorways, longer distances with a roof box will cost if you start driving at above 50mph.

“You can certainly save yourself a lot of money by just taking the roof box off,” says Downes.

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## 2022.04.25 - Opinion

- How bad do things have to get in Britain before we start to see solidarity emerge?
- I've dealt with Putin before: I know what it will take to defeat this brutal despot
- Don't call them anti-vaxxers – that just further erodes people's trust
- It's time for the Royal Shakespeare Company to be led by an actor

## OpinionProtest

# How bad do things have to get in Britain before we start to see solidarity emerge?

[Moya Lothian-McLean](#)

Despite a widespread sense of anger against the government, narratives of division still prevail, stymying public unity



Extinction Rebellion protesters stop traffic in Trafalgar Square, London, on Saturday. Photograph: Guy Bell/Rex/Shutterstock

Mon 25 Apr 2022 05.00 EDT

Sri Lanka is in revolt. Since early April, thousands of protesters have taken to the streets, initially to demand a solution to what has been dubbed the "[worst economic crisis since independence](#)". Now, in the face of a political stalemate, and after [police fatally shot one protester and wounded 13 others](#), regime change is top of the agenda. One element of the protests has been particularly striking: they have united groups that were previously starkly

divided, and who have begun sharing analysis of what – and who – split them apart in the first place.

“Here you have the Sinhala Buddhist majority protesting side by side with Tamils. You have trade union protests happening next to Muslim protests where Muslims are breaking their fast under the rainbow umbrellas of the LGBTQ community,” [said the Guardian’s Hannah Ellis-Peterson](#) on the Today in Focus podcast. “This has never been seen before in Sri Lanka. People are talking about a [...] betrayal, that they were fed this lie of majority and minority, nationalist and divisive politics. They feel like this is the thing that has ultimately caused the destruction of Sri Lanka.”

In a Buddhist-majority country, where [the persecution](#) of Muslims has become a winning strategy for the politically dominant Rajapaksa family, economic disaster has finally blasted through artificially constructed walls of separation. It makes me wonder: just what point of crisis will Britain have to reach before we follow suit?

This is not a new train of thought. In the past I’ve often fantasised about just what it would take to see sustained mass action that would result in long-lasting, positive change rather than a temporary stay of execution on some individual cruel policy. I cannot remember a moment more desperate than the current one. Yet despite general anger directed against the government, narratives of division – stoked by [politicians and amplified by media](#) – still prevail over all else, stymying the sort of public unity seen in Sri Lanka.

While we are not quite as divided as we think we are, British political identities, now stronger than party alignments, give a warped view of what the “other side” believes, both about topline issues and their opposition. Research from [King’s College London](#) found that 91% of leave supporters agree with the statement: “The NHS is crucial to British society and we must do everything we can to maintain it.” But only 60% of non-leave supporters predicted that Brexit backers would hold this view. Similarly, less than a quarter of surveyed Brexiters expressed climate denial beliefs. Remainers thought the results would be double that.

Even when there is [agreement between groups](#) with ostensibly different political identities, that is not enough to bridge the gulf. Dislike is so strong based on a single issue that people can't see all the sections of the Venn diagram where their views overlap.

A deep fear of each other and the beliefs others might hold has taken root. Studies [warn](#) that a “hostile culture of ‘othering’ political rivals can spill over into social relations”. Speaking about politics with a stranger has transformed from a potentially awkward endeavour to a minefield. An acquaintance of mine recounted meeting a couple in a Soho pub the other day. They got on well; the couple bought a round. Conversation turned to the police. Tentatively, he ventured that he thought policing had deep problems. The couple reacted so vehemently that my acquaintance thought they had misheard his mild statement. Eventually the encounter ended with them screaming at him until he left the pub. Political disagreement now is expressed through anger and escalation; coalition seems light years away.

I've seen this up close, on non-partisan issues that should unite everyone. Take climate protesters. [Physical attacks](#) by fellow members of the public on the likes of Insulate Britain have become horrifyingly normalised. In [polling by the](#) Sunday Express, 53% of respondents believed that “eco-extremists” should be penalised with harsher criminal punishment. You might read this and agree; that protesters have “gone too far” by blocking roads in their successful attempt to keep the issue of insulating houses (an action that would save every single person in Britain money, and which is essential to meeting climate goals) on the agenda. But even the act of being seen to support a greener future marks one out as a suspect character in some spaces, for murky reasons that have nothing to do with renewables and everything to do with how lines of division have been drawn.

Last November, I walked into two separate pubs after a climate protest and was called a “cunt” and a “dickhead” simply for clutching an upside-down sign asking for change. Sans sign, I've never had a problem in pubs. But with that accidental political act (I just wanted a rum and a sit down), I became the embodiment of a set of beliefs that have been cast as “other” by divisive, nationalistic rhetoric that seeks to position anyone demanding positive change (such as warmer, affordable houses) as disruptive, unpatriotic and the very cause of this country's disunity. And for those with

me, the people insulting us represented a public blindly following whatever hateful narrative they are fed, poisoning themselves in the process. Do either of those positions bring us closer to persuading each other of our concerns, or bringing about the change we so desperately desire?

The more disempowered people feel by the apparent inability to hold elected representatives to account, the more they turn on each other. Even within demographics supposedly on the “same side”, such as leftwing spaces, petty purity politics has taken root. Sniping at one another’s credentials has become an outlet in the face of disillusionment and political alienation.

Ideally, it shouldn’t take a crisis to create a coalition. But I’m starting to worry that not even desperate times will call for undivided measures. We need to direct our fire towards the people in power, to do as Sri Lankan protesters have done and recognise in practice what we know in theory: that division is a political tool, and one we have been all too susceptible to. Is the British public still capable of rediscovering the commonalities that could chart an eventual course of escape from our current misery? I have to believe so. Cauterising this festering wound is still an option. It’s the only one that offers a future built on solidarity. Otherwise we’ll rot from the inside out.

- Moya Lothian-McLean is a journalist who writes about politics and digital culture
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## OpinionUkraine

# I've dealt with Putin before: I know what it will take to defeat this brutal despot

[Viktor Yushchenko](#)

International solidarity is the best weapon we have against Russia's dictator. A united front is now more crucial than ever

- Viktor Yushchenko was the president of Ukraine from 2005 to 2010



'The Putin I dealt with then no longer exists.' Viktor Yushchenko, right, and Vladimir Putin in Kyiv, March 2005. Photograph: Sergey Chuzavkov/AP

Sun 24 Apr 2022 07.56 EDT Last modified on Sun 24 Apr 2022 23.23 EDT

Maksym Kurochkin is a playwright. For almost three years, he and 20 other Ukrainian playwrights had been planning to build a new theatre in the heart

of Old Kyiv. The group found a magnificent old structure that they were busy renovating in order to open the [Playwrights' theatre](#) on 12 March. On 24 February, Maksym and his colleagues awoke to the horrific sound of bombs. 12 March came and went. Instead of planning a grand opening for a new theatre, Maksym is now examining military strategies to defeat the Russian invaders. Instead of a pen in his hand, he now carries a weapon.

It is two months since the Russian army illegally crossed our borders. They have been failing ever since in their attempts to invade Ukraine. Part of the reason for their failure is that they were not expecting to meet such fierce and heroic resistance, both from our sophisticated military and from [territorial defenders like Maksym](#) who, when faced with the reality of the Russian invasion, decided to take up arms and fight.

Many of these brave territorial defenders, including my own daughter, who immediately signed up once the war began, have never had any military training or been in any kind of conflict situation. Stories like that of the [young couple](#) who pushed their wedding day forward in order to join the territorial defence force, or the [comedian](#) who usually helps veterans get over their trauma but has decided to become a fighter himself, show you the unbreakable spirit of the Ukrainian people. Tragically, some of these defenders have [fallen in battle](#). Others have been beaten and killed in cities such as [Bucha](#), Kharkiv and Mariupol. We will not know how many of our citizens have died until we open the mass graves and clear the rubble of our razed cities.

As shocking as these stories are to hear, this is exactly what we should expect from the savage Russian army led by the dictator Vladimir Putin. My own history with Putin goes back to 2000, when we were both prime ministers of our respective countries. It was only when I ran to be president of Ukraine in 2004 that he actively [campaigned against me](#). The extreme lengths he was willing to go to in order to get what he wanted became clear. I could not allow this to deter me; after I won, I realised that I needed to try to keep a workable relationship with him as the leader of our neighbour in the east. But the Putin I dealt with then no longer exists. He has since become a completely isolated and brutal despot who cannot stand any opposition.

One of the greatest weapons we now have against Putin is international solidarity and support. This is something that really bothers him. I know that, while news about our war made headlines all over the world and dominated the global conversation for several weeks, interest in stories of our territorial defenders is starting to wane. Fatigue towards the horrors of war is sadly common; we saw this with Syria, Yemen and our own [Donbas](#). But those of us in Ukraine cannot afford to feel fatigued, or else we risk losing sight of victory. Our strength is now more important than ever. Although various Russian retreats are taking place, we hear stories that Russian troops are regrouping and planning to continue their attack. It is now that we must resolve to win this war.

We cannot do this without external support. This war is a defining moment, not just in Ukrainian history, but in defence of democracy. This is not just a regional conflict between [Ukraine](#) and Russia but a fight against tyranny and imperialism. Our army continues to need weapons and military assistance from all our allies. And we need monetary assistance to help us plug the holes that this war is blowing in our previously strong economy. Our leadership is not only at the forefront of the war with Russia, but is also fighting behind battle lines – in the safety of international offices and institutions – to secure the support from allies that we need in order to restore peace and freedom to Ukraine.

At the same time, we have an army of volunteers who must keep supplying our territorial defenders with the protective equipment they need in order to keep fighting on the frontlines. Thankfully, civil society organisations such as the [Ukrainian World Congress](#) have worked tirelessly to ensure a steady stream of non-lethal supplies to our defenders. They have also mounted a mammoth effort to advocate for our allies to send the weapons we desperately need, and impose the economic blockades and sanctions necessary to defeat Russian aggression. Our defenders will keep fighting until we finally achieve victory, and our supporters will keep doing everything they can to help them.

I strongly believe that victory for Ukraine is inevitable. When ordinary Ukrainians give everything up to fight for their freedom and dignity, victory is the only option. I cannot wait for the day when this war is finally over and Maksym and his colleagues will be able to open their theatre and stage new

plays written by brave and defiant playwrights who will focus not on propaganda, but on their own voices and ideas. Today, we fight for freedom. Tomorrow, we will watch the plays of our authors who won this freedom, defining what it means to be Ukrainian.

- Viktor Yushchenko was the president of Ukraine from 2005 to 2010
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## OpinionVaccines and immunisation

# Don't call them anti-vaxxers – that just further erodes people's trust

[Gary Finnegan](#)

There's been a worrying decline in diphtheria, polio and measles jabs. We should heed the lessons of Covid-19



A community health worker in Nairobi, Kenya, calls for children to come and be vaccinated against polio in July 2021. Photograph: Simon Maina/AFP/Getty Images

Mon 25 Apr 2022 01.00 EDT Last modified on Mon 25 Apr 2022 05.19 EDT

We forgot about measles. And tetanus and diphtheria. And polio. In the race to vaccinate the world against Covid-19, the global drive to suppress some of the biggest killers in history has fallen back.

Almost [12bn doses](#) of Covid-19 vaccine have been administered in less than 18 months – a stunning achievement, even if the global distribution has been uneven. Yet more than [30 million children](#) have missed out on other basic vaccinations during the pandemic, with south-east Asia and the eastern Mediterranean region being the worst hit. This means large numbers of young people will be vulnerable to diphtheria, pertussis (whooping cough) and tetanus, as well as [measles](#) – a disease that continues to kill tens of thousands of people every year.

Part of the decline in routine vaccination will have been because of clinics closing and staff being diverted, or falling ill themselves – problems that will gradually improve as health services begin returning to normal. But there are also people who haven't accepted vaccines for themselves or their children when they've been offered them.

Given the dangerous dip in vaccination levels, the challenge of building trust in vaccines has now become more important than ever as we enter [World Immunization Week](#). The good news is that we now know a lot about how to increase vaccine uptake, and the pandemic has taught us some important lessons.

First, while the past few years have, perhaps understandably, increased many people's hostility towards those who refuse vaccines, lumping them together into a homogenous group of “anti-vaxxers” is unwise – especially as dialogue with these groups is crucial to increasing the overall vaccine uptake. Some find this term offensive: they may not be “anti” anything but have questions or concerns about a vaccine or vaccines.

The reality is that vaccine hesitancy is a spectrum. At one end are the hardliners whose appetite for absorbing attention is insatiable but who are not for changing. At the other are those whose views are not yet permanently fixed.

In [Target the Fence-Sitters](#), a landmark 2011 Nature paper, Prof Julie Leask of the University of Sydney, made the case for engaging with those who can be won over. Coaxing – or insulting – the hardliners is a waste of energy, and risks nudging mildly hesitant people in the wrong direction.

More than a decade on from that much-cited publication, research on why people vaccinate (or not) is mounting. Some of this has been applied to good effect during the Covid-19 rollout, yet there is still much to learn.

One important problem is that vaccine conversations have become more polarised and political during the pandemic. [Health](#) authorities need to work on reducing the “cost” of changing one’s mind about vaccination. Doing a U-turn doesn’t feel good. If choosing to vaccinate is seen as a personal capitulation or political concession then it becomes deeply unconformable.

No political grouping has a monopoly on absorbing vaccines into their worldview. In the US, [right-leaning voters](#) are less likely to be vaccinated; in the UK, [Tory-voting](#) constituencies are *more* likely to be vaccinated. Meanwhile, “[wellness influencers](#)” are a growing source of vaccine misinformation as part of what Prof Heidi Larson, of the Vaccine Confidence Project, calls the “[pursuit of purity](#)”.

As vaccination is increasingly wrapped up in people’s identity, attitudes can calcify quickly. The trouble with this is that it can make people feel as if they are betraying themselves or their “tribe” if they later opt to be vaccinated. And once someone has opted out of one vaccine, they become more likely to opt out of others. This means those who refuse a Covid jab might not take their next flu vaccine. [Uncoupling vaccines](#) from people’s philosophical, religious or political attitudes prevents hesitancy hardening into refusal.

Politics aside, there are more practical steps that can be taken to improve vaccine uptake. For starters, there is evidence that “[presumptive recommendations](#)” can increase acceptance, so instead of opening a debate on vaccines with every patient or parent, doctors might say, “It’s time for Charlie’s measles jab” rather than, “Would you like to make an appointment for Charlie’s measles jab?”. Engaging in greater depth would happen with those who have questions.

For those who are hesitant, [motivational interviewing](#) – a time-consuming but effective way to inject a little empathy into doctor-patient conversations on vaccination – has also [shown promise](#) in improving vaccination receptiveness by discussing individual drivers of scepticism.

The crucial skill is listening. Doctors ask their patient to voice their concerns about vaccines, offering specific responses in a non-judgmental manner. Both parties accept that they may not see vaccines in the same way but are open to discussion. This takes the heat out of any potential conflict and leaves the door open to a change of heart.

In 2014, a report by a [WHO working group](#) set out the 3Cs of vaccine hesitancy: convenience, complacency and confidence. Easy access to free immunisation may be a bigger challenge in the global south, but convenience is too often overlooked while we obsess about confidence.

The best way to find out why people skip vaccines is to ask them. When measles outbreaks gripped orthodox Jewish communities in London, it may have been tempting to imagine a religious or philosophical objection to the MMR vaccine. But when asked, parents – many of whom had large families – cited as an obstacle [the inconvenience](#) of taking several children across the city on public transport. Service providers responded by scheduling clinics nearby on days that suited the community, supported by information leaflets and reminders.

Complacency matters too. To reach [herd immunity](#) against measles, uptake needs to hit about 95%. But once the virus is suppressed this can slip, opening the door to a [resurgence](#).

Confidence, of course, is still hard won and easily lost. But there are lessons that Covid campaigns – and rejuvenated routine immunisation drives – can learn from how dips in public trust in other vaccines have been reversed.

When [HPV vaccination rates in Ireland](#) fell from 87% to 50% in 2015, a broad [alliance](#) of health professionals, teachers, parents, cancer societies and children's advocacy groups came together to show their support for the campaign. A media campaign fronted by a high-profile [cervical cancer patient](#) helped Ireland to arrest the decline and made vaccination the norm.

To the credit of some health authorities, several Covid-19 immunisation campaigns have adopted personalised vaccine invitations and made vaccinations more convenient by allowing community pharmacists to offer the jab.

Most have avoided the kind of blunt myth-busting and debunking that can backfire, instead finding ways to apply science communication research and tackle misinformation in the real world. There is a growing acceptance that facts alone are not enough to win people over.

Australia has developed decision aids to walk people through the pros and cons of signing up, the US has been quick to try mobile pop-up vaccine clinics, and Romania has offered jabs at popular tourist spots (including Dracula's castle).

And aside from Emmanuel Macron's ill-advised pledge to “piss off” the unvaccinated, France has recorded stellar uptake of Covid-19 vaccinations – despite being dubbed “the most vaccine-sceptical country in the world” and polling indicating that French people would shun the vaccine. The lesson: even countries steeped in vaccine scepticism can turn things around if they get the incentives right.

Now it's time to apply all of this with unprecedented energy to closing the immunisation gaps that have emerged during the pandemic. The goal should be to regain lost ground as quickly as it was lost and go the extra mile to reach those who have never received a vaccine dose.

- Gary Finnegan is a health journalist based in Ireland

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**Royal Shakespeare Company**

## **It's time for the Royal Shakespeare Company to be led by an actor**

**Michael Billington**



Gregory Doran has achieved much at the RSC and directed some fine productions. Let's have an actor in charge next: how about Adjoa Andoh or Simon Russell Beale?



The Royal Shakespeare Theatre in Stratford-upon-Avon ... the company needs a London base. Photograph: Tim Gainey/Alamy

Mon 25 Apr 2022 05.29 EDT Last modified on Mon 25 Apr 2022 07.24 EDT

When the boss of a big theatre company stands down it is usually the cue for change or continuity. In the case of Greg Doran – who has [resigned as artistic director of the Royal Shakespeare Company](#) but will keep his links with it as a director emeritus and a verse specialist – I hope it will be both. [The RSC urgently needs a reboot](#). And some things are worth preserving.

Doran's greatest achievement during his 10-year tenure has been overlooked: he revamped the idea of [the Shakespeare repertory](#). His grand scheme was to present each of Shakespeare's plays within eight years (it stretched to 10 because of Covid). Pre-Doran, a Stratford season would be built around the bankable hits with a few oddities such as [King John](#) or Timon of Athens thrown in. That meant that popular plays such as A Midsummer Night's Dream or Twelfth Night would come round every two or three years, thus forcing directors to find ever more extravagant variations on over-familiar texts. Doran democratised the rep by ensuring that each play had only one production within the cycle so that Much Ado had no more exposure than Measure for Measure.

Doran did many other things. He directed some fine productions, of which King Lear, [Death of a Salesman](#) (both with his late partner, [Antony Sher](#)) and [The Tempest](#) stand out. He saw the theatrical potential of epic novels such as Hilary Mantel's Thomas Cromwell sequence and [Robert Harris's Cicero trilogy](#). He also increased the number of female directors, gave black and Asian actors lead roles and was open to incorporating non-professional talent. Doran deserves credit for all this. But I would argue that the RSC desperately needs two things: a permanent London base and the capacity to combine ensemble work with blood-stirring star casting.



A charismatic RSC leader? Star of Richard II and Bridgerton Adjoa Andoh.  
Photograph: Suki Dhanda/The Observer

When it comes to the choice of Doran's successor, I have a radical idea. Why, for once, should the company not be led by an actor rather than a director – someone who combines a passion for Shakespeare with an ability to attract lustrous colleagues? It is not without precedent – as [Laurence Olivier at the National Theatre](#) and Mark Rylance and Michelle Terry at Shakespeare's Globe have proved – and it could mean more emphasis was placed on actors' performances than directors' concepts.

The RSC needs the kind of permanent London base it so wantonly discarded. It should once more become a magnet for the most exciting

## talent in the land

Two names come to mind. One is [Adjoa Andoh](#) who, if she could be prised out of Bridgerton, would be a charismatic and inspirational leader. I base this on the work I have seen her do on stage including an astonishing Richard II, of which she was the star and co-director and which boasted an all-female cast of colour, at Shakespeare's Globe. My other candidate would be [Simon Russell Beale](#) who is a proven Shakespearean and possesses the kind of inquiring mind that any theatrical organisation needs. Would other actors not want to join a company led by either of these?

I realise the RSC governors are more likely to play safe and choose a director, in which case I would put forward four names. [Simon Godwin](#), whose record includes an [RSC Hamlet](#) and a [National Theatre Antony and Cleopatra](#), would be a frontrunner, although he is currently [based in Washington DC](#). I also have great faith in [Blanche McIntyre](#), whose dazzling production of [Titus Andronicus](#) in the RSC's 2017 Roman season was one of the best Shakespeares of recent times. [Owen Horsley](#), whose current productions of the Henry VI plays at Stratford have won him golden opinions, seems to possess the qualities of a natural leader. And [Erica Whyman](#), who is currently acting artistic director of the RSC, has the advantage of being in situ.

But I go back to my original point. The RSC cannot simply stand still. It [needs the kind of permanent London base](#) it so wantonly discarded. It also should once more become a magnet for the most exciting talent in the land. How to achieve that? By overturning expectations and putting a lead actor in charge.

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## 2022.04.25 - Around the world

- [Sudan At least 168 people killed in violence in Darfur region, aid group says](#)
- [Amazon Labour organizers push for second union victory in New York](#)
- [Amazon Ocasio-Cortez to unionised workers: victory is ‘just the beginning’](#)
- [Live Stock markets and oil slide as China lockdown fears rattle markets](#)

## Sudan

# Sudan: at least 168 people killed in violence in Darfur region, aid group says

Fears death toll from Sunday's clashes could rise after armed tribesmen attacked villages of non-Arab Massalit minority



A Sudanese Janjaweed fighter in Sudan's western Darfur region in 2004. Aid groups have accused Arab Janjaweed militiamen of orchestrating the latest attacks in the area. Photograph: Espen Rasmussen/AFP/Getty Images

*Agence France-Presse*  
Sun 24 Apr 2022 19.46 EDT

Clashes between rival groups in Sudan's [Darfur](#) killed at least 168 people on Sunday, an aid group has said, in the latest bout of deadly violence to hit the restive region.

Darfur, which was ravaged by civil war that erupted in 2003, has seen a spike in deadly conflict since October last year triggered by disputes mainly over land, livestock and access to water and grazing.

The latest fighting began on Friday in the Krink region of West Darfur, said Adam Regal, spokesman for the General Coordination for Refugees and Displaced in Darfur, an independent aid group. “At least 168 people were killed on Sunday and 98 wounded,” said Regal, voicing fears that the death toll could rise.

The violence broke out when armed tribesmen attacked villages of the non-Arab Massalit minority in retaliation for the killing of two tribesmen, the aid group said.

At least eight people were killed on Friday, it added.

On Sunday, a tribal leader from the Massalit minority described seeing multiple bodies in villages of the Krink region, which lies 80km (50 miles) from West Darfur’s provincial capital, Geneina.

Medics from the Central Committee of [Sudan](#) Doctors warned of “catastrophic” health conditions in West Darfur, saying that several hospitals were attacked in the violence.

## ‘Janjaweed’ blamed

The International Committee of the Red Cross called on authorities to ensure the safe arrival of the wounded to hospitals.

The United Nations special representative, Volker Perthes, condemned the killings and called for an investigation.

Images posted online on Sunday showed burning houses sending plumes of thick black smoke to the sky, while others showed round patches of scorched earth where huts had stood before they were set alight.

Agence France-Presse could not independently verify the authenticity of the images.

On Sunday, the aid group accused the Arab Janjaweed militiamen of orchestrating the latest attacks.

The mainly Arab militia gained notoriety in the early 2000s for its role in the repression of an ethnic minority rebellion in Darfur.

Many of its members have since been integrated into the feared paramilitary Rapid Support Forces, commanded by General Mohamed Hamdan Daglo, the de facto deputy leader of Sudan, according to rights groups.

Regal said the militiamen had in recent weeks “committed killings, burning, lootings, and torture without mercy”.

The conflict that erupted in 2003 pitted ethnic minority rebels who complained of discrimination against the Arab-dominated government of then-president Omar al-Bashir.

Bashir’s government responded by unleashing the Janjaweed, mainly recruited from Arab pastoralist tribes, who were blamed for atrocities including murder, rape, looting and burning villages.

The fighting killed 300,000 people and displaced 2.5 million, according to UN figures.

The main conflict has subsided across much of Darfur but the region remains awash with weapons and deadly clashes often erupt mainly over access to pasture or water.

[Bashir was ousted in April 2019](#) following months-long mass protests against his rule. He remains [wanted by the international criminal court](#) over his role in the Darfur conflict.

In recent months, scores of people have been killed and hundreds of houses torched in several [bouts of violence in Darfur](#), according to the UN and medics.

The latest violence has reflected a broader security breakdown in Darfur following [last year's military coup](#) led by army chief Abdel Fattah al-Burhan, that derailed a transition to full civilian rule following Bashir's ouster.

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## [Amazon](#)

# Amazon labor organizers push for second union victory in New York

About 1,500 eligible workers at LDJ5 sorting center on Staten Island vote in union ballot, after recent success at JFK8 warehouse



The Amazon facility in Staten Island, New York. The company is vigorously contesting its first union loss. Photograph: Brendan McDermid/Reuters

[Michael Sainato](#)

Mon 25 Apr 2022 02.00 EDT Last modified on Mon 25 Apr 2022 10.36 EDT

Amazon workers in New York will go to the polls again as labor activists push to unionize a second facility in the US following their [surprise recent victory](#) over the tech giant.

About 1,500 eligible workers at an LDJ5 Amazon sorting center in Staten Island, New York, begin voting in a union election on Monday, in a process

that will continue through 29 April. [Ballot-counting](#) starts on 2 May.

Amazon has aggressively opposed unionization among its workforce, which totals [about 1.1 million people](#) in the US alone. The fight comes as workers at other major corporations [including Starbucks](#) are fighting to unionize.

Amazon has spent millions hiring union avoidance consultants. [Amazon Labor Union \(ALU\)](#) organizers have alleged harassment and intimidation from management.

The company is vigorously contesting its first loss and has accused ALU of using “objectionable, coercive, and misleading behavior”, to convince workers to support them. Among other objections, Amazon claims the vote should be overturned because ALU “intentionally created hostile confrontations” and offered marijuana to workers in an “impermissible grant of support” for workers’ votes, according to [filings obtained by the New York Times](#).

The sorting center is right across the street from the JFK8 warehouse where workers [won](#) a historic first union election at Amazon in the US on 1 April.

It is the second union election petition filed by the ALU, an independent group of current and former Amazon workers with no affiliation with established labor unions and led by the former Amazon worker [Chris Smalls](#).

Voting Tents going !!↑ up We’re ready to make history again LDJ5 will be the 1st sortation center in the country to unionize [@amazonlabor #ALU #ALUfortheWin](#)  [pic.twitter.com/rcRq9KsaLb](https://pic.twitter.com/rcRq9KsaLb)

— Christian Smalls (@Shut\_downAmazon) [April 18, 2022](#)

Since the union’s election win at JFK8, ALU has [received inquiries](#) from workers at dozens of Amazon facilities around the US and internationally about forming unions at their respective facilities and received over \$300,000 in [donations](#) to the union’s GoFundMe page.

Ahead of the election, ALU [hosted](#) a rally featuring speeches from [Senator Bernie Sanders](#) and union leaders, including the AFA-CWA international president, [Sara Nelson](#), and Mark Dimondstein, president of the American Postal Workers Union.

ALU organizers who work at LDJ5 have said they [experienced](#) similar anti-union efforts by Amazon, and have filed multiple unfair labor practice charges with the National Labor Relations Board.

“This employer has been engaging in sustained unlawful union busting. Amazon has violated the National Labor Relations Act (NLRA) by forcing employees to attend captive audience meetings, disciplining organizers for protected union activities, and prohibiting the union from displaying its banner in the break rooms,” said Seth Goldstein, a pro bono attorney representing the ALU.

The union has joined with the American Federation of Teachers and New York State United Teachers in [filing a complaint](#) with the New York state attorney general, Letitia James, alleging that Amazon’s anti-union efforts are in violation of the provisions of the New York state Excelsior Jobs Program, and pushing for Amazon to pay back \$400m in tax breaks they received through the program.

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[Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez](#)

## Ocasio-Cortez to unionized Amazon workers: victory is ‘just the beginning’

Democratic congresswoman joins Bernie Sanders in Staten Island and says workers’ successful effort was ‘first domino to fall’



Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez on Sunday. She said: ‘What happened out here ... what you guys did in Staten Island was just the beginning.’ Photograph: Peter Foley/EPA

*[Richard Luscombe](#)*

*[@richlusc](#)*

Sun 24 Apr 2022 15.54 EDTFirst published on Sun 24 Apr 2022 14.55 EDT

The progressive congresswoman Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez told Amazon’s [first unionized workers](#) in New York on Sunday that their victory was “the first domino to fall” in what she expected to be a wave of similar votes for representation across the country.

The leftwing Democrat joined Vermont senator Bernie Sanders on stage in Staten Island to celebrate the historic achievement and to call for workers in more [Amazon](#) facilities in the US to follow their example.

“What happened out here ... what you guys did in Staten Island was just the beginning. It was the first domino to fall,” she said, noting that workers at a second Amazon sorting facility in the New York borough were [voting on Monday](#).

“We have another election tomorrow, and we’re going to support them in that. And the day after that, and the day after that, all the way. But what we need Amazon to do first and foremost is to recognize the union that won their election.”

Amazon has so far refused to acknowledge the vote at its Staten Island fulfillment center, after it was accused of [intimidating and hounding workers](#) during the campaign with anti-union messages, and spending millions of dollars to try to ensure the vote failed.

Immediately after the result, Amazon, owned by the world’s second richest man Jeff Bezos, whose personal wealth is [estimated by Forbes at \\$170bn](#), went to court to try to get the outcome overturned.

“First and foremost, Amazon, Jeff Bezos, everybody, we got to recognize the fact that they did this thing, and they won a union election fair and square,” Ocasio-Cortez said.



Bernie Sanders at the rally on Staten Island. Photograph: Andrew Kelly/Reuters

“You got to treat our people right. You can give our workers a bathroom break, you can ensure you’re treating people well and giving them solid health care benefits, and that they don’t have a three-hour commute to and from work, that they can afford a house they can live in, that people are not going to be sleeping in their cars in order to work for Amazon.

“All of this is an indignity and an injustice and it has no place in New York city and we’re going to change that, and right here, our workers out here are going to change that.”

Sanders was equally scathing of Amazon’s treatment of workers. “When you got a corporation that is making huge profits, you know what, you can pay your workers good wages, provide good benefits, and you can have decent working conditions, not what you got right now,” he said.

Addressing [Chris Smalls](#), the union organizer behind the successful New York vote, and fellow activists in attendance, Sanders added: “You may not know this, but you have been an inspiration for millions of workers all across this country, who have looked at you and said, ‘These guys in Staten

Island stood up to an extraordinarily powerful corporation. If they can do it in Staten Island, we can do it throughout this country’.”

Sanders also took a shot at centrist Democratic senators Joe Manchin and Kyrsten Sinema, whom he said were “sabotaging” America’s working class with their opposition to Joe Biden’s social reform agenda.

Although he did not mention them by name, it was clear he was attacking the two Democrats whose opposition to Biden’s Build Back Better package of social spending, welfare assistance and climate measures blocked its passage through Congress.

“To get it passed we need at least 50 Democrats who are going to stand up with the working class of this country, we don’t have it,” he said.

“We have a couple of people who are busy sabotaging the working-class agenda.”

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This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2022/apr/24/alexandria-ocasio-cortez-democrats-bernie-sanders-amazon>

[Skip to key events](#)

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

# Markets hit by China lockdown fears; UK manufacturing confidence slides amid supply crunch – as it happened

Fears over China's economy are rising as Beijing district launches mass-testing, factory confidence drops and more British households are hit by rising costs

- [Latest: Biggest drop in UK manufacturing confidence since April 2020](#)
- [More households find it hard to pay bills in March](#)
- Nine out of 10 adults see rise in cost of living
- Introduction: [China lockdown fears hit markets](#)
- [China's CSI 300's biggest fall since February 2020](#)
- [UK's FTSE 100 hits five-week low.... crude oil tumbles 4%](#)
- Pound falls to 18-month low vs US dollar
- [Panic buying in Beijing as largest district begins mass testing](#)

Updated 5d ago

[\*Graeme Wearden\*](#)

Mon 25 Apr 2022 12.27 EDTFirst published on Mon 25 Apr 2022 02.48 EDT



An electronic share price board showing the closing numbers on the Tokyo Stock Exchange in Tokyo today Photograph: Kazuhiro Nogi/AFP/Getty Images

Graeme Wearden

Mon 25 Apr 2022 12.27 EDTFirst published on Mon 25 Apr 2022 02.48 EDT

## Key events

- [5d ago Twitter agrees Elon Musk takeover deal](#)
- [6d ago Summary](#)
- [6d ago European markets close in the red](#)
- [6d ago Brent crude falls through \\$100/barrel](#)
- [6d ago ECB's Panetta demands action over crypto 'Wild West'](#)
- [6d ago Stocks open lower in New York](#)
- [6d ago Full story: Optimism falls as UK factories hit by fastest rise in costs since 1975](#)

Show key events only

## Live feed

Show key events only

From 6d ago

03.55

## China market's worst day since February 2020



Residents and office workers wearing face masks line up for mass coronavirus testing outside a commercial office complex at the central business district in Beijing. Photograph: Andy Wong/AP

**China's benchmark stock index has suffered its worst day since early in the pandemic, after a day of heavy selling.**

The CSI 300 index has closed down 4.94% today, its biggest one-day drop since February 2020, as [Beijing's largest district begins mass-testing](#) and Shanghai's lockdown enters its fourth week.

The CSI 300, which tracks the top 300 companies traded in Shanghai and Shenzhen, tumbled by 198 points to close at 3,815 points, its lowest since May 2020.

China's CSI 300 index falls 4.9%, most since February 2020.  
[pic.twitter.com/9QeQnL9RIX](https://pic.twitter.com/9QeQnL9RIX)

— Jean-Charles GAND (@jeancharlesgand) [April 25, 2022](#)

Traders are anticipating export disruption, and a hit to growth, as China tries to stamp out Covid-19 cases, as **Jeffrey Halley** of trading firm **OANDA** explains:

China has tightened parts of the Shanghai lockdown, including erecting fences around apartment buildings with Covid-19 infected individuals. Meanwhile, residents of the Chaoyang district of Beijing will have to submit to three days of testing to get on top of the omicron outbreak there, with parts of it “sealed” or “controlled,” to paraphrase Bloomberg’s story this morning. Although some parts of China have been under restrictions longer than Shanghai, omicron’s arrival in Beijing would be an ominous development.

It is important to remember that although market darlings like Tesla and Foxconn are operating normally in China under a “closed-loop,” and China is vigorously playing whack-a-mole across the country to enforce the Covid-zero policy, omicron only has to get lucky once, while those manning the ramparts have to get lucky 100% of the time. Just ask any other previously Covid-zero country.

The difference here is that China is the world’s second-largest economy and has shown no signs it intends to live with the virus.

It would be a brave man that bets on President Xi Jinping backtracking on anything he says he is going to do, or on the government in general. With that in mind, the likely pressure valve is going to be disruption to China’s export machine, and a cratering of consumer confidence.

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[5d ago](#) **16.39**

**A late PS: Wall Street has shrugged off its earlier losses, to close in the green.**

Despite concerns over China's lockdowns, the Dow Jones industrial average ended the day 0.7% higher at 34,049 points, up 238 points in the session, with technology and consumer firms among the gainers.

**Johnson & Johnson** (+2.5%), **Microsoft** (+2.4%) and **American Express** (+2%) led the gainers, while communications group **Verizon** (-3.1%) and oil major **Chevron** (-2.1%) lagged.

All three major U.S. stock benchmarks closed higher Monday, as Treasury yields fell and investors appeared to shrug off concerns over China's Covid-19 lockdown.

The Dow Jones Industrial Average finished up 0.7%, according to preliminary FactSet data: <https://t.co/cZG5xfPb13> [pic.twitter.com/J85iD6hxkn](https://pic.twitter.com/J85iD6hxkn)

— MarketWatch (@MarketWatch) [April 25, 2022](#)

Tech stocks benefited from a drop in bond yields today, as investors anticipated a slower-than-hoped recovery. Twitter jumped around 5.6% after [agreeing to Elon Musk's takeover offer](#).

As **CNBC** points out, [US stocks have already been on a poor run](#):

Stocks bounced after the Nasdaq Composite fell into a bear market last week. The Nasdaq is now down 19.8% from its record, while the S&P 500 is back in correction territory, down 10.8% from its high. The Dow is coming off its worst one-day performance since 2020 on Friday and four straight losing weeks. The S&P 500 and the Nasdaq fell for three consecutive weeks.

Wall Street is bracing for a stacked week of earnings, particularly reports from major technology companies. About 160 companies in the S&P 500 are expected to report earnings this week, and all eyes will be on results from mega-cap tech names, including Amazon, Apple, Alphabet, Meta Platforms and Microsoft.

“This week may easily be a fork in the road of equities. ... Bottom-up drivers will either confirm or reject what the challenging macro backdrop has given us over the last three weeks,” MKM’s JC O’Hara said in a note.

Dow stages big reversal Monday, closing up by more than 200 points  
[@CNBC](#) <https://t.co/4vvJRI57jH>

— Patrick Manning (@PatrickDManning) [April 25, 2022](#)

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[5d ago](#)[15.40](#)

## Twitter agrees Elon Musk takeover deal



Dan Milmo

**Twitter has agreed to sell itself to Elon Musk, the world's richest man, in a \$44bn (£35bn) deal.**

The deal puts the Tesla chief executive in charge of a company with 217

million users and an influential role in shaping the political and media agenda on both sides of the Atlantic. Twitter's initial reluctance to accept a transaction appeared to fade after Musk confirmed a funding package for the deal and shareholders warmed to it. Musk has signalled that Twitter will be overhauled under his leadership, including changes in content moderation, having described himself as a "free speech absolutist".

The deal comes after a dramatic few weeks of speculation about Twitter's future, triggered by Musk's emergence as the platform's largest single shareholder [on 4 April](#). He then declared a \$43bn takeover bid [on 14 April](#), which prompted Twitter's board to signal its displeasure at his overtures by adopting a so-called poison pill defence [24 hours later](#).

However, the apparent opposition of Twitter's board faded after Musk drew up a \$46.5bn funding package for the bid, including \$21bn of his own money. According to reports, both shareholders and the Twitter board began to take the offer seriously once finance had been put in place.

The deal is not expected to face serious scrutiny from US competition authorities because Musk's major business interests – an electric car company, the SpaceX rocket business and tunnelling firm the Boring Company – do not compete with Twitter.

However, the deal is likely to draw comment from politicians and campaigning bodies given Twitter's influence as an information source and Musk's stance on free speech.

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[5d ago](#) [15.35](#)

Here's our news story on today's market jitters:

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[6d ago](#)[12.27](#)

## Summary

Here's a round-up of today's main stories:

*That's probably all for today... Goodnight. GW*

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[6d ago](#)[12.19](#)

## European markets close in the red



A general view of the floor at Madrid's Stock Exchange main headquarters today. Photograph: Vega Alonso/EPA

## **Stock markets across Europe have closed with losses across the board.**

Fears that China's Covid-19 outbreaks will hit global growth sent the UK's FTSE 100 index down by 1.9% by the close of trading.

The blue-chip index ended 141 points lower at 7,380, its lowest close in over five weeks and its biggest drop since early March.

Mining stocks led the fallers, after the tumble in commodity prices today, with **Anglo American** (-6.8%) followed by **BP** (-6.1%) and **Glencore** (-5.6%).

The pan-European **Stoxx 600** index lost 1.8%, hitting a one-month low. France's **CAC 40** dropped by 2% as anxiety over the risk of lockdowns in China outweighed relief that Emmanuel Macron had won a second term as France's president.

**Michael Hewson**, chief market analyst at **CMC Markets**, sums up the day:

European markets have been a sea of red today, after a weak lead from Asia which was prompted by sharp falls in Chinese markets as the Covid situation in Shanghai continued to deteriorate, with deaths rising to a record level. Notwithstanding that, covid cases are now starting to manifest themselves in Beijing, raising concerns over a strict lockdown there.

This, in turn, has prompted concerns that China's zero covid policy will hobble the ability of the Chinese government in meeting its GDP target for this year. The 5.5% target had already started to look difficult to achieve after Q1 GDP came in at 4.8%, and with little sign of an economic reopening this target is already being revised lower by various banks.

The re-election of Emmanuel Macron as French President has almost become an irrelevance to the wider overall concerns around the global economy, offering little in the way of a lift to French markets or the euro.

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[6d ago](#)[12.07](#)

## Brent crude falls through \$100/barrel

Economic slowdown fears have pulled Brent crude oil prices back below the \$100 mark, for the first time in a fortnight.

Brent is now down over 6% today at \$99.64 per barrel, on jitters that further [China](#) lockdowns would mean lower demand for energy.

**Ole Hansen**, head of commodity strategy at **Saxo Bank**, says China is heading for the worst oil demand shock since early 2020.

Supply worries have not suddenly disappeared with Libyan supply disruptions as well as sanctions and a potential widening ban against Russian crude oil import also lingering.

For now, however, the market is in risk-off mode with the risk of longs getting squeezed.

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[6d ago](#)[11.36](#)

## ECB's Panetta demands action over crypto 'Wild West'

A senior European Central Bank policymaker has called for co-ordinated global action to regulate crypto-assets and protect consumers from danger.

Fabio Panetta, Member of the Executive Board of the ECB, compared crypto to the gold rush, where “greed and lawlessness” saw “the few exploited the dream of the many”.

Panetta told an audience at Columbia University that crypto-assets are bringing about instability and insecurity – the exact opposite of what had been promised in the landmark 2008 white paper on bitcoin.

In a no-holds-barred speech, Panetta says:

They are creating a new Wild West. To quote Littlefinger from Game of Thrones, “chaos is a ladder”. The story does not end well for this character. However, it only takes a few to climb high on the ladder – even if their gains are only temporary – to convince many others that they are missing out.

Indeed, the crypto market is now larger than the sub-prime mortgage market was when – worth \$1.3trn – it triggered the global financial crisis. And it shows strikingly similar dynamics. In the absence of adequate controls, crypto-assets are driving speculation by promising fast and high returns and exploiting regulatory loopholes that leave investors without protection. Limited understanding of risks, fear of missing out and intense lobbying of legislators drive up exposures while slowing down regulation.

We must not repeat the same mistakes by waiting for the bubble to burst, and only then realising how pervasive crypto risk has become in the financial system. And while some may hope to be smarter and get out in time, many will be trapped.

Now is the time to ensure that crypto-assets are only used within clear, regulated boundaries and for purposes that add value to society. And it is time for policymakers to respond to the people’s growing demand for digital assets and a digital currency by making sovereign money fit for the digital age.

□ Globally coordinated efforts are needed to bring crypto-assets into a regulatory framework, says Executive Board member Fabio Panetta at

[@Columbia](#). We must not repeat past mistakes by waiting for the bubble to burst before acting <https://t.co/dGo0HV0KmL>

1/5 [pic.twitter.com/2MpmkmtG4](https://pic.twitter.com/2MpmkmtG4)

— European Central Bank (@ecb) [April 25, 2022](#)

**Panetta also compared the crypto market to a Ponzi scheme, explaining:**

Rising prices are fuelled by extensive news reports and investment advice on social media, highlighting past price increases and features such as artificial scarcity to create the fear of missing out. As a result, many invest without understanding what they are buying.

Like in a Ponzi scheme, such dynamics can only continue as long as a growing number of investors believe that prices will continue to increase and that there can be fiat value unbacked by any stream of revenue or guarantee. Until the enthusiasm vanishes and the bubble bursts.

Panetta: Unbacked crypto-assets can't even fulfil their objective of facilitating payments, since they are too volatile to perform as money. We must decide how to regulate them, seeking a balance between innovation, financial stability and consumer protection

2/5

— European Central Bank (@ecb) [April 25, 2022](#)

Panetta: Crypto-assets already have a larger market than sub-prime mortgages had before the global financial crisis started. The longer we wait, the more exposures and vested interests build up. And the harder it will be to act

3/5

— European Central Bank (@ecb) [April 25, 2022](#)

Panetta: Regulation is progressing in Europe and worldwide, but not swiftly enough. We need globally coordinated efforts to bring crypto-assets into a regulatory framework and ensure they follow the same standards as the rest of the financial system

4/5

— European Central Bank (@ecb) [April 25, 2022](#)

Panetta: Central banks must engage even more with digital innovation by upgrading wholesale financial infrastructures, operating fast retail payment systems and preparing for the issuance of central bank digital currencies

5/5

— European Central Bank (@ecb) [April 25, 2022](#)

Here's the full speech:

## [For a few cryptos more: the Wild West of crypto finance](#)

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[6d ago](#)[10.48](#)

**The U.S. economy expanded in March, but growth softened compared with the previous month, data shows.**

The Chicago Fed National Activity Index, which tracks economic activity and inflationary pressures, decreased to 0.44 in March from a revised 0.54 in February. That suggests the US kept growing last month, but at a slower rate.

US Chicago Fed National Activity Index Mar: 0.44 (est 0.45; prev 0.51; prevR 0.54)

CFNAI consistent with solid but slowing economy in March  
<https://t.co/iy0Soc8iWC>  
<https://t.co/i9DcaDGQyy>  
<pic.twitter.com/xR3pSCbRQM>

— Neil Sethi (@neilksethi) [April 25, 2022](#)

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[6d ago](#)[10.05](#)

**Back in the UK's cost of living crisis, more than one in seven private tenants are paying over the odds to secure a rental property.**

Research shows that 15% of tenants paid more than the advertised rent to secure their property, due to desperation to get a roof over their heads or because of a shortage of options on the market.

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[6d ago](#)[09.49](#)

**Stocks open lower in New York**



The New York Stock Exchange. Photograph: Caitlin Ochs/Reuters

**Wall Street has joined today's selloff, as investors fret about the prospect of more lockdowns in [China](#) and aggressive US interest rate hikes.**

The Dow Jones industrial average has dropped by 270 points, or 0.8%, to 33,540 points, its lowest in over a month.

That follows its worst session since early in the pandemic on Friday, when the Dow lost 981 points.

Oil company **Chevron** (-2.6%) is the top faller on the Dow, with aerospace manufacturer **Boeing** (-2%) and construction equipment maker **Caterpillar** (-1.75%) also among the fallers.

The tech-focused Nasdaq has extended its recent selloff too, down another 0.9%, while the broad S&P 500 index is down 1%.

U.S. stocks open lower, extending selloff as China fears spark another round of jitters <https://t.co/ZEfjYHUhUc>

— MarketWatch (@MarketWatch) [April 25, 2022](#)

**Fawad Razaqzada**, market analyst with **City Index** and **FOREX.com**, says Covid worries are roiling financial markets.

Concerns about demand have intensified as after Beijing locked down parts of Chaoyang District as the virus spread there. This triggered panic as people had hoped that lockdowns would ease in Shanghai rather than more restrictions being imposed elsewhere.

But now the prospects of the capital city being put into a full lockdown has unnerved investors worldwide. Not only does this imply weaker demand from China, but it could reignite supply chain woes, further exacerbating inflationary pressures.

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6d ago**09.39**

**Precious metals prices are sliding, hit by worries over China's economic outlook as Covid-19 infections spread.**

Palladium has taken the biggest knock. The metal, used in catalytic converters, is down 10%. Platinum, silver and gold have all lost over 2%.

KitcoGoldQuotes: <https://t.co/OXfmGXVqcO> 9:00 EDT #GOLD: 1894.30 / 1895.30 | -38.00 | -1.97% #SILVER: 23.51 / 23.61 | -0.62 | -2.57% #PLATINUM: 907.00 / 917.00 | -19.00 | -2.05% #PALLADIUM: 2054.00 / 2204.00 | -239.00 | -10.42% #kitco #goldprice #silv...  
[pic.twitter.com/SeyNUDW5Y8](http://pic.twitter.com/SeyNUDW5Y8)

— KC&J (@KyCandJ) [April 25, 2022](#)

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6d ago**09.23**

## **Full story: Optimism falls as UK factories hit by fastest rise in costs since 1975**



Larry Elliott

Optimism among UK manufacturers has fallen at its sharpest pace since the first coronavirus pandemic lockdown two years ago as firms struggle to cope with the fastest increase in their costs since 1975, according to the latest industry health check.

With the war in Ukraine giving a fresh upward twist to the pressures on companies, the April industrial trends survey from the employers' organisation the CBI found firms cutting back on investment and planning to pass on higher costs to consumers.

Manufacturing output and order books continued to grow despite the worsening inflationary backdrop but at a slower pace than in recent months, the CBI said.

The survey showed the balance of firms whose costs increased – the number reporting a rise minus the number reporting a drop – stood at 87 percentage points in April. That was only slightly below the record of +88 points in July 1975, when UK inflation was running at more than 20%.

Average costs in the quarter to April grew at the fastest rate since July 1975, while domestic prices grew at the fastest pace since October 1979. [#ITS pic.twitter.com/db0KJCTGvQ](#)

— CBI Economics (@CBI\_Economics) [April 25, 2022](#)

Dearer raw materials and energy resulted in the fastest average price increases (+60 points) since 1979, with a further acceleration in price growth expected in the next three months.

The CBI said the downward trend in optimism among manufacturers had continued. A year ago, when the UK was emerging from the early 2021 lockdown, firms upbeat about the outlook outweighed those gloomy by a balance of +38 percentage points. By October that had dropped to +2 points as supply chain shortages pushed up prices. The figure now stands at -34 points.

More [here](#):

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Updated at 09.25 EDT

[6d ago](#) [09.16](#)



Phillip Inman

**Almost 90% of British households reported an increase in their cost of living last month as they were hit by escalating fuel, food and borrowing costs, my colleague Phillip Inman reports.**

Heaping further pressure on Rishi Sunak to increase his support for those on low and middle incomes, the [Office for National Statistics](#) said a quarter of all those in its survey were struggling to pay their bills and 17% had turned to loans or borrowing on credit cards to make ends meet.

Debt charities and anti-poverty campaigners said the figures, which cover the last two weeks of March, were a shocking reminder that this year households face the [biggest cut in their living standards since the 1950s.](#)

Here's the full story on [this morning's ONS report:](#)

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[6d ago09.08](#)

**EXCLUSIVE:** Twitter is nearing a deal to sell itself to Elon Musk for \$54.20 per share in cash, the price that he originally offered to the social media company and called his 'best and final,' people familiar with the matter say <https://t.co/ZHeaXAICLy> [\\$TWTR](#) [pic.twitter.com/01a60vpXRX](https://pic.twitter.com/01a60vpXRX)

— Reuters (@Reuters) [April 25, 2022](#)

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[6d ago](#) [07.54](#)

**Shares in Twitter have jumped in pre-market trading, on reports that the social media group is in the final stretch of negotiations about [a sale to Elon Musk.](#)**

Here's Reuters' latest:

Twitter Inc is nearing a deal to sell itself to Elon Musk for \$54.20 per share in cash, the price that he originally offered to the social media company and called his 'best and final', people familiar with the matter said.

Twitter may announce the \$43bn deal later on Monday once its board has met to recommend the transaction to Twitter shareholders, the sources said. It is always possible that the deal collapses at the last minute, the sources added.

Twitter has not been able to secure so far a 'go-shop' provision under its agreement with Musk that would allow it to solicit other bids from potential acquirers once the deal is signed, the sources said.

Still, Twitter would be allowed to accept an offer from another party by paying Musk a break-up fee, the sources added.

Twitter and Musk did not immediately respond to requests for comment.

Twitter shares are up over 5% at \$51.58 in pre-market trading, up from \$48.93 on Friday night, [approaching Musk's proposal](#).

Twitter shares jump 5% on reports that it's ready to accept Elon Musk's bid <https://t.co/SOwMkMMmH4>

— CNBC (@CNBC) [April 25, 2022](#)

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[6d ago](#) [07.32](#)

## Lunchtime markets: Slowdown fears rattle markets

Global markets are continuing to show heavy losses today, as rising Covid-19 cases in [China](#) fuel worries about economic growth.

In London, the **FTSE 100** index is down 160 points, or 2%, at 7368 points, a five-week low, after China's stock market [saw its biggest one-day drop in over two years](#).

CHINA CSI 300 Crushed approaching covid lows  
[pic.twitter.com/TfZWEDIXDy](https://pic.twitter.com/TfZWEDIXDy)

— Michael J. Kramer (@MichaelMOTTCM) [April 25, 2022](#)

Meltdown in Chinese financial markets today as omicron spreads to Beijing, while Shanghai shows no sign of easing its month-long lockdown. Low elderly vaccination rates mean the central govt is likely to continue with its strict approach.

CSI 300 -4.9%  
HSCEI -4.1%  
CNH -0.9%

— Richard Frost (@frostyhk) [April 25, 2022](#)

Anxiety about the economic consequences of China's Covid-19 outbreaks are driving the selloff, with mining group **Anglo American** now down 7.3% and **Glencore** off 6.5%.

**BP** are down 4.5%, with crude oil prices still down around 4% on forecasts that China's energy demand will be hit by lockdowns.

Other internationally-focused firms are also among the major fallers in London, reflecting concerns over the global economy as the US Federal Reserve looks likely to hike US interest rates sharply this year.

Fashion group **Burberry** has lost 4.5% and equipment rental group **Ashtead** is down almost 5%.

**Raffi Boyadjian**, lead investment analyst at **XM**, says:

A worsening outbreak of Covid-19 in China dragged risk assets lower at the start of the new trading week as stocks extended Friday's losses while the US dollar scaled a fresh two-year high against a basket of currencies. Restrictions in Shanghai are being tightened again, having been partially eased only last week, after a fresh flare-up in daily cases.

The latest measures are likely the most draconian yet with infected people being transferred to government quarantine facilities, while some neighbourhoods have been fenced off. But perhaps an even bigger warning sign for investors is that Beijing is also now seeing a spike in infections. Authorities have placed parts of Chaoyang district under lockdown and ordered residents to get tested three times this week.

With markets still reeling from the fallout from the war in Ukraine and global supply chains yet to normalize, China's zero-Covid strategy is

threatening to destabilize supply lines even further, fuelling the shortages and adding more pressure on prices.

China's benchmark CSI 300 index slumped by almost 5% today as the government's growth target of 5.5% looked increasingly unattainable.

Investors have been less than impressed by the economic support measures that have been announced so far by Chinese policymakers as they don't go far enough to address the concerns about a major slowdown.



Photograph: XM

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Updated at 07.36 EDT

[6d ago](#) [06.54](#)

**UK manufacturing confidence hammered after Ukraine invasion**

**Confidence among UK manufacturers has fallen at the fastest rate since the first Covid-19 lockdowns, as the Ukraine war and rising inflation bites.**

Business sentiment and export optimism both fell in April, at the sharpest rates since April 2020, as economic uncertainty and commodity prices both jumped.

The balance between UK factories who were more upbeat about their business situation, rather than pessimistic, slumped to **-34%** in April from -9% in January, according to the CBI's first quarterly Industrial Trends Survey since Russia's invasion of Ukraine.

That's the biggest drop in confidence since April 2020, in the first wave of the pandemic.

The April CBI Industrial Trends Survey, sponsored by [@AccentureUK](#), found that business & export optimism both fell at the sharpest pace since April 2020. [#ITS pic.twitter.com/u29ZO5ZFV9](#)

— CBI Economics (@CBI\_Economics) [April 25, 2022](#)

Investment intentions for the year ahead were much weaker across the board in April compared to three months ago, suggesting that firms are cutting back.

Companies also reported that growth in output and new orders slowed over the last quarter, with new orders expected to keep falling in the next quarter -- a sign that the economy is slowing.

Cost pressures remained intense, with **average costs** growing at the fastest rate since July 1975 . Firms also hiked **domestic prices** at the fastest pace since October 1979, which will feed through to consumers as higher prices in the shops.

The **cost of raw materials** was the most important factor behind expectations for cost growth in the next three months (80% of respondents

said this was extremely important), followed by energy costs (59%), transport costs (41%) and labour costs (38%).

Average costs in the quarter to April grew at the fastest rate since July 1975, while domestic prices grew at the fastest pace since October 1979. [#ITS pic.twitter.com/db0KJCTGyQ](#)

— CBI Economics (@CBI\_Economics) [April 25, 2022](#)

**Anna Leach, CBI** deputy chief economist, explains:

“Manufacturing orders and output continue to grow, albeit at slower rates.

But the war in Ukraine is exacerbating the Covid-related supply crunch, with cost increases and concerns over the availability of raw materials at their highest since the mid-1970s.

It’s little wonder that sentiment has deteriorated sharply over the past three months and manufacturers are now scaling back their investment plans.

Investment intentions for the year ahead weakened across the board in comparison to January. [#ITS pic.twitter.com/oPn7z3ZoRB](#)

— CBI Economics (@CBI\_Economics) [April 25, 2022](#)

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